Historians of the Indian Ocean world have animated how mobility and immobility shaped and reflected the histories of not only littoral societies but also their “hinterlands,” “extending inwards into the interior with ‘porous frontiers acting as filters through which the salt of the sea is gradually replaced by the silt of the land.”[1] During the long nineteenth century, the waters of Lake Tanganyika, situated at the heart of the African continent, became somewhat saltier as various inhabitants of the East African coast and across the ocean, as well as many translocal groups from the interior, forged together new emporia on the lakeshores, thus expanding the frontiers of the Indian Ocean world and the Great Lakes region of Africa. In his innovative monograph, *On the Frontiers of the Indian Ocean World: A History of Lake Tanganyika, c. 1830-1890*, Philip Gooding brings together the lacustrine and oceanic environments to illustrate how the histories of the Indian Ocean and Lake Tanganyika became co-constitutive over the nineteenth century. The book challenges how African history is conceptualized spatially and how it operated on both the local and global scales by investigating the rapid environmental, material, and cultural transformations of the lake within the orbit of the Indian Ocean world.

Gooding organizes the book thematically, dividing it into two parts, in addition to an introduction and an epilogue. The introduction situates the lake within the history and historiography of the Indian Ocean world by discussing how both the ocean and the lake were far from being in a unidirectional hegemonic relationship emanating from the first to the latter. Rather, Gooding demonstrates how the lake and its populations' imprints can be seen on what is characterized as oceanic cultural and material identity signifiers (e.g., Islam, built environment, dhows, and apparel). The first part, "Demarcations of Space," is composed of three chapters that outline the environmental contours of the region and the gradual processes of urbanization, land use, and relationship to the lake that developed over the nineteenth century. The development of emporia on the lakeshore resembled how the trajectories of different rising and falling ports around the Indian Ocean characterized its history. The commercial boom and bust of lakeshore towns affected population growth and urbanization, which in turn irreversibly altered how the locals interacted with the lake.

The second part, "Interactions," unfolds in four chapters that examine the integration of the lake with the Indian Ocean and the broader world...
economy through tracing the settlement of Swahilis, Omanis, and Europeans on the lakeshores. Gooding charts the subsequent relationships, conflicts, and events over material goods, religious ideas, and bondage structures that integrated the lake into an Indian Ocean arena. In his epilogue, Gooding revisits the riots of 1888 and the subsequent outbreak of the Abushiri Rebellion (1888–90) to highlight the lake's contribution to what has been conceived as primarily a Swahili movement. By interrogating descriptions of the rioters in European sources as “Barbarians/shenzi” and the timing of the arrival of interior caravans to the coast, Gooding highlights how an earlier formation of interior populations' identity loosely based on coastal cultural norms played out as a significant motivation that protested Swahili power hierarchies (p. 218).

Gooding maps out a dynamic world, involving far-flung actors. The ivory trade, financed by the South Asians, fueled the caravans that traversed East Africa, from the ocean to the lake, which in turn gave rise to political authorities in the Zanzibar Archipelago and attracted global commercial networks. This did not go on without challenges from local powers represented in many chiefdoms, such as Mirambo, Ngoni, Rundi, Jiji, Fipa, and Nyungu ya Mawe, all of whom founded new states that attempted to carve out political authority by using military strength to tap into the ivory flows. The narrative centers on "encounters" between the locals and their environment and between distinct groups of people coming from different locales. What resulted was the emergence of mutual perceptions, shared belief systems, trade networks, institutional structures, and interconnected material cultures that shaped both the lake's populations and those of the East African littoral.

The concept of “frontier” operates throughout the book, highlighting “socio-political instability, economic opportunity, and heightened levels of cultural exchange” (p. 16). Building on the works of Frederick Jackson Turner, Dietrich Gerhard, and Igor Kopytoff, Gooding redeploy their theorization of “frontier” to accentuate the encounter between the populations of the lake and the ocean.[2] Gooding opens the book with the Omani merchant Mohammed bin Khalfan el-Barwani (known locally as Rumaliza) arriving at the lake in the late 1870s. Moving in the opposite direction, we find heterogeneous groups known collectively as Manyema crossing the lake from the Congo to the Indian Ocean. There they were joined by coastal traders, who came in occasional “flying caravans” in the 1830s but gradually settled around the lake and in eastern Congo (p. 14). The monsoon system shaped the climatic conditions of the Great Lakes and was thus a familiar sight to oceanic newcomers. These exchanges across the lake were multifaceted and multidirectional, permeating both material and cultural life; the lakeshore populations saw their lake as "endless,' as an ocean" (p. 116).

The book is a much-needed contribution to African historiography, which tends to overemphasize the local when writing regional histories within the confines of postcolonial nation-states. The division of Swahili and inland history is a colonial legacy that should be undone in both African and oceanic historiographies, and Gooding manages to paint a textured picture of a connected world. Some of the lake’s populations, such as the Rundi, Jiji, and Bende, claimed to originate from across the lake, unlike their inland neighbors. Likewise, some of the Swahili groups traced their origins from across the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf, rather than to their hinterlands. By writing a history of Lake Tanganyika, Gooding shows not only how the lake functioned as an ocean-like environment for the different populations to traverse and interact with one another but also how its cosmopolitanism reflected the wider western Indian Ocean as a “meeting place” (pp. 10, 19).
Similar to the framework of “frontier,” the generative notion of a “meeting place” can also be extrapolated as Gooding showcases the encounter between different groups of people, their agrarian environment, and sociocultural expectations. The ecological reading of agrarian practices and their intersection with oceanic and lacustrine crop selection is particularly significant in shaping these cultural-environmental meetings. East Africa’s longue durée connections with the rest of the Indian Ocean brought many staple crops over the centuries that affected economic activities and generated social changes. Since the spread of bananas in antiquity, the nineteenth century revolutionized the agrarian landscape of the lake, first with cassava, then with maize, and finally with rice. Gooding insightfully foregrounds the interconnections between these agrarian introductions and intersecting changes in land use, climatic conditions, labor requirements, and cultural expectations. Culturally, the spread of Islam was closely linked to a set of agrarian and material-cultural introductions that characterized lakeside Muslims, who “spoke Swahili, preferred rice over other staples, wore imported cotton cloth (especially *merikani* and often in the style of a *kanzu*), and carried a gun” (p. 200). This observation is remarkably found on the eastern Indian Ocean rim where Islam spread around the Ganges Delta and the Malay Archipelago. This process was also accompanied by wet rice cultivation and religious associations with material-cultural markers of Islamic identity.[3]

Gooding’s book offers critical interventions on many fronts; however, some parts of the book engage in unwarranted critiques of the latest wave of scholarship on the transoceanic history of Oman and East Africa, particularly the works of Fahad A. Bishara (*A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950* [2017]) and Thomas F. McDow (*Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* [2018]). For example, he accuses Bishara of sidelining interior African peoples, which seems an unfair critique of a book that aims to trace transoceanic legal connections. Gooding overlooks textual Arabic and Swahili sources and writes a revisionist history based on the publications of “explorers” and the archives of missionaries, informed by oral histories collected from twenty-seven interviews with elders over three months (p. 23). Although the latest wave of Indian Ocean histories and their textual sources might not directly answer his research questions about the lake and its history, it could offer a textured and nuanced interpretation of his European sources and oral histories—particularly the latter. Moreover, because of this dependence on European sources, the Omanis and Swahilis appear monolithic and instrumentalist, acting upon each other without much internal variation in terms of interests and alliances and with little motivation beyond material interests. This could be improved with a wider engagement with scholarship on the region, such as John C. Wilkinson’s comprehensive book, *The Arabs and the Scramble for Africa* (2015).

Despite these issues, which are perhaps to be expected in such an innovative and ambitious scholarly work, *On the Frontiers of the Indian Ocean World* offers groundbreaking contributions that bring together the often disconnected histories of the African interiors and the broader oceanic worlds; it also provides insights into the environmental and material-cultural processes that have animated the shared histories of Lake Tanganyika and the Indian Ocean world. This book can serve as an informative companion to other lacustrine and oceanic histories. Its chapters can be read as standalone introductions, which is helpful for undergraduate- and graduate-level seminars on oceanic Africa’s transregional, environmental, economic, and cultural histories.

Notes

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