

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

This issue of the *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* contains three research articles and one book review. Collectively, they display the interdisciplinarity of Indian Ocean World (IOW) Studies as a field, moving between history, art history, anthropology, fashion, and cultural heritage studies. They also show how approaches rooted in IOW Studies can challenge Eurocentric spatial frames, such as the nation-state and area studies, in scholarly analysis.

In ‘Indian Ocean history for the age of non-alignment,’ Nile Green traces a process of indigenous identity formation amongst urban Muslims in Sri Lanka, referred to as ‘Moors,’ from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Although ‘Moorish identity’ was forged partly with reference to colonial and orientalist publications, the process by which it occurred challenges us to think beyond the nation state and conventional ‘areas’ when examining identity formation. The ‘Moorish connection’ in Sri Lanka, Green shows, reached across the western Indian Ocean World and beyond, into the Mediterranean and as far as Morocco and Andalusia. In some ways, Green’s is an intellectual history that highlights trans-IOW networks that extend beyond more familiar ‘global,’ commercial, soft-power connections.

Dionisius Grandy Fharose’s article, ‘The crown of a man,’ supports many of these threads. Like Green, he focuses on Muslims in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century IOW, and he stresses the importance of cultural connections that transcend traditional ‘areas.’ His focus, though, is on nearly identical skullcaps – specifically, headgear worn by Muslim men at different times in a variety of locations, including in present-day Tanzania, India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Drawing on his Indonesian heritage, his fieldwork in Tanzania, and secondary literature, he traces changing fashions in various locales to a range of historical circumstances, including the imposition of European colonial rule, the rise anti-colonial movements, and identity formation in modern nation states.

Jessica Leigh Thornton and Zanele Hartmann’s article, ‘The living sea,’ integrates this broader drive to challenge Eurocentric spatial frameworks by focusing on the ocean itself. Through interviews with coastal populations in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, they challenge scholars and policy makers to look beyond the traditional binary between terrestrial and maritime spheres. They show that people of diverse backgrounds and occupations engage with the ocean in both spiritual and material ways, making it central

to their culture and heritage. This, Thornton and Hartmann argue, needs to be reflected in both scholarship and in policy decisions regarding coastal and maritime access.

Finally, renowned writer and poet, J.C. Niala, in her review of Prita Meier's *The Surface of Things* (2024), notes that the work is an 'immensely valuable contribution to the field.' As Niala indicates, Meier's book examines over 200 images from the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries as a medium through which to examine the history of the Swahili coast. Relatedly, members of the Indian Ocean World Centre would like to endorse the book's approach and Niala's review. Following our May 2024 conference, 'Visual portrayals of environmental crises in the Indian Ocean World, past to present,' we see the enormous value from multiple academic perspectives of engaging with the visual as an additional frontier in IOW Studies. Critical engagement with 'visual portrayals' as sources, including photographs, has the capacity to advance scholarly approaches across disciplines.

The JIOWS Editorial Team