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# Complex Strands: Changing Textile Trades in Western Madagascar and the Mozambique Channel in the Nineteenth Century, Evidence from Nosy Be Island

SAMUEL SANCHEZ

*This article examines the textiles trades of the west coast of Madagascar through the commercial relations and connections of Nosy Be with East Africa, the Comoro islands, the Mascarenes, India, French and other European imperial and metropolitan interests. It argues that, despite having been overlooked by historians in favour of Madagascar's east coast economy centred on Tamatave, the island of Nosy Be in the far north-west of the island provides a critical vantage point from which to study the commercial exchange dynamics centred on a variety of textiles in the nineteenth century, a period of marked upheaval in the western Indian Ocean. Despite competition from European and American cloths — involving state perquisites granted to French textiles — Indian and other regional cloth continued to maintain important markets amongst Malagasy consumers into the early twentieth century.*

In the nineteenth century, the island of Madagascar imported great quantities of a range of manufactured objects from Europe and India, including weapons, hardware, ceramics and cotton fabrics. As in continental eastern Africa, which lies 400 kilometres across the Mozambique Channel, textiles were by far the most significant of these imported goods. Several recent works have traced the diffusion of weaving and dress styles in the Indian Ocean world, while others have examined the continental eastern African trade, centred on Zanzibar. Looking to Madagascar, authors have written much about the eastern port city of Tamatave (Toamasina) and its east coast economy, believing it to have been the most important trade interface with American and European traders. By contrast, we still lack detailed studies of the west coast of Madagascar, and a precise understanding of the specific pathways by which imported textiles were carried there through maritime trade, and from there into the hinterland of the *Grande Île*. Through an examination of the customs records of the island of Nosy Be, located in the far north-west of Madagascar, and my compilation of trade statistics from them, this article specifies how textile trading networks in western Madagascar were articulated in the early nineteenth century, and their ongoing organisational transformations into the early twentieth century. My main focus concerns the interactions between the key economic players involved in the regional trade — namely Swahili, Gujarati, French, American and German traders and merchants — who settled on Nosy Be (a French colony from 1840) and in several nearby ports of the Mozambique Channel.

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This article also brings to light the little-known, but important, ‘French connection’ that shaped the textile trades of the western Indian Ocean world in the nineteenth century: the role of the French colonial establishment of Nosy Be as a major hub in the redistribution of textiles in the Mozambique Channel, the impacts of French policy on the nature of the textile trade in the wider region and, finally, the circulation of textiles made in French colonies (Pondicherry) and in metropolitan factories. In describing the different kinds of textiles sold in western Madagascar and mapping their links to various trading networks of importation and re-exportation, this article further reveals the connections between the chronological rhythms of the textile trades and the geopolitical events that occurred in the wider region. For this undertaking, it becomes necessary to examine the transformations in the market share of each import and export chain by era and by area. A central aim is to underscore the importance of the nineteenth century as a crucial moment of transition when Madagascar became more firmly entrenched in an expanding global economy. The case study of Nosy Be supports others’ findings that, despite the many major changes during this century, some older patterns were maintained in the western Indian Ocean world, in this case continuity in the connections between Madagascar and the cloth manufacturing areas of western India and, to a smaller degree, of Oman in southern Arabia. Finally, Nosy Be offers the unique advantage of having detailed and consistent archival records extending back to the 1840s, due to its early French colonisation. It therefore offers information unavailable for any other port of western Madagascar in the nineteenth century before the advent of the French protectorate established in 1885.

### CLOTH AT THE HEART OF EARLY MODERN EXCHANGE IN MADAGASCAR

As in East Africa in the sixteenth century, Indian textiles — in addition to ceramics and weapons — were the most important manufactured good imported into Madagascar, an island larger than the combined British Isles. Amongst the earliest observations made by the Portuguese when they first visited the ports of the west coast of Madagascar at the dawn of the sixteenth century (1506) was their amazement at the ubiquity of textiles from Gujarat. They noted that the cloths came in particular from Cambay (present-day Khambhat), and were stocked in the warehouses of local Muslim merchants known as the Antalaotra, ‘People of the Sea’.<sup>1</sup> This west coast maritime trade was dominated by these Antalaotra as well as Swahili traders who resided in small coastal towns such as Langany and Boeny, and were deeply connected to the Swahili cities of Malindi and Mombasa on continental East Africa, and through them, to western India.

Early records underscore how the island of Madagascar was already at that time deeply integrated into an economic area radiating from the great textile-producing centres of the northern Indian Ocean. These cloths, as many scholars have shown, were mostly manufactured in Gujarat in western India, the birthplace of cotton which dominated the world until the first decades of the nineteenth century; they were shipped *en masse* from Gujarat to consuming areas in the western and southern Indian Ocean. From the seventeenth century, the port of Surat surpassed Cambay as a commercial and trading centre, but Gujarati merchant networks remained prominent in the distribution of textiles in the south-western Indian Ocean.<sup>2</sup>

Two distinct supply chains for Indian textile imports can be detected in Madagascar. The first, previously mentioned, involved the west coast of the island which, together with the

coast opposite Mozambique, formed a secondary market for exports from western India, supplied by brokers who were mainly Swahili or Gujarati. On the east coast of the island, by contrast, Indian textiles mostly originated from Bengal, in eastern India, and were transported by European traders, based in the nearby Mascarene islands (present-day Reunion Island and Mauritius), who used the cotton cloth to trade for products in Madagascar. They were for the most part French and creole traders seeking slaves, rice, beef and wood to sustain the Mascarenes' developing plantation-type economy.<sup>3</sup> Malagasy traders, for their part, would release these raw commodities only in exchange for silver *piastres* (coins) and, on a smaller scale, certain types of textiles. In order to correct this trade imbalance, the French from the Mascarenes desperately sought to procure silver and cloth by developing direct relations with America and India, and, in the latter case, Bengal for its textiles.

This commercial pattern continued into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Europeans (Portuguese, English, Dutch, French) succeeded in penetrating the Malagasy market of the east coast slave trade, but they were largely shut out of the west coast, which remained in the hands of Swahili merchants, connected to the textile exporting port of Surat. For a short time, too, at the turn of the eighteenth century, several hundred Sakalava Malagasy joined this long-distance trade, organising sea-going expeditions that largely took the form of slave raids on the Swahili Coast; how and if textiles played into this short-lived venture has not been determined.<sup>4</sup> And so it was that, at the end of the eighteenth century, the Mascarene French still considered the west coast as a region 'monopolised by the Arabs', a region which French traders very much wished to penetrate economically. This, however, would only come about at the very end of the nineteenth century, when Madagascar officially became a French colony, and its markets were massively and forcibly re-oriented towards French and English textiles.

Recent works by several scholars, notably Gwyn Campbell, Pier Larson and Sarah Fee on Madagascar, Jeremy Prestholdt and Chhaya Goswami on the Swahili Coast and Pedro Machado on Mozambique, have deepened and extended our knowledge of the textile trades of the south-western Indian Ocean between the sixteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries, trades involving mainly cloth carried by Gujarati merchants.<sup>5</sup> Madagascar was unique in some respects in the wider region, as it was not only an importer, but also a producer of textiles, even at times a cloth exporter. Locally woven raffia, bast or cotton wrappers were the ordinary dress of most Malagasy, while both mid-range and high-quality raffia and silk cloths were at times exported to East Africa, the Mascarenes and even Europe. These export textiles were made and/or transformed in the Antalaotra harbour towns of West Madagascar, or at times in the Central Highlands. And while there is evidence that trade and textile imports stimulated certain sectors of Madagascar's handweaving, overall the Malagasy textile industry likely suffered from Indian textile competition, beginning in the late eighteenth or mid-nineteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> As mass-produced cottons became cheaper than ever, and as Madagascar's involvement in the slave trade in African captives increased, so too did the importation of non-Malagasy-made cotton textiles. More durable than cloth made of raffia, and likely fashionable for their novelty, imported cottons became highly desirable, at the expense of local cloth. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, many remote regions continued to rely on locally made textiles.<sup>7</sup> In the 1820s, James Hastie, an English agent who served also as military advisor to King Radama I of the central highlands, measured a region's wealth based on the way its inhabitants dressed. Indeed, dress was an important indication of a region's level of involvement in globalised

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trade, and the writings of Hastie revealed that many areas were little connected with overseas networks. For instance, in Ambongo to the west, and North Alaotra of the highlands, the Malagasy continued to wear raffia clothing and possessed no imported manufactured wares, neither dishes nor weapons.<sup>8</sup>

On the west coast of Madagascar, the port of Majunga served as the main base for the Antalaotra, Swahili and Gujarati merchants who monopolised Indian cloth imports. In the 1820s, it received annually ships sent and freighted by Gujarati merchants from Surat, bringing cargoes of Indian fabrics that were exchanged for raw products and also for the silver *piastres* obtained by the Malagasy in their slave trade with European traders from the Mascarenes.<sup>9</sup> From there, the cloth was distributed far and wide in the island. Much of it travelled eastward, hundreds of kilometres inland, ferried up the Betsiboka River and then marched upland to the expanding highland Merina kingdom, where demand for Indian textiles was so high that, according to Gwyn Campbell, in the first part of nineteenth century, Merina traders spent up to 80 per cent of their earnings on Indian textiles.<sup>10</sup>

Until the 1820s, Madagascar's west coast remained a market for imports of Gujarati Indian cloth, while its east coast sought cottons from Bengal and Coromandel, principally from the French colony of Pondicherry in the latter. And yet, although all the textiles may have originated in the Indian subcontinent, the identities of the traders carrying them varied markedly; in the west they were local Muslim seafaring traders, while in the east they were merchants with connections both local and linked to the Atlantic economy.

Simultaneously, new networks of textile diffusion were taking shape. During the Napoleonic wars, New England merchants from Boston and Salem entered the Mozambique Channel economy, especially in Majunga and Zanzibar where they founded important warehouses, connected to Swahili and Antalaotra brokers' networks.<sup>11</sup> As several scholars have shown, their commerce was facilitated in no small part by their access to the industrially made cloth that had begun to pour from new factories in and around Lowell, Massachusetts, cloth custom-made to appeal to the consumer tastes of East Africans and the Malagasy.<sup>12</sup> After 1810, cottons from Manchester, England, also found new outlets in the Indian Ocean, through Mauritius, which became an important port of redistribution of Indian and British manufactured goods in the region.

### NINETEENTH-CENTURY TRANSFORMATIONS

By around 1900, the nature of the textile trade in Madagascar had changed dramatically. Most imported textiles in Madagascar were now coming from France or, to a lesser degree, from Britain. Analysing this shift is important not only for economic history, but also for understanding the social dimensions of the history of consumption in the greater region of the Indian Ocean.

Trade figures from Nosy Be, a small island measuring some 312 square kilometres lying off Madagascar's west coast, provide unique insights into this little-studied transition that occurred from the 1820s to the 1890s. Rare early figures exist for Nosy Be because it became a privileged stopping point for Mozambique Channel trade once the island was made a French colony in 1840, with agents recording imports and exports in the decades thereafter.

The first information on textile exchanges in the Nosy Be area indeed dates to the French arrival there in 1840. At that time, the region was noted to be entirely dominated by Antalaotra and Swahili trading networks, and the west of Madagascar remained a satellite

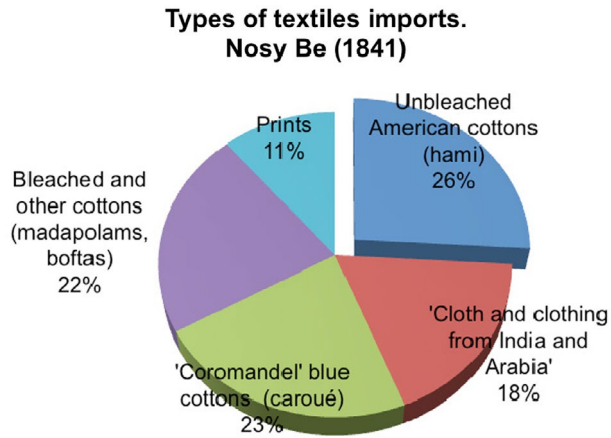


FIG. 1. Types of textile imports, Nosy Be (1841).

Source: C. Guillain, 1843.

of the economy of Zanzibar. An important part of textiles sold to the Malagasy was American cloth or American-made unbleached sheeting — known as *merikani* ('American') in East Africa and *hami* or *soga* in Madagascar — which was introduced in Zanzibar and Majunga by New England merchants, like Ropes and Co., and then distributed by local Swahili brokers in the south-western Indian Ocean.<sup>13</sup>

Though American-made sheeting was important, it by no means constituted the majority of imported textiles in the west. Of the 88,439 francs of imported textiles which arrived in Nosy Be in 1841, only a quarter (26 per cent) was unbleached sheeting from America (Fig. 1). Furthermore, although this American-made sheeting was appreciated for its durability and resistance to stains, it usually first had to be adapted to western Malagasy tastes by artisans in Zanzibar, who made it more fashionable by stitching red bands or fringes to the plain white cloth.<sup>14</sup> Although the vague cloth terminology of French records is difficult to decipher, it is likely that the remaining 74 per cent of imports were cloths mostly of finer quality, and mostly manufactured in the western Indian Ocean, in various parts of India and in Oman in southern Arabia (see Fee, this volume). Nearly equal in amount to American sheeting were bleached and other cottons (22 per cent) — 'madapolams, boftas' — likely handwoven in India, although some of these may have been re-exports of British-made industrial cloth, as we know from other sources that Madagascar, like East Africa, received English wares via Gujarati ports.<sup>15</sup> A slightly higher share (23 per cent) of Nosy Be's cloth imports was so-called 'Coromandel' blue cottons, indigo piece-dyed cloth, imported by French traders from Reunion Island, which were most probably dyed in Pondicherry, France's Indian colony that had long produced for West African markets.<sup>16</sup> Prints (11 per cent) constituted the smallest class of textile imports; designated as 'various prints', their provenance could have been India, England, or both. A high percentage (18 per cent) of Nosy Be's cloth imports comprised 'cloth and clothing from India and Arabia', likely mainly striped wrappers from Oman and Kachchh, some of which could be embellished with silk or gold thread as Sarah Fee describes at length in this volume.<sup>17</sup> We know that merchants of the 1840s were shipping these types of striped cloths, used as turbans and wrappers, to nearby Majunga on mainland Madagascar.<sup>18</sup>

NOSY BE AS LOCUS FOR STUDYING THE MADAGASCAR WEST COAST TEXTILE TRADE

Although detailed information on the origins of cloth imports to Nosy Be exists for the year 1841, unfortunately there is very little material on the structure of trade for the following two decades. Archival sources are patchy and do not provide accurate information on the type of textiles nor on the share of each textile type in the total value of imports. Nevertheless, it appears that textiles constituted around 50 per cent of total imports, as in the 1870–1890 period, for which more accurate information is available.

From the mid-1860s, several sources provide additional details, but still do not reveal the types of textiles that were imported. French customs officials contented themselves with generic terms like *tissus* ('cloth'), *balle de cotonnade* ('bales of cloth') or *balle de tissus de coton et de soie* ('bales of cloth of cotton and silk') to designate textiles, not bothering to record further details. Specific names such as *simbo*, *Madrapolam*, *percale*, *toile de Guinée*, and so on do appear occasionally, but they are still not specific enough to allow identification or origins and are too rare to enable the creation of statistical series.

Nonetheless, if we examine the ports of departure of the vessels that transported the textiles to the warehouses of Nosy Be harbour, we can begin to generate a bigger picture. From the 1850s, the trade between Madagascar and Europe grew, carried by big companies operating out of Marseilles and Hamburg. Beginning in 1859, the German (Hanseatic) company O'swald marketed English-made textiles robustly in western Madagascar, and Nosy Be became a general warehouse for manufactured goods introduced by German ships. These English products were redistributed on the coast by Antalaotra and Swahili brokers, using dhows for coastal trade.

In this regard, Nosy Be was similar to Zanzibar for the same period, when its major port town of Unguja redistributed textiles of Indian, European and North American manufacture to the African hinterland. Textiles represented 40 per cent of Zanzibar's imports, with 70 per cent of its re-exports to the mainland constituted by textiles. These

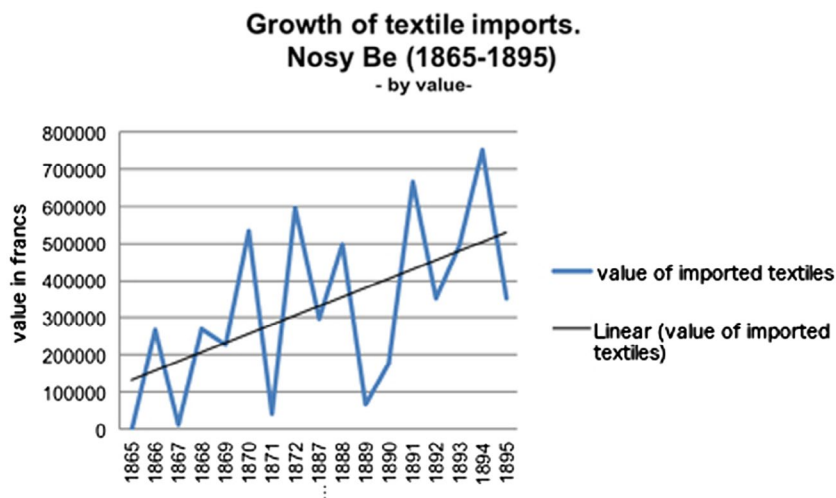


FIG. 2. Growth of textile imports, Nosy Be (1865–1895).  
Source: ANOM, *Madc290*.

could in some years be worth up to 900,000 dollars.<sup>19</sup> In Zanzibar, as has been well established, textiles sent to the mainland were exchanged for ivory and slaves, or served as diplomatic gifts in the conduct of these trades; in Madagascar, cotton fabrics were used by merchants to acquire rice, mangrove poles, tortoiseshell, hides and salted beef, and, from the 1870s, latex.

Documentary sources for Nosy Be improve considerably for the years 1866 to 1895, making it possible to establish figures on textile imports. Figure 2 shows the general growth of textile imports, despite the recurring crises then affecting trade, such as hurricanes, the 1870 Franco-German war, the abolition of free trade harbour laws and the global turbulence in sugar markets from 1860 to 1880 which caused sugar-cane plantation economies such as the Mascarenes to experience great economic difficulties.<sup>20</sup>

#### FRENCH TEXTILES IN MADAGASCAR

In the period between 1866 and 1872, industrial textiles redistributed by French trading firms dominated Nosy Be's textile imports, representing 44 per cent of all textile imports. For the most part, these cloths came from factories in Rouen, Lyons and Marseilles, but one cannot exclude the possibility that some British- and American-made textiles were also carried to Madagascar by French ships. Yet, other foreign European firms were also active at this time — for instance, O'swald & Co. imported around 33 per cent of the textiles that entered Nosy Be during these years.<sup>21</sup>

The continuing importation of manufactures from India (16 per cent) and Zanzibar (7 per cent) indicate that intra-Indian Ocean trade and wider exchanges in the Mozambique Channel remained important (Fig. 3). A certain quantity of textiles sent from Zanzibar to Madagascar were, however, likely industrial goods coming from Britain or America. But from the beginning of the 1880s textile imports dropped sharply. The economic stagnation

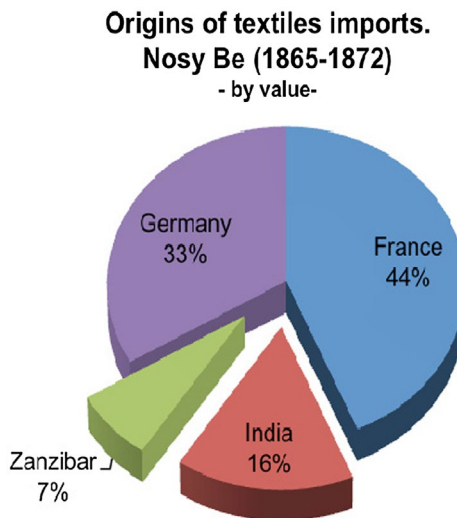


FIG. 3. Origins of textile imports, Nosy Be (1865-1872).  
Source: ANOM, *Madc290*.



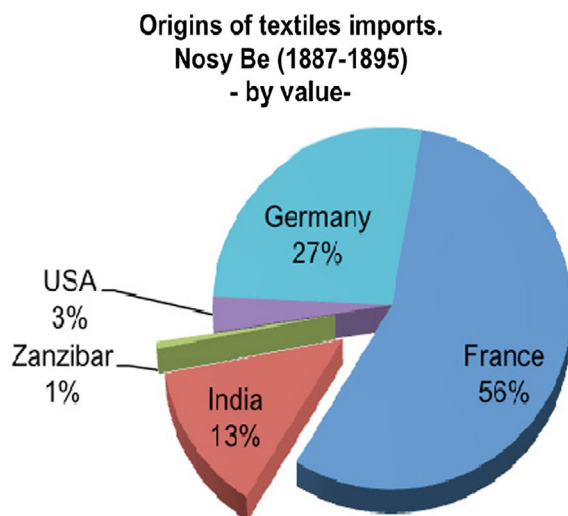


FIG. 4. Origins of textile imports, Nosy Be (1887–1895).  
Source: ANOM, *Madc290*.

in Europe and the global sugar crisis mentioned previously, together with the attendant regional economic downturn in the south-western Indian Ocean, decreased exchanges with Europe.<sup>22</sup> This same global economic crisis brought about the dissolution of the Marseilles-based company Roux de Fraissinet, one of the main capital providers to western Madagascar. Its liquidation in 1883 provoked further crisis in the economic structure of the area, causing a shortage of capital that increased European traders' vulnerabilities.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, relations with Europe were maintained through the shipments and commercial networks of the O'swald Company, which continued to channel British and American textiles to Madagascar via Nosy Be and its branches on the east coast. From the mid-1880s, Mante et Borelli Co. of Marseilles took over the former activities of Roux de Fraissinet, but the former trading structure developed in the 1850–1880s never recovered its importance. Marseilles warehouses in several ports on mainland Madagascar had been severely crippled, and their networks dismantled by the Franco-Malagasy war of 1883–1885. The Miot-Patrimonio Peace Treaty that ended that conflict affected all commercial structures of western Madagascar. However, the Marseilles traders of Mante et Borelli managed successfully to restart importing activities, mainly of textiles, but also of small manufactured goods, weapons and alcohol, principally wine.<sup>24</sup>

Between 1887 and 1895, exchanges with France expanded, as European industry recovered and developed a new appetite for rubber to meet the needs of its changing and expanding industry, and as Malagasy consumer demand for cloth remained almost insatiable (Fig. 4). In these two entwined strands, the external demand for Madagascar's rubber provided the means for Malagasy consumers to continue to acquire foreign cloth, and indeed even to increase their acquisitions of it. In this period, cloth imports in Nosy Be harbour grew dramatically, from 178,870 francs in 1890 to 665,976 francs in 1891, then to 753,538 francs on the eve of Madagascar's 1895 war with France (see Fig. 2). In the decade of the 1890s, the general trade of Nosy Be was nearly exclusively oriented to the exportation of local rubber.



FIG. 5. A Gujarati shop in Stone Town, Ambanoro (Nosy Be), c. 1905. Note the garments and lengths of chequered cloth for sale; the building, made of blocks of coral, and dress of the figures point to shared western Indian Ocean (Swahili) material practices.  
*Private collection.*

Paralleling developments on the Swahili Coast of eastern Africa (Ryan, this volume), much of the cloth carried by German ships was Manchester-made printed cottons, ‘Kitamby encadrés anglais’ of a red colour, a kind of colourful wrapper (known as *kanga* in continental Africa and *lambahoany* in Madagascar) very popular in the west of Madagascar. It was sold in lots of one hundred to the Indian brokers in the Swahili town of Ambanoro.<sup>25</sup> According to several documents, the entire Malagasy textile market was exclusively composed of British and American cloth. This caused some French observers to complain in the mid-1890s that ‘of the 10,000,000 francs of unbleached cotton cloth [imported annually to Madagascar], France doesn’t provide a single metre of fabric’.<sup>26</sup>

Contradicting these popular perceptions of the time, Nosy Be archives show that in fact only Madagascar’s east coast, controlled at the time by the Merina royal administration, imported little or no French-made fabrics. Indeed, during France’s ‘ghost protectorate’ of Madagascar from 1885 to 1895, 56 per cent of textiles passing through Nosy Be came from France, for an average value of 234,177 francs per year, while German companies introduced around 119,371 francs worth of French-made cloth.<sup>27</sup> Indian firms based in Ambanoro-Marodoka, such as the one depicted in Figure 5, imported on average 62,455 francs worth. In addition, imported French textiles were also re-exported from Nosy Be to the Malagasy west coast mainland, although as they entered without any control or accounting by Merina custom authorities it is impossible to assess their quantity. Almost all the Marseilles ships serving Nosy Be unloaded great quantities of cotton bales in addition to tailored garments,

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such as trousers, shirts and skirts, a category of import that deserves increased attention and study. These French textiles and garments were sent to the west coast where they were exchanged for rubber, wood, rice and beef. It is also likely that these same articles entered other Malagasy markets through smugglers who carried them to the Highlands.<sup>28</sup>

Even if the quantities of French fabrics imported into Madagascar could be quite high, around 400,000 francs worth in the mid-1890s, the number remained modest relative to the entirety of textile imports to Madagascar, estimated at about 10,000,000 to 15,000,000 francs at the time. The French share in textile imports was minor in a country then supposedly under a French protectorate. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this produced indignation in French colonial circles. As soon as Madagascar became a protectorate of France, several French commercial agents urged the French government to adopt mercantilist measures. They requested that the clauses of the Meline tariff Law of 1892 — aimed at giving advantage to French producers — already active in France, be applied in the colonies:

From the moment when, in accordance with the [Meline] law ... the French government will honour a decree to determine the taxes to be levied on imported foreign goods in Madagascar's ports based on the general customs rates for similar articles fabricated in France, importing foreign merchandise will cease rapidly and French industry alone will supply these goods.<sup>29</sup>

The French government thereafter took into account the demands of the pro-business colonial political party. From its annexation by France on 6 August 1896, Madagascar became a protected market, constrained to importing French goods. Protectionist measures led to an explosion in French imports to the island and, to a lesser extent, exports to France. Nevertheless, French industry struggled to capture some Malagasy cloth markets, notably the specialised *lambahoany* printed wrappers mentioned above, which required factories to invest in new machinery and dyes to produce to the very specific dimensions and patterns demanded.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, British and German trades stagnated. These protectionist measures touched mainly imports, the government wishing to promote French industry alone. Regarding Madagascar's exports, trade remained principally oriented toward Britain and above all toward Germany, until the First World War.

## THE 'DROP' IN INDIAN OCEAN-MANUFACTURED TEXTILES

According to the argument that I have presented here, the percentage of imported textiles made in the Indian Ocean — in India and Oman — was prominent in the Nosy Be trade in 1840, but dropped over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. This does not mean that there was a decline in the quantities of Indian Ocean textiles imported into Nosy Be, but rather that overall consumption of textiles in Madagascar rose, with common cloths supplied by European and American industry. Indeed, the volume of Indian Ocean-made cloth imports generally remained stable throughout the period (Figs 6–7).<sup>31</sup>

Despite their higher prices and, in some cases, lower quality, Indian and Omani textiles retained niche markets, due to consumers' established and particular tastes.<sup>32</sup> In a general sense, during the first part of the nineteenth century, textiles from the Atlantic world — manufactured in Europe and North America — were added to those produced in the Indian Ocean. These textiles were not necessarily in competition with their predecessors, as demand in Madagascar continued to grow. The volume of total textile importations increased with

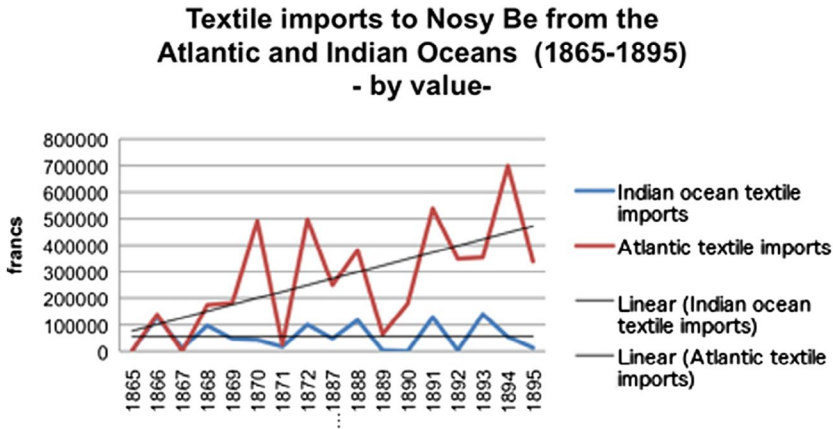


FIG. 6. Textile imports from the Atlantic and Indian Oceans to Nosy Be (1865–1890), in value.

Source: ANOM, Madc290.

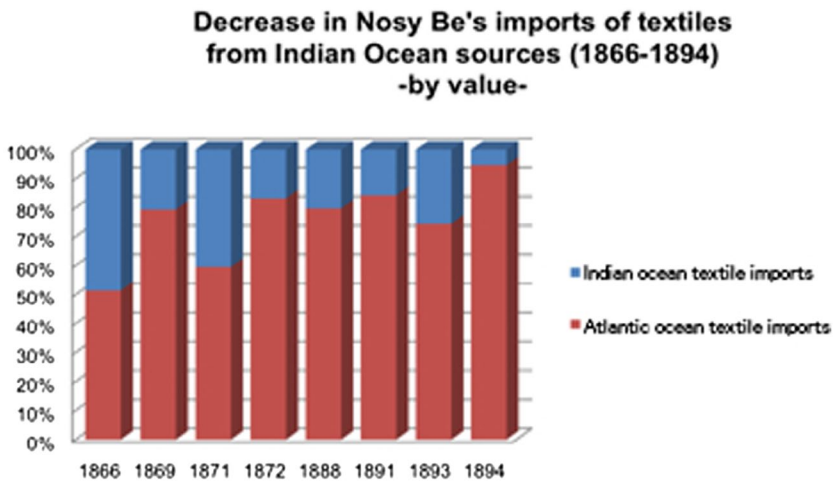


FIG. 7. Decrease in Nosy Be’s imports of textiles from Indian Ocean sources (1866–1894), in value.

Source: ANOM, Madc290.

the quantity of Indian Ocean goods remaining stable and the Atlantic goods becoming increasingly dominant. By the end of the nineteenth century, even the most autarchic regions of Madagascar were penetrated by transregional trade, and almost everywhere Malagasy dressed in industrial cotton goods. Raffia cloth was still in use, but only by the very poor, and it no longer clothed entire regions or ethnic groups. Malagasy weavers, where they continued to work, increasingly focused their efforts on either these low-end goods, or on high prestige ritual cloths.

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The growth of textile imports was tied to both continuities in the entry of Indian (and, to a lesser extent, Omani) cloth and to growing supplies coming from Europe and America. The latter were shipped by a variety of networks that did not necessarily originate from the locales of cloth production. For example, German traders in Nosy Be never sold German-made fabrics in Madagascar; they mainly sold the British and American textiles that the Malagasy sought in ever-greater quantities. Later, after the adoption of protectionist legislation by the French administration, German traders specialised in the trade of French fabrics, or developed complex trading structures. They were also known to import British cloth into France, from where it was re-loaded and re-exported to Madagascar, in order to circumvent French protectionism. Indian merchants, too, dealt widely in European and American industrial fabrics.

### NOSY BE'S TEXTILE RE-EXPORTS AND MERCHANT SEASCAPES

The sphere of activity of Nosy Be traders can be seen through the directional movements of their textile re-exports. Cloth stocked in Nosy Be's major port town of Hell-Ville, and above all in Ambanoro-Marodoka, represented 50 per cent of the value of goods exported from the port. From there, these goods were redistributed to the mainland of Madagascar's west coast. This reveals the role played by Nosy Be as an economic hub in the commercial organisation of the west coast. From 1870 to 1872, textile exports from there were directed, in almost equal measure, to mainland Madagascar (51 per cent) and to East Africa (43 per cent), mainly Zanzibar, Comoros and Mozambique Island (Fig. 8). Only 6 per cent of textiles were sent to India. One-third of textiles were used for trading with the Sakalava independent kingdoms of the west coast (Nosy Lava, Narinda, Baly, Ambongo), while 21 per cent went to Majunga and Anorontsangana controlled by the highland kingdom of Madagascar.

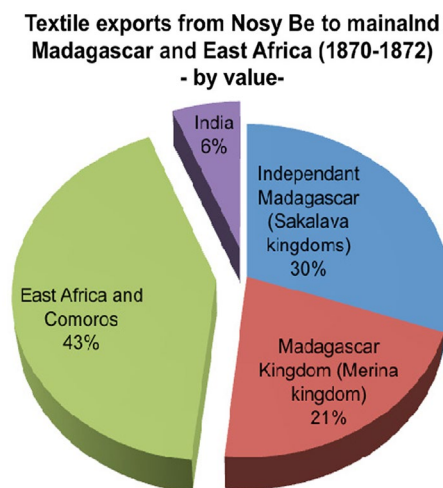


FIG. 8. Textile re-exports from Nosy Be to mainland Madagascar and to East Africa, in terms of value (1870–1872).

Source: ANOM, *Madc290*.

**Textile exports from Nosy Be to mainland Madagascar and East Africa (1887-1894)  
-by value-**

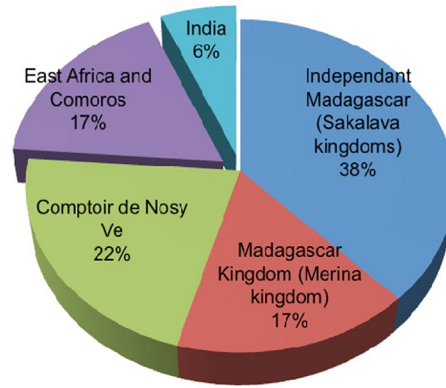


FIG. 9. Exports of textiles from Nosy Be to mainland Madagascar and East Africa (1887–1894).  
Source: ANOM, *Madc290*.

**Destination of Nosy Be's textile exports  
by region (1887-1894)  
- by value-**

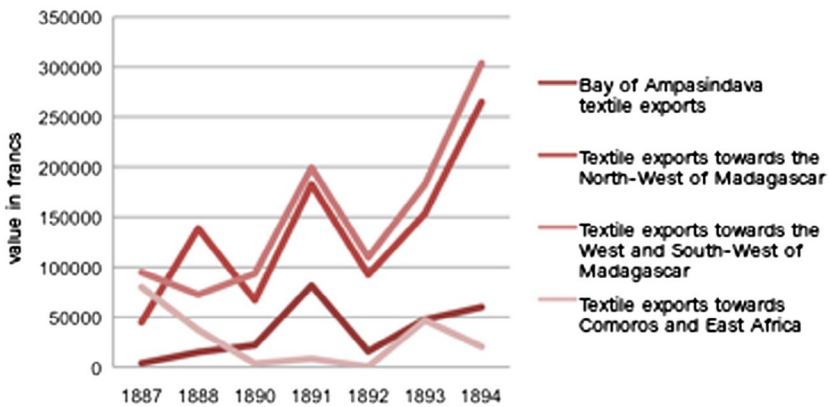


FIG. 10. Destination of Nosy Be's textile exports by region, by value (1887–1894).  
Source: ANOM, *Madc290*.

Twenty years later, between 1887 and 1894, the situation was very different. Under the Protectorate, re-exports were forcibly redirected to the Madagascar mainland and consequently connections with East Africa dropped to only 17 per cent of Nosy Be's textile exports (Figs. 9, 10). Many factors explain this change. Regional geopolitics complicated

### Textile imports in Nosy Be and Tamatave (1869-1891) - by value -

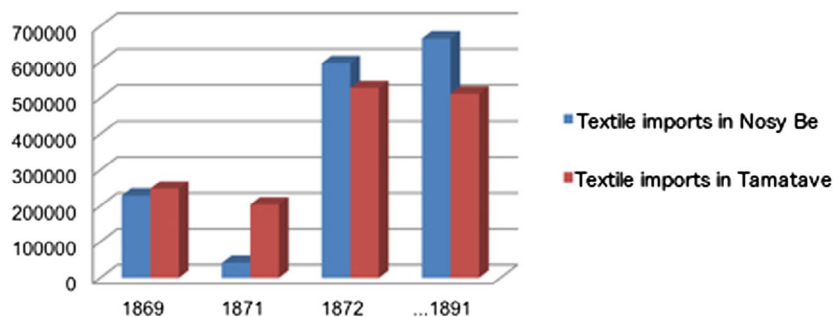


FIG. 11. Textile imports in Nosy Be and Tamatave (1869–1891).  
*Source: ANOM, Madc290; G. Campbell, 2005.*

relations with East Africa, with Portuguese, British and German forces having largely already divided up the continent into separate colonial spheres. Moreover, the Malagasy export market was again changing with the appearance of foreign demand for rubber and rare woods, such as ebony and rosewood. Finally, Nosy Be trade networks began to extend into new regions where they had not been present previously. For instance, from the 1870s, the European trading post of Nosy Ve (south-west Madagascar) became a central point for the collecting of rubber and, in turn, funneled textile distribution throughout the south of Madagascar. In addition, the levels of trade with the east coast of Africa remained about the same as in previous decades. The change in proportions was due to the expansion of Malagasy exports, and to European merchant attempts to balance their exchange with the sale of textiles.

Nosy Be was one of the most important harbours involved in the textile trade in Madagascar. If one compares better-known Tamatave customs data to those of Nosy Be, it appears that in some years the amount of textiles imported into Nosy Be could exceed those received at east coast ports (Fig. 11). This finding suggests ultimately that we need to re-think the importance of west Madagascar in the economic history of Madagascar.

#### CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis of the distribution of manufactured products underscores the intense commercial competition that typified the nineteenth century, when ever more regions became more deeply enmeshed in the expanding global economy. From the middle of the nineteenth century, cloths originating in the Atlantic — in both Europe and America — entered Indian Ocean markets such as Madagascar where they competed with — but never entirely displaced — the Indian (and Omani) textiles which had long held the market. This article has aimed, among other things, to show that in this shift French trading companies and French-made cloth, via the colonial outpost on Nosy Be, played a larger role than has been

recognised in the scholarly literature. And yet, despite the consequences of certain political events, such as the Franco-Malagasy Wars of 1883–1885 and 1895–1896 that dramatically accelerated France’s ability to impose monopolistic practices on Madagascar, Malagasy consumption of French cloth and other goods did not follow apace. To create a captive market favourable to French exports, administrators were forced to raise taxes on foreign imports during the first years of colonisation. So, too, they had to repeatedly petition French industry to cater to the cloth tastes of Malagasy consumers. Even then, Madagascar’s connection to wider Indian Ocean trade remained important throughout the colonial period. These eastward-looking oceanic trading networks connected to the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere in the western Indian Ocean persevered and, indeed, came to prominence at several periods when Madagascar was cut off from Europe, most notably during the First and Second World Wars. Indeed, trading dhows were still plying the waters between Nosy Be and India into the 1950s, but that is a story for another time.

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## Complex Strands

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<sup>15</sup> A. Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* (London: James Currey, 1987), p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> French efforts to establish factory production of textiles in Pondicherry is detailed in R. Roberts, 'Guinée cloth: linked transformations within France's empire in the nineteenth century', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 32, no. 4 (1992), pp. 597–627.

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<sup>18</sup> See S. Fee, "The Dearest Thing on the East African Coast": Muscat cloth as a driver of trade in the western Indian Ocean world of the nineteenth century', in P. Machado, S. Fee and G. Campbell eds, *An Ocean of Cloth: Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures and the Textile Worlds of the Indian Ocean* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence, Madc290.

<sup>21</sup> Fee, "Silks and Soja", p. 321 prematurely labels as 'German-made' the cloth imported by Hamburg merchants; imports of German-made cloth would occur only as German trade grew stronger at the very end of the nineteenth century and became prominent just before the First World War. Until that time, Hamburg merchants relied mainly on English, American and Swiss-made cloth.

<sup>22</sup> Sanchez, 'Le long XIXe siècle de Nosy Be', pp. 550–55.

<sup>23</sup> O. Lambert, *Marseille et Madagascar, Histoire d'une aventure outre-mer (1840–1976)*, Histoire du commerce et de l'industrie de Marseille XIXe–XXe siècles, xiv, Marseille (Marseille-Provence: Chambre de commerce et d'industrie, 2000), p. 97.

<sup>24</sup> Lambert, *Marseille et Madagascar*, p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> One piece of cloth measured 182 cm × 127 cm.

<sup>26</sup> H. Mager, *Rapport Adressé aux Chambres de Commerce de Rouen et des Vosges*, 1 (Rouen: Lapiere, 1897), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> ANOM, Madc290.

<sup>28</sup> According to Campbell, in the 1880s only 50 per cent of goods entering Malgasy ports were declared (*An Economic History*, p. 284).

<sup>29</sup> The French original reads: 'C'est du jour où, conformément au paragraphe 4 de l'article 3 de la loi du 11 janvier 1892, le Gouvernement français rendra un décret en forme de règlement d'administration publique, déterminant les droits à percevoir dans les ports de Madagascar sur les marchandises étrangères, droits basés sur le taux du tarif général pour les marchandises ayant leurs similaires en France de jour-là, les importations étrangères seront arrêtées net et l'Industrie française fournira seule'. Mager, *Rapport adressé aux Chambres de commerce*, vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Fee, "Silks and soja", p. 26.

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<sup>32</sup> Prestholdt, *Domesticating The World*, p. 66; Fee, this volume.

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