

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The editors of the *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies (JIOWS)* are proud to present the first of two special issues organised by anthropologists Iain Walker and Martin Slama on diasporas and transnationalism in the Indian Ocean World (IOW). This first special issue challenges scholars to refocus our understandings of the meaning of ‘diaspora,’ a term whose wide usage in recent years has diminished its analytical utility, by conceiving the IOW as a macro-region in which diasporas ‘come into being, endure, and sustain themselves.’ Building on both classic and more recent works, the contributors to this issue examine the ways in which the development of diasporas has facilitated the maintenance of networks – commercial, religious, kinship, and more – around the IOW. They do so partly through the conceptualisation of the ‘diaspora for others.’ This concept rejects recent approaches that conflate ‘groups of migrants’ with diasporas. Instead, it conceives the diaspora as a ‘spatially dispersed community’ that functions ‘as a community,’ despite the sometimes large distances between its members. The emphasis is not merely on what diasporas *are* as an abstract phenomenon, but what they *do* for the people within them. This enables the contributors to incorporate communities whose ‘diasporic’ identity might be brought into question if the focus on the ‘group of migrants’ in diaspora studies were to continue. They additionally do this from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, including anthropology, literary studies, history, ethnography, and cultural heritage studies. They thus both refine and expand how the concept of ‘diaspora’ should be understood, highlight the interdisciplinary focus of the *JIOWS*, and show the ‘diaspora for others’ as a potentially ground-breaking feature of diaspora studies in the IOW and beyond.

The *JIOWS* Editorial Team