
On the Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism

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ANALYSTS OF GLOBAL INTEGRATION have been rightfully concerned with elucidating global inequalities. But increasing interconnectivity has also created possibilities for seemingly marginal people to affect larger patterns of interrelation. By concentrating on how economic power is deployed by dominant global actors, analysts of globalizing processes have largely overlooked the ways in which quotidian acts such as consumer demand across the globe influence economic relations, however asymmetrical those relationships may be. Highlighting instances of direct reciprocity in global networks, this essay recovers some of the ways that East African consumers shaped the global economy during the nineteenth century. By tracing courses of global integration through the complexities of global circulation and negotiated transaction, this essay contributes to an alternative genealogy of globalization inclusive of the local contingencies of intercontinental relationships and the interests of historically under-considered populations.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC SYSTEMS are to a great degree determined by the cultural logics of consumer demand. Thus reflection on the effects of consumer desire within networks of relation—even effects that seem to contradict dominant power relations—sheds critical light on processes of globalization, past and present. For instance, the recognition that the social calculi shaping consumer desire are both local and transcend the local, and that global economies regularly accommodate changing desire, makes it less probable that the forms global systems take are reducible to a single logic such as capital accumulation, important as it is. What attention to “peripheral” cultures of demand, or any local interests that produce long-range reverberations, brings to historical analyses of global processes is an appreciation of both mutual determination and plural causality. Yet reciprocities, however uneven, have rarely gained critical attention in the most developed

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paradigms of global economic integration, such as dependency, world-system, and neo-liberal approaches. While it is to their great credit that theorists of the global economy employing these models have long debated the ways in which the non-West became important to the West's economic buoyancy, neither they nor many other analysts of globalization phenomena have fully appreciated how the *interests* of the "periphery" have affected distant societies. This is particularly surprising considering that world-system theory,¹ the most rigorous market-based and often highly deterministic model of global interaction, implies ways of thinking about the repercussions of "peripheral" interests in its basic conceptualization.² The very notion of interconnectivity on which theories of the world system are predicated suggests possibilities beyond the deterministic language of core-periphery relations that is frequently assumed in contemporary analyses of globalization, despite broad criticisms of world-system theory.³ If any part of a system has the potential to affect other parts, we should accept the possibility that seemingly marginal actors can, at times, significantly affect seemingly powerful ones.⁴ Indeed,

¹ In using this term, I do not mean to imply that there is unity beyond a concentration on systemic interaction, and a belief that systems exist, among world-system(s) theorists. Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas Hall sum up the field as a concern with *systemness*: how events in one locale have consequences for social structures in another. Chase-Dunn and Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (Boulder, Colo., 1997), 17. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, the general "claim to strength" of the world-systems perspective is that it makes sense out of seeming coincidences that in fact link far corners of the globe. *AHR Forum*: Steve J. Stern, "Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean," and Wallerstein, "Comments on Stern's Critical Tests," *AHR* 94 (October 1988): 829–72 and 884–85 (quote).

² See, in particular, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 3 vols. (New York, 1974–89); *Historical Capitalism: With Capitalist Civilization* (New York, 1995); and "The Three Stages of African Involvement in the World-Economy," in *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa*, Peter Gutkind and Wallerstein, eds. (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1976), 30–57.

³ The language of core/periphery categorization has become so normalized that its genesis and assumptions are rarely acknowledged in globalization literature. See, for instance, Kevin Cox's introduction to a recent anthology on economic globalization, *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*, Cox, ed. (New York, 1997), 1. Other social scientists working in a historical vein, such as Andre Gunder Frank, have attacked the conclusions of world-system analysts but have not challenged the idea of "cores" as the determining features of global systems. *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998). At the same time, some world-systems theorists, such as Chase-Dunn and Hall, have argued that it is a mistake to assume that all relations among "less" and "more developed" societies entail exploitation or processes of underdevelopment. *Rise and Demise*, 36.

⁴ Many historians and anthropologists have soundly criticized the monocausal analytical logic at the heart of Wallerstein's model of the world-system, a logic that only explained change in the "periphery" by reference to the system's center, or "core." See Stern, "Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System," 829–72, and the ensuing debate between Stern and Wallerstein in the same volume. Nearly two decades ago, Roland Robertson and Frank Lechner suggested that contemporary theory must account for the trajectories of global integration in a "multidimensional fashion." "Modernization, Globalization and the Problem of Culture in World-Systems Theory," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 3 (1985): 113. Peter Geschiere, Richard Kilminster, and Arif Dirlik have recently extended this critique to contemporary globalization studies, arguing that the ability of the local to shape global relationships is still too easily overlooked. Geschiere suggests that only detailed analysis of exchanges "may effectively debunk a terminology, still coming so easily to many colleagues, that serves to depict people in the 'periphery' as only receivers or as re-actors." "Historical Anthropology: Questions of Time, Method and Scale," *Interventions* 3, no. 1 (2001): 37; Kilminster, "Globalization as an Emergent Concept," in *The Limits of Globalization*, Alan Scott, ed. (London, 1997), 269; Dirlik, *Postmodernity's Histories: The Past as Legacy and Project* (Lanham, Md., 2000), 160. Good examples of how global systems can look from local perspectives include Marshall Sahlins' imaginative essay, "Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of 'The World System,'" in Sahlins, ed., *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 415–70; and Donald Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (Armonk, N.Y., 1997).

a largely forgotten aspect of Immanuel Wallerstein's theorization of global interrelation revealed ways for thinking beyond the moncausality of a world system determined by Western (that is, "core") interests. In his analysis of Africa's integration into the world economy, Wallerstein characteristically stressed that people act for their own particular purposes under conditions constrained by larger structures, but he added the critical caveat, "each actor opting for a given alternative in fact alters the framework of the whole."⁵ It is this more complicated insight—individual actors are not autonomous, yet they do possess abilities to alter larger frameworks—that deserves particular attention at a time when the rhetoric of globalization pushes historians to challenge vigorously moncausal narratives of global integration.⁶ What Wallerstein's qualification leaves ripe for consideration are the negotiations and interests brought to bear on transactions the world over, no matter how insignificant they might appear on the surface.⁷ Transactions can be severely circumscribed, but, as negotiations of demand, they can both determine the shape of trans-societal dynamics and, at times, challenge the assumed power of systemic interactions.

Over the last twenty-five years, African historiography has provided important signposts for moving beyond the restrictive analytical logic of an always dominant "core" that underwrites most models of historical integration. And it has done so by reconsidering the terms of trade manifest in Africa's transactions of global significance. For example, David Richardson's work on West African consumption patterns troubled narratives of the West's imposition of its economic will on Africans by highlighting the ways in which West African demand shaped the parameters of African-British economic relations at the height of the Atlantic slave

⁵ Wallerstein, "Three Stages," 35. Wallerstein recognized that linkages between regions in the world economy are reciprocal, but he argued that in these linkages we find the "underlying determinants of social actions at a more local level." I suggest that linkages, because of the reciprocities they convey, reveal both the negotiation of various social actions *and* the imposition of economic constraints. Wallerstein, "Three Stages," 35. Also working through a sociological optic, Anthony Giddens and Roland Robertson moved in a somewhat different direction by stressing the dialogic processes and multicausality inherent in global integration. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, 1990); and *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif., 1991); Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London, 1992).

⁶ Frederick Cooper offers a sharp critique of the tendency among globalization theorists to derive historical conclusions from "idealized versions of the 'globalized present'" in ways that occlude past contingencies, choices, decisions, and constraints. Cooper argues that globalization models, like modernization theory (I would add dependency, world-system, and neo-liberal approaches), reduce great diversities of phenomena to singular conceptual frames that may reveal important constants but at the same time obscure myriad historical processes. This "singular notion of change" has undermined the utility of most social-science theories of global integration. Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 205, 212. For other important efforts to bring historiography into dialogue with globalization studies, see Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York, 2003); Anthony G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York, 2002); Philip Pomper, Richard H. Elphick, and Richard T. Vann, *World History: Ideologies, Structures, and Identities* (Malden, Mass., 1998).

⁷ Perhaps more than any other field, economic anthropology has directly addressed the cultures and social meanings of exchange. See, for instance, Jane Guyer, ed., *Money Matters: Instability, Values, and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1995); Caroline Humphrey and Stephen Hugh-Jones, eds., *Barter, Exchange, and Value: An Anthropological Approach* (Cambridge, 1992); Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); Parker Shipton, *Bitter Money: Cultural Economy and Some African Meanings of Forbidden Commodities* (Washington, D.C., 1989).

trade.⁸ Richardson showed that consumer interests across West Africa were divergent and locally contingent, which suggested a complexity in Euro-African commercial relations unexplored in most accounts of pre-colonial exchange. Most important, Richardson's work demonstrated that African consumers directly affected the shape of British trade across West Africa and globally. Africans negotiated the terms of trade by refusing all undesired goods, and the failure of British manufacturers to replicate the kinds of items in demand—certain Indian textiles, for instance—forced English merchants to depend on particular Indian manufacturers.⁹ These findings led Richardson to conclude that we can only understand the changing parameters of the eighteenth-century Atlantic slave trade through a proper appreciation of regional variations in West African demand.¹⁰ Richard Roberts's recent work also illustrates how African interests affected global systems of exchange and production. Roberts reveals that the first industrial textile mill in India was founded (by French manufacturers) to produce cloth for the Senegalese market.¹¹ In the case of Central Africa, Joseph Miller has suggested that demand for certain Indian textiles shaped Lusophone trade both in Africa and Asia.¹² What such examples suggest is that when activities such as consumption in the "periphery" are reinserted into systemic analysis, we can develop multi-

⁸ David Richardson, "West African Consumption Patterns and Their Influence on the Eighteenth-Century English Slave Trade," in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, Henry Gemery and Jan Hogendorn, eds. (New York, 1979); see also Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1996); Stanley Alpern, "What Africans Got for Their Slaves," *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 5–43; George Metcalf, "A Microcosm of Why Africans Sold Slaves: Akan Consumption Patterns in the 1770s," *Journal of African History* 28 (1987): 377–94.

⁹ Richardson, "West African Consumption Patterns," 308. Philip Curtin's work on Senegambia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries argued a similar point. French industries were unable to copy Indian-manufactured cloth—even though they attempted to counterfeit the Indian textiles, stamping them with look-alike marks—and were thus dependent on Indian manufacturers until the 1830s. Moreover, Curtin argued that the economy of slave supply in the Western Sudan did not respond to external market conditions, and even at the height of the slave trade the external market did not fully determine the economic orientation of Senegambian states. He concluded that until the end of the slave trade the terms of trade favored Africans. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave trade* (Madison, Wis., 1975), 312–13.

¹⁰ Richardson, "West African Consumption Patterns." Miller, in his consideration of imports at Luanda, predicted, "Imports are likely to prove more momentous for Africa's history than its better publicized exports." He developed this point further in *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison, Wis., 1988) by exemplifying the ways in which commodities reconfigured social as well as productive relationships. Joseph C. Miller, "Imports at Luanda, Angola 1785–1823," in *Figuring African Trade*, Gerhard Liesegang and Adam Jones, eds. (Berlin, 1986), 164.

¹¹ Richard Roberts, "West Africa and the Pondicherry Textile Industry," in *Cloth and Commerce: Textiles in Colonial India*, Tirthankar Roy, ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1996), 142–74. Roberts also notes that colonial conquest in the Western Sahel depended on French abilities to adapt to West African economies.

¹² Miller, "Imports at Luanda," 196–97. Marion Johnson argued that, before colonialism, global trade not only did not destroy local industry in West Africa, it actually spurred local production in some areas. West African weavers imported large amounts of British-spun cotton yarn in the late nineteenth century and even exported cloth to Brazil and Barbados. Johnson, "Technology, Competition, and African Crafts," in *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India*, C. Dewey and Anthony G. Hopkins, eds. (London, 1978), 259–69; see also Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1991–97), 2: chap. 5, esp. n59; Ruth Nielsen, "The History and Development of Wax-Printed Textiles Intended for West Africa and Zaire," in *The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, Justine Cordwell and Ronald Schwarz, eds. (The Hague, 1979).

dimensional perspectives on economic relationships that challenge unilinear historical trajectories of the consolidation of economic power in a "core."

The study of pre-colonial East African consumerism offers another way to assess the effects of "peripheral" interests on global economic trends. Through demand, perhaps more than through production, East Africans leveraged global commercial relationships during the nineteenth century. For example, assumptions of the dominance of external market forces in East Africa are immediately thrown into question by the fact that, throughout the nineteenth century, foreign firms doing business in Zanzibar were, to their consternation, subject to local trading partners and the whim of regional producers. The records of foreign traders are replete with references to their inability to spur production or even regulate the prices of their own goods. Moreover, the intense competition between foreign merchants, combined with the sultan of Zanzibar's economic egalitarianism and the relatively buoyant prices of many East African exports, assured favorable terms of trade for both African producers and the marketers of African commodities. From the East African case, an image of global relations emerges which suggests that the shape of world markets has not been determined by Western interests alone but has, instead, been defined by a matrix of shifting accommodation and, lest we forget, in the dynamics of non-Western exchanges. Drawing inspiration from the work of Richardson, Roberts, and Miller, as well as a growing body of interdisciplinary literature that highlights the fact that the West's global relations have rarely been unilaterally determined,¹³ this essay will address not only the particularities of exchange in East Africa but also, following Frederick Cooper's appeal, the courses of global interrelation that Africans affected.¹⁴ The profile of global relations that I outline below is one of reciprocal determination, inequitable in the long run, and increasingly so from the beginning of the East African colonial era in the 1880s, but reciprocal nonetheless. This dialectic was one that constricted possibility without foreclosing a variety of actions, choices, or potentials. Global circuits of exchange fixed the parameters of activity, and yet both East African consumer demands and cultures of production forced outsiders into certain relationships with African producers. By paying more attention to reciprocities among actors in macro-

¹³ The notion of mutual effect is, of course, not unique to this analysis; it has become a central concern of colonial historiography. Cooper summarizes this stance: "Recognition of the much greater power of the Europeans in the colonial encounter does not negate the importance of African agency in determining the shape the encounter took"; "Conflict and Connection," 1529. Micro-focused accounts of the dynamics of colonial interfaces have begun to reveal how seemingly marginal actors can, at times, significantly affect seemingly powerful ones. For instance, the Comaroffs have explored the cultural complexities of what has been termed "reciprocal determination" in Tswana-European encounters. Although reciprocity does not amount to equity, the Comaroffs and others demonstrate that inequity does not arrest the possibilities of mutual determination and adaptation within a variety of constraining circumstances. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*; and A. Gupta, "History, Rule, Representation: Scattered Speculations on *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Volume II," *Interventions* 3, no. 1 (2001): 40–46. See also Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis, 2000), 2; Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Hall, ed. (Oxford, 1997), 184–227; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993).

¹⁴ See Cooper, "Africa in a Capitalist World," 394; and "Africa and the World Economy," in *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America*, Frederick Cooper, et al., eds. (Madison, Wis., 1993).

networks, we can better appreciate the ways in which historically marginalized people have affected distant societies and world systems of relation. Finally, attention to reciprocities complements market-based analyses, institutional, encounter, and other approaches to global interaction by highlighting—much as Richard White did in his analysis of the “middle ground” of intercultural relationships—dimensions of circularity and accommodation that further temper our genealogies of globality.¹⁵

TO DEMONSTRATE HOW EAST AFRICAN CONSUMERS affected distant societies, this essay will trace the repercussions of East African consumer demand to two distant locales: Salem (Massachusetts) and Bombay. In order to perceive the relationships between places of production and consumption with greater clarity, I will first highlight links in the chains that connected East Africa to other world regions. Such links included the consumers and retailers who purchased goods in mainland East African societies, the caravan porters who carried loads of goods across eastern Africa, the caravan leaders who bought and arranged for the transport of goods into the interior, foreign agents and local buyers in Zanzibar and elsewhere on the East African coast, the ships that delivered cargoes, the firms, brokers, and consignors in Asian, American, and European ports, and the manufacturers of various consumer goods. Along these chains of relation, we can see precisely how consumer demand came to drive the system, how demand was translated and relayed, and how through such translation the production of certain goods was organized and executed. Of these links between East African consumers and foreign producers, two were particularly important: foreign agents in Zanzibar—East Africa’s commercial hub—and the caravan leaders who traded directly with consumers throughout mainland East Africa.

The correspondences of Westerners operating in East Africa reveal the local contingencies of global exchange, such as regional cycles of production and changing regional tastes. Letters from American merchants in East Africa abound with frustrated remarks about contaminated copal (a resin used for making furniture varnish), producers’ unwillingness to collect it during the planting or harvesting seasons, the lack of caravans during the planting season, and the slowing of business during Ramadan.¹⁶ None of the Americans’ efforts affected these patterns of production and exchange. Americans could, at best, attempt to control the volume of their national goods in the market, but they were largely unsuccessful even at this, since there were so many firms in competition. To complicate matters,

¹⁵ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991). On institutional analysis, see Lauren Benton, “From the World-Systems Perspective to Institutional World History: Culture and Economy in Global Theory,” *Journal of World History* 7, no. 2 (1996): 261–95; Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (New York, 2002); Douglas North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (New York, 1990). On the encounter approach, see Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn., 1972); Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts in Pre-modern Times* (New York, 1993).

¹⁶ On the relation of caravan traffic to planting seasons, see Stephen J. Rockel, “‘A Nation of Porters’: The Nyamwezi and the Labour Market in Nineteenth-Century Tanzania,” *Journal of African History* 41 (2000): 173–95.

while East African demand constantly changed, foreign traders in East Africa could rarely afford to be fickle in their demands. Instead, they had to take, or compete for, what was available and hope that the prices of East African copal, ivory, and cloves remained steady at home. Western agents and travelers, who out of necessity learned East African methods of exchange, were equally frustrated by the complexity of African demand and their utter inability to circumvent it. Joseph Thomson, who fit out a caravan for Lake Tanganyika in the 1870s, wrote, "fashion was as dominant among Central African tribes as among the *belles* of Paris or London." "Each tribe," he explained, "must have its own particular class of cotton, and its own chosen tint, colour, and size among beads." Indicative of the importance of the trader's sensitivity to local tastes, Thomson continued, "The absence of the required article at any particular point, might mean nothing less than disaster and failure to the expedition, as people will have nothing but the cloth or bead that happens to be in fashion. Everything else is of no value, and will hardly be accepted as a present." Venting his dissatisfaction with the terms of exchange, he added, "Worse still, the fashions are just as changeable [as in England] . . . In one year a tribe goes mad for a particular bead; but the trader having supplied himself with the fashionable article, according to latest news, might, if his journey was long, arrive to find the fashion changed, and his stock just so much unmarketable rubbish."¹⁷ Speaking directly to the popular myth of African satisfaction with baubles, Richard Burton remarked that the "Birmingham trinkets and knicknacks, of which travellers take large outfits to savage and barbarous countries, would in East Africa be accepted by women and children as presents, but . . . would not procure a pound of grain."¹⁸ Burton and Thomson, like countless caravan leaders before them, learned this lesson the hard way. In Thomson's case, he took the advice of a caravan leader who had visited the Lake Tanganyika region a full two years earlier and on his recommendation bought "a great amount of beads of a certain size, composition, and color," which he found to be out of fashion on his arrival. The beads, carefully chosen and carried halfway across the continent, were now of little value.¹⁹

As European travelers would only be the latest to discover, demand was not easy to predict, nor was it necessarily definable by cultural-linguistic group. Individual consumers often sought out particular goods in order to differentiate themselves from their neighbors. Harry Hamilton Johnston, who traveled to Kilimanjaro, described the desires of people he came into contact with as "most varied and capricious," adding that, "scarcely two villages concur in their canons of taste." The solution that East African caravan leaders devised to address the contingencies of fashion was to carry various sizes and shapes of, for instance, a bead that had been reported to be in style in a particular locale. Using the *maji ya bahari* (literally "seawater" in Swahili) beads as an example, Johnston advised potential travelers to carry multiple sizes, since "an entire tribe may affect one shade of blue in their bead necklaces, yet each individual will have special opinion as to the correct size of the

¹⁷ Joseph Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes and Back: The Narrative of the Royal Geographical Society's East Central African Expedition, 1878–80* (London, 1881), 35–36.

¹⁸ Richard Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa: A Picture Exploration*, Vol. 2 (London, 1860), 400.

¹⁹ Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes*, 35–36.

bead.”²⁰ To put the complex nature of demand into perspective, there were at least 400 varieties of beads current during Burton’s sojourn in 1857, each with a different value, name, and particular locale of preference. Red beads, for instance, were the only kind salable in Unyamwezi, whereas black beads were currency in Ugogo, though worthless everywhere else. “Egg” beads were valuable in Ujiji and Uguha but refused elsewhere. White beads were popular in Ufipa and parts of Usagara and Ugogo but disliked in Uzigua and Ukonongo. The bright yellow *samuli* (Swahili: ghee) was in demand among Chagga and Maasai consumers but found no market further south.²¹ Such drastic divergence in preference meant that merchants had to buy amounts appropriate for the length of travel and the regions passed so that they would not be left with stocks of valueless goods.²² If a caravan found itself overstocked with a particular variety of bead, its only chance to dispose of the surplus would be at commercial centers such as Ujiji (on Lake Tanganyika), where bead changers traded hundreds of varieties.²³

Perhaps more indicative of the importance of appealing to East African tastes is the fact that American merchants at Zanzibar had to return entire cargoes when particular goods, such as a certain kind of cloth or gun, found no market in East Africa.²⁴ In order to gauge the market so that time and money were not lost in sending the wrong kinds of things to Zanzibar, manufacturers in the United States, England, Germany, France, and India sent samples ahead of cargoes.²⁵ When firms did not follow this practice, they could incur heavy losses. After receiving a shipment of glassware and crockery, an American agent in Zanzibar wrote to his firm that these were both selling very slowly and that, in the future, the firm should be careful not to ship goods before testing samples in the market.²⁶ Another American agent, William Jelly, wrote angrily to his firm in 1845 that the wrong kind of muskets had been sent to Zanzibar. After giving a detailed explanation of why this particular variety would find no buyers in Zanzibar, Jelly added, with great irritation, that the consignor in Salem had spent enough time in Zanzibar “to know the kind wanted for the Zanzibar market.”²⁷

²⁰ Harry Hamilton Johnston, *The Kilima-Njaro Expedition: A Record of Scientific Exploration in Eastern Equatorial Africa* (London, 1886), 45.

²¹ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 396.

²² Henry M. Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa* (New York, 1887), 24; J. R. Harding, “Nineteenth-Century Trade Beads in Tanganyika,” *Man* (July 1962): 104–06.

²³ Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, 473.

²⁴ For instance, B. F. Fabens had to send 200 bales of cotton drills back to Salem when he could find no buyers for them. At 700–800 yards per bale, this was a very large consignment of cloth. Fabens to Michael Shepard, August 16, 1844, MH 23, Shipping Papers, Correspondence (1843–1846), Box 12, folder 3, Peabody-Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts (hereafter, PE).

²⁵ “Invoice of Merchandise Shipped on Board the Brig Cherokee,” Salem, February 24, 1840, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, B2, folder 6, PE; Charles Ward to Shepard, March 25, 1850, Consular Papers, Vol. B, Letter Book, MSS 47, Charles Ward Papers, PE; *Bombay Gazette*, Part 1, January to December 1875, V/11/2200, India Office Library, British Museum, London (hereafter, IOL).

²⁶ Ward to Shepard, March 25, 1850, Consular Papers, Vol. B, Letter Book, MSS 47, Charles Ward Papers, PE; Ward to Shepard, May 16, 1846, MH 23, Shipping Papers, Correspondence (1843–46), PE.

²⁷ A few years later, Burton, the only European traveler to publish a detailed description of East African consumer interests, wrote that the muskets exported to East Africa had to have a black butt and an elephant on the lock, otherwise they would never survive in the market. He also wrote that they had to be inexpensive, not exceeding 3 or 4 shillings. Richard Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*, Vol. 2 (London, 1872), 412; Jelly to [obscure], April 17, 1845, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PE. East

Brass wire, the third most common import after cloth and beads, was a troublesome commodity to the Americans since its width, shape, length of coil, packaging, and weight all determined value in East Africa. At mid-century, Zanzibari purchasers would only buy certain gauges that they knew to be in demand for making jewelry in the interior.²⁸ Indian and European merchants also imported American brass wire, and when an American firm wrote to its agent in Zanzibar that the wire was becoming too expensive in the United States, the Zanzibar agent warned the firm that if it ordered wire from England it must not only be the right gauge but also look exactly like the American variety.²⁹ The form was especially important. Pieces had to be of a standard size, in coils nine to twelve inches in diameter with each coil consisting of either ten or twenty rings. And they had to be wrapped in brown paper so that they would not oxidize. Its "bright appearance," as one American merchant described it, was essential to the wire's sale in the interior.³⁰ Because of its importance to trade—foreign merchants often likened brass wire's exchange value to gold—and the attention necessary to produce the right product and packaging, American manufacturers began making brass coil conforming exactly to East African specifications. One agent described the brass wire made for East Africa as "a superior article," calibrated for the market.³¹

There was no way for foreign traders to circumvent the exigencies of African demand. In the 1850s, for instance, English chintz did not sell very well in the interior because people across the region preferred French and Hamburg varieties, despite the fact that their price was three times that of English chintz.³² Imitations were also rarely successful, except under extreme circumstances such as during and after the U.S. Civil War. Lewis Pelly, the British vice-consul at Zanzibar, wrote of several incidents in which foreign merchants attempted substitutions of regional favorites to no avail. In one case, a Hamburg firm tried to copy a popular blue checked turban cloth made in Muscat (Oman). The firm began to import a knockoff that they imagined to be an equally attractive turban cloth and sold it at a price lower than the Muscati-made kind. But Zanzibari consumers found the colors overly bright, and, accordingly, it was "gossamer to a beaver": valueless. Pelly wrote of the similar plight of various textiles that arrived with a stripe too narrow or a line too broad. Such things were, according to Pelly, "sufficient to make the conservative ladies of the Negro races doubt quality, and stick to the original Surat, Broach or

Africans had very specific demands for gunpowder as well. When Americans tried to sell glazed powder in Zanzibar, they incurred significant losses as it was refused on the mainland. Fabens to Shepard, September 27, 1846, and Ward to Shepard, May 16, 1846, MH 23, Shipping Papers, Correspondence (1843–46), PE.

²⁸ Ward to Shepard, September 24, 1849, Consular Papers, Vol. B, MSS 47, Charles Ward Papers, PE.

²⁹ Ward to Shepard, March 25, 1850, Consular Papers, Vol. B, MSS 47, Charles Ward Papers, PE. Another American wrote that a consignment of wire received in Zanzibar was about one-third too thick and as a result could find no buyers in town. Fabens to Shepard, August 16, 1844, MH 23, Shipping Papers, Correspondence (1843–46), Box 12, folder 3, PE.

³⁰ Moreover, the coils had to weigh between nine and ten pounds or else they were very difficult to sell. Ward to Shepard, February 5, 1849, Consular Papers, Vol. B, MSS 47, Charles Ward Papers, PE; Fabens to Shepard, August 29, 1844, MH 23, Shipping Papers, Correspondence (1843–46), PE; Ward to Shepard, December 3, 1850, Consular Papers, Vol. B., MSS 47, Charles Ward Papers, PE.

³¹ Jelly to J. A. West, August 30, 1837, MH 235, J. A. West Papers, Box 1, folder 3, PE.

³² Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 397.

Bengal.”³³ East Africans developed both highly differentiated tastes and sophisticated ways of assessing quality. Foreign merchants had to produce goods that fit these parameters if they wished to be successful in East Africa. For example, despite considerable British political influence at Zanzibar, British merchants were virtually frozen out of the direct trade with East Africa because they offered little of appeal to East Africans. A British consul wrote in the early 1850s that English manufacturers simply could not replicate the American cloths so popular in East Africa. “Many have tried,” Atkins Hamerton explained, but they failed to produce the “proper article.”³⁴ Yet British cloth did find its way to East Africa. Bombay exporters first broke into the East African market by remaking cheap English textiles with added colors and stamped designs.³⁵ For example, the *kisuto*, a cloth popular across East Africa, was a plain English cotton that had been dyed and spotted in Bombay.³⁶ What Bombay-based firms, like all those who would succeed in the East African market, recognized was that success depended on their agents’ abilities to identify African fashion trends and relay information about these trends to artisans at home.

Perhaps the most important figure at the interface of global exchange and local consumers was not the urban import-exporter but the merchant in the East African interior. On the East African mainland, imported goods were often sold directly to consumers. Therefore, caravan leaders—the primary negotiators of the caravan trade—were lynchpins in the system of global exchange. Without navigable rivers to connect the coast and the interior, caravans of hundreds or even thousands of porters carried goods into the interior, traded, and then collected goods for export. These caravans, and particularly their leaders, faced the immediacy of local demand, its unpredictability, rapid changes in style, and the political environments of each locale. Caravan headmen, whether of coastal or interior birth, had to know the languages and fashion exigencies of all the peoples with whom they wanted to trade or through whose territory they simply wished to travel. If headmen did not possess such knowledge, the journey could not only be unsuccessful, it could also be extremely dangerous. The caravan leader thus had to gauge the right amounts of each commodity needed in each region. This was a complex metric, drawing on experience, recent reports, and knowledge of trade equivalencies between local produce and imported goods. Before setting out for Kilimanjaro, the adventurers Richard Thornton and Baron von der Decken solicited information from Kapitau, a Mombasan caravan leader with a particular knowledge of Chagga country, who

³³ Lewis Pelly, “Remarks on the Tribes and Resources around the Shoreline of the Persian Gulf,” *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society* 17 (1863–64): 32–103, quoted in Mohamed R. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: Roots of British Domination* (New York, 1992). For detailed descriptions of these turban cloths, see “Marchandises d’importation propres au Commerce de la Côte de Zanguébar [ca. 1860],” *Océan Indien* 5/23 no. 7, Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence (hereafter, CAOM). I owe a great debt of gratitude to Chris Hayden for locating this and other French archival material.

³⁴ Hamerton to A. Malet [ca. 1852], A 3/11, Zanzibar National Archives, Zanzibar, Tanzania (hereafter, ZNA). At the end of the decade, Burton called for further British attempts to replicate the American cloth. Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 388.

³⁵ Col. Christopher P. Rigby, “Return of the Imports at the Port of Zanzibar in the Year 1859,” AA 2/4, ZNA.

³⁶ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 398.

informed them of the goods necessary for their journey.³⁷ Burton's chief advice to those who wished to travel on the mainland was to seek out such *viongozi* (Swahili: caravan leaders) who knew the route one wished to take, and to inquire as to the "varieties [of trade goods] requisite" for the particular road. "Any neglect in choosing beads," Burton wrote, "... might arrest an expedition on the very threshold of success."³⁸ For instance, James Grant wrote that, in southern Unyamwezi, *gulabi* (Swahili: rose) beads were "great favorites; and when exhausted, the price of everything rose to double." The *maji ya bahari* beads, so highly regarded in the Kilimanjaro area, were utterly refused in Unyamwezi, as were white and red beads, even though red beads had been acceptable just four years earlier. Only when the *ukuti wa mnazi* (Swahili: coconut palm leaf) beads were brought out was the caravan able to buy basic provisions.³⁹

Even more important, caravan leaders had to stock unique gifts for the political elites through whose territory they wished to pass. These often mirrored the consumer tastes of coastal elites and included things such as music boxes, silk cloth, musical instruments, European or Asian prints, and the latest firearms.⁴⁰ East African discrimination between varieties of imported goods became extremely refined over the course of the century, particularly as trade with the coast, travel to coastal cities, and the sheer volume of imports increased. As Jonathon Glassman has shown, by the 1880s, political elites such as Mandara of Moshi derisively labeled all but the most recent European imports "Zanzibari-made." Much as in coastal cities, the value of certain imported commodities in the interior was rarely stable, since elites were constantly looking for objects that could serve to differentiate them from non-elites. Mandara, like his nephew Miriali, sought out the most unique or technologically sophisticated goods from traders in order to set himself off from his subjects—perhaps even to use such privileged access as a way of maintaining his authority. When offered cloths and other standard gifts by the Bostonian traveler May French-Sheldon, Miriali requested instead her music box, an object highly coveted in the region.⁴¹ The choice of gifts was crucial to the caravan's progression, since inadequate tributes paid to rulers or their appointees could stall a caravan and even force it to find another route to its destination.

To complicate matters further, caravan leaders often shouldered responsibility for directing the remaking of consumer goods in their charge. Since fashions changed quickly, it was necessary to redesign pieces of cloth or restring beads on the road. Caravan leaders purchased the kinds of cloth or beads they thought to be in demand in a particular locale, and, just outside the area where they intended to trade, they would stop and redesign cloth in a way that appealed to local consumers. For example, Maasai only accepted two kinds of cloth, both of which were syntheses of imported materials. Younger Maasai men wanted what was termed *naibere*. This

³⁷ Richard Thornton, Letters, June 3, 1861, MSS Afr. s. 27, Rhodes House, Oxford; Charles New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours in Eastern Africa* (1873; rpt. edn., London, 1971), 452.

³⁸ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 390.

³⁹ James Grant, *A Walk across Africa: or, Domestic Scenes from My Nile Journey* (Edinburgh, 1864), 87.

⁴⁰ Johnston, *Kilima-Njaro Expedition*, 46.

⁴¹ See Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1995), 49–51; May French-Sheldon, *Sultan to Sultan: Adventures among the Masai and Other Tribes of East Africa* (London, 1892), 194.

was a cloth made of about two yards of *ulayti mfupi*, a kind of narrow unbleached cotton, onto which was sewn a strip of red calico six to eight inches wide. After the strip was sewn on, the edges of the cloth would be frayed about four inches, and this fringe would be bound with a red or dark purple fabric. Older, married Maasai wanted a cloth of similar make, though a little wider and about an eighth longer. This cloth was left without the broad stripe in the middle but was given larger fringes. Before entering Maasai country, the Teleki expedition produced nearly 1,200 of these cloths. This remaking of cloth occupied the members of the caravan for several days, with nearly 100 people engaged in the task.⁴² Strings of beads also had to be reconfigured for Maasai consumers. Before entering Maasai country, caravan porters had to rethread beads in lengths of twenty-one or twenty-two inches. Such labor was necessary because beads would not be accepted unless in this form.⁴³ Similarly, at Taveta (eastern Kenya), Thomson's caravan had to restring what added up to 60,000 measures of beads. The remaking of imported goods points up a common fallacy in African economic analysis: the asymmetrical exchange of finished imported products for African raw materials.⁴⁴ Although we tend to think of cloth, beads, and brass wire as finished manufactured goods distinct from the "raw" materials Africans exported, it is more appropriate to think of them as only partially manufactured, since they often had to be radically redesigned in India, East African centers of trade, or on caravan trails before they could be sold in local markets. Such was the case in Unyanyembe, where coastal artisans purchased imported English broadcloth and tailored it into the *kizibao*, or short coastal-style coat sought by wealthy men.⁴⁵ In Unyanyembe, brass and iron wire was remade before it was sold to consumers; local artisans fashioned imported wire into armlets, leg bracelets, bells, necklace beads, and rings, as well as inlays for gunstocks and knife hilts.⁴⁶

Much of the remaking of imports took place in East Africa's coastal cities. Artisans in Zanzibar altered cloth designs, added prints and colors, and cut and reshaped textiles based on information provided by caravan leaders and porters. In coastal cities, one could find artisans who specialized in weaving colored borders onto imported cloth.⁴⁷ This adding of value was essential to the mainland trade since consumers, like many in Chagga country, would not buy long-cloth without *taraza*, or fringes. The Chagga fringe functioned stylistically much like the center strip of a Maasai *naibere*. It gave a measure of American unbleached cloth vibrant color and, because of the elaborate patterns of its stitching, an ornate, personalized aesthetic.⁴⁸ Zanzibaris wove varieties of thread into imported cloth in order to

⁴² Lt. Ludwig Ritter von Höhnel, *Discovery of Lakes Rudolf and Stefanie*, Vol. 1 (London, 1894), 104–05.

⁴³ Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes*, 56.

⁴⁴ Here I second Christopher Chase-Dunn's critique of the notion that world systems are necessarily constituted by a division of labor in which a core exports manufactured goods and a periphery exports raw materials. *Global Formation: Structures of the World-Economy* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁴⁵ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 396.

⁴⁶ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 410. Johnston, *Kilima-Njaro Expedition*, 45; Charles Pickering, *The Races of Man and Their Geographical Distribution* (1848; London, 1876), 202.

⁴⁷ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 418. Additionally, Zanzibari smiths made brass and copper bracelets for export to Ugogo. Vernon Cameron, *Across Africa* (New York, 1877), 78.

⁴⁸ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 1: 224.

make them more appealing and to drive up their prices. For example, the *uzar*, or silk-cotton wrappers worn by the moderately wealthy on the coast, were often sewn with gold thread at Zanzibar as a way of attracting local consumers and increasing the fabric's value.⁴⁹ In the case of the Surati (western Indian) silk *dewli* embellished with a border of gold thread at Zanzibar, the value added was extreme. Without a fringe, three and a half yards of *dewli* cost around seven Maria Theresa dollars (\$MT) in 1857; when the fringe was added, the price increased by almost 30 percent; when Zanzibari tailors added a gold fringe, the price reached as high as 80\$MT. In the 1850s, Zanzibaris stumbled on a hit in Unyamwezi with the *kitambi banyani*, or white Indian-made cloth stamped in Zanzibar (or less often in India) with a narrow red border. Common Surati white cotton loincloths were given broad border stripes of indigo, red, and yellow for interior markets. Different colored borders on the same type cloth often indicated its target market. The Kutchi-made *taujiri*, or indigo cotton cloth, was in demand in both Yao and Nyamwezi country, although Yao consumers only bought it if it had a red border, while Nyamwezi only accepted the cloth with a yellow border.⁵⁰ Coastal artisans also wove cloth for local consumption and export. Weavers in Zanzibar made a popular turban cloth worn by coastal elites and manufactured coarser cotton cloths for the mainland market.⁵¹ Weavers in several northern coastal cities fashioned the *lemali*, a kind of coarse cotton particularly favored in Oromo territory.⁵² Zanzibaris even wove and dyed their own *kaniki*, or indigo cloth, although the volume of production was relatively low.⁵³ By manipulating imports and manufacturing for market niches, regional artisans could respond quickly to East Africa's shifts in consumer demand.

FOR THE ENTIRE NINETEENTH CENTURY, cloth was at the center of East Africa's global exchanges. East African demand for cloth would shape most of the region's trade relationships and draw economies around the world into dynamic relation with African consumers. Until the U.S. Civil War, American trade with Zanzibar was dependent on East African demand for New England cloth. This demand was initially met by Massachusetts' famous Lowell mills. But due to increasing competition for Lowell cottons and the introduction of a rail system between the mills and Boston, Salem merchants were forced to invest in their own mill, which would be the first entirely steam-powered textile factory in North America. Where

⁴⁹ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 399.

⁵⁰ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 397–99.

⁵¹ W. S. W. Ruschenberger, *A Voyage round the World: Including an Embassy to Muscat and Siam, in 1835, 1836, and 1837* (Philadelphia, 1839), 38; Col. Sykes, "Notes on the Possessions of the Imaum of Muskat, on the Climate and Productions of Zanzibar," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 23 (1853): 108; Burton, *Zanzibar*, 1: 350.

⁵² New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 63, 270. Zanzibaris imported raw, uncleaned cotton from western India for use in the weaving industry, while they exported local bombax floss to Nyamwezi, where it was used as a substitute for cotton. At Ujiji, weavers used bombax to spin a kind of yarn that Burton described as of a better quality than that spun from Unyanyembe cotton. *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2: 418.

⁵³ A sample of this local indigo cloth was sent to Bombay in 1862 to ascertain its value. It was later sent on to the Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta. H. Brooke to J. Shaw Stewart, Bombay, June 16, 1862, AA 12/8, ZNA. American merchants sent samples of Zanzibari indigo to the Lowell mills in Massachusetts, but the mills never used it.

American merchants had once staked their East African investments on simple unbleached sheeting from Lowell, between the 1840s and the 1880s they exported a variety of cloths to Zanzibar, including bleached and unbleached sheeting, brown shirting, “common” shirting, “superior” shirting, unbleached and bleached drills, linen, red broadcloth, and handkerchiefs. In the years leading up to the Civil War, demand for American cloth not only provided a commercial staple for East African merchants, it also assured a primary export market for America’s largest textile mill.

In the late eighteenth century, Boston-area merchants sought new markets in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They exchanged New England-made consumer goods for Chinese porcelain, Indian textiles, Mochan coffee, Muscati dates, and Sumatran pepper. By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, Salem and Boston monopolized American trade with Indian Ocean and Pacific ports. However, the War of 1812 initiated the decline of Salem’s mercantile power in the Pacific and Eastern Indian oceans. British hostility kept Americans out of the regions during the war, and as soon as the war was over Salemites faced an equally difficult challenge: competition from New York firms. After 1815, merchants in many New England port cities began to gravitate toward the growing entrepôts of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, all cities with better port facilities than Salem. Moreover, capital investment within New England was shifting from mercantilism to industrial production. By the 1830s, American trade with many of the world’s most lucrative commercial ports—across the Atlantic, in India, China, and Southeast Asia—was controlled by firms based in the larger cities. As a result, Salemites began to concentrate on a variety of alternative ports of trade outside the longstanding trade routes. Of the new markets Salemites entered in the Indian Ocean, Zanzibar would prove one of the most important.⁵⁴

The East African market was attractive to Salemites because it supplied two commodities essential to New England industries: hides for regional leatherworks and gum copal, the resin necessary for the varnishes used in the regional furniture industry. In the early nineteenth century, Salem’s tanneries were its most significant industry, and East African hides constituted a large proportion of Salem’s imported supplies. More important to Salem’s economy over the longer term was the fact that the finest copal in the world came from East Africa. During the nineteenth century, high quality copal was dug on the *mrima*, or mainland coastal strip just opposite Zanzibar. Serving furniture manufacturers across the Eastern seaboard, the Whipple Gum Copal Factory in Salem became one of the city’s largest employers as a result of its access to East African copal. Fortunately for American merchants, people in the copal-producing region and across East Africa took a great interest in Lowell unbleached calicos (called *merekani*, or “American,” in Swahili). Salemites thus gained a distinct advantage over others desirous of East African copal. This unique access would frustrate British manufacturers. Indicative of British furniture manufacturers’ interests in circumventing the American copal monopoly, Richard Burton received a letter before embarking on his “exploration” of East Africa that urged him to seek out possibilities for lowering the cost of copal

⁵⁴ Much of this discussion is taken from P. H. Northway, “Salem and the Zanzibar–East African Trade, 1825–1845,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 90 (1954): 123–53, 261–73, 361–88; and Cyrus Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa* (Salem, Mass., 1950).

imported to Britain. The letter writer asserted that any suggestions for reducing the price of varnish would "entitle Captain Burton to a larger share of the gratitude of his countrymen than the measurement of the elevation of the Mountains of the Moon or the Determination of the Sources of the Nile."⁵⁵ In the face of fierce competition from New York and Boston, Salem merchants were able to ensure their city's economic viability by turning, at least in part, to trade with Zanzibar, a port that offered a market for local manufactures and access to important materials for Salem's industries. The profits that were derived from the sale of copal, cloves, ivory, and hides, moreover, provided capital for the shift from mercantilism to industrial manufacturing in the Salem area.⁵⁶ The relation of Zanzibar to the vitality of Salem is clear if we consider that many of the merchants invested in the Zanzibar trade became key members of boards at Salem banks, insurance companies, and new factories. And East African demand for various products, such as cloth, furniture, shoes, and glass, gave new life to an array of Salem's industries. The repercussions created by Salem's fiscal dependence on markets like Zanzibar even had perceptual dimensions: the mother of Richard Waters, one of the most important American traders in Zanzibar, was said to know more about Zanzibar's surroundings than she did the outskirts of Salem, even though she had never visited East Africa.⁵⁷

East Africans consumed a great diversity of American manufactures. Salem exports found markets throughout the region and across socioeconomic categories. Most of the *merekani*, brass coil, and beads were sold to caravans heading into the interior, while furniture, clocks, and agricultural goods appealed to coastal consumers. A typical cargo of American goods illustrates the kind of diversification that allowed Salemites to hold an important position in the Zanzibari market: cargoes generally included cloth, brass wire, specie, gunpowder, loaf sugar, muskets, and flour.⁵⁸ Yet the cargo manifests of Salem vessels reveal that most ships brought much more than these staple articles. For example, the Salem-based ship *Rolla* sold many of the above products at Zanzibar but also discharged cedar shingles, 200 chairs, 200 boxes of soap (4,000 pounds), rocking chairs, almost 3,000 lustre plates, gold watches, and a diversity of less expensive timepieces.⁵⁹ Other cargoes included things such as lumber (11,226 feet in one shipment), clapboard, bread, ice, and even ham—a surprising import for Muslim Zanzibar.

Of course, North America's greatest trade staple was *merekani* cloth. By the mid-1830s, the popularity of American unbleached cottons had begun to challenge the dominance of indigos from Kutch (northwestern India). British manufacturers

⁵⁵ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 1: 266.

⁵⁶ Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar–East African Trade," 128–31, 153.

⁵⁷ This kind of global consciousness was not out of the ordinary in Salem. Salemites prided themselves on their knowledge of places like Canton and Zanzibar. See Winifred Barr Rothenberg, "The Invention of American Capitalism: The Economy of New England in the Federal Period," in *Engines of Enterprise: An Economic History of New England*, Peter Temin, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 69–108; Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar–East African Trade," 372.

⁵⁸ Capt. Mansfield, "Navigation and Commerce of the United States at This Port of Zanzibar during the Quarter Ending June 30, 1858," Roll 2, Vol. 4–5, U.S. Consulate, Zanzibar, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, hereafter, USCZ).

⁵⁹ "Invoice of Goods Shipped on Board the Brig *Rolla*, 1843," MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, Ships Papers (*Rolla*), Box 1, folder 4, PE.

had no luck replicating the American fabric, even though they attempted to counterfeit it by stamping English cloths with American marks. This strategy was unsuccessful, according to one American in Zanzibar, because “the people say, the strength and wear of the American goods are so superior”; and he added that, “lest they be deceived, [Zanzibaris] will no longer even purchase from Englishmen.”⁶⁰ In 1847, the British consul wrote that *merekani* had come into “universal use” in Arabia and East Africa, in no small measure because of its durability. He wrote to his superiors in Bombay that even the most extreme measures—such as pressuring the sultan of Zanzibar to change his treaty with Britain in order to favor the importation of British cloth—would still not allow British merchandise to compete with American cloth.⁶¹ So successful was the American unbleached calico by the early 1860s that an American merchant compared the *merekani* domination of the market to another American victory over Britain: “Zanzibar,” he proudly proclaimed, “is the Saratoga of the East.”⁶² More important, in the late 1840s, *merekani* supplanted Indian manufactures as the most common article of imported clothing for all East Africans. Within just ten years of its introduction, *merekani* was more commonly used than the Surati and Kutchi-made indigo *kaniki*: the cloth with the longest history in the East African market.

From the 1830s until around 1847, the vast majority of unbleached shirting and sheeting that arrived in East Africa was manufactured at the Lowell mills.⁶³ Echoing his predecessor, the American consul wrote in 1851 that the demand for *merekani* in East Africa seemed infinite, since people across the region preferred them to all other imports.⁶⁴ As we have seen, *merekani* cloth was remanufactured into all manner of clothing by stitching other material onto it, dyeing it, or tailoring it. It was also used for making burial cloth, and it was durable enough to use as sailcloth.⁶⁵ In some societies, even the stamps that the mills printed on the textiles became fashionable. James Grant wrote that at Ukuni (in southern Unyamwezi, Tanzania), when people acquired a piece of *merekani* bearing the blue stamp “Massachusetts Sheetings,” they would wrap the cloth around their body in such a way as to ensure that the words appeared clearly across the front of the garment. According to Grant, anyone who could afford this particular length of *merekani* was thought “a considerable swell.”⁶⁶ American cloth was authenticated by its stamp, and the stamp itself became not only a signifier of quality but also an item of fashion.

The steady increase of elephant hunting, intra-regional slave trading, copal digging, and grain as well as clove production for export led to a greater

⁶⁰ Ruschenberger, *Voyage round the World*, 47.

⁶¹ Hamerton to [obscure], March 26, 1847, AA 1/3, ZNA. British firms, such as that of Newman, Hunt, and Christopher, had operated in Zanzibar in the 1820s and 1830s, but the entrance of American cloths pushed them out of the market.

⁶² S. Speer to William H. Seward, June 25, 1862, Roll 2, Vol. 4–5, USCZ.

⁶³ Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa*, 116.

⁶⁴ C. Abbott to Daniel Webster, March 12, 1851, Roll 1, Vol. 1–3, USCZ.

⁶⁵ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 1: 72, 382–83. It was even used as a form of tributary payment. The governor of Pangani, according to J. L. Krapf, paid tribute to Kimweri ye Nyumbai of Shambaa in the form of two hundred yards of Lowell sheeting. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa* (London, 1860), 375.

⁶⁶ Grant, *Walk across Africa*, 87.

commodification of economic and social relationships in East Africa. The new tendency to consider the exchange values—not simply the use values—of both people and produce, and the increasing ease with which people could sell commodities to the market, meant that imported cloth was more accessible to more people than ever before.⁶⁷ By the 1840s, it was no longer only the elite who could access imported goods but anyone who had produce valued by passing caravans or who was willing to carry produce to regional markets. The enormous demand for American cloth was directly affected by the increasing commodification of produce and people across East Africa as well as the buoyant prices of East African exports. Increasing African demand was soon reflected in New England. Demand for Lowell cloths domestically, in East Africa, and in other export markets strained the supply of Massachusetts cotton mills in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In 1843, a Salem consignor wrote to the American merchant Richard Waters in Zanzibar to inform him that *merekani* was scarce because Lowell could simply not stay apace of demand.⁶⁸ The strain on Lowell production led to a rapid inflation in the prices of cloth, and soon Salem merchants were forced to contract for future consignments at prices to be determined at the time of delivery. These conditions were disastrous for Salem exporters, since the buying price of Lowell cottons was now raised above the projected returns from the East African trade.⁶⁹ It was this crisis of the Salem trade and possibilities for increased profits from manufacturing in a moment of great consumer demand that, as P. H. Northway first argued in his treatise on Zanzibar-Salem relations, encouraged Salemites to invest in the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company.⁷⁰ The opening of Naumkeag would be a landmark in Salem as well as American history.

Founded by a former shipmaster in 1847, the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company was both the first fully steam-powered textile mill in the United States and the largest mill in North America. Richard Waters, a long-time agent in Zanzibar, and probably the American most knowledgeable of the East African market, became the director and later president of Naumkeag.⁷¹ In the late 1840s, Naumkeag's output was not only greater than its competitors, but the quality of its manufactures was among the best in the nation. During its first year of production, Naumkeag won national acclaim for its textiles.⁷² Although the mill made twills as well as various other cloths, it focused production on the sheeting that underwrote

⁶⁷ For a thorough discussion of the importance of commodification processes to the political economy of nineteenth-century East Africa, see Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, chap. 1; See also Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa: Changing Patterns of International Trade in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, Calif., 1975); Juhani Koponen, *People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania: History and Structures* (Jyväskylä, 1988); Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London, 1991); Philip D. Curtin, et al., *African History*, 2d edn. (New York, 1995), chap. 13.

⁶⁸ David Pingree to Waters, May 13, 1843, MH 14, Waters Papers, Box 1, folder 2, PE.

⁶⁹ Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar-East African Trade," 367.

⁷⁰ Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar-East African Trade," 375.

⁷¹ The mill boasted a board of directors that included many of Salem's most prominent Zanzibar exporters. Waters would later become the director of the Naumkeag Bank as well. Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar-East African Trade," 273.

⁷² *Annual Report of the Engineer to the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company, Salem (Mass.)* (Salem, 1848), 7.

the East African trade.⁷³ From its opening, the mill was fantastically successful, and between the late 1840s and the early 1860s the growing East African market was one of the most important export outlets for Naumkeag.⁷⁴ In the 1850s and early 1860s, Salemites gained much more control over the prices, designs, and availability of the cloth they exported. As a result, the volume of *merekani* exports to Zanzibar grew exponentially. Americans soon dominated Zanzibar's trade with the Atlantic.⁷⁵ From 1855 to 1859, British, Hamburg, French, Portuguese, Prussian, Spanish, Danish, and Hanoverian ships visited Zanzibar, but the number of American vessels and their total tonnage consistently surpassed all other Atlantic nations. In most years, Americans shipped at least twice the tonnage of Hamburg vessels, their closest European competitor.⁷⁶ In 1859, for instance, Americans imported all of the cotton piece goods brought directly from Atlantic ports (most English cottons came through Bombay); this added up to almost 5 million yards of *merekani*.⁷⁷ In the same year, Americans exported almost 1,000 clocks and 3,000 chairs to Zanzibar, while Hamburg merchants, since they had difficulty finding consumer goods for the East African market, were forced to import bullion.⁷⁸ In the six years leading up to the American Civil War, East Africans consumed over 29 million yards of *merekani* cloth.⁷⁹

Yet America's dominance of the textile import trade in East Africa would prove short-lived. Soon after the Civil War began, Salem's cotton supplies were cut off. American merchants in Zanzibar stayed on during the war but became hopelessly dependent on imported specie, a dependence that severely cut their margins of profit. The *merekani* once dominant in the market was now far too rare and expensive to sell in East Africa. American imports fell to a fraction of what they had been, and Bombay firms began flooding Zanzibar with English-made *merekani* knockoff cloth in an attempt to gain market share.⁸⁰ Unfortunately for the Americans, the volume of ivory exported from Zanzibar increased steadily over the war years, as did the demand for imported goods in East Africa. As a result of the expanding purchasing power of East Africans, the total value of beads and brass wire imported more than doubled in a short four-year span, while the total value of

⁷³ Rudolph Dick, *Nathaniel Griffin (1796–1876) of Salem—and His Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company* (New York, 1951), 11–13; Dick, “Pequot Mills: The Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company of Salem, Mass.,” *Cotton History Review* 1, no. 4 (1960): 109–17; Peter Temin, “The Industrialization of New England, 1830–1880,” in Temin, *Engines of Enterprise*, 109–52.

⁷⁴ Northway, “Salem and the Zanzibar–East African Trade,” 128–31.

⁷⁵ On the details of this trade, see “Marchandises d’importation propres au Commerce de la Côte de Zanguébar [ca. 1860],” CAOM; and “Lois & coutumes de Douaner: Commerce sous les divers pavillons [ca. 1860],” Océan Indien 5/23 no. 2, CAOM.

⁷⁶ Col. Christopher P. Rigby, “Return of Merchant Shipping Arrivals at the Port of Zanzibar during the Last Five Years,” AA 2/4, ZNA. And all of this was direct trade between the United States and Zanzibar, not ships involved in the “carrying trade,” or intra-Indian Ocean exchange.

⁷⁷ Rigby, “Return of Merchant Shipping Arrivals at the Port of Zanzibar during the Last Five Years,” AA 2/4, ZNA. For purposes of comparison, the amount of cloth imported into Zanzibar in 1859 was more than the total projected annual production of the Naumkeag mill during its first year of operation (1848). *Annual Report of the Engineer*, 7.

⁷⁸ Rigby, “Return of the Imports at the Port of Zanzibar in the Year 1859,” AA 2/4, ZNA.

⁷⁹ Foreign Office 54/22, Public Record Office, Kew (hereafter, PRO).

⁸⁰ Edward Ropes, Jr., “Report on the Commerce of Zanzibar, October 5, 1865, Roll 2, Vol. 4–5, USCZ.

textiles imported nearly doubled as well.⁸¹ Indian-exported textiles, both Indian and British-made, filled the enormous gap in the market created by the exit of the *merekani* and widened by rising ivory prices.⁸² As the Civil War drew to a close, cloth exports from India—exported from both Kutch and Bombay—accounted for the vast majority of the total Zanzibari textile import trade.

By the end of the war, Americans had lost the battle for East African consumers. Moreover, the cost of postwar American labor forced the prices of cottons well above their competitors, Indian as well as British. For much of the rest of the century, Americans were reduced to buying East African products with gold.⁸³ Furthermore, Salem firms that had once been important to the Zanzibar trade were coming under increasing pressure from Boston merchants, who were now aware of the commercial prospects of East Africa. New York and Providence merchants soon followed, and by the 1880s Salem firms had taken a back seat in Zanzibar. Even though East African consumers continued to show an interest in the American unbleached cloths well into the 1880s, their terminally high prices, compared to the affordability of Bombay copies, made it extremely difficult for Americans to regain the sizable share of the market lost during the war.⁸⁴ The situation of American merchants became dire in the early 1880s. In 1884, the American consul Edward Ropes, Jr., wrote angrily about Bombay *merekani* knockoffs that were meticulously folded, stamped, and packaged to look like real American cloths yet were sold for far less.⁸⁵ Writing three years later, the American consul lamented the retreat of American cloth from Zanzibar: "Immense quantities of Brown sheetings, the production of the many Bombay mills," Seth Pratt explained, were now the standards of the Zanzibar economic system. "Their merit," he remarked bitterly, "is their extreme cheapness."⁸⁶ While East Africa had been important to Salem's economy in an era of intense competition from larger Boston and New York firms, its greatest importance to Salem was in the transition from mercantile capitalism to industrialization. Not only was the first steam-powered mill in North America built in part to accommodate the East African trade, but Zanzibar was essential to the expansion of several local industries. Salem's most important industries were all linked to East Africa, and what was perhaps the largest industry for much of the 1840s—varnish making—was entirely dependent on African copal producers. Finally, the returns from the East African trade in part allowed Salem to remain a viable commercial center despite its crippling lack of competitive port facilities.

FOR CENTURIES, INDIAN MANUFACTURERS produced textiles and other consumer goods for the East African market. Varieties of Gujarati indigo-dyed cottons, for

⁸¹ Edward Ropes, Jr., "Report [on Zanzibar], 1865," Roll 2, Vol. 5, USCZ.

⁸² See Sheriff's table (appendix A) for the dramatic increase in Bombay textile exports to East Africa beginning in 1861. *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory*, 249–52.

⁸³ F. R. Webb, "Report on the Trade of the Zanzibar Coast for the Two Years, Ending This Day [September 30, 1873]," Roll 3, Vols. 6–7, USCZ.

⁸⁴ L. Bachelder, "Report on the Trade of Zanzibar for the Year Ending June 30, 1880," Roll 3, Vols. 6–7, USCZ.

⁸⁵ Edward Ropes, Jr., "Trade Report on Zanzibar June 30th '83–June 30th '84," in *The Zanzibar Letters of Edward D. Ropes, Jr., 1882–1892*, Norman Bennett, ed. (Boston, 1973), 121.

⁸⁶ Seth Pratt, "Trade Report of Zanzibar, July 1, 1886 to June 30, 1887," Roll 4, Vol. 8, USCZ.

example, were staples of East African exchange since at least the fifteenth century.⁸⁷ In the early nineteenth century, Kutch became the center of Indian textile manufacturing for East Africa.⁸⁸ By the 1820s, Zanzibar was the single most important market for the Mandvi (Kutch's metropole) export trade, and weaving constituted the city's largest industry.⁸⁹ Mohamed Reda Bhacker suggests that, from 1800 until about 1840, Mandvi exported three times as much cotton cloth to Zanzibar as did Surat or Bombay, while it imported at least twice as much African ivory.⁹⁰ In turn, capital investments and credit from Kutchi and Kutchi-born Bombay businessmen helped fuel the expansion of the East African regional economy. Indian merchants at Zanzibar acted as intermediaries between East African consumers and Indian as well as British, American, German, and French firms. The role of Indian merchants, financiers, and small business operators in the nineteenth-century East African commercial boom cannot be underestimated, since the majority of Zanzibar's largest retailers at mid-century were of western Indian descent.⁹¹ In fact, by 1863, at least four-fifths of the entire trade of Zanzibar passed through the hands of British Indian subjects, most of whom were either from Kutch or Bombay.⁹² Western Indians had long been important to East Africa's global relationships, but after the American Civil War their response to the consumer demands of East Africans would have enormous consequences for the industrialization of the western Indian Ocean's emerging commercial center: Bombay.

Two shifts in the Zanzibar market during the early 1860s drew East Africa and Bombay together. First, the Civil War took the popular *merekani* cloth out of circulation. Second, the total value of East African ivory exports increased dramatically. Even though the volume of ivory on the coast had been increasing since 1857, the rise in demand in Europe, India, and China put a premium on East African ivory. This, combined with the sudden removal of *merekani*, provided an ideal opportunity for Bombay exporters interested in selling Indian cloth in the Zanzibar trade. Bombay exporters moved quickly to flood the market with Indian consumer goods.⁹³ The immediate success of Bombay goods in East Africa is exemplified by the fact that before the war Zanzibar was an insignificant consumer of Indian-made cloth exported from Bombay, whereas by 1863 it had already become the second most important export destination for Bombay-made cloth.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Edward Alpers, "Gujarat and the Trade of East Africa, 1500–1800," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (1976): 22–44. Gujarati traders' concentration had shifted to Mozambique by the turn of the nineteenth century. Personal communication, Pedro Machado, October 2001. For earlier examples of the relationships between Indian cloth manufacturing and East African consumers, see also Michael Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1998); and my "As Artistry Permits and Custom May Ordain: The Social Fabric of Material Consumption in the Swahili World," *Northwestern University Program for African Studies, Working Paper* no. 3 (Evanston, Ill., 1998).

⁸⁸ Bartle Frere to Granville, May 7, 1873, FO 84/1391, PRO; T. Postans, "Some Account of the Present State of the Trade between the Port of Mandvi in Cutch, and the East Coast of Africa," *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society* 3 (1839–40): 170, 174.

⁸⁹ Marianne Young, *Cutch, or Random Sketches of Western India* (London, 1838), 12, 14.

⁹⁰ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire*, 160.

⁹¹ James Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa* (London, 1876), 356.

⁹² R. L. Playfair to Earl Russell, December 20, 1863, AA 3/21, ZNA.

⁹³ Playfair to Earl Russell, January 1, 1865, FO 54/22, PRO.

⁹⁴ "Report on the External Commerce of the Presidency of Bombay for the Year 1863–4," V/17/290, IOL. In using the term "export destination," I mean to make a distinction between Indian and

This trend continued, and in 1866–1867 the number of Indian-made cloths exported to East Africa increased ninefold.⁹⁵ To put this trade in perspective, the only Indian product of more importance to Bombay exporters was opium.

Initially, however, it was neither Indian-made cloth nor dyed, printed, and otherwise remade British cloth that became an important item of export to East Africa; it was instead unbleached English cloth, the closest match to the *merekani* available in sufficient quantities at the outbreak of the Civil War. The volume of this cloth exported to East Africa in 1863–1864 was more than twice that of Bombay-dyed English cloth.⁹⁶ English unbleached cloth coming through Bombay picked up where the *merekani* left off, and this meant a windfall for Bombay merchants and their British suppliers. It also made the Bombay export sector more dependent on East African consumers than it had ever been. The volume of East African cloth consumption would continue to increase throughout the 1860s. After the end of the Civil War, ivory production and prices remained high, and Bombay textile exporters stocked the Zanzibar market. In the short four years between 1866 and 1870, East African consumption of Bombay-exported English unbleached cloth quadrupled. With the increasing price of ivory and African production of a greater variety of commodities for the world market, Bombay's new relationship with Zanzibar would change Bombay as much as East Africa in the early years of the 1870s.

In the first half of the 1870s, the exportation of Bombay-manufactured unbleached cottons to East Africa increased, while the volume of British unbleached cotton sent to East Africa declined proportionally. By 1878, Bombay exports of locally made cloth to Zanzibar reached a volume of 2.8 million yards annually, surpassing the volume of British-manufactured unbleached cloth exported to East Africa. Another telling sign of the increased volume of the Indian cloth trade was that, by 1878, the East African region had become the most important importer of Indian-manufactured soap, which was used to wash and soften stiff new cloth. In aggregate, the volume of cloth exported to East Africa from Bombay increased many times over in the late 1870s, even though the Bombay trade in British cloth decreased by 15 percent.⁹⁷ The changes in Bombay's relationship to Zanzibar were, much like similar changes in Salem production forty years earlier, directly related to local production for the East African market. As Bombay merchants and financiers began to invest heavily in expensive European industrial machinery, they appealed to East African tastes in order to secure a growing foreign market. During the 1880s, East Africans would be Bombay's most important

non-Indian reported destinations. The annual reports on trade do not make such a distinction. Instead, they simply list the port to which a cargo was sent. This means that many Bombay textiles sent to Surat or Kutch could have also found their way to East Africa, but I have chosen not to speculate on this indirect trade.

⁹⁵ "Report on the External Commerce of the Presidency of Bombay for the Year 1866–67," V/17/293, IOL. This was not always constant, however, since by 1870 these percentages had fallen somewhat.

⁹⁶ "Report on the External Commerce of the Presidency of Bombay for the Year 1863–4," V/17/290, IOL.

⁹⁷ "Annual Report on the Trade and Navigation of the Presidency of Bombay for the Year 1874–75," V/17/301, IOL.

overseas consumers for its single most important manufactured export: unbleached cotton cloth.

The first textile mills in Bombay were built in the 1850s, and their number increased rapidly in the 1860s and 1870s, reaching almost seventy by the mid-1890s. What is particularly important about these mills from the perspective of the western Indian regional economy, and colonial India's history, is that they were founded almost entirely by investments of Indian, not British, capital.⁹⁸ Bhatia (a Hindu social group) merchants, many of whom relocated to Bombay from Kutch, built up the Bombay overseas trade and invested tremendous amounts of capital in the new mill industry at the very moment that the exit of American cloth left a consumer vacuum in the western Indian Ocean region.⁹⁹ Bhatia firms, along with many Parsi houses based in Bombay, expanded their operations and came to command much of the export trade of western India, which included cotton, opium, rice, and diverse manufactures. It was these firms that had the greatest interest in, and seemingly the most to gain from, the establishment of Bombay as western India's industrial center. Mills that could both spin cotton and manufacture cloth provided ideal investments for Bombay-based houses, as they allowed Bhatia and Parsi cotton traders flexibility in a volatile global cotton economy. With the option to either export cotton thread or manufacture cloth at home, firms could export raw and spun cotton when prices were high or produce their own textiles when cotton prices were depressed. The ubiquity of Indian firms in East Africa ideally positioned Bombay's textile industry to produce for the East African market. Moreover, in the 1870s, the establishment of a telegraph station at Zanzibar allowed for immediate communication between Bombay firms and their Zanzibar agents. Perhaps most important, a revolution in carriage between Zanzibar and Bombay substantially lowered transportation costs and, in turn, reduced the retail price of Bombay cloth in East Africa: direct steamship service.

In the late 1870s, Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar, as part of his vision for the commercial preeminence of his sultanate, introduced a line of six steamships to run between Bombay, Zanzibar, and Madagascar. Even though the British Indian Steam Navigation Company already covered the route between Bombay and East Africa, Barghash was unsatisfied with the company's service and so instituted his own line. The sultan bought several large steamers from German and Scottish manufacturers and offered cargo space at low rates.¹⁰⁰ Since most of his revenue would come from duties, which increased with the introduction of the line, this investment was based on good, long-term fiscal reasoning. Bombay firms quickly began consigning thousands of tons of cargo to each voyage. American residents reported, with great dissatisfaction, that these vessels increased the business between Bombay and Zanzibar exponentially. In the early 1880s, trade in Zanzibar

⁹⁸ Although the first mechanized mills in India were founded in Pondicherry, these employed European, not Indian, capital. Roberts, "West Africa and the Pondicherry Textile Industry"; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capital in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940* (New York, 1994), 26, 247.

⁹⁹ Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capital in India*, 56.

¹⁰⁰ Ropes, in Bennett, *Zanzibar Letters*, 34 n113; Holmans to William MacKinnon, June 1, 1879, MacKinnon Papers, PPMS1/Corr 1, Box 22/folder 88, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library, University of London.

expanded so much that Barghash was forced to enlarge the Zanzibari customs house to accommodate the new volume.¹⁰¹ With lower shipping rates, firms based in both Zanzibar and Bombay began to saturate East Africa with unbleached *merekani* look-alike sheeting, *kaniki* (usually English cottons indigo-dyed in India), as well as rice, wheat, sugar, furniture, and wood—all products that would become essential to the Bombay export trade in the 1880s and that would contribute to Bombay's position as the premier entrepôt in the western Indian Ocean region.¹⁰²

By replicating American cloth and capitalizing on subsidized shipping to Zanzibar, Bombay could continue to lower its cloth prices and appeal to a vast market. Assuming the place American exports had once held in the East African market, the Bombay-manufactured unbleached cloths were a hit, and the repercussions were immediately felt in Bombay. In 1881, the annual volume of Indian-manufactured unbleached cloth exported to Zanzibar reached 5.5 million yards, far outpacing British cloth exported from Bombay.¹⁰³ Over the course of the 1880s, this trend intensified such that in 1887–1888 Zanzibar imported almost all of the unbleached drills, more than half of the unbleached Indian-manufactured sheeting, as well as nearly one quarter of all *dhoti* (a lighter loincloth material) exported from Bombay. In terms of value, these cottons comprised the most important category of Indian-manufactured exports leaving Bombay. By 1888, Bombay exports of unbleached and English cloth to Zanzibar had reached the dizzying height of over 15 million yards a year.¹⁰⁴ An indication of the increasing buying power of East Africans, the decreasing costs of consumer goods, and a revolution in Bombay manufacturing, the volume of imported Indian unbleached cloth alone was now 30 percent higher than the American export trade had been at its apex.

East African consumers were also becoming essential to Bombay's other manufacturing sectors. They were now buying Indian carriages and carts, cabinet ware, furniture, boots, shoes, stationary, rice, ghee, and even fresh vegetables.¹⁰⁵ While the Bombay export economy as a whole was still focused on unmanufactured or semi-manufactured exports such as rice, opium, raw cotton, and thread, Bombay manufacturing for export received critical stimulus from East African consumers. At the same time, convergent price curves meant a windfall for African consumers.

If we track the aggregate Bombay trade with Zanzibar up to the creation of the British protectorate in 1890, we can see that in just five years (1885–1890) the total value of Indian-produced exports to Zanzibar more than doubled. What is so noteworthy about this statistic is the fact that, although the total volume of the

¹⁰¹ Ropes, in Bennett, *Zanzibar Letters*, 20.

¹⁰² Cheney, "Trade in Zanzibar for the Year 1883–4," Roll 3, Vols. 6–7, USCZ. Steamers were only one sector of the trans-Indian Ocean trade. On the all-important dhow trade of the western Indian Ocean, see Erik Gilbert, "The Zanzibar Dhow Trade: An Informal Economy on the East African Coast, 1860–1964" (PhD dissertation, Boston University, 1997).

¹⁰³ "Annual Statement of Trade and Navigation for the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1881–82," V/17/311, IOL. At this time, the total exports of Indian manufactured goods were increasing, but the increases in textile trade were particularly marked.

¹⁰⁴ "Annual Statement of Trade and Navigation for the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1887–1888," V/17/317, IOL.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, the "Annual Statement of Trade and Navigation for the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1881–82," V/17/311, IOL.

export trade of Bombay had not increased significantly, Zanzibar's share of that trade had increased dramatically. In 1890, Zanzibar imported almost 13 million yards of unbleached cotton cloth—India's most important manufactured item—amounting to nearly *half* of the total unbleached cloth exported from Bombay.¹⁰⁶ By the date of the sultan of Zanzibar's acquiescence to protectorate status, East Africa was importing 10 percent of the total of all Indian manufactured goods and produce exported from Bombay, which less than fifty years earlier had only accounted for 10 to 15 percent of the market but now accounted for the vast majority of Bombay's trade.¹⁰⁷ Zanzibar's share of India's trade would further increase in the 1890s and only reach a plateau after the turn of the century.

Bombay had become the Indian Ocean's most important commercial and industrial center, and its success was related, in part, to East African demand for a constellation of consumer goods. On the eve of colonial imposition in Zanzibar, Bombay had not only overtaken its American and Kutchi competitors, it had supplanted their manufactures by developing its own textile industry, one that also catered to the tastes of East Africans. As a result, unbleached cottons became the central focus of the Bombay export trade in manufactured goods. Between the 1860s and the early 1890s, Bombay had affected a radical economic change, drastically increasing its export and manufacturing capacities. When the British government appropriated Zanzibar in 1890, East African consumers were crucial to both the export trade in Bombay-manufactured goods and the external commerce of South Asia's commercial hub generally.¹⁰⁸ This new relationship was clear in East Africa as well. Imported cloth had become ubiquitous throughout the region, and wearing an abundance of cloth was by no means uncommon. For instance, May French-Sheldon, visiting Taveta (eastern Kenya) in the late 1880s, wrote that the elders with whom she met wore up to fifteen yards of cloth at a time.¹⁰⁹

It is difficult to assess the myriad or long-term ways in which East African consumers affected India's export economy, but the figures I have considered here, combined with Bombay's trajectory as the British Empire's second city and most important colonial capital, suggest the significance of East African consumer demand to Indian industrialization and British Indian interests. When the East African consumption of Bombay goods peaked at the end of the 1890s, Bombay was India's most important port for foreign trade. The mills were Bombay's primary industry and the city's largest employer. Textile production was the foundation of the city's prosperity and rapid economic growth. The industry shaped the nature of

¹⁰⁶ "Annual Statement of Trade and Navigation for the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1881–82," V/17/311, IOL. Again, I have excluded Bombay exports to other Indian ports in this tabulation. This number includes almost 10 million yards of unbleached sheetings (52.6 percent of the total Indian-produced sheetings exported from Bombay), over 2 million yards of other unbleached cloth (28.8 percent of the total), as well as the majority of drills, jeans, and chadders exported from Bombay. Zanzibar also imported nearly 9 million yards of British-manufactured colored cloth from Bombay, bringing the total annual Bombay export trade in textiles to East Africa up to 22 million yards. Zanzibar was the single largest market for Bombay-exported umbrellas, glassware, and furniture as well.

¹⁰⁷ "Annual Report of the Trade and Navigation of the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1889–90," V/17/319, IOL.

¹⁰⁸ "Annual Report of the Trade and Navigation of the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1889–90," V/17/319, IOL. Mozambique imported nearly 25 percent of Bombay's unbleached cloth exports. This made eastern Africa the single largest market by far for the Bombay textile industry's export trade.

¹⁰⁹ French-Sheldon, *Sultan to Sultan*, 225.

the regional labor market and patterns of rural-urban migration, making Bombay one of Asia's most important manufacturing centers.¹¹⁰ Under pressure from cheap English textiles—what Marx famously called the “heavy artillery” of capitalism—the Bombay export industry appealed to East African consumers. While English merchants flooded Indian markets with British cloth, Indian merchants both remade this British cloth to meet African standards and cultivated a market for Bombay-manufactured textiles by replicating the American varieties popular in the western Indian Ocean region. In choosing to buy immense amounts of Indian cloth, East African consumers in turn stimulated Bombay’s industrialization.

THIS ESSAY HAS SOUGHT TO EXAMINE the complex relationships among economies, cultures, and the global systems they affect by considering the importance of East African consumer desires to the nineteenth-century global economy. Significant international competition for East African commodities—such as ivory and cloves—assured East Africans favorable terms of trade. As a result of this commercial position, East Africans had great leverage in defining their relationships to other world regions. American, Indian, and European producers learned that they had to appeal to African tastes and often found no market for goods that did not meet Africans’ shifting aesthetic standards. Yet fashions changed so quickly in East Africa that overseas manufacturers could not always stay abreast of trends. Thus many trade goods had to be refinished or remade in Zanzibar, other coastal cities, at inland centers of trade, or on the caravan trail. Despite the complexities of East African trade, manufacturers in America and India produced inexpensive cloth that appealed to East African consumer interests. In the process, Salemites built the first steam-powered textile mill in the United States, while Bombay embarked on a program that would make it the industrial center of the Indian Ocean region by the end of the nineteenth century. For two cities on opposite sides of the world, manufacturing for the East African market offered new economic opportunities and provided important stimuli to industrialization at conjunctural moments in their histories. What we can discern from these vignettes of transregional engagement is that negotiated transaction and consumer desire on the part of people considered marginal to global systems have, at times, been just as important to patterns of global integration as “peripheral” adjustments to the demands of international capital. More specifically, we can conclude that the terms of trade in the southwestern Indian Ocean were constantly being negotiated before colonialism, and that these terms were never wholly determined by the interests of Americans, Indians, or Europeans.¹¹¹ The direct reciprocities evident in these

¹¹⁰ Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capital*, 239; D. Mazumdar, “Labor Supply in Early Industrialization: The Case of the Bombay Textile Industry,” *Economic History Review* 26, no. 3 (1973): 477–96.

¹¹¹ Even colonial conquest did not negate the effects Africans could have on economic systems through consumer demand. See Christopher Steiner’s analysis of European textile production for West African consumers under colonialism: “Another Image of Africa: Toward an Ethnohistory of European Cloth Marketed in West Africa, 1873–1960,” *Ethnohistory* 32, no. 2 (1985): 91–110. See also Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, N.C., 1996).

exchanges were not a function of equity or symmetry over the long term—Europeans colonized Africa, after all—but they did entail a dialectic that reshaped extra-African locales at the same time that foreign interests, ideas, and strategies were transforming East Africa.

The global repercussions of East African consumerism point up an epistemological concern that transcends the networks I outlined above. By not recognizing the kinds of histories of interdetermination evident in East Africa's global relationships, we indulge a mode of thinking that imagines the world as a conglomeration of historically disjointed spheres only brought into relation by the interests of Westerners. Such a divisive ideology, born of the nineteenth-century imperial imagination, dispossesses “peripheries” of global historical relevance beyond production for a world market and obscures the ways in which societies have always constituted themselves in direct relation to others across the globe. It is my belief that interconnected pasts have the power to challenge modern fantasies of historical isolation and contest notions of discrete national or continental historical trajectories that underwrite much of contemporary globalization rhetoric.¹¹² The archive of an interdependent past, of which the repercussions of East African consumerism are only a small part, offers myriad stories that complicate assumptions of hermetic pasts. A reconsideration of global interrelation from a multi-dimensional, historical perspective allows us to see contemporary globalization processes as overlaying and drawing on, as well as departing from, past moments of integration. Vignettes of relation like those I offered above can resuscitate visions of globality that have fallen prey to a process of forgetting integral to imperial, colonial, and nationalist knowledge production.¹¹³ In considering the global repercussions of African consumerism, for instance, we disrupt unidimensional histories of Western and Indian economies.¹¹⁴

The global repercussions of East African consumerism demonstrate that any account of globalization that posits a singular historical trajectory is untenable. While we should not discount the constraints on choice faced by people around the world, the evidence I offered above suggests that seemingly marginal individuals have possessed abilities to affect larger frameworks. Thus I believe that the frames of reference and strategies for self-definition that many people outside of the “core” employ in their everyday lives deserve greater attention in the development of an inclusive genealogy of globalization. By considering trajectories of global integration from the standpoint of “peripheral” interests, we both reinsert multidimensionality into narratives of globalization and offer alternative perspectives on global relationships that do not assume the primacy of any unmitigated globalizing

¹¹² For important interventions that challenge discrete historical trajectories, be they national, regional, or continental, in contemporary globalization discourse, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Perspective of the World: Globalization Then and Now,” in *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization*, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, ed. (Albany, N.Y., 2002); and Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997). Of course, building an archive of human interrelation beyond the categories of nation-state and continent lies at the heart of the World/Global History project.

¹¹³ Vinay Lal, *Empire of Knowledge: Culture and Plurality in the Global Economy* (London, 2002).

¹¹⁴ See, for example, K. N. Chaudhuri's assumption of East Africa's relative unimportance to the economic history of India and the Indian Ocean in *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York, 1985).

dynamic. The evidence offered here suggests that we can ascribe systemic constitution and change to not only the interests of the "core" but also to consumer desires across the globe and myriad transactions as seemingly inconsequential as the purchase of a length of cloth.

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