

Global Zanzibar:
East meets West meets South on the Indian Ocean

David E. Harris

University of California, Berkeley
College of Letters and Sciences
Department of Interdisciplinary Studies
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Advisors:
Professor Earl Klee, Interdisciplinary Studies
Professor Gillian Hart, Geography

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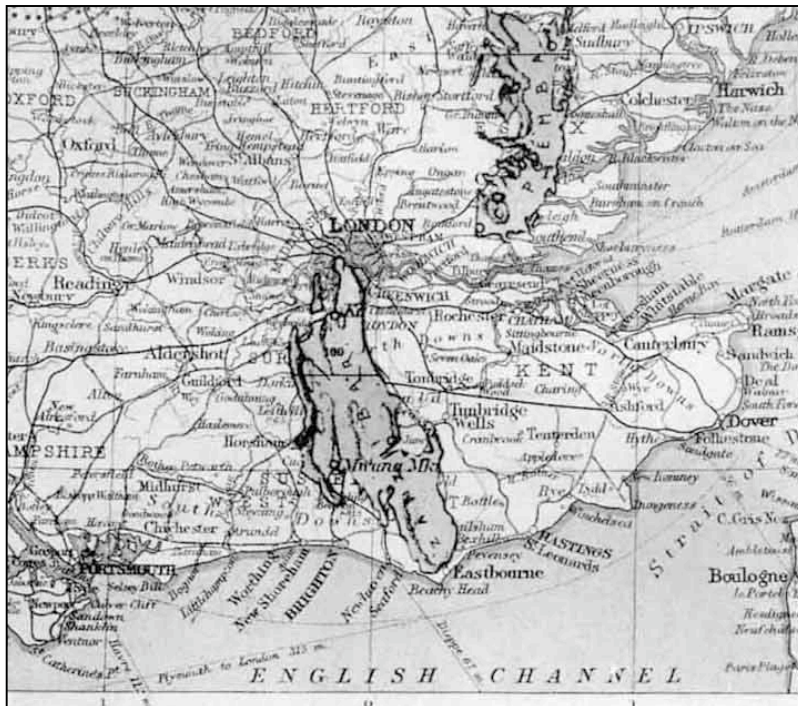


Figure 1: "Sketch-map of S.E. England with Zanzibar and Pemba on same scale super-imposed to demonstrate relative size." (Pearce 1920)



Figure 2: Map of Zanzibar, Tanzania and surroundings. (Central Intelligence Agency 2002)

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I. “This is not a hotel” (A Preface)¹

Walking down a quiet, semi-paved road on the northern periphery of Zanzibar city, Gordon, Helen and myself—three young, sweaty, white Americans—were clearly out of place. We were looking for the headquarters of Zanzibar’s radical opposition party, the Civic United Front (CUF), where we hoped to interview Ismail Jussa Ladhu, the party’s number two man. Our directions to the office were vague, but we were told to “just ask anyone” if we couldn’t find it.

We didn’t like to think of ourselves as tourists in Zanzibar. Officially, we were students—“studying abroad.” Gordon preferred to call himself a traveler; I wore a Canadian flag on my backpack in hopes that people wouldn’t realize I was an American. Helen was a New Yorker, so she didn’t need any of our make-believe. Either way, the three of us were lost.

I got the attention of a fairly well dressed man walking past us. Hoping that he would speak English, I asked him, “excuse me, could you please tell us where the CUF (pronounced “cuff”) office is?”

“Coffee? No coffee here,” he told me.

I decided to try out my freshly acquired Swahili on him instead.

“CUF iko wapi?” [Where is CUF?]

“No coffee. Coffee over there.” He pointed back towards the center of town. “You want internet?”

¹ The names of some of the people and places mentioned herein have been changed and/or modified to protect the anonymity of various individuals.

The four of us looked in confusion to one another for a few long seconds. The heat was making the afternoon seem just a bit surreal. An idea hit me. I pulled my phrasebook from my back pocket and quickly located the word for ‘office.’

“Mtendeni CUF?” I spelled it out for him then. “C-U-F.”

“Ohh, CUF. Why you want to go there?” He looked at us like aliens and shook his head. Not giving us time to reply, he pointed us in the direction of the office and continued on his way.

Part of his look of surprise most likely stemmed from the fact that CUF is not exactly known for its love of Western tourists. The party’s graffiti is widespread throughout the streets of Zanzibar (see Figure 3) and in recent years its efforts to usurp

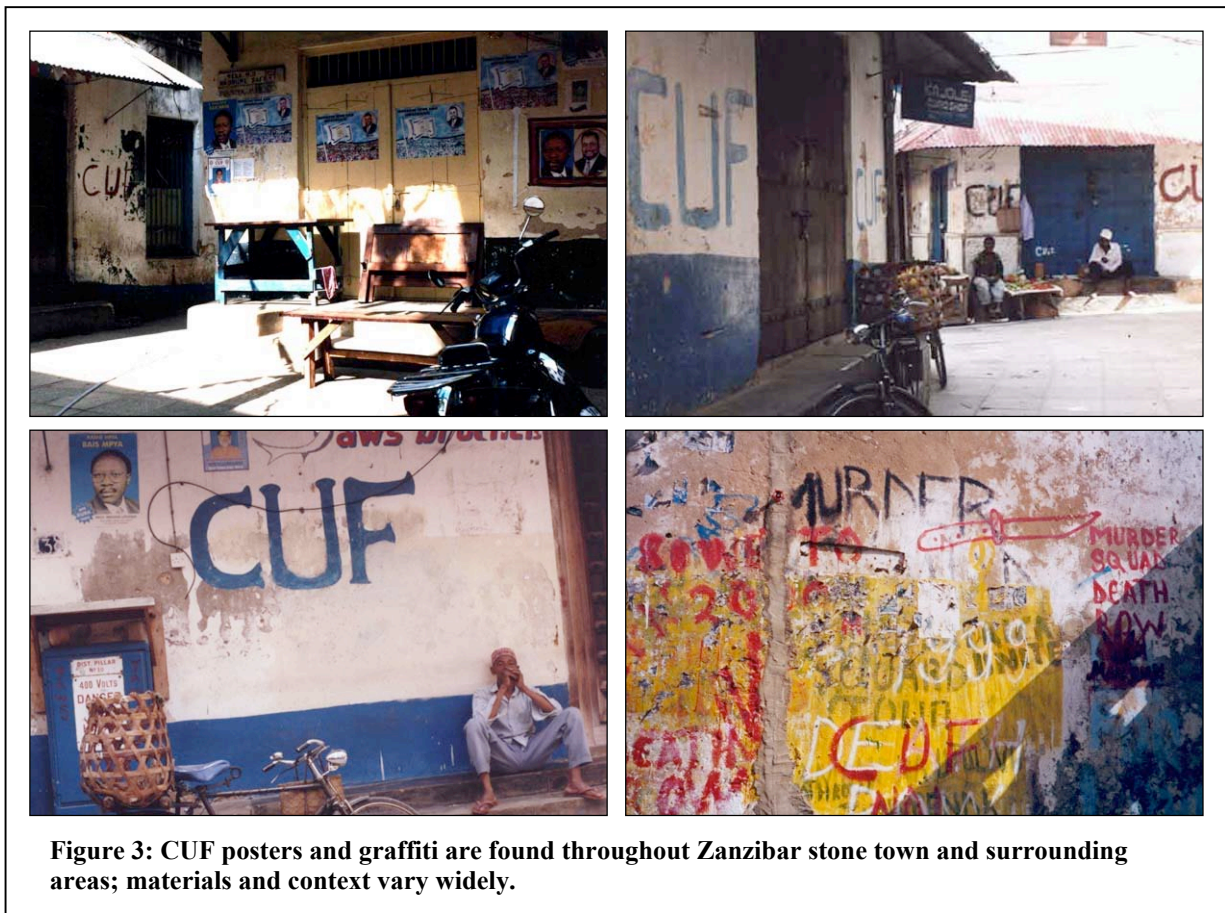


Figure 3: CUF posters and graffiti are found throughout Zanzibar stone town and surrounding areas; materials and context vary widely.

control from the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi [The Revolutionary Party] (CCM) have been met with violent repression. Since the 1964 union of Tanganyika (today's mainland Tanzania) and the islands of Zanzibar² that formed Tanzania, CCM and its predecessor parties have ruled the nation in a single-party government. While Zanzibar's population of nearly one million people is more than 98% Muslim, on the mainland Islam makes up a much smaller portion of population, ranging in reports from 35% to 54%, most of which is located in coastal areas. The total mainland population is approximately 36 million and aside from Muslims, it is made up of primarily Christians (35%) and those harboring "indigenous beliefs" (30%).³ International observers are unanimous in agreement that the 1995 and 2000 Zanzibar elections were pervasively corrupt and most agree that, in actuality, CUF represents the majority of the Zanzibari electorate (Commonwealth 2001). On January 27, 2001, police opened fire on peaceful CUF protesters demanding electoral redress in Zanzibar. The widespread and clearly premeditated police violence killed at least thirty-five and wounded hundreds. Most of the dead and wounded were said to have been fleeing at the time at which they were shot, as bullets rained down upon them from police snipers in a helicopter and heavily armed police in the streets.⁴ This pivotal event in recent Zanzibari history, the first episode of

² Zanzibar is made up of two main islands, Unguja and Pemba. Unguja, the larger of the two, is home to Zanzibar city and is often referred to as simply "Zanzibar" island. My brief field research was conducted only on Unguja.

³ Demographic reporting from various sources varies widely. These data come from Maliyamkono (2000a: 142), Maliyamkono (2000c: 244), Population Reference Bureau (2003), the US State Department (2003), and an interview with Ali Saleh (2001).

⁴ For a thorough account of the police violence of January 27, 2001, see Human Rights Watch, "The Bullets Were Raining': The January 2001 Attack on Peaceful Demonstrators in Zanzibar" (2002).

mass violence since the revolutionary 1960s, signaled the beginning of the end for CCM in Zanzibar and has left many analysts wondering what might be the fate of Zanzibar in the future.

CCM has sought frequently in recent years to portray CUF as an Islamic fundamentalist movement, and sometimes goes so far as to conflate all Islamic organizations with terrorist groups, thus justifying policies of arbitrary repression.⁵ As of



Figure 4: Pro-Osama bin Laden graffiti is rare and syntactically unthreatening, but clearly present in Zanzibar city.

⁵Between 1997 and 1999, 18 members of CUF, including members of the Zanzibar House of Representatives were imprisoned on charges of treason based upon their involvement with the party. See Amnesty International, "Prisoners of conscience face treason trial in Zanzibar" (2002).

December 2001, a small contingent of bin Laden supporters were beginning to affiliate themselves with CUF in Zanzibar through appearances at rallies, though, as we later found out, the party is officially non-religious, condemns terrorism, and has a large base of non-Muslim support in mainland Tanzania.

One of our main reasons for seeking out CUF was to determine exactly what their political platform consisted of. Its main attraction to most of the people we had spoken with seemed to lie in its simply being an alternative to the widely perceived corruption and graft of CCM. We were also of course interested in finding out if some of the most extreme graffiti we'd seen around the island (see figure 4) was related directly to CUF or CUF's explicit ideology.

We had been sent by Ali Saleh, an independent radio and print journalist who freelances for Reuters and the BBC and has been jailed seven times by the government for incidents related to his controversial reporting (though never convicted of a crime). We went to Saleh hoping to get some insight into government corruption and the police killing of dozens of protesters in the aftermath of the previous year's elections. He gave us his view of the situation, but suggested that we go straight to the source by seeing the opposition party headquarters and meeting its leadership for ourselves.

We continued on our way towards CUF headquarters wondering exactly what we had gotten ourselves into. After a few similar encounters with incredulous locals and another fifteen minutes or so of walking, we arrived at a two-story building that was festively decorated with streamers and flags and plastered literally from top to bottom with the characteristic posters of the CUF candidate for president of Zanzibar. It was

clearly the CUF headquarters. We looked it up and down, looked at each other, and just as we stepped towards the door, a taxi zipped up behind us and stopped with a jolt in a small cloud of dust. The face of a rather disturbed and anxious looking man quickly appeared from behind a tinted window that he was rapidly rolling down by hand.

“This is not a hotel!” he blurted at us with an urgent tone of almost motherly concern in his voice. “Where you wanna go? No accommodation here! Get in the taxi.”

It was as if we were about to walk into a snake pit. After convincing this kind man and the crowd of passers by that we quickly began to attract that we really were there to talk with Ismail Jussa Ladhu, Private Secretary to the Secretary General of CUF, Zanzibar, we walked in the building’s front door. The strange looks didn’t stop there.

As we stepped into the air-conditioned building, the entire experience began to take on a much more surreal feel. One young man greeted us with an odd look and some questions and then ran off to find his boss. Another came and asked us more questions and walked away. Other men just came out into the entryway to look at us, offering only uncomfortable smiles and inquisitive looks. We just kept on smiling and nodding and trying not to attract too much attention. Finally, we were taken to a room full of ancient looking computers where we were told to wait for Ladhu. And we waited. After about half an hour of looking back and forth to each other, down to our watches and up at the room’s amazingly powerful air-conditioning unit, a phone rang. We were told by one of the CUF volunteers that we would continue waiting in our absent host’s private office. We were led up some stairs and into a roomy office with a large desk, a couch, and a rather intriguing bookshelf filled with various strands of radical political literature

including Mao's biography, Hoxha's *Imperialism and the Revolution*, and a number of other titles on economy, socialism, communism, capitalism and so on. Needless to say, we were intensely intrigued. Knowing of CUF at the time as simply a vehicle for general political subversion with an Islamic flair, we were curious to see how the owner of these books might relate such theoretical and historical works to the predicament of Zanzibar. But nothing could have prepared us for what we were about to hear.

The first clue was his shirt: a starched, white, short-sleeve polo with an embroidered HSBC logo practically jumping off his chest at me. Having passed through the UK on my way to Tanzania, I recalled seeing the same logo emblazoned atop a mammoth London skyscraper and then again on countless ATMs across the city. The shirt just didn't seem to fit quite right with his bookshelf. Either way, he was an extremely welcoming and educational host. As it turned out, Ladhu had also passed through Britain recently, having received a law degree from the University of Hull, before coming back to his native Zanzibar to work for CUF. After making some small talk and telling him about our study abroad program, we decided to pop the big question: What does CUF really stand for?

“First and foremost, we stand for free markets.”

Our jaws dropped.

“But we don't want investment from the West. We want it from the East. We want to see Zanzibar become the Hong Kong of East Africa with investments coming in from across the Arab world.”

And thus began our lesson in Zanzibar's history and geography a la CUF.

II. Representing Zanzibar

...we should have to look at history itself in a new light. We should have to study not only the history of space, but also the history of representations, along with that of their relationships – with each other, with practice, and with ideology.... We may be sure that representations of space have a practical impact, that they intervene in and modify spatial textures which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology. Representations of space must therefore have a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space.

-Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]: 42)

It is difficult to imagine a single patch of land on earth that has, over so long a time span, been subjected to such a wide and intensive array of externally imposed regimes of resource expropriation and political domination as the islands of Zanzibar.

In this paper I will examine the role of representational struggles—political, ethnic, religious, and even economic—that have shaped and been shaped by Zanzibar’s long history of global encounters. I approach my seemingly abstract subject, representation, through the examination of two of the most concrete and contested fields of power and lived experience that exist on Zanzibar today: electoral politics and tourism. Creative electioneering in 2005 on the part of CUF could potentially lead to Zanzibar’s independence, with a deep rupture in the fabric of East African politics likely to follow. Tourism is Zanzibar’s number two source of revenue behind cloves (Sultan 2003), and the industry relies heavily on a very specific portrayal of an exotic and mysterious Zanzibar in order to be effective. Each of these two fields of praxis entails a different set of representational motives and key actors. In electoral politicking, a small number of

Zanzibari and mainland Tanzanian elites are in the process of continually constructing and maintaining sets of conflicting and parallel identities (“Pan-African,” “Muslim,” “Arab,” “Shirazi”) that draw votes and legitimacy to their parties. In the tourism industry, Zanzibari entrepreneurs and government officials along with foreign tour operators, guidebook authors and travel journalists, all set out to continually market and reproduce an imagined notion of a Zanzibar of the past, a cross between a human museum of “Eastern” and “African” cultures and a serene tropical paradise of coconut palms and sunsets on the beach. These two domains of course have their overlaps; with tourism has come a great increase in the amount of “Western” consumer goods marketed to Zanzibaris, and in politics, the presence of the “West” is felt heavily in the ideological posturing of political parties and programs.

In the realm of politics, I argue that present-day oppositional movements in Zanzibar are deeply embedded in a complex global history of domination and external control that defy simple materialist or cultural determinist explanations.⁶ Oppression in Zanzibar, as perceived by elements of the opposition party as well as the adherents to various forms of radical Islam, is at once political, economic, cultural, ethnic and religious. Through this analytical framework, I hope to provide the beginnings of an explanation of how and why the vanguard of Zanzibari politics has transformed so dramatically over the past four decades. When the islands gained independence from colonial rule in 1964, radical politics were rooted deeply in the growing movement for

⁶ This neo-Gramscian understanding of power and hegemony allows me to employ a broadly Marxian analytical agenda while staying away from excessively structuralist interpretations of Zanzibari social institutions. See Gramsci on “Structure and Superstructure” (Gramsci and Forgacs 2000: 190).

pan-*African* socialism and a wide array of essentially anti-Arab sentiments coming in large part from the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP). Today, CUF's identity rests upon both a starkly different spatial identity and a seemingly reversed political ideology: Afro-Arabian capitalism.

In the realm of tourism, I charge that yet another conception of Zanzibar's identity has been systematically created and exploited for the benefit of numerous individuals both inside and outside Zanzibar. This exploitation, however, is not simply a foreign imposition on Zanzibar. As is the case with the political campaigns based upon "African" or "Arab" identities, the image of "exotic" Zanzibar is propagated with the consent and active participation of countless Zanzibaris.⁷ My reason for examining these representational struggles is *not* to discover any sort of "true" Zanzibar, or, conversely, to accuse anyone of having been duped into believing in a "false" Zanzibar. My aim, rather, is to contribute to the formation of a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which systems of political and economic power deal in what might be traditionally considered cultural, ethnic, or religious currencies.

The lessons to be learned from a careful analysis of this period of postcolonial transition speak to numerous theoretical and practical areas of concern. In the context of critical scholarship on globalization and development, this paper demonstrates the immense importance of generating what Hart (2002b) calls, "politically enabling and non-reductionist understandings of political economy, culture and power in an

⁷ As Appadurai writes, "...the work of the imagination...is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern. ...the imagination has become a collective, social fact." (1996: 4-5)

increasingly interdependent world.” My ethnographic approach privileges an understanding of the specific spatial processes taking place within and through Zanzibar, in one sense linking the local to the global, and yet at the same time problematizing this very dichotomy⁸ by emphasizing the extreme mutability of conceptions of locality and globality in the face of the constantly shifting sub-global currents (i.e., ethnic, religious, geographical, political-ideological) of representational space.⁹ Put another way, I am not attempting here to simply understand the impacts of global forces affecting politics on Zanzibar,¹⁰ but rather I seek simultaneously to explore the various means by which certain structures of power in Tanzania bring themselves to bear by employing a global toolbox of ideas and representations that is at their disposal. It is through this set of spatial productions and representations that one can clearly see the formations of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses and identities amongst Zanzibaris and those who seek to dominate, recruit, or assimilate them for any number of causes.

Zanzibar is an ideal site for such a processually focused analysis for numerous reasons. Its location at the confluences of so many different political and cultural forces over such a long historical time frame contributes to the presence of a highly visible set of articulated power relationships. At the geographical periphery of the “Islamic world,”

⁸ My theoretical approach and methodology are inspired in part by Burawoy’s conception of “grounded globalization,” whereby he endeavors via the “extended case method” to “ascend from the local to the global” through the creation of a new tradition of “global ethnography” that binds together comparative historical and ethnographic investigative approaches. See Burawoy’s *Global Ethnography* (2000).

⁹ Lefebvre’s instructive use of the conceptual triad of spatial production, representations of space and representational space inspires such an approach. (1991)

¹⁰ Hart’s deconstruction of the “impact model” is linked to her previously mentioned call for a more “enabling” understanding of globalization. See Chapter 8, “Enabling Alternatives” in *Disabling Globalization* (2002a: 290-313).

Zanzibari Islam has a tenuous relationship to various Islamic centers that is heavily mediated by television, radio, and print media. As a popular tourist destination in recent years, Zanzibaris feel the force of North American and European consumer culture very palpably. Each of these three characteristics adds texture to the ethnographic project attempted herein. Zanzibari lived experience is of course not something that could ever be fully documented or catalogued by any means available to a foreign visitor (especially one like myself with a very limited experience on the islands) and this is not my goal. I seek only to set forth the beginnings of an understanding of ways that various parties—Zanzibaris and Tanzanians, Arabs and Europeans, elites and the unemployed—each construct particular spatially and temporally situated imaginations and representations of Zanzibar, and what the implications of such processes are for both Zanzibar and the world.¹¹

My key propositions that follow from this investigation are threefold. Firstly, I argue that *perceptions of cultural identity* and *conceptions of spatiality* are the key epistemic terrains through which inequitable power relationships are exercised in Zanzibar. Secondly, I propose that these ongoing representational struggles serve in large part to distract both Zanzibaris themselves—impoverished and elite alike—and visiting foreigners from the immediate political salience of the largely depauperate material

¹¹ Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) lays out a useful conception of the role of imagination in the construction of nationalistic identities; I extend his provocative arguments to interrogate imaginations and representations of otherness that serve to insulate and further normalize conceptions of bounded notions of community; imaginations of Spivak's subaltern (1988) or Said's "oriental" (1978) form the object of my study. I also seek to extend Anderson's conceptions to imagined entities that are lie between that national and the universal; see discussion in Chapter III on Cooper (2001).

conditions of Zanzibari existence. In other words, clash over (in politics) and exoticization of (in tourism) Zanzibar's identity facilitate the continued lack of significant action to increase the standard of living of the bulk of the Zanzibari population. As the tourism industry suffers heavily from reports of potential terrorist attacks in Zanzibar,¹² and as the world market for cloves begins to falter,¹³ it is becoming increasingly clear that the Zanzibari economy doesn't have a leg to stand on.¹⁴ Even while these sectors thrived, one has to wonder how much of their proceeds ended up in the hands of privileged "WaBenzi"¹⁵ elites and how much actually trickled down to Zanzibar's peasantry and former slave classes. At the risk of committing the very representational crime I seek to rebuff, I shall note that herein lies the "South" in my own intentionally overstated title: abject poverty meets *kulturkampf* in the brave new hybridity that is contemporary Zanzibar.

Finally, I argue that Zanzibar's representational dilemmas reflect outwards upon the world at large in the early 21st century. As a wide range of American conservative authors and even policy-makers line up behind Samuel Huntington's almost messianic

¹² "Terror warning cripples Z'bar economy," *Zanzibar News* (Muga 2003).

¹³ The situation for cloves has become so desperate that calls to replace the crop with coffee are growing more prominent, despite the disastrous effects of fluctuations in global coffee prices upon farmers in Northern Tanzania. "Coffee to be Zanzibar's newest cash crop," *Zanzibar News* (Mwambande 2003).

¹⁴ Due to a lack of reliable data collection and a relative paucity of publications specifically focused on Zanzibar, it is difficult to find accurate or even remotely believable figures on Zanzibar's economic well-being. However, one can conclude from Tanzania's overall statistics and from various reporting that Zanzibar is clearly among the world's poorest regions, with desperately lacking public infrastructure and social services, especially in rural areas. (United Nations Development Program 2000; Economist Intelligence Unit 2002; Mtatifikolo and Mabele 2000)

¹⁵ Swahili, trans: "the tribe that drives the Mercedes Benz." (Champkin 1984)

predictions of an impending “clash of civilizations,” (1996) and as the United States embarks on a reckless, global “war against evil”¹⁶ with no end in sight, geo-spatial identity formations and inflammatory representations thereof are increasingly stoking the flames of violent conflict. Edward Said’s reply to Huntington’s claims speaks volumes in this regard:

These are tense times, but it is better to think in terms of powerful and powerless communities, the secular politics of reason and ignorance, and universal principles of justice and injustice, than to wander off in search of vast abstractions that may give momentary satisfaction but little self-knowledge or informed analysis. "The Clash of Civilizations" thesis is a gimmick like "The War of the Worlds," better for reinforcing defensive self-pride than for critical understanding of the bewildering interdependence of our time.¹⁷

Said’s appeal to his readers to seek out a conception of justice rooted in a sense of common humanity that transcends ethno-spatial boundaries has implications that reverberate all the way from the sphere of international relations to the conduct of everyday life. It is through the prism of Zanzibar that I hope to concretize an understanding of the need for such a transformation and, by this means, lend some hope to the possibility of its eventuation.

¹⁶ For a telling sampler of official American government views on Islam, see “In the President’s Words: Respecting Islam.” (Bush 2002)

¹⁷ Said’s “The Clash of Ignorance” (2001) effectively rebuts many of Huntington’s claims in the context of the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

III. Global Zanzibar

My argument here is that it [globalization] is not [a useful analytical category]. Scholars who use it analytically risk being trapped in the very discursive structures they wish to analyze. Most important in the term's current popularity in academic circles is how much it reveals about the poverty of contemporary social science faced with processes that are large-scale, but not universal, and with the fact of crucial linkages that cut across state borders and lines of cultural difference but which nonetheless are based on specific mechanisms within certain boundaries. That global should be contrasted with local, even if the point is to analyze their mutual constitution, only underscores the inadequacy of current analytical tools to analyze anything in between.

- Frederick Cooper, "What is the concept of globalization good for?"
(2001: 191-192)

Ismail Jussa Ladhu wasn't the first to imagine Zanzibar as the "Hong Kong of East Africa," (Boyles and Rose 1991:12) but he may be the among the most recent to imagine it as a future goal and not in reminiscence of a past glory.¹⁸ Zanzibar's international history cannot be understated; this tiny patch of land is one of the most dynamic, interconnected, and contested political terrains on the Indian Ocean, if not the planet. The isles have held long-term extractive trading partnerships with or suffered direct rule by a lengthy list of nations including Ancient Greece and Persia, various polities on the Arabian Peninsula, India, Portugal, the Sultanate of Oman, Germany, Great Britain, the United States, Sweden, China, the former Soviet Union, and most recently, some might

¹⁸ Mtatifikolo and Mabele share a part of Ladhu's vision; they compare Zanzibar to the East Asian "development tigers" and argue for a similar strategic development plan focused on specialization and investment in "financial services, marine services, off-shore banking, business services, conference tourism, and the like." (2000: 207)

argue, mainland Tanzania.¹⁹ The earliest record of these encounters dates back more than two millennia; in A.D. 60, a Greek historian wrote of his second-hand knowledge of an island off the coast of East Africa populated by African natives and an established group of Arab traders (Gray 1962). From the late 15th to the late 17th centuries, Portuguese traders and conquerors played a significant role in the region, initially trading with and then seeking to subjugate the Arab, Indian, and Persian traders. French, Dutch, and English sailors followed the Portuguese lead, though their eventual ouster came at the hands of an Arab power. By way of an alliance between native East Africans and the Sultanate of Oman, the Portuguese were thoroughly expelled from the Swahili coast by 1729. After more than a century of Omani rule over the Swahili coast, Sultan Seyyid Said in 1840 decided to relocate the seat of his empire from his home in Muscat to the increasingly cosmopolitan and climatically favorable Zanzibar, thus becoming the first in a lineage of eleven Sultans of Zanzibar that lasted until the 1964 revolution.²⁰

Zanzibar's cosmopolitan identity came from the islands' growing role as both a source of production and a hub for trade in goods (and humans) brought from all over East Africa. The isles are best known historically for trade in three highly sought-after items: slaves, ivory, and spices (Sheriff 1987). These trading circuits brought great wealth to Zanzibar's (primarily "foreign") merchant and slave-holding classes for

¹⁹ Thorough histories of Zanzibar's various encounters with foreign entities over the past two millennia can be found in Bennett (1978), Gray (1962), and Pearce (1920). For a journalistic perspective on recent clashes over mainland domination, see "Sumaye intervenes in Union/Z'bar funds debate," *Zanzibar News* (Nyanje 2003). A more thorough review of economic literature can be found in Maliyamkono, "Zanzibar's Financial Benefits From the Union" (2000c).

²⁰ See Al-Maamiry's *Omani Sultans in Zanzibar* for one of the few Omani perspectives on Zanzibari history available in English (1988).

centuries, earning the isles global renown as a gateway between East Africa and the world. One cannot overlook, however, the extent to which the long history of slavery—and the extreme disparity in power and privilege in Zanzibari society that went alongside it—continues to shape the island’s political landscapes up to the present day.

The slave trade in Zanzibar began under Arab control in the 8th and 9th centuries and ended at the hands of the British in 1873.²¹ The slave markets in Zanzibar were stocked primarily with slaves brought by force from the African interior, and as a result, strong divisions between different groups of “Africans” living on Zanzibar exist to the present. Though it is estimated that a century ago, the great majority of people living on Zanzibar were slaves, today very few Zanzibaris identify their ancestry as having arrived on the islands as slaves.²² Maliyamkono offers two explanations for this, the first being the potential embarrassment derived from such identification and the second being the simple passage of time and the forgetting of ancestry. A fascinating manifestation, however, of this shift in identification patterns is the means by which claims to social or class status were strategically converted to claims of ethnic or racial origin in the face of the British attempts to govern Zanzibar through a normalized racial hierarchy.

²¹ The motives behind British efforts to end the slave trade are a source of contention; Depelchin argues, against the grain of popular thought (Newman 1898: vi), that “The reasons for abolishing the legal status of slavery were not based on humanistic or moralistic grounds... the reproduction of slave labour was becoming financially prohibitive.” (Depelchin 1991: 21) Many other scholars, especially of the (structural) Marxist variety, tend to agree.

²² Maliyamkono’s survey of 3,900 Zanzibaris found only 7% to consider their ancestry as having slave origins. Most Zanzibaris of all ethnicities identify their ancestry as having come to Zanzibar for commercial purposes—either fishing or maritime trade (Maliyamkono 2000a: 152).

In the course of World War II food shortages, British colonial officials organized a rationing system that provided Europeans, Asians and Africans respectively with a hierarchical distribution of food allotments. Many argue that a result of this policy was seen in the 1948 census, when the “Shirazi” population of Zanzibar increased dramatically and suddenly became the dominant ethnic group on the isles. The Shirazi identity, referencing as its origins the Persian city of Shiraz, is today endemic to Zanzibar, as residents of Shiraz in Iran have for more than a century considered themselves to simply be Persian or Iranian. Yet the Shirazi Zanzibaris, though considered to be higher in social status than “Africans” from the mainland, were also referred to by British colonists as “tribes,” and divided as such into the Hadimu, Tumbatu and Pemba based on geographical origins within Zanzibar.²³

Moving into the 20th century as a British protectorate under Arab rule with a growing pan-Africanist movement, Zanzibar became the site of yet another clash of competing external contentions for influence. The nature of these encounters during the Cold War period led a number of authors to furnish yet another geopolitical metaphor, calling Zanzibar the “Cuba of Africa,” alluding to its unstable and frequently nonconforming regional political character.²⁴ Zanzibar became an independent sultanate in December

²³ This account of the genealogy of the “Shirazi” identity comes from Mbwiliza’s highly insightful essay on the historical origins of Zanzibar’s current political tensions, “The Birth of A Political Dilemma and the Challenges of the Quest for New Politics of Zanzibar” (2000: 5). Mbwiliza’s call for a “new historiography of Zanzibar” is heard here and taken with great seriousness. Gray (1962: 156) also offers an interpretation of the origins of the Shirazi identity in Zanzibar.

²⁴ For an first-hand account of the revolution from one of its key figures, see Okello’s *Revolution in Africa* (1967:23). A fascinating propaganda document on the newly independent Zanzibar is Kharusi’s *Zanzibar, Africa's first Cuba* (1966).

1963, only two months later a violent communist revolution broke out with Ugandan (self-appointed) Field Marshall John Okello at its head. The revolution was backed by the Afro-Shirazi party and was based heavily on anti-Arab rhetoric and even fury.²⁵

Thousands of Arabs—elites and otherwise—were murdered, imprisoned and tortured in the course of a few days.

In April 1964, only three months later, Zanzibar's revolutionary leadership decided to join with Tanganyika to form Tanzania. Since the time of unification, a steady minority movement of independence-seeking Zanzibaris has sought, with only recent advances, to remove itself from the Union. The fact that Zanzibar's population is more than ninety-eight percent Muslim—as compared to only thirty-five percent on the Tanzanian mainland—has fueled a large part of this disquietude. Also playing a large role in the drive for independence is the persistent perception that the mainland Tanzanian government, based in Dar es Salaam, conspires to promote an agenda that entails the systematic subjugation and marginalization of the Zanzibari economy and populace (al-Zinjibari 2002). A major aspect of Zanzibari dissention, in addition to the continuous complaints around the issue of foreign domination, is the ethno-racial hierarchy existing within Zanzibar itself. The Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), which made attempts to gain power through the democracy set up in the final years of British rule and led the 1964 revolution, was founded on the basis of notions of racial equality. This egalitarianism explicitly challenged the small Arab minority's domination of Zanzibari political and

²⁵ In solidarity with the Zanzibari struggle, the Ghanaian Bureau of African Affairs published a highly provocative historical document on the eve of the revolution that is emblematic of the pan-African nationalist sentiment that fueled such intense clashes. See *Historical Facts about the Zanzibar (Unguja) National Struggle* (Ghana 1963).

economic life that had developed over the course of centuries and was further strengthened by British policies of indirect rule via strategic alliances with Arab elites;

“Although Islam does not possess an explicit political theory, two of its religious doctrines, insistence on obedience to established authority and the divine origin of multi-racial harmony, were highly conducive to widespread African support for Arab leadership. Indeed, the ZNP campaigned throughout the country on the grounds that the Sultan, and by implication the Arab elite itself, represented precisely the established authority to whom obedience was enjoined.” (Okello 1967:11-12)

In this sense, the British government, through its strategic alliance with the Sultanate, was able to effectively “orientalize” itself in the eyes of the Zanzibari people by cloaking their Western hegemony with an Arabian veneer, as, in turn, the Arab elite strategically employed the teachings of the Qur’an to legitimate their political-economic dominion over the predominantly “African” population of the islands. This British strategy of indirect rule was popular throughout the colonies, though its character in Zanzibar was particularly inflammatory as the selected ruling elite—the Sultanate—descended from a lineage that had only limited popular support.

Zanzibar’s decidedly communist positioning during the revolution was softened with the union and Nyrere’s ideologies of non-alignment and pan-African socialism. Recently released CIA documents indicated that serious concerns were had that the so-called “Zanzibar Disease”—communism—might quickly spread to other newly independent African states.

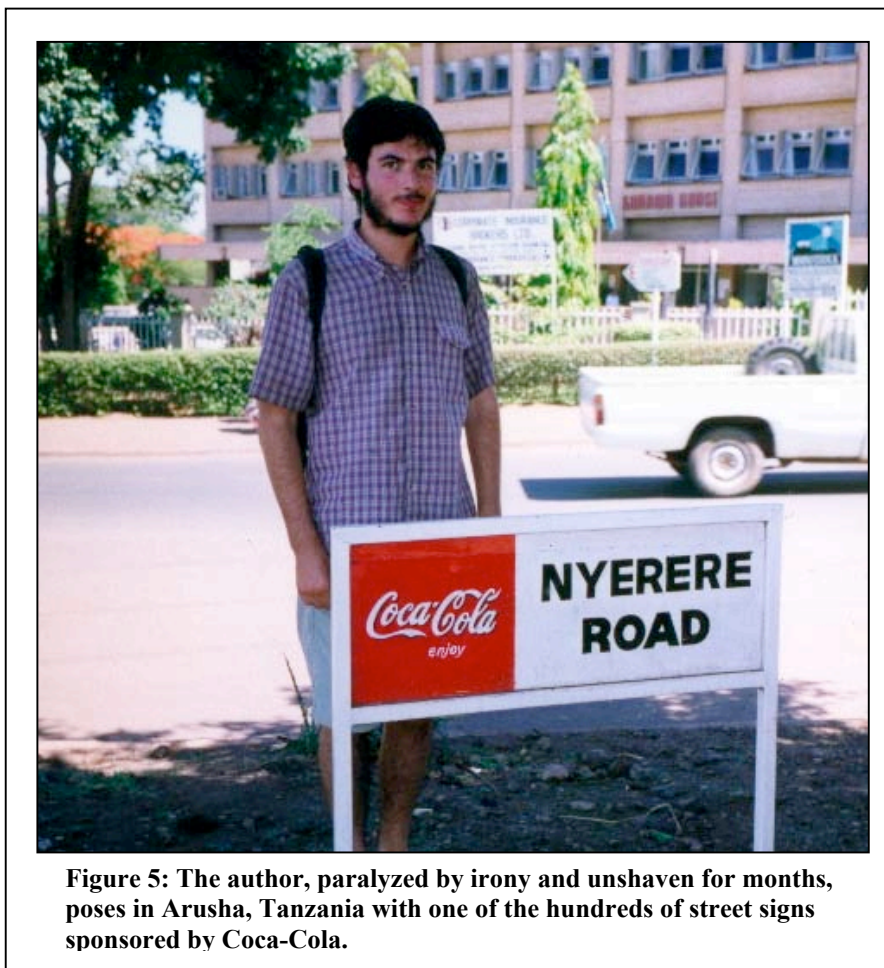
The Union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, hastily enacted a year ago, has not only failed to eliminate the Zanzibar cancer, but has in some ways facilitated its spread throughout the mainland government.
(Central Intelligence Agency 1965)

As the next decades passed, African communism and socialism did not pan out exactly as planned, and Zanzibar was no exception. In the 1970s under Zanzibar's first President Karume (his son is President today), draconian controls on what types of crops could and could not be grown (cloves before everything) and how much food of what varieties could be imported (wheat was forbidden in hopes that people would eat more local crops so that the island could be self-sufficient in food production) led once again to shortages and rationing. Though some progress was made in the areas of land distribution, education, and health care, basic issues such as poverty and malnutrition were never permanently addressed. (Martin 1978) Though the intentions behind Tanzania's socialist reforms may have been noble, the results for the majority of Zanzibaris were unfortunate at best.

Zanzibar's most recent political strife has come to the fore in the context of this corrupt and ineffective formerly socialist, now "liberalized," regime. Zanzibar's autonomy has progressively decreased in many respects since independence. In 1977, the ASP merged with Nyerere's mainland party, the Tanzania African National Union (TANU) party to form the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM; trans: the Party of the Revolution). The government has essentially followed a single-party structure and a unilinear genealogy of leadership since the revolution. The faltering economy was only one symptom of the nation's problems. While Nyerere proved to be one of Africa's most respected leaders as a chair of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) and in political engagements around the world, his efforts to improve quality of life for Tanzanians fell far short of his lofty goals. With his nation falling into heavy debt, Nyerere was forced to

look to the World Bank for desperately needed funds for development and to keep the government financially solvent.²⁶ International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies directed at Tanzania in the mid 1980s pushed for fiscal austerity, privatization, and liberalization of markets to tourism and foreign investment.

During the course of Julius Nyerere's tenure as Tanzanian President from 1964-



²⁶ For a description of the situation of Zanzibar as subjugated to the Tanzanian government with respect to international aid and trade policy, see Bell's "L'aide internationale à Zanzibar." (1998)

85²⁷, the government's strong socialist policies discouraged tourism as a form of development and even forbade the entry of Coca-Cola, McDonalds and other transnational corporations into the nation. This stance, however, was one of the early casualties of the ostensibly still-socialist government's shift towards acceptance of global capitalism. This attitude of anti-Western cultural Puritanism (often difficult to enforce) came at the same time as a heavy-handed program of compulsory villagization entitled "Ujamaa," where Tanzanians were forced into uniformly designed settlements modeled after what Nyerere viewed as the ideal, cooperative African community, as outlined in his 1967 policy paper, "Socialism and Rural Development." James Scott's (1998) highly critical dissection of the Ujamaa program highlights its function as a coercive territorial project, irrespective of the presumably altruistic ideals of the post-colonial state (Harris 2001). Though the ideals of pan-Africanism may have carried the African popular political consciousness far, especially in light of the legacy of colonialism from which it so recently emerged, the reality of pan-African socialist practice in Tanzania is a far cry from the dreams of any of its founders who hoped to bring an end to the exploitation and material suffering of their populations.

Since Ujamaa's collapse and the fall of the partial TNC embargo, one can't walk down a street in even the smallest of cities in Zanzibar or mainland Tanzania without seeing at least a handful of Coca-Cola signs and billboards. In Arusha, Northern Tanzania's largest city and gateway to numerous Safari destinations, every street sign in the entire city features a prominent Coca-Cola logo on it, even that of Nyerere Road (see

²⁷ Nyerere served as President of Tanganyika from 1961 until the unification of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964.

figure 5). Such an ironic tribute to one of Africa's most outspoken critics of Western hegemony speaks volumes of the state of Tanzania today.²⁸ Such a spectacle is emblematic of the political landscape onto which CUF, Zanzibar's popular opposition party, arrives.

²⁸ Though such symbols of Western consumerism as Coca-Cola are only superficial parts of a much more complex life experience in Tanzania, they play a large role in structuring the region's *representational* space. See Lasn's *Culture Jam: the uncooling of America* (1999)

IV. The Radical Opposition

The presence of the Arab in East Africa is an important factor in any consideration respecting future development. The Arab has displayed a vigour and executive power that must be recognized by any Government. From circumstances inherent to his mode of life, that faculty has fatally degenerated; but many Arabs to-day evidence real administrative ability. A glance at their remarkable history enables us to recognize their ability, however much we may controvert their methods.

Henry Stanley Newman, *Banani* (1898)

The primary problem...is the sharp division between two sectors of the Islands' population. This split did not arise in 1995 or in 1964 or in the 1950s.... this split is primarily a legacy of the British empire. They did this [gained influence] by encouraging not only Arab political control but also, by and large, Arab economic dominance, including alienation of land from indigenous farmers. Both policies and laws so favoured Arabs that people began to call themselves Arabs, or Shirazis, to obtain the more favourable treatment...To this day, people who are obviously Africans call themselves Arab, and vote accordingly.

T. L. Maliyamkono, *The Political Plight of Zanzibar* (2000b: 253)

“You don’t know what is mwa-fucka?!” Ali Saleh, our friendly BBC journalist, looked at us in dismay.

Once again, Helen, Gordon and I glanced at each other confused, but this time desperately trying not to crack up.

“Mwa-fucka, mwa-fucka. You’ve been here how many weeks and you don’t know mwa-fucka?”

Finally, I bravely tell him, “Three weeks. But how do you spell...”

After much chiding from Saleh about our truly impressive level of ignorance, we were clued in. Muafaka is the Swahili name for the agreement signed between CUF and

CCM—Zanzibar’s two warring political parties. Each has a counterpart on the mainland; CCM’s runs the nation and CUF’s has only a handful of seats in the Tanzanian legislature. The muafaka of 2001 is actually the second agreement of this type that’s been made between CUF and CCM. The first was made after the 1995 elections, which were widely accepted to have been a sham. That agreement set up the Zanzibar Electoral Commission and provided for election observers designed to ensure the fairness of the 2000 elections. When I asked Saleh if the 2000 elections were any better than the 1995 ones, he laughed for a second and then glumly explained to me the extent to which they had actually been far worse. The violence, especially in the aftermath of the elections when masses of protesters were shot at in the streets, was far worse in 2000 than it ever was in 1995.

And then there was the media coverage. Saleh recounted a story to us of a CUF meeting that he attended at which police shot at and seriously wounded members of CUF. Saleh reported the incident on Zanzibari television at 6:30pm—almost immediately after it happened—and then rushed a bleeding victim to the hospital in his own car. At 8:15pm the same evening, Saleh turned on the TV only to hear the news station report that there had been no shooting and that Saleh’s report was falsified. That’s what happens when the ruling party controls the only local TV news, he explained. He went on to tell us of an occasion the previous year where he was framed with the kidnapping of two women and taken to prison. In 1988, he spent a full month in prison without being charged and he’s now up to his seventh stay, all without ever being convicted of a crime.

A large part of the problem facing Zanzibar has to do with the distinct lack of any formalized process for determining if the Zanzibari people or elected officials have any real say in their own affairs. Their independent constitution was scrapped with the union in 1964, having lasted only a few months. But this has not really been a problem for the ruling CCM government given that they have controlled Zanzibari politics since the revolution anyway. The fact that Zanzibar is today recognized as “semi-autonomous” seems to have little bearing on reality given that election procedures are what one might call semi-fascist.

The CUF propaganda pamphlet produced in the lead-up to the 1995 elections entitled, “Whither Zanzibar,” asserts not only that the union was created without the consultation of either nation, but also that it “was not conceived with the noble aim of uplifting the people... but rather for the personal aggrandizement of Nyerere and Karume.”²⁹ As mentioned above, Nyerere and Karume’s CCM party was founded on socialist principles, but has bowed in the past 17 years to the free market doctrines enforced by the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the IMF in order to qualify for massive loans from the World Bank. As evidenced by this turn to the right, it is clear that CCM’s constitution, platform and policies have not always been self-consistent. As Ismail Jussa Ladhu, Private Secretary to the Secretary General of CUF in Zanzibar put it, “the government here has a very confused ideology; no one can tell you—is it capitalism? Socialism? Liberalism?” Although Zanzibar regained its own constitution in 1985, it still remained under single-party rule. In 1991, however, CCM, in response to intense public pressure,

²⁹ Abeid Karume was Zanzibar’s first President, serving from 1963 to 1972.

drafted a blueprint for multi-party rule. In 1992, when alternate political parties were legalized, CUF was formed. The 1995 elections were surrounded by great controversy, with CCM's win by less than 1% being announced four days after polls closed. There were countless allegations of corruption, voter fraud, and rigged results, but CCM still managed to gain control of the government. As Saleh told us, in 2000, despite the new Zanzibar Electoral Commission, things only got worse. In 2000, CCM openly brought boatloads of voters to Zanzibar from the mainland in hopes of swaying the elections. There were also reports of ballot boxes stolen at gunpoint, individuals being intentionally misregistered, repeated voting by others, police brutality against demonstrators, and countless other allegedly fraudulent tactics on the part of the CCM and the government.

Another interesting piece of this story, however, is the platform upon which CUF has ascended to mass popularity. In addition to calling for increased autonomy from mainland Tanzania, CUF proposes an alternative economic path:

...both capitalism and socialism do not have the capacity to ameliorate the very poor living conditions of Tanzanians. It was found that each of the two does have vices that are incompatible with the type of society that CUF envisages to build. In instance, capitalism flourished out of exploitation and general apathy to human sufferings. Socialism, on its part, is a social system which discourages individual initiative and encourages mental slavery, and worst of all it suppresses the rights of individuals. Hence the Utajirisho ideology is cleansed of all the vices of the two dominate [sic] ideologies and incorporates some of their virtues. (Civic United Front 2002)

In elaborating the principles of Utajirisho, Ladhu explained that CUF has no problem with capitalism or foreign investment per se, but they strongly believe that funds must come from "the East," referencing both the Arab world as well as the boom economies of

East Asia. Yet again, the politics of East and West have brought themselves to bear in the Zanzibari context. In a country where “socialism” has proved itself to be a largely despotic and destructive force, and Western capitalism has arrived on the shoulders of the IMF’s unhelpful liberalization and austerity policies³⁰, such an alternative ought not be shocking. However, once one looks at this ideological development in the context of the past five centuries of contestation between “East” (Oman, India, Persia, China, +/- Russia, East Germany) and “West” (Ancient Greece, Portugal, Britain, Sweden, United States), this political stance fits clearly into place.

Bringing the emergence of CUF even more clearly into historical perspective is the still somewhat contentious legacy of the 1964 revolution. In a fascinating survey that breaks down Zanzibaris by race and political affiliation, Maliyamkono (2000a) finds that respondents who identify as African are more likely to believe that the revolution was unavoidable and to be members of the CCM party. Arabs on the other hand, tend to see the revolution as having been avoidable and tend to support CUF. Irrespective of race, those who complete their full religious education tend to see the revolution as having been avoidable. Differences between the four predominant forms of Islam on the islands also indicate strong correlations for voting patterns: Ibadhi (traditionally Arab, less orthodox) and Hanafi Muslims are more likely to vote with CUF

³⁰ For a thorough discussion of this topic, see (Moshi and Kilindo 1999)1999)

while Sunni (more orthodox) and Shafi are more attuned to the CCM platform.³¹

Middleton and Campbell (1965) write in this regard:

Community distinctions play a large part in the everyday thinking of the peoples of the country. Some political leaders have wished to break them down and have succeeded to some extent. Others have tried to exploit them for their own ends, thereby acting as though the distinctions were more fixed and permanent than in fact they are...

Such a commentary written in 1965 seems almost prescient. By looking at Zanzibar's political history over the last 50 years, it is easy to find evidence of the malleability of relational spatial identities in the Zanzibari context. Perhaps the first of these "spaces of representation" (to use Lefebvre's language) was that of the pan-African socialist movement, initially represented in the 1960s by the Organization for African Unity (OAU). National leaders like Nyerere sought to construct an imagined geographical unity for the African continent through which their ideological goals could be met, namely socialism and non-alignment. The Afro-Shirazi party was successfully mobilized along these lines and in opposition to both European and Arab territorial domains. Without such a mobilization around spatial imaginaries, it seems clear that the bulk of independence movements could not possibly have happened. The non-aligned movement mobilized a larger, yet politically similar movement through conferences like Bandung in 1955 where the likes of Nehru, Sukarno, and Nasser created the ultimate spatialized response to "Western" hegemony: the "global south."

³¹ Due to a somewhat underdeveloped analysis of such trends in Maliyamkono's paper, it is difficult for me to make further conjectures about this data due to my limited understanding of the various denominations of Islam and their specificity to Zanzibar.

But as the non-aligned movement and pan-African socialism's allure began to wane in the 1980s with mounting debt crises and the advent of IMF structural adjustment loans, a new spatial order came to the fore: global capitalism, operating out of Washington, D.C.. Zanzibar took on whatever programs Washington demanded, in large part because they had little say in the behaviors of even their own national government. During the 1980s and 90s, Zanzibaris saw their social service provisions collapse under the weight of liberalization. But along with this change in conditions of governance and economy, Zanzibar also saw deep penetration of "Westernization" into their everyday lives. Coca-cola was legalized and quickly became ubiquitous. Satellite television became a staple for urban Zanzibaris (see figure 6). Hotels sprung up overnight, and for the first time they were permitted to exist with foreign ownership. Bikini-clad American and European tourists took to the white sand beaches of the islands in hordes. In this sense, spatial praxis in Zanzibar shifted dramatically. Zanzibari residents and tourists actively produced both a new global identity for Zanzibar as a tourist haven for the wealthy as well as a sense among many Zanzibaris of displeasure with their lot in life as a result of the disregard for their Islamic traditions (bikinis in the streets are unacceptable to the devout Muslim) and a collapse of their government's albeit limited progress over the past two decades. Through this locus of simultaneous shifts in spatial experience, it made perfect sense that yet another form of geospatial association would rise up to fill the gap left by the hollow promises of neoliberalism.

It is this niche in Zanzibari representational space that both CUF and the far more radical bin Laden supporters are both seeking to occupy. Each looks to the "East" to find

its geographical imaginary, CUF to the Arab world, and the bin Ladenists to the vision of a pan-Islamic world (“Uma”). Each draws upon a specific reimagining of Zanzibari history that is decidedly distinct from the narratives of pan-Africanism and Western neoliberalism. Sub-Saharan Africa is in many ways irrelevant to their spatial imagination. Clearly, however, these new conceptions of Zanzibari identity did not simply arise out of the blue; they rely heavily upon the centuries-old history of Islam in Zanzibar, but conceive of it differently than any spatial order of the previous half-century.



Figure 5: Top: The Michenzani flats, built with Swedish aid money in the 1960s under the Nyerere government are now heavily endowed with satellite dishes, though they lack both running water and consistent electricity. Bottom: A view from the third floor of Michenzani building #5.

V. Westernization meets Easternization

A remarkable instance of the production of space on the basis of a difference internal to the dominant mode of production is supplied by the current transformation of the perimeter of the Mediterranean into a leisure-oriented space for industrialized Europe. As such, and even in a sense as a 'non-work' space (set aside not just for vacations but also for convalescence, rest, retirement, and so on), this area has acquired a specific role in the social division of labour. Economically and socially, architecturally and urbanistically, it has been subjected to a sort of neo-colonization... the use to which it has been put calls for 'ecological' virtues such as immediate access to sun and sea... The quasi-cultist focus of localities based on leisure would thus form a striking contrast to the productive focus of North European cities. The waste and expense, meanwhile, would appear as the end-point of a temporal sequence...leading to the consumption of space, sun and sea, and of spontaneous or induced eroticism, in a great 'vacationland festival.'

There are two reasons for bringing these considerations up at this point: to make the notion of the production of space as concrete as possible... and to show how the class struggle is waged under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

- Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]: 59)

Not knowing what “mwa-fucka” was really drove it home for me. As much as I wanted to be a student in Zanzibar, or a researcher, or maybe even a human rights activist, I really was just a tourist. Despite all of the fabulous lectures I had sat through on the art and architecture of Stone Town, all of the ecotourism projects I had visited, all of the histories of Tanzania and the Indian Ocean that I had read through, nobody had told me about Muafaka. I remembered reading briefly about the killings in January 20001 on the

Indy Media website³², but I had not even heard a single word about them from a Zanzibari until I turned up in Saleh's office. I also had heard almost nothing about CUF. From the bits and peaces that my friends and I had scraped together, we knew that they were "radical" in some sense of the term and that people sporting Osama T-shirts show up at their rallies.

Though my much of my time in Zanzibar was spent living with a host family and learning about the landscape, I had not really gotten beyond Lefebvre's characterization

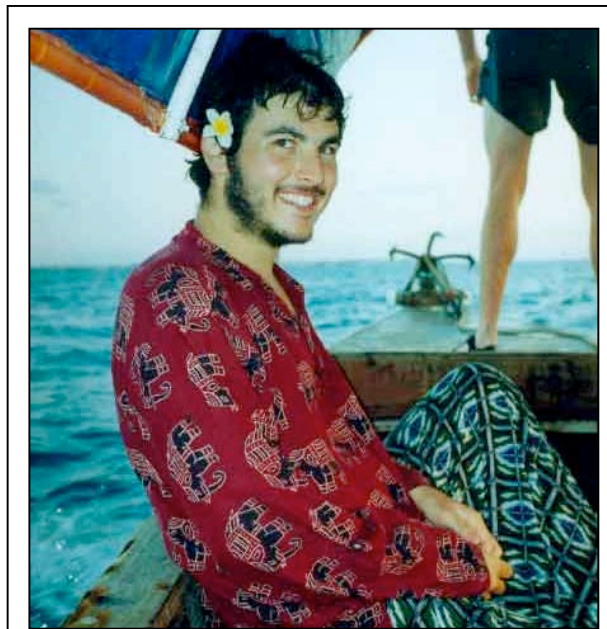


Figure 7: The author en route to a snorkeling site wearing Indian-made elephant-patterned shirt, "traditional" Zanzibari skirt (worn rarely by actual Zanzibaris), and frangipani flower behind ear (probably brought initially from American tropics by Portuguese explorers during 18th or 19th century).

³² Indy Media provides independent reporting on human rights, the environment, international summits, etc. from anyone anywhere and puts it on the web at <http://www.indymedia.org/>

of leisure space in a fundamental way. In some senses, I was the *uber*-tourist. Having enough time to visit every last beach on the island, hear from every famous Zanzibari historian and even to live with the “natives.” A batik shirt that I bought in Zanzibar sums up my experience fairly well. On my second day on the island I strolled into Memories of Zanzibar, what I later realized was the fanciest, most expensive souvenir boutique in Stone Town. I looked carefully through every men’s shirt they had in the store. I wanted something genuinely, authentically, quintessentially Zanzibari. And I knew virtually nothing about Zanzibar (I didn’t know that then). And then I found it. The elephant shirt. A parade of little batik elephants on a dark red background running around my torso in circles. How much more exotic could I get? A few weeks later I realized that there were no elephants in Zanzibar. I then came to notice one day that on the shirt’s tag it said in very small letters, “made in India.” When, on my study abroad program, I traveled to India the next month, I quickly came to realize that I had purchased the most popular shirt in India—for tourists, that is (see figure 7).

Tourism in Zanzibar is fraught with the same representational dilemmas that characterize politics, except in reverse. On one hand, politicians craft strategic political campaigns to represent an image that Zanzibari voters want to align themselves with, while on the other, Zanzibaris (and foreigners) craft representations of themselves that make tourists want to consume their experiential and material productions. In this sense, tourism in Zanzibar goes beyond Lefebvre’s conception of a “non-work” space; Zanzibar is a non-work space where you can imagine yourself not only never having to work, but

also as living the life of someone from a different world entirely. Every travel article about Zanzibar sounds pretty much just like this one:

Strictly speaking, we don't do much in this antique port town. We watch the mornings rise up to the decrepit rooftops, wander our days away and sit back down for sunsets. The fishing boats roll out at dawn, lumber home at dusk. We watch and walk, little more.

But that's Zanzibar -- like falling asleep to colored and complicated dreams. In this city of shadows and spice, we feel like children who've sneaked into a museum after hours.

Zanzibar. The Spice Islands. A coral archipelago rising from the Indian Ocean 25 miles off the eastern coast of Africa.

The name reminds us of something, but what? Some vague, tropical and half-forgotten idea, some scrap of history more intricate than the ornate doors of Stone Town. Something glimpsed years ago in the pages of an old storybook.³³

Zanzibar is this journalist's image of heaven. She wanders about with nothing to do, consuming the world around her as spectacle³⁴ and imagining herself in a time long past where one exists only to observe and to indulge. Another travel piece gives us a similar sense of Zanzibar, but with a strikingly self-conscious twist at the end (or is it?).

... my time is limited, and islands are like short stories: compact, quickly taken in, but, if they're good, complete in themselves. ...[Zanzibar] contains a living, vibrant Swahili city with its own character, a city that has existed in something like its present form for centuries. Both [Lamu and Zanzibar] have survived and absorbed layer upon layer of conquest and culture -- African, Indian, Asian, Arab (primarily Omani), Portuguese and British -- and this range and mix of ethnicities and histories are visible in their people, and palpable, too, in a kind of unsurprised curiosity and ease they seem to have with whatever comes along. Lamu was at the peak

³³ "Exotic Zanzibar: Sleepy days wandering alleys in mysterious, decrepit Stone Town." *Tri-City Herald* (Stack 2001).

³⁴ Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1970) is instructive here. If only he could see Zanzibar and wander the mysterious alleys...

of its civilization from the 17th to the 19th century, Zanzibar slightly later, and both faded in wealth and power as the slave trade died. They are especially worth seeing now...because they are fragile, their very physical being as well as their way of life threatened by age and growth and the pressures of increasing tourism.³⁵

Comparing Zanzibar to a short story, the author seeks to “take in” all the valuable aspects of an island inhabited by one million of the world’s poorest people in the space of a few days, for of course it is a mythical land preserved in time to be read like a book or strolled through like a museum. One must wonder if the author realizes the deep hypocrisy involved in noting that Zanzibar’s “very physical being” and “way of life” are being threatened by the pressures of tourism and then writing an article promoting it in one of the most popular travel magazines in the United States.



Figure 8: American students studying abroad in Zanzibar hold a party where they show off their newly purchased Zanzibari “khangas,” displaying more bare skin than any Zanzibari woman would ever imagine showing in public.

35 “Zanzibar.” *New York Times*, *Sophisticated Traveler Magazine* (Miller 2001).

When one begins to consider the representational space of Zanzibar in light of popular cultural critiques of globalization as “Western cultural hegemony,” whereby the world is portrayed as a vast realm of diverse cultures systematically being paved over and assimilated by Coca-Cola, McDonalds, and American movies, it becomes obvious that the case of Zanzibar clearly does not fit the bill. Of course, “Westernization” is clearly taking place in Zanzibari pop culture as evidenced by the popularity of satellite television, the heavy presence of American pop music,³⁶ the growth of basketball as a popular sport, and of course the ubiquity of Coca-Cola and related beverages consumed by all those who can afford it. However, at the same time as this process of “Westernization” takes place, a parallel process of what I call “Easternization” is taking place in the tourist industry as well as in the homes of Zanzibari elites. Some of the most privileged Zanzibaris, with access to many “First World” goods and experiences, such as DVD players, computer systems, private cars, and international travel experiences, make very much intentional choices to add “Eastern” flair to their geographically “African” and aesthetically hybrid wealth. Many wealthy Zanzibaris make frequent trips to India or Oman and some even send their children to boarding schools in Northern India for their high school education. However, based on my limited interviews and casual observations, I noted that

³⁶ Graffiti relating to Tupac Shakur is seen all over Zanzibar town, and many urban Zanzibari youth adhere strongly to the notion that he is still alive. Tupac’s death is questioned in the United States as well; despite his being shot five times after attending a boxing match in 1996, many committed fans insist that he still lives and his record sales have actually increased since his “death.” (Tupac Fans 2003)

American or British university-level education is by far the most highly valued.³⁷

Architectural and decorative practices that I observed in the most upscale of Zanzibari homes that I was able to visit, however, always incorporated strong elements of traditionally Arab, Persian, or Indian³⁸ design in their architecture and décor.

One particularly striking example of such an encounter lay in the village of Pungwa and a home on its outskirts that came to be known to my friends and myself as the “Palace of Pungwa.” Pungwa is a small fishing village on the South coast of Zanzibar. The great majority of the village’s population lives in small, one story, concrete or wattle and daub houses without electricity. As my friends and I received a tour of the village from a professor from the University of Dar es Salaam, we observed the ways that people from the village make their own wicker fish traps and use old flip-flop sandals as floatation devices for their larger fishnets. Seaweed farming has been a recent source of income for the village’s female residents, though they complain loudly that since the transnational corporations arrived a few years ago to set up the operations for them, their payments for harvested and dried seaweed have dropped dramatically. When we asked the women what they purchased with their income, we found out that

³⁷ See Ruete’s *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar* (1989) for the story of one of the first Zanzibari females to attend boarding school in India.

³⁸ As I make these observations, I feel that it important for me to note that such aesthetic practices are not necessarily any more Arab, Persian, or Indian than they are Zanzibari, as any statement to the contrary would almost inevitably employ a highly problematic normative aesthetic framework implying certain racialized notions of “genuineness” that I cannot herein embrace.

khangas, the traditional dress of Zanzibari women (shown in figure 8 above) are the most popular choice. Our professor told us later that many of them have closets stuffed full of more khangas than they know what to do with.³⁹

As we reached the end of our tour through the village, we noticed a large, concrete white wall with red trim ahead of us. As we approached the wall, we realized that it extended probably a hundred feet in either direction, and then we noticed the presence of a rather large satellite dish poking out from behind it. We also heard a strange sort of whinnying noise that sounded suspiciously like a small band of camels. As we followed our tour guide along the length of the wall, we noticed its rather thick and sturdy construction and its stylized contours indicating some sort of vaguely middle-Eastern architectural model. As we turned the corner, we noticed that the noises we heard were, in fact, coming from two camels. As far as I know, these were the only two camels on Zanzibar. The compound stretched a long ways along the beachfront and formed the barrier between the fishing village of Pungwa and the tourist resorts of Pungwa, which, I'm told, are mostly Italian-owned. When I later asked some locals what they thought about the "Palace," I was told that its owner is actually quite generous with the adjacent community, donating funds for the construction of a new mosque and an impressive new school. I was given conflicting stories about the source of the owner's wealth; some say he is involved in drug trafficking, while

³⁹ In a trip to the market a week later, I noticed in my search for a khanga that many, if not all of the khangas for which I could find labels, indicated that despite their Swahili imprints, they, like my favorite shirt, were made in India.

others told me that he is the owner of a large chain of supermarkets on the mainland.

One of the bearers of the drug-trafficking rumor came from a rather interesting source, a bartender in Pungwa who went by the nickname of the “bush doctor.” Serving up alcoholic beverages and various other intoxicants to tourists, the bush doctor was also a fantastic source of insight into another side of Zanzibari cultural representations. One evening in the bush doctor’s bar, as Bob Marley music played loudly in the background, the bush doctor wowed me with his English vocabulary and conversational skills. I asked him how he’d learned to speak English so well, and he told me that he dropped out of high school and learned it mainly from talking to tourists like myself. He told me of his own desire to travel like the backpackers that he encountered every evening, but then gave



Figure 9: The "Zanzibar Bikini," from *Tropi-Ties*. Catalogue caption reads: “Fit for a Sultan’s wife... This exotic print is reminiscent of far off islands and the mysterious Orient...”

the caveat that things were going pretty well for him in Pungwa. Our conversation ended as he and a Zanzibari friend walked off for an evening swim with two beer-clutching, bikini-clad European tourists (see figure 9).

The bush doctor himself represents yet another aspect of Zanzibar's many-faceted representational identity within the tourist industry. Using a reference to traditional African tribal practices of shamanism and healing, the bush doctor gives party-hungry backpackers in Zanzibar the chance to not only bask in the sun and experience a museified version of Zanzibari history, but to forget their worries, their future work-lives, and even their present geography as they frolic in wild dance parties surrounded primarily by other Europeans and North Americans. Through his use of the title of "bush doctor" and his reggae music, he sells a particularly telling brand of tropical African hedonism—the tribal—with great success to his young visitors.

While the bush doctor happily serves drinks in the isolated coastal village of Pungwa, all Zanzibaris do not share his rosy view of tourists. Many public complaints have been made in recent years about the offensive behavior of tourists in Zanzibar, especially regarding the wearing of bikinis and the consumption of alcohol. News was spreading in 2001 of attempts to ban backpackers from the islands and to direct tourism explicitly towards wealthier clientele, based on the rationale that backpackers bring little revenue to Zanzibar while contributing to the growing narcotics trade. Other anti-tourist efforts have not been so strategic; in the past two years, two different sets of non-lethal

bombings took place in bars serving alcohol in Zanzibar city. Police and media blame “Islamic extremists” for the bombings (Zanzibar News 2003), and many worry that if such a trend continues, Zanzibar could eventually be written off the map of global tourist destinations for good.

In the context of such intense conflicts over religious practice, one must ask what really is at stake in these discussions, which take for granted the inherent value of tourism as a major (if not primary) means of escape from the trap of Third World poverty. The mainstream discourse in this arena seems to rely upon an assumed “trickle-down economics” of development, very much akin to Ronald Regan’s policies of funneling government funds into the hands of the wealthy with certainty that said funds will eventually make their way to the needy.⁴⁰ Of course, such an analytic is not without concrete theoretical roots. The Bretton Woods institutions themselves and the “Washington Consensus”⁴¹ that has stood unfaltering behind them until only very recently profess explicitly such a logic of free markets, unfettered capitalism, privatization, and enterprise which rests again on similar ideas of wealth flow and distribution.

When such assumptions are concretely problematized, the perspective of the bar-bombing Muslim fundamentalist begins to look a bit less “evil”—as certain latter-day Ronald Regans have named the trend—and a bit more like a highly predictable response to an economic and cultural hierarchy imposed upon a

⁴⁰ See Emma Rothschild’s *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (2001).

⁴¹ See Robert Wade’s “Showdown at the World Bank,” *New Left Review* 7 (2001).

people with a strong tradition of violent and organized response to perceived injustices.

The final dimension of the phenomenon of tourism in Zanzibar to be explored herein is that of the fabrication of identity. Though it may be easy to explain away cultural shifts towards the “West” as “impositions,” the diligent scholar cannot ignore the fact that a very large piece of this transition is executed at will by members of the so-called “East.” By the same token, it is “Easterners” themselves who often mount their own counter-attacks upon “Westernization,” by choosing to exoticize and “Easternize” themselves beyond any historically concrete level. This “auto-orientalization,” as I wish to call it, in the tradition of Said, is evident in the construction of the previously mentioned “Palace of Pungwa,” in the dress of Western-educated, wealthy, re-patriated Zanzibaris, and in the design of various tourist attractions ranging from the hundred-million dollar “exotic” Serena Hotel to the proffering of Zanzibari-style dresses to American women sipping mixed drinks at a bar by a Zanzibari wearing a Nike T-shirt. At this stage in the game of global cultures, “ethnic” identities are as much identities as commodities, passing simultaneously from one into another as they have throughout the history of Zanzibar as the currencies of power, violence, tradition, and domination.

VI. Conclusion

Events do not depend on the will of a single individual, nor on that even of a numerous group. They depend on the wills of a great many people, revealed through their doing or not doing certain acts and through their corresponding intellectual attitudes. And they depend on the knowledge a minority possesses concerning those wills, and on the minority's capacity to channel them more or less towards a common aim, after having incorporated them within the powers of the state.

- Antonio Gramsci, *Utopia* (2000 [1918]: 46)

Small nations are like indecently dressed women. They tempt the evil-minded.

-Julius Nyerere, 1964

With the help of a Gramscian notion of hegemony and Nyerere's tongue-in-cheek pessimism in mind, one can begin to understand the implications of a spatially situated rendering of representational Zanzibar. This paper demonstrates the essential nature of an understanding not just of structures of domination, but of the more ethereal means by which such structures operate—by way of engagements in the seemingly abstract discursive realms of the cultural and the spatial. It is my hope that through the careful examination of the practice of power in Zanzibar, such notions are effectively concretized to the benefit of the reader. Such abstractions, as Cooper (2001) tells us, must be understood not just at the local or global levels, but at every step of the way in-between as well, in order for a useful understanding of globalization to be had. As such, I hope that I have not become too much of what Burawoy (2000) might call a “high-flying academic,” or that even if I have, you might have at least enjoyed the ride.

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Image sources:

(All photos taken by the author unless otherwise noted)

Figure 3: Photos by Elizabeth Howland.

Figure 4: “Osama we love U” by David Chalmers

Figure 7: Photo by Frances Cheston Thacher

Figure 5: Photo by Mneesha Gellman

Figure 9: Photo from “Tropi-Ties: Online magazine and catalog.” (2003)