

A historical black and white photograph showing a city in a state of complete ruin. In the foreground, a man in a white suit and a white hard hat stands on a pile of rubble. Behind him, a large, multi-story building has been reduced to a skeletal frame of columns and beams. Debris, including wooden planks and large pipes, is scattered everywhere. In the background, a group of people can be seen walking through the wreckage. A large, semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the upper half of the image, containing the title text in white.

Urban Design, Chaos,
and Colonial Power in
Zanzibar

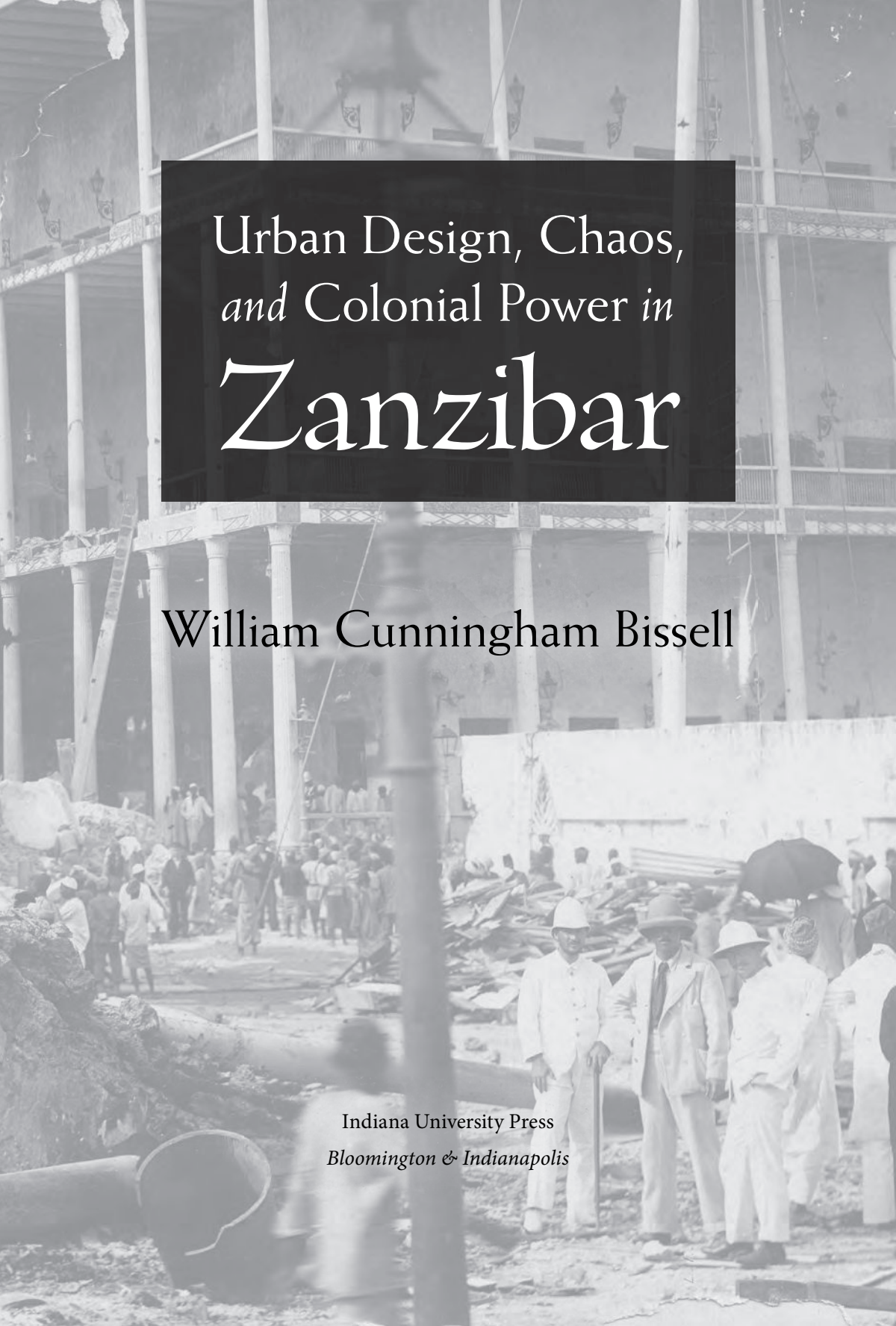
William Cunningham Bissell



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*To my own agents of creative disorder: dedicated with love
to Caroline Grace, Theo Rhodes, and Zora Wilde B.*

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Anthropology is founded on imaginative acts involving both travel and translation—moving out from one’s own space to encounter cultural worlds located elsewhere (if only around the corner or even online). This movement always entails bracketing one’s own beliefs and practices and engaging those of others: opening oneself to new conceptions and ways of being in the world. Ethnography is often poised on the margins, trying to mediate between here and there, self and other, familiar and strange, known and unknown. Occupying this sharp edge of possibility is always a creative challenge, but both personally and professionally, it is deeply enriching. I’ve been extremely lucky to work in an absolutely absorbing African context, as countless Zanzibaris have bestowed astonishing lessons in grace, generosity, and everyday gestures of inclusion. If one argument in this book is that Zanzibaris look past their own urban arts of invention and ingenuity, so too they all too often seem to regard their openness and hospitality as something that goes without saying. But this *ukarimu* is extraordinary, and I have learned a great deal from it. Much of this book has been written while my family and I have been sharing lives and space with an extended family, who opened their doors and hearts to us, and words simply don’t suffice to express our thanks to Salum Said Suleiman, Fatuma Khamis, and their children, Azza, Amira, Aida, and Ad-Hawad. Bibi Hasina and Mzee Mohamed Aboud and their children, as well as Bi. Nasra and her family, always joined in, cajoling me to drop the research and come on by.

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INTRODUCTION

Landscapes of Power and Planning

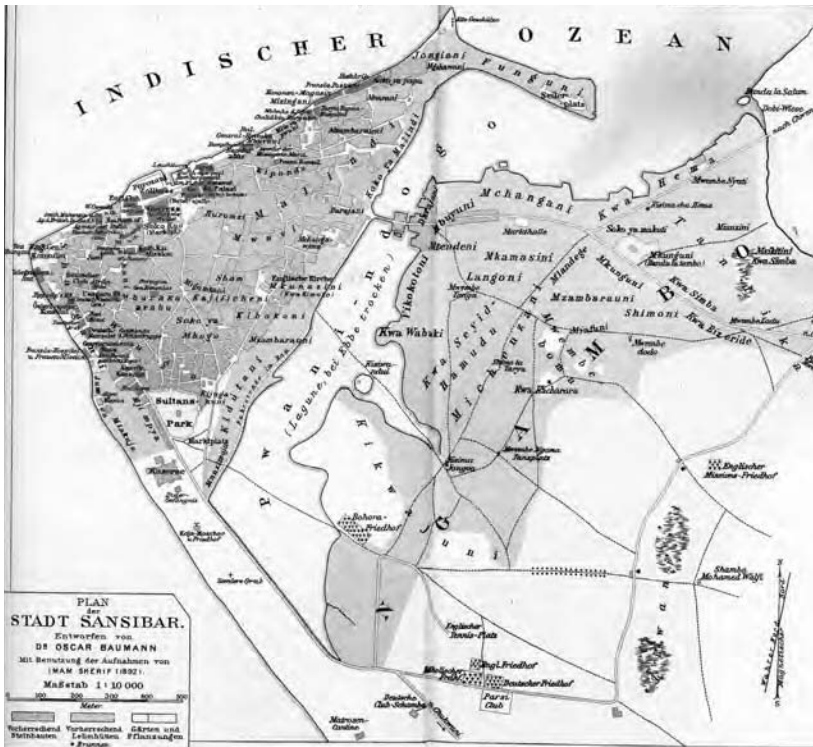
This book analyzes the repeated attempts of British colonialism to impose its writ on a dynamic African city, seeking to regularize and rationalize space in strikingly Eurocentric ways. On paper, colonial urban plans often appear fully formed, the ultimate realization of promises to modernize the city, but in practice they were marked again and again by incoherence, incapacity, and incompleteness. Debates about colonial power have ranged widely, yet on at least one point there is a surprising degree of concurrence: most scholars seem to agree that at some level colonialism *worked*—it altered the cultural terrain, introduced new conditions, impacted consciousness, or provoked resistance. Yet the historical ethnography of urban interventions in East Africa reveals a quite different portrait of the colonial state and its policies, one deeply marked by contradiction, confusion, even chaos. In tracing the tale of the incessant making and remaking of the modern in Zanzibar city, I show how colonial disorder and dysfunction has laid the foundation for contemporary conditions typically attributed to postcolonial African regimes. Reflecting on these erasures of historical memory, I seek to transform how we think about the relationship between Western rationality, colonial power, and urban modernity.

Urban Zanzibar has long been a cosmopolitan space, with a heterogeneous population drawn from widely diverse African, Arab, and Indian backgrounds. In the nineteenth century it became the capital of the Omani sultanate and the center of an expansive commercial empire linking Asia, Arabia, Europe, and America with the interior of Africa.

Initially, the British cultivated the sultan as an ally in the Indian Ocean world, but as they grew more assertive in their regional power, they worked to undermine and subsume the sultanate within their empire. The sultanate was ultimately reduced to little more than a client state, restricted within ever-narrower spheres by treaties and threats of force. The intra-European competition unleashed by the scramble for Africa only increased the pressures, and Britain eventually imposed a full protectorate in Zanzibar in 1890, seeking to contain Germany and protect their Indian Ocean trade routes.

Until recently, the outlines of the colonial city in Zanzibar seemed rather stark and clear. As with the literature on colonial cities elsewhere, works on Zanzibar emphasized the dual and divided nature of urban space. These narratives suggested that race and class were literally inscribed in the built environment, arguing that the city was both separated and segregated. In Zanzibar, then, the urban sphere was said to be structured by absolute oppositions: Stone Town or “the city proper” split off from Ng’ambo, the “other side,” Arab from African, elites from ex-slaves, stone mansions from mud huts (Menon 1978; Lofchie 1965). In broad outline this portrait seems to echo Frantz Fanon’s classic Manichean description of the colonial city (1968). And yet recent research in the African context suggests that this dualistic depiction of urban form and social life masks a far more complicated and contradictory situation (Bissell 2011; Sheriff 2002). In Zanzibar and elsewhere in the empire, colonial states and elites struggled to impose their vision on urban space. In fact, grounded archival and ethnographic study reveals the degree to which British officials were perpetually frustrated in their attempts to create a more “rational” and “orderly” urban milieu. From the earliest days of the protectorate, they possessed only an incomplete grasp of the complexities of city space. The unruliness of urban life frequently disrupted their efforts to make the city conform to a grid of abstract legal definitions and bureaucratic rules. Despite many decades of work, attempts to achieve a master plan for the city repeatedly collapsed in disarray.

Colonial designs on the city, rather than successfully reworking space, repeatedly failed to rationalize the urban sphere. These schemes, sponsored by an overextended and disjunctive state apparatus, foundered precisely in the gap between intention and implementation, hindered



1. Late-nineteenth-century map of Zanzibar city with triangular peninsula and Ng'ambo, the "Other Side." Oscar Baumann, *Die Insel Sansibar und Ihre Kleineren Nachbarinseln* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1897).

by internal disarray as well as the incapacity of legal and bureaucratic instruments to reorder the totality of the everyday. Yet by emphasizing the inadequacy of imperial designs on the city, I do not mean to suggest that they were either ineffable or inconsequential. Failure in this sense should not be seen as mere folly. If schemes to reorder the city were uncertain and ungrounded, they also had very real effects, with profound implications for our understanding of the materiality and meaning of colonial power. The development of these plans served as justification for the reformist claims of British rule, consumed inordinate amounts of resources and energy, promoted an expansive administrative apparatus, and inserted colonial subjects within an arbitrary legal and bureaucratic order that was all the more dominating because of its capricious and

amorphous nature. If the plans never came to fruition, their impact was anything but intangible—and indeed, the effects continue to be felt down to the present day.

In a real sense, then, this book centers on the sociocultural production of space in Zanzibar city, exploring how colonial spatial arrangements—the architecture of rule, so to speak—were not marked by coherence and consistency but instead riven by profound and enduring contradictions. Ethnographic research reveals the degree to which repeated colonial attempts to impose order on the city instead produced a whole series of disorders and disruptions that have been subsequently ignored or misunderstood. Through either historical amnesia or active forgetting, contemporary problems in the city have been wrongly interpreted as the products of postcolonial mismanagement and indigenous incompetence when in fact the roots of urban disarray stretch far back into the bureaucratic chaos unleashed by colonial designs.

Space, Memory, and the Ethnography of the Everyday

Long before I had heard of Lefebvre, the social production of space had already sparked my imagination. A child of the suburbs, I came to live and work in cities, but it was a rural landscape that first intrigued me, planting the germ or seed of questions that subsequently became significant for this study. My grandfather had a farm in northeastern Ohio that had been in the family for generations. He lived all of his life in relationship to the same plot of ground, gaining sustenance from the soil. My father too grew up working the fields and orchards, but eventually left to make his life elsewhere, having had his fill of farm labor with its privations and toil, the ceaseless and repetitive rounds of tasks. I first came to the farm with him when I was six weeks old and have returned regularly since, most recently seeing my own young children, Theo and Zora, play in the fields that were once my delight. My experience of the site was always linked to the fact that I never had to be there or get anything done; freed from necessity, I could explore the feel and texture of a very different sort of life, ordinary and yet somehow exotic all at once. I was deeply engaged with the place, yet came to it with an outsider's perspective, cultivating an ethnographic curiosity long before I formally understood it as such.

The farm was indelibly linked to my emerging sense of family and the unfolding of a personal narrative. Because I visited frequently, the landscape became altogether familiar, receding into the background as a setting or context, something that was simply *there*. But as I came to know it better, the space of the farm no longer seemed quite so simple or straightforward. As I grew older and witnessed changes in the way the land looked and was used, I became more aware of the farm as a historical product, seeing the imprint and influence of temporal processes. Recent changes raised questions about those that had occurred in the past, and I began to explore the richness of my grandfather's spatial memory, learning to see the land through other eyes.

Much of my newfound understanding emerged through the ethnography of everyday practice. Living in New York and Chicago in my late teens and twenties, I found myself increasingly drawn to projects on the farm both as a way to come to know my grandfather and as counterpoint to more urban pursuits. Amid the rhythms of work, I plied my grandfather with questions that often struck him as naïve or highly amusing. As we planted, pruned trees, or split wood, I asked where this or that implement had come from, or what it was used for, and then listened to his stories, passed on from his father or grandfather like the tools in our hands. In this way, I started to learn how common landscapes could speak. Through his narratives, quotidian things—earth, stones, trees, and buildings arranged in space—gradually became infused with layers of significance, part of a submerged and intricate history that had come in some way to form me. The land itself began to take on archaeological dimensions, revealing hidden layers of meaning (a slight depression in the earth showed where an old well had been, or a copse of trees across the road, seemingly unremarkable, marked the crumbled foundation of the original cabin, now covered by the loamy soil).

Features of the landscape that were mute or meaningless to me signified something quite different to my grandfather, prompting stories drawn from fragments of family history, images, reflections on changing times, or discourses on technology and material culture. In his hands, the rural geography became a kind of embodied archive, and he interpreted the landscape with a depth and richness of knowledge that I found intriguing, making connections and filling in contexts that remained unnoticed by others. Through these discussions I began to

grasp some of the complexities of social spaces, seeing how they speak in multiple ways to differently located individuals, following along the skeins of everyday practice, perspective, and memory. As different layers and accounts emerged, the place came alive for me with a multiplicity of voices and visions. Small details caught and held my attention: the name of an infant, carried off by some childhood malady long ago, starkly etched on a family tombstone; visions of my grandmother, a music teacher, summoning the boys in from the fields with an operatic yell; a costume box in the garage, filled with musty outfits that folks had worn when performing skits at house parties in the 1930s and 1940s; the stones of the hearth, gathered from the fields over the years and tossed into a pile, eventually used to make the chimney when the old house burned down and the barn was converted for human habitation. A place that long seemed ordinary took on new and unexpected dimensions.

These fragments evoked more than the tale of a family and its changing relationship to a particular piece of ground. Spatial narratives, I discovered, cut across conventional lines, easily conjoining personal experience and public events, material life and memory, cultural landscapes and historical processes. Becoming attuned to these divergent layers of meaning, I began to catch beguiling glimpses of a broader narrative about the history of rural life in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From early beginnings, to railroads and electrification, Mennonite dairies and make-work programs during the Depression, I could trace the development and spread of an agricultural economy—even as it was on the verge of disappearing. What was once a small rural town was giving way with astonishing rapidity to suburban sprawl, as most of the region's farms and dairies were sold off to make way for housing developments, golf courses, spas, and factory outlet stores. New roads with suitably bucolic names were laid out where once fields lay, as the surrounding area was being transformed into a bedroom community oriented toward Cleveland, filled with new commuters who had very different relationships to the land, spatial practices, and modes of consumption. Novel socio-spatial forms were being born out of the old, leaving few traces behind of what had come before. The foundations of the present were built on silences, submerged beneath subdivisions, scattered in stories.

The cultural landscape of an Ohio farm might seem quite distant from urban Zanzibar. Despite the surface dissimilarities, however, during the course of my research in East Africa I began to see striking resemblances with and echoes of my earlier experiences. In Zanzibar city, as on the farm, I began to understand the intensely social and historical qualities of space. Urban Zanzibaris frequently mapped the city in terms of lived experience rather than abstract coordinates, linking particular sites to specific moments and personal meanings (“the house I was born in,” “the quarter where we lived when we first came to the city,” “the square where our wedding celebration took place,” and so forth). Speaking of a succession of places and linking them in time, the city’s residents could chart the course of their own and others’ lives in shifting relationship with the landscape of the city. These personal and familial stories pointed at something much larger. Private lives intersected with public social worlds, and the tales I was told offered insights into a dynamic, dizzyingly complex array of cultural forms and practices—gender relations and economic life, housing and health, protest and play, and much else besides.

Urban sites were densely interwoven with sociocultural relations in Zanzibar, and just as I had on the farm, I grew interested in the way that space often served as a crucial index of time. Formal architecture is typically framed around gestures of permanence. The city is a precipitate shaped by history, and what remains or endures is hardly accidental. In other words, place—and what stays in place—is always linked to social processes and broader questions of power. To take but one example: the marginal status of residents in informal settlements, slums, or squats is inextricably linked to the fact that they are denied enduring rights to the spaces they inhabit, typically forced to occupy improvised or temporary quarters. Urban construction is both resource- and labor-intensive, and building sites are neither abundant nor inexhaustible. For both material and symbolic reasons, then, buildings are generally built more or less to last. And while individual structures may come and go, the streetscape they collectively define is relatively long-lived.

As such, city settings (like rural landscapes) come to form a horizon against which people measure or map the passage of time. Because



2. Urban palimpsest: “To Be Consumed Either On or Off the Premises.” Colonial bar regulations, now partially effaced on residential building, Mji Mkongwe. Photograph by author.

of their seeming solidity and capacity to endure, structures serve to register and reflect changes in the course of a life or across generations. Over time, they take on different textures, meanings, and uses, becoming sedimented or layered, acquiring a patina, acting like palimpsests. Dwellings and edifices are erected on the ruins of previous structures or inhabited by the shadows of what once was there, captured in stories, still photographs, maps, and archival texts. The metropolis is infused with memory—not just the official memory displayed in museums and inscribed on monuments but the memories of significant moments in ordinary lives commemorated by a diverse array of spatial markers. Urban sites don’t just map cultural practices; they also serve as frames for the unfolding of historical processes. “The city,” Italo Calvino (1972, 11) writes, “does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of its streets, the gratings of its windows, the banisters of its steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of its flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.”

Urban Plans and Research Designs: Illusions of Coherence

This is a book framed around the multiple intersections of space and society, colonialism and the city, planning and power. Simply stated, this is a text about urban spaces and processes shaped by conditions that modernist social science has mostly displaced or ignored: unpredictability, disarray, disorder, and incoherence. Published works share certain resemblances with the urban plans I first encountered in the archives in Zanzibar. Both, after all, are the culminations of tangled (and less visible) social and cultural processes, but in their final form they tend to convey a coherence and completeness that was nowhere to be found during their creation. Books, like urban designs, neatly disguise the messy conditions of their own making, and it is critical to avoid the trap of reifying the end product while ignoring the process of its production.

Most academic accounts take on the appearance of fully realized and polished works—structured, organized, and neatly conceptualized from beginning to end. When we initially encounter them as readers, it seems as if they are the ultimate expressions of rational planning, moving in organized stages from initial outline to finished text (and progressing smoothly from introduction to conclusion in an inexorable line). These narrative conventions have a long history, very much linked to hegemonic conceptions of rationality, scholarly authority, and narrative coherence. It might be convenient for me to present this research as closely planned from start to finish, clearly seen from the beginning and carried out until the end. But to make that claim would be to indulge in a particularly modern form of myth-making—a kind of misrepresentation that goes to the core of modern power and colonial planning, science and scholarship. After all, in their final form most scholarly narratives work to mask or marginalize the very processes that actually worked to produce them. Nowhere in their pages do we ever see the everyday labors that went into their making: the wrong turns and reverses, the research questions that fell by the wayside, the drafts and revisions, the whole messy and creative process by which books unevenly come to fruition and eventually see the light of day. In this sense, finished texts very much resemble the colonial urban designs that are the subject of my analysis here.

After all, the British sought to legitimate their colonial control of Zanzibar by continually pointing to its beneficial and improving character. They often claimed that before they came to Zanzibar, the city was a chaotic and unclean space, devoid of sense, services, or sanitation. According to these accounts, early protectorate officials took over a city that was the disorderly product of Oriental despotism and worked progressively to reorder and regularize the urban milieu. The British allegedly pursued their urban goals by applying themselves to the task at hand in a modern, scientific, and bureaucratically organized manner—assessing the state of the city, laying out proposed solutions, and then working over time to bring the built environment into conformity with their ideas. As testimony to their public spirit, civic sense, and rational administration, colonial officials touted their achievements, especially in the form of a series of full-scale urban plans that allegedly represented the culmination of their efforts to remake the city along modern lines.

When I first came across these colonial designs, they seemed much as the British claimed: rational, structured, and comprehensive. But initial appearances were deceiving, masking a far more complex and engaging story about colonialism and the making of the modern city. As I read more widely in archives from England to East Africa, a series of questions claimed my attention. Despite the wealth of references to the plans in the archival record, why was there so little evidence of concrete results on the ground? If colonial plans had laid the groundwork for the “City Perfect,” as British resident F. B. Pearce put it, why did planning seem to be a perpetually ongoing process that occupied the colonial government for decades on end? If a master plan promised a definitive resolution to urban ills, why did there always seem to be a need for yet another round of design making and bureaucratic debate? What precisely was going on?

Attempting to answer these questions has taken me on a route with significant twists and turns. At its best, scholarly inquiry involves cultivating a capacity for surprise, being willing to entertain the unexpected or engage new premises. Within anthropology itself, fieldwork and its analysis are most compelling when they serve to push us beyond the known and habitual, taking us to places that, before starting out, we could never have foreseen. Urban research requires us to engage with

different perspectives, drawing on diverse methods and cutting across disciplinary borders and boundaries. And the analysis of colonialism, with its globalizing aspirations, involves drawing connections and juxtaposing phenomena that are both diffuse and distant, never readily given or apparent. During research, as I experimented with different methods and modes of inquiry, rethinking and redefinition became central to the work I was trying to do. First and foremost, I came to realize that urban designs had to be taken off the drawing board and restored to the everyday worlds that had shaped them. Beneath the polished appearance of these plans lay an entire domain of sociocultural practice that remained largely unexplored. I began to see how colonial urban planning as a social process and modality of state power utterly belied the finished look of the final plans. And this insight led me to reexamine my own research practice, seeking to flesh out the critical possibilities of historical anthropology as a methodology of fieldwork. Ultimately, these revisions led me to develop novel perspectives on the making of the modern city and to redefine the extent and reach of colonial power itself.

From the Concrete to the Inchoate: Theories of Colonialism and the City

Debates have long raged about the import and impact of colonialism, but there is no denying that scholarly discourses have shifted significantly in recent decades. Much like the city itself, the outlines of colonialism once seemed clearly drawn and distinct. There were a range of arguments pro and con, but most writers seemed quite confident that they knew what colonialism was all about. Certainly this was the case with an entire genre of event histories that largely echoed the views of proponents of empire, casting European colonial expansion as a narrative of progress or improvement. These older accounts mostly accepted the premises of the so-called civilizing mission, discussing Western colonialism in terms of the alleged benefits it conferred on peoples considered less advanced. Somewhat later, the assumptions of these progress narratives were taken over by modernization theories of varying kinds. By contrast, there were of course always critics of a more or less liberal bent who sharply disputed the claims made by imperial apologists. But the underlying portrait of colonialism remained much the same, even as the terms of valuation

were rather neatly reversed. So, too, with a long tradition of Marxist critiques, which gained widespread currency with theories of dependency and underdevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s. These critical accounts recast colonialism as a mode of global exploitation and capitalist oppression. If there were any benefits to empire, they flowed not from colonizer to colonized but in exactly the reverse direction. Marxist narratives, however, were still very much cast in a realist voice, though one emphasizing materiality and modes of production rather than progress or development. In other words, the contours of colonialism still stood out in sharp relief.

In recent years these crisp definitions have given way to rather different problematics. In the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and the flowering of various forms of poststructuralist theory in the social sciences and humanities, questions of culture and power have become central to colonial studies. Rather than discrete and bounded worlds, we find culture referenced in terms of discourses, projects, and representations. Instead of clearly opposed and neatly defined domains, the West and its various "others" are thrown into question as stable and holistic orders. Indeed, much of this research has argued that the "West" was only produced as such through a complicated process of articulation with and subordination of the "rest" through historically dynamic sociopolitical, economic, and cultural relations. These processes were neither monolithic nor unidirectional; their outcomes never preordained or determined. In analytic terms, this suggests that scholars must be attentive to the historically specific contexts that produced colonizers and colonized, realizing as well that these categories were rarely unified but instead were diverse, multiple, and contested. Rather than the coherent modernist self, in these texts we find subject positions and shifting lines of difference—race, sexuality, gender, and class. A narrative of empire building has given way to multiple narratives highlighting the anxieties, tensions, and ambiguous desires of colonial rule. Distinct units of analysis—state, nation, tribe—have dissolved into discursive formations, cultural technologies, and invented traditions. Progress (or the Marxist variant, impoverishment) has been replaced by fields of power, brute oppression by the Panopticon. Or so it seems.

For some academics, these trends—variously glossed as postmodern, postcolonial, or poststructuralist—have been read as particularly

threatening signs. Contemporary theory, they assert, has retreated from the world, leaving reality and active engagement far behind. But are the choices really quite so stark? Does a return to empiricist social science or determinist Marxism truly represent the way forward? Why is a concern with discourse, say, necessarily incompatible with an analysis of global inequalities? On a surface level, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* could be glossed as a “postmodern” text, insofar as it seems to underscore the incoherence and indeterminacy of a particular colonial project—urban rationalization and modernization in Zanzibar. But I approach theory as a form of worldly commitment—one way among others of trying to make sense of the forces and forms that surround and shape us. In the city as elsewhere, insightful theory must always be engaged with practices on the ground, attending to matters both concrete and intangible. Being concerned with ideologies and aspirations of rule—with cultural struggles and claims about urban space and life—does not imply abandoning material contexts or political economy. Rather than choose either one or the other, we need to grasp precisely how these dimensions intersect and combine. Indeed, throughout the book I endeavor to account for both concrete processes and diffuse, even inchoate, forms. Drawing connections and bringing disparate domains together is an essential component of any urban research.

As the project progressed, I began to see how placing colonialism and the city in a single analytic frame allows us to view both phenomena in new ways. Conceptualizing colonialism as a spatial project opens up the possibility of going beyond old antinomies between the real and the ideal. On the one hand, this entails taking colonial rule seriously as a set of designs, examining the ideological and symbolic aspects of urban visions. At the same time, we also have to maintain a grasp on everyday life and embodied practices in the city, analyzing the enduring tensions between ideology and implementation, meaning and materiality. Seen in this way, colonial rule no longer seems quite so regular—or the state as seamless as is often claimed. Conversely, exploring the city as a colonial construct means foregrounding issues of culture, power, and race, while challenging us to formulate a more dynamic understanding of urban practice and production.

As sites of analysis, colonial cities require synthetic and multifaceted approaches. They were at once spaces of highly symbolic fantasy and

material worlds of division and distinction. Rigid oppositions between culture and political economy, say, will not help us to survey this terrain. Colonial cities have been described in many ways: as “theatres of accumulation” that articulated different modes of production and consumption, nodes in a global economic process (Armstrong and McGee 1985); political and administrative centers marked by ritual displays of power and authority, architectural and otherwise (King 1990; Home 1997); “laboratories” or experimental terrain for the metropole to try out technologies of the modern (Wright 1991; Rabinow 1989a); and places, par excellence, of cultural and social difference, where European ideologies of race and health were used to separate black from white, rich from poor, ruler from ruled, native quarter from garden suburb. The formation of colonial cities was a process in which politics and economy, culture and society were inextricably fused, calling for more flexible and creative approaches. Such spaces also require us to cross other inherited boundaries, placing metropole and colony within a single framework: “Not only can colonial urban development not be understood separately from developments in the metropole but similarly, urbanism and urbanization in the metropole cannot be understood separately from developments in the colonial periphery” (King 1990, 7).

Anthropology, Modernity, and the Metropolis

Some of the earliest and most incisive work in urban anthropology occurred in an African colonial context, as researchers associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute sought to make sense of the dynamic impact of industrialization and urbanism in the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia (Robinson 2006; Ferguson 1999; Hannerz 1980). Despite these efforts (beginning in the 1930s) to grapple with large-scale forces and processes of modernity, urban ethnography eventually developed along more localized lines. With its methodological emphasis on face-to-face interaction and intensive study, urban anthropology tended to emphasize fine-grained analyses of specific sites or communities within cities. George Stocking has defined this “popular option” as one that seeks to “define, within a ‘complex’ society, the equivalent of a bounded-island entity in which one can seek an empathic insider’s knowledge by the traditional ‘methodology’ of participant observation—a street gang, a

women's credit cooperative, a first-year medical class, a Moscow gypsy theatre" (1992, 367). As a result, anthropology *in* the city has often taken precedence over anthropology *of* the city.

While this approach to the field has produced a good deal of valuable work, broader questions about the forces and forms that have produced modern cities on a global scale have received less attention. But as Clifford Geertz (1973) long ago observed, anthropologists don't just study villages *per se*—they study *in* them, immersed in particular places as a means of speaking to larger questions. If villages are sites that readily open up to considerations of capital, transnational migration, modernity, or the nation-state, these connections and complexities are even more apparent in cities. It is hardly adequate for anthropologists to respond to these challenges of spatial scale by carving out urban niches and staying within defined boundaries. Rather than restricting ourselves to particular locales, we need to trace interconnections starting from the local to the global and back again, going wherever they may lead.

Studying the metropolis, then, becomes a way of formulating new methods and approaches to the anthropology of modernity. Indeed, locating the extent and influence of urban forms has long presented challenges to anthropologists, anticipating many of the issues raised by recent efforts to rethink the ethnographic enterprise in light of intensified transnational flows of goods, peoples, and images. Cities are congealed products of capital and culture, but they also cast a more amorphous and diffuse shadow. As Simmel noted over a century ago, "It is the decisive nature of the metropolis that its inner life overflows by waves into a far-flung national or international area. . . . A city consists of its total effects which extend beyond its immediate confines" (1950 [1903], 419). Appreciating those "total effects" is by no means an easy task. And in a global context profoundly marked by long histories of urbanization and colonialism, locating city limits is never as simple as it might seem.

The cultural horizon of the city points to complex social worlds and imagined communities, forms of social connection and consciousness that extend across space and time. "When the pipes play in Zanzibar," the old Kiswahili proverb explains, "they dance on the Lakes"—a potent image of how, in the nineteenth century, the capital of the Omani sultanate reached far into the interior of Africa and even beyond. Fol-

lowing these influences is especially crucial in a colonial context, not to mention in the cosmopolitan milieu of the western Indian Ocean. Cities often act in similar ways, combining internal diversity and division with the capacity to extend culturally and politically far beyond their formal borders. As Louis Wirth recognized, urban sites combine dynamic and expansive tendencies together with centrifugal forces. The city, he noted, “is the initiating and controlling center of economic, political, and cultural life that has drawn the most remote parts of the world into its orbit and woven diverse areas, peoples, and activities into a cosmos” (1938, 2).

What kind of “cosmos” the city creates—or whether indeed it is a cosmos at all—is precisely the sort of question that creative urban research should pose. Dolores Hayden has proposed uncovering the “history of the cultural landscape” as a central goal of urban work. She suggests the importance of a broad focus on various processes of place making—asking how places are “planned, designed, inhabited, adapted, appropriated, reworked, discarded” (1995, 15). In the heterogeneous world of the city, this entails remaining attentive to the diverse forces, levels, and agents that might be involved. Developers and designers, architects and officials, of course, but also inhabitants, users of space, street sellers and homemakers, manual laborers and merchants, squatters and owners—in varying degrees, all these are shapers of urban landscapes, and we have to follow the play of difference and debate both between and among diverse constituencies.

City spaces have a way of confounding our established categories, challenging conventional knowledge. Urban zones are of course inherently material—real worlds that can be seen, heard, felt, smelled, and even tasted. At the same time, they are utterly intangible and evanescent, infused with imagination, fantasy, and representation. Cities never exist for us in some direct or immediate form; we encounter them as preconfigured cultural constructs that fuse the material and symbolic, representation and reality. Urban experience is inherently mediated at different levels. We walk the streets, but our experience of them rarely conforms to the abstractions of formal maps. Instead, urbanites redraw space in terms of the routes and places they trace and inhabit regularly, carrying their own “cognitive maps” with them as they go (Lynch 1960). Spatial orientations and sensibilities are shaped and remade through

lived experience, constituted by means of everyday practice (de Certeau 1984). And long before we come to cities for the first time, we already feel we “know” them through films, maps, photographs, and texts.

As social spaces, urban milieus are diffuse and diverse. Across the social sciences and humanities, scholars who study them confront a real conundrum: while cities are the most dynamic and transformative of spheres, we typically approach and analyze them through synchronic media (texts and images). It is akin to “reading” a film by recourse to photo stills, and the challenge still remains: how can we capture the unstable mix of mutability and materiality, change and continuity in the urban scene? Analytically, how do we come to terms with the inherent dynamism of the city? These are questions that historical anthropology is well positioned to address, drawing on an array of archival, architectural, and ethnographic methods (Axel 2002; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). Urban spaces cannot be understood simply as social texts, frozen in points of time, or as the neutral contexts in which action unfolds. Instead, they should be conceptualized as both *forces in* and *contexts of* social processes and historical production, simultaneously maps and makers of meaning (Holston 1989).

Drawing on this insight, I focus on urban plans as a crucial framework, seeking to locate them in a broader sociocultural landscape. Such designs are richly revealing on any number of levels—esthetic, architectural, and anthropological. They allow us to map the city at a certain moment in time, providing rich insight into the urban imaginary of the state, spatial layouts, and social forms. But interpreting designs entails looking beyond what lies on the drawing board. While the end product is important, one must also analyze plans in terms of the social and bureaucratic processes that produce them in the first place. This involves exploring not only municipal decrees or master plans but also the drafts that led to them and the correspondence, confidential minutes, internal disputes, and debates that surrounded their making—in short, attending to the paper trail produced by the colonial state, seeking to tease out the latent conflicts and contradictions of urban rule as a form of everyday power and practice.

Looking at planning as a process makes it possible to begin to unpack some of the complexities of colonialism as a cultural project. At the very least, this means we need to highlight the problem of difference

and disjuncture within colonial regimes. In spatial and temporal terms, colonial administrations were extended and diffuse, with officers and officials few and far between, separated by great distances. Establishing the bare mechanisms of rule—borders, outposts, transport, communications, and such loci of authority as barracks, courts, and prison—was a complicated and capital-intensive process. Ultimate decision-making authority and budgetary approval resided in the far-off metropole, which itself was divided into diverse private interests, parliamentary factions, and public institutions. Residents or governors in the colonies may have been able to make use of their proximity to shape the flow of information to their superiors, representing events in the most favorable light. But they were also subject to higher dictates, forced to defend their administrations before external reviews, inspection tours, and official commissions.

“The” colonial project, seen from the perspective of practice, dissolves into a neat analytic fiction (cf. the trenchant criticism of “colonial discourse” in Thomas 1994). Arguments about the nature and direction of colonial rule were legion within the empire. Plans and programs took shape through debates and dissension, struggles over bureaucratic power within the various arms of the administration, and significant gaps between metropole and colony. In certain respects, the state could appear as quite cohesive, monolithic, and powerful—suppressing riots, enforcing *corvée* labor, evicting tenants, and imposing quarantines against cholera or plague. But it had other guises as well, as laws were declared that could not possibly be enforced; policies were promoted in one branch of the regime that others ignored; and plans were developed at length but never realized, hollowed out by lapses and lags.

Critical Conjectures: Thinking Comparatively about Colonial Power and City Plans

What insights can we take away from the tangled course of urban schemes in colonial Zanzibar? Above all, I want to make clear that the book does not provide an argument about the nature of colonialism *per se*. It would be absurd to suggest that Zanzibar was representative of colonial rule across the board. Even if we just focus on the colonial sphere controlled by Britain alone, leaving other empires out of the picture, we

can see that India, Ghana, Fiji, Zanzibar, and Bechuanaland were by no means all the same. Critical historical ethnography seeks to analyze spatial and cultural differences, not eradicate them. It makes little sense to try to collapse such different colonial formations and trajectories into a singular model—indeed, this would be an act of hubris quite in keeping with many of the colonial bureaucrats and planners critiqued in these pages. But while Zanzibar should not stand in for colonialism in general, it would also be far-fetched to portray it as purely exceptional—either so minor or so extreme an example that it offers few insights applicable elsewhere. Some might argue that the sultanate was a kind of backwater, an outpost of empire of no particular importance to the British. But if this marginal status or size explains why planning never quite seemed to work in the isles, were matters markedly better elsewhere? Was Zanzibar’s urban planning experience all that qualitatively different from the results obtained in Bombay, Lagos, Cairo, or Canberra? Were colonial development initiatives elsewhere truly more successful?

Of course, colonialism in and of itself was not the cause of failure. One can readily cite colonial situations where planning was carried out in a far more “effective” manner. The clearance and effacement of District Six in Cape Town by the apartheid state in South Africa, prompted by an authoritarian and racist application of Le Corbusier’s modernism, certainly showed the combination of political ruthlessness, commitment of resources, and organization necessary to carry out urban schemes over the long haul—with tragic consequence. If colonial power per se wasn’t the issue, the fault also doesn’t lie just with modern planning. There is nothing to suggest that urban schemes are somehow fatally flawed or inherently compromised. Indeed, in the modern era, one can think of numerous examples where plans were formulated and mostly imposed, from Baron Haussmann’s Paris to Washington, D.C., New Delhi, Brasilia, Bucharest, and (more recently) Beijing (Meyer 2008; Zhang 2006). Hence my account should not be read as a blanket indictment of colonial power or planning in isolation but instead as an analysis of what happens when they are conjoined under certain circumstances.

Colonial rule in Zanzibar could have been much more streamlined and straightforward if pretensions to provide social betterment or modernization had simply been jettisoned. Or authorities might have distinguished more carefully between essential social goals and those they

could do without (wider streets or urban beautification, for example). The colonial state could have turned then to focus much more forthrightly on the business at hand: maintaining their geopolitical position on a global scale, keeping the Indian Ocean world accessible for trade, and exploiting local resources and labor as much as possible. Alternatively, we can certainly envision scenarios where the colonial state might have actually managed to translate its urban designs into reality. Indeed, the British could very likely have remade Zanzibar into a “model” city if they had placed high priority on doing so, but achieving this aim would have required commitments of resources, capital, and personnel far in excess of anything they ever considered possible or worthwhile. Different configurations of power or planning would have produced divergent outcomes. But in Zanzibar, the regime could not simply dispense with plans for improvement and modernization. Nor could it transform the political and economic circumstances that constrained it. This dilemma was rarely understood and never surmounted, as repeated waves of officials pursued schemes that could never be realized.

In the context of European imperialism in Africa, claims to deliver economic and social “advancement” were often wildly ambitious in light of the actual resources, means, or bureaucratic capacities that regimes wielded on the ground. Certainly we can think of colonial territories where administrations were undercapitalized (Angola, or Mozambique, for instance) but never truly attempted to carry out broad programs of social development—hence the kinds of contradictions that arose in Zanzibar simply didn’t occur. At the same time, there were also regimes that were in a more favorable position to implement their schemes, either better capitalized or more centralized and authoritarian (again, South Africa springs to mind). But colonialism itself wasn’t the determining issue. Instead of focusing narrowly on colonial power, I’m concerned here with a broader imperial impulse: the will to power and pursuit of mastery in situations marked by high degrees of complexity, fluidity, and unpredictability. The book centers on programs of spatial design and social engineering, showing how modern dreams of master planning—seizing control of a sprawling, dynamic realm and trying to remake it as a neat, tidy, and efficient domain—came unraveled at the seams, resulting in incoherence and chaos. In Zanzibar, we see the problems engendered when the totalizing impetus to rework socio-spatial worlds

occurs in the context of a colonial order that is undercapitalized and ill-organized, and where social aims are located far down the list in comparison with political and economic needs. While these conditions certainly characterized colonialism in Zanzibar, they were never limited to it by any means. British imperialism in the twentieth century was surely never alone in its capacity to foster a mode of power marked by lack of accountability, official indifference, bureaucratic in-fighting, false starts, ineptitude, and irrationality. Indeed, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the bungled occupation of Iraq, Zanzibar hardly seems especially exceptional; if anything, it is all too sadly familiar.

ONE

Cosmopolitan Lives, Urbane Worlds: Space and Society in Zanzibar City

When Western travelers first encountered Zanzibar, two aspects of the city seemed to loom large in their consciousness: the architectural lines of the seafront and the layout of the streets. In the 1830s, John Studdy Leigh, a young English commercial agent, complained that it was difficult to estimate the population “as there is scarcely a street which is straight for 50 yards” (1980 [1837], 288). Passing through the islands in July 1843, an American travel writer, J. Ross Browne, also found the city strange, observing that “a very remarkable peculiarity of all Arabian towns is the narrowness of the streets” (1846, 357). In the 1850s, the explorer Richard Burton described the streets as “deep and winding alleys, hardly 20 feet broad, and travelers compare them with the threads of a tangled skein” (1872, 1:82). An early British agent and consul, C. P. Rigby, added to this chorus of dismissal in 1860. “Like all eastern towns,” he wrote, “the streets are narrow, irregular and ill-built” (1932 [1860], 337). Nearly two decades later, the civil surgeon at the British agency surveyed the urban topography and summed up what was already established as the dominant Western view: “In Zanzibar there is hardly a single street worthy of the name, as we think of it. The town is a curious and haphazard jumble of misleading lanes and provoking *culs-de-sac*. To a stranger they are extremely bewildering” (Robb 1879, 4).

Just as the layout of the city seemed confusing or chaotic to outsiders, it was also inevitably marked as other: Eastern, Oriental, or Arabian. To Euro-American observers, the city lacked a certain order and rationality. It was irregular, haphazard, misleading. These terms were certainly not

shared by those diverse Africans and Swahili, South Asians, and Arabs then streaming into the city, engaged in the very process of constructing a vibrant and dynamic new urban culture. Yet even as the city was rapidly expanding to become what some called the “Paris of East Africa,” at least some *wazungu* (Europeans or whites) were already dreaming of razing it and starting all over again. “Zanzibar could well afford to be pulled down and rebuilt,” the Reverend Arthur Dodgshun wrote in late 1877. “The narrow streets and offensive alleys might then be made wide and straight and clean and the native huts would be pushed back far into the interior, where they ought to be. As things are now, there is no room to improve anything” (1969, 46).

This vision of making the streets wide and straight and clean—of clearing out huts and putting natives where they “ought to be”—would drive colonial urban planning deep into the next century—indeed, until the end of colonialism itself. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Euro-American observers mostly failed to grasp the fact that Zanzibar city was organized along quite different cultural lines. They remained utterly confident, even arrogant, in the belief that their terms were the only terms, not just one set of categories among many. In their eyes, the layout of the city reflected its backwardness, requiring improvement and modernization by a more “enlightened” regime. Making streets wide and straight and clear wasn’t just one mode of spatial rationality; it was the soul of rationality itself.

The inflexible linearity of this thinking was anything but aberrant. Indeed, quite similar logics suffused a wide range of fields at the time, including early anthropology, colonialism, and Western theories of urbanization. Nineteenth-century unilineal evolutionist thought held that all the world’s societies could be ranked on a chart of historical development from primitive to civilized, simple to complex, static to dynamic. There was a single line of progression involved, and in a Eurocentric and imperialist age, Europe considered itself the model and measure of progress—all human groups, if they hoped to advance to the ranks of the “civilized,” would have to progress through identical stages of growth, mimicking Europe and following the same developmental course. Colonialism, with its alleged “civilizing mission,” was represented as the process that would set “backward” societies on the right road to advancement. The final result would be Western-style in-

dustrialization and urbanization. These various modes of characterizing other social worlds and spaces were deeply teleological in spirit, and they all depended on establishing a series of sharp contrasts: between country and city, nature and culture, instinct and rationality, backwardness and sophistication, stasis and dynamism, East and West. Transition from one to the other was understood as a developmental and moral process, involving passage through required stages of historical progress. Whether applied to individuals or entire societies, the journey from rural life to urban worlds was often seen as a one-way street, part of an inevitable (and necessary) march to modernity with all its perils and promises.

Many of the first generation of social theorists to grapple with the sociocultural significance of cities believed that urbanization marked an epochal and irreversible movement in human history. In trying to understand the novelty of urbanism as a mass cultural form, Georg Simmel, Louis Wirth, and Robert Park defined the city in contrast to an originary past. They argued that human society was formed in small-scale rural settings where the force of tradition, habit, and face-to-face relations ordered existence. Humans lived close to nature, bound to kin and clan, following established rhythms and regularities. Life was slow, simple, emotionally vivid, and concrete. But in making the city, Park argued, “man has remade himself”—developing science and philosophy, becoming both “rational” and “a sophisticated animal” (1929, 1). For Simmel (1950 [1903]), the metropolis was the center of the “money economy,” ruled by the abstractions and calculations of market exchanges. Amid the movement and flow of a dizzying array of material things, city life was intense and fast changing, providing an ongoing rush of new stimuli. And for Wirth (1938), cities were densely populated and diverse zones that spurred cultural innovation and change, as strangers were thrown together in a common space to find new selves and forge novel social connections.

These stark contrasts shaped a myth of origin that defined urban modernity in distinctly parochial Western terms. A few sites (London, Berlin, Chicago) served to establish the model for the city itself—cast as dynamic, advanced, and modern—while erasing most existing cities from the global map. Nonwestern spaces were assumed to be backward and uncreative, in need of intervention and development. As Jennifer Robinson argues, “Modernity could be understood as simply the West’s

self-characterisation of itself in opposition to ‘others’ and ‘elsewheres’ that are imagined to be not modern, an opposition that was strongly reinforced through the mundane practices of colonisation” (2006, 4). Such Eurocentric views worked to sharply limit the range and reach of urban theory, producing a hierarchy of world cities where some count as innovative and the rest simply fall away as irrelevant.

These teleological oppositions do not simply linger on in theory, nor are they purely products of the colonial past. We still encounter them in various forms of modernization theory, development discourse, and policy or press reports. Moreover, they continue to inform popular consciousness, haunting the hopes and dreams of many Africans living in the wake of modernization’s illusory promises of advancement (Ferguson 1999, 2006; Malaquais 2006). In Zanzibar itself, as elsewhere in Africa, many urbanites have internalized these dualistic terms, perceiving that they live in places left behind by modernity and located far from centers of technological progress and urban development. They cast their eyes elsewhere, seeking to move to spaces seen as more advanced, while overlooking the distinctively modern forms and inventive practices that infuse their own vibrant city. Moreover, colonial terms have continued to influence both popular and academic views of Zanzibar’s urban history, creating a simplistic and stereotypical portrait of the city’s past. Since the late colonial period and especially following the revolution, the city has been represented as neatly divided and dualistic, its cosmopolitan character, complex culture, and creative construction mostly lost or submerged from view (Bissell 2011; Sheriff 2002). Recovering this history while analyzing the alternative logics and practices that shaped the modern in Zanzibar city is a vital first step in laying the groundwork for a more genuinely postcolonial urban future.

Urban Roots: Maritime Circuits and the Swahili Coast

Zanzibar has often been described as “old” or “ancient,” but the city is actually very much a modern creation, dating mostly from the last half of the nineteenth century. The present-day site originated as a fishing village on the Shangani peninsula on the western side of Zanzibar island and shows signs of inhabitation as least as far back as the twelfth century.¹ Primarily occupied by Wahadimu and Watumbatu fishing

communities, it was dwarfed in significance by other Swahili city-states such as Kilwa, Pate, Lamu, and Mombasa. Over time, it developed into a typical coastal settlement, a minor node in Swahili maritime circuits based on subsistence production, crafts, and the long-distance monsoon trade. By the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese were increasing their incursions along the coast, seeking to establish trading sites and military outposts in the region. Like other Swahili urban centers, Zanzibar was compelled to come to terms with this new naval power, paying tribute and tolerating at least nominal subjugation. The Portuguese maintained an intermittent presence in the region until the end of the seventeenth century. But from the 1630s on, they increasingly faced local resistance and external challenges to their suzerainty. Omani forces ejected the Portuguese from Muscat in 1650 and sacked their settlement in Zanzibar two years later, seeking to take over as the predominant power in the western Indian Ocean.

All along the coast, local rulers and elites sought Omani assistance and protection in hopes of gaining allies that could help them in their efforts to throw off the Portuguese yoke. Until the close of the century, Zanzibar was caught between these contending naval powers. The settlement itself was razed several times in the ensuing conflict, which finally culminated with the expulsion of the Europeans from East Africa in 1698. The ruler of Zanzibar who had been allied with the Portuguese, Queen Fatuma, was exiled to Oman; a chapel and merchant's dwelling on the seafront were demolished and replaced with fortifications (on the site of the Ngome Kongwe, or Old Fort). In other respects, the Omanis initially exercised a loose suzerainty, ruling eventually through Fatuma's son, Hasan, who undertook the enlargement of the settlement, clearing bush from the peninsula and initiating construction. The indigenous fishing community was later supplemented and enlarged by Mafazi Arabs from Pate and Shatiri Arabs from Mafia Island. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, as the Omanis increased their garrison and strengthened fortifications against external assault and indigenous resistance (at least one of the fort's cannons was aimed at the house of the local sovereign), their presence was increasingly resented (Gray 1962, 87). Over time, with increasing land alienation, exactions of tribute, and sociopolitical control, the Omani regime would become a more overtly colonial force in the islands.

A lengthy account by Captain Thomas Smee provides crucial insight into urban conditions in the early nineteenth century. Smee was in charge of two English schooners that visited Zanzibar as part of a military “voyage of research” charting the East African coast. He reported that the island was under the sovereignty of the *imam* of Muscat (the main port city in Oman), who ruled through an appointed governor (*hakim*). At the time of his visit, an Abyssinian named Yakut, one of the sultan’s most trusted slaves, held the post. His chief duty was to collect revenue from customs and land tenure, transmitting this tribute to Oman. To maintain order, he was supported by three Arab officers overseeing an armed garrison of between four and five hundred slaves. Smee estimated that three-quarters of the population were slaves; unable to distinguish between the diverse Africans on the islands, he designated them all as “Souallies” (Swahilis), a “tribe” he claimed was part “Galla negroes, Arabs, natives of India &c” (1844 [1811], 46). The rest of the population consisted of “descendants of Arabs from Soualli mothers,” “Arabs,” and “Banians.” Smee clearly marked out the last two groups as a kind of privileged colonial minority: “The Arabs are not very numerous; but the principal part of the slaves and landed property belong to them. A considerable number of Banians likewise reside in the town, many of whom appear to be wealthy, and hold the best part of the trade in their hands” (45).

Of the town itself, Smee commented, “It is large and populous, and is composed chiefly of cajan huts all neatly constructed with sloping roofs. There are, however, a good number of stone buildings in it belonging to Arabs and merchants; and in the center, close to the beach, stands a fort seemingly partly of Arab, partly of Portuguese construction. . . . It is the only assemblage of habitations on the island that deserves the name of town, or even village; for the principal part of the inhabitants without the town being slaves of landholders, are scattered over their respective owners’ estates” (1844 [1811], 43). As Pouwels has observed, a “basic division in coastal urban society seems to have been between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’” (1987, 76). Smee’s description shows how early colonial Zanzibar was informed by this older Swahili urban geography, with “Arabs and merchants” living in stone dwellings as a reflection of their growing wealth; as yet, however, the elite were few in number, and their one- and two-story residences were surrounded by much more

numerous “cajan huts.” The settlement was clearly expanding, attracting newcomers on the basis of increased local trade, slaves, and agricultural production.² But from the late 1820s, the pace of growth began to accelerate in the wake of Sultan Seyyid Said’s decision to transfer his capital from Oman to Zanzibar. Thereafter, urban development in the islands would be fueled by a dynamic political economy spurred by plantation agriculture and merchant capitalism.

Omani Expansion

The territorial shift of the sultanate to Zanzibar was ultimately the product of religious and political changes in the earlier Omani imamate. Until the eighteenth century, the imamate was constituted as a confederation of rival Omani clans, joined together as an *umma*, a divinely guided community of believers. As Pouwels notes, the imam was elected from among the clans to serve as foremost religious guide and head of state. If the imam was privileged as the leading interpreter of *shari’a*, he was only one among many; his decisions were subject to scrutiny by other religious authorities and circumscribed by the power of the *umma* as a whole—which had primacy over the imamate itself. “The *umma* could function without an Imam in that the people themselves, without superior authority, could apply the *Shari’a*. . . . Often the election and the legitimacy of the chosen one’s claims were disputed by some of the tribes. Unanimity was rare” (1987, 102).

By the early eighteenth century, a number of shifts had occurred that significantly altered the charismatic basis of power in Oman. The sacred nature of the imam’s rule was displaced by more secular sources, just as election from amongst the clans was supplanted by dynastic succession. Although the innovations were initiated under the prior Ya’rubi dynasty, the Busaidi house took full advantage of these shifts to consolidate its hold on power and extend its reach, assuming an enduring rank superior to other clans. Instead of imam, the head of state took the title of *sultan* or *seyyid*, keeping the position within the Busaidi line. Other clans contested these changes, but the Busaidi were highly successful in cultivating new sources of wealth and external support that consolidated their hold on power. Rather than being dependent on the interior and rival tribes, they increasingly looked outward to the Indian Ocean world,

gaining control over the nascent shipping industry out of Muscat and allying themselves with the British.

Hence the change in emphasis away from the Omani interior and the sacred character of rule under Ibadhi Islam occurred in the context of profound economic and political realignments. Oman occupied a highly strategic position along the trade routes linking the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and India at a time when the British were seeking to guarantee the security of their Indian trade (Bennett 1986). In the context of the expansion of Anglo-French conflict into the Indian Ocean during the Napoleonic wars, Oman allied itself with Britain and carried much of its trade goods under a neutral flag, even capturing a substantial percentage of the traffic between Indian ports (Sheriff 1987). After the conflict ended, this alliance provided crucial political support and opportunities for the sultan. As the British were becoming a more expansive maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, they were initially content to cultivate and work through local rulers so long as their essential interests remained unthreatened. Over time, of course, these partnerships became less equal, being replaced by patron-client relations and ultimately subsumed by colonial “protection” as the British Empire became a more overtly intrusive force in the region. But in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Omani ruler, Seyyid Said bin Sultan, still possessed considerable room for maneuver, and he was deeply interested in enhancing trade and expanding into the western Indian Ocean. Under his aegis, the sultanate rapidly developed into the foremost power in the area, becoming the center of an extensive empire that stretched from the Persian Gulf to East Africa and beyond.

The heightened sociopolitical importance of Zanzibar within the sultanate was matched by its increasing economic significance. Before Said’s first visit to the island in 1828, he had already acquired through confiscation or purchase a number of estates planted with clove trees. After shifting to Zanzibar, Said contributed greatly to the expansion of clove production, owning forty-five plantations by the time of his death in 1856. The plantation boom attracted other members of the Busaidi ruling elite to the islands, as well as prominent figures in rival Omani clans. Phenomenally high clove prices in the 1830s led many Arab and Swahili smallholders to clear coconut trees and plant cloves, but the Omanis acquired the largest amount of property, creating huge estates

and establishing themselves as a landed colonial aristocracy. The “feverish expansion” of cloves, worked by slave labor, continued into the 1840s and was aptly described as a “mania” (Sheriff 1987, 51). The first English agent, Atkins Hamerton, observed in 1844 that “the people are growing rich, and able to buy more Slaves to cultivate cloves, the chief article now cultivated, and from which considerable profit is derived in a few years.”³

As the clove sector took off, so too did the Omani population. In the late 1770s, for example, there were only three hundred Omanis in Zanzibar. By 1819 their numbers had grown to about one thousand, increasing significantly to five thousand by the 1840s. Profits from cloves increasingly were invested in the urban sphere. Sheriff (1995, 13) notes that while the owners of modest plantations—both Arab and Swahili—tended to live in the countryside, the larger Omani landlords built substantial mansions in the city, which was developing into a sociopolitical and ceremonial center. The sultan was the ultimate source of wealth and power. Attendance at his *baraza* and proximity to the court were key measures of status and influence. By 1835 Said had constructed a palace along the seafront, Beit el Sahel, which became the center of a complex of royal buildings. Elite Omanis increasingly clustered in the area, which was built up from the 1840s on. Property along the seafront was highly prized for economic, social, and environmental reasons, and as a result the Omanis spread from the palace area down along the sea to Shangani point and beyond, moving eventually into the southern quarter of town. The stone buildings of the elite, however, were as yet few in number and far between. Visitors in the 1830s and 1840s continued to report that most structures in the town were huts or single-story mud and wattle dwellings rather than stone buildings (Leigh 1980 [1837]; Hume 1840; Browne 1846). By 1860, Rigby reported that “numerous large, substantial buildings are now being erected in place of the former ones of mud-walls and roofs of cocoanut leaves,” but it would be a long time before stone houses predominated in the urban landscape. In 1879, Robb asserted,

The houses are in keeping with the streets. They are of all sorts and sizes in the same quarter, and they have evidently been built anyhow and anywhere, without regard to order or straight lines. Gradually, new ideas, sprinkled with a little taste, are being imported, and progress is already marked by the improvements that adorn the Sultan’s Palace both outside

and inside. The higher and well-to-do classes of the community live in substantial stone-built houses, but the teeming slave population who do not live in the houses of their masters, and the labouring classes generally, occupy huts of wattle and dab, roofed over with grass or plaited palm leaves. (1879, 4)

Even at the end of the nineteenth century, the homes of the wealthy, their clients, and poorer relations existed side by side, and the “stone” town continued to be full of mud houses and huts, as building types and materials remained intricately mixed (Sheriff 2002).

Metropolitan Growth, Merchant Capital, and South Asian Migration

By the late nineteenth century, observers spoke of a taste for luxuries and imported commodities among Omani elites, describing how their homes were decorated with expensive Persian carpets, gilded mirrors, chandeliers, fine china, and glassware (Rigby 1932 [1860], 332; Robb 1879, 5; Ruete 1989 [1888], 18–19). Later writers picked up on these themes, highlighting the ostentatious lifestyle of urban Arabs. In some sense this was simply seen as an extension of older Swahili patterns, as town patricians were believed to mark their social prestige and wealth by building in stone—symbolic and material gestures of permanence and power, stamped upon the social landscape (Middleton 1992). Some have even emphasized Omani socio-spatial dominance to the degree that they have defined Zanzibar as a plantation town, where control over land and slaves translated into lives of urban opulence and leisure (Menon 1978). But while plantation wealth was key to urban development in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was increasingly eclipsed by merchant capitalism. As Sheriff (1995, 15) observes, “Although the landowners were politically and socially dominant in the political economy of Zanzibar and their massive mansions tended to dominate the facade of the town, the plantation economy on the islands of Unguja and Pemba contributed only a fifth of the total trade passing through the port during the nineteenth century. Moreover, that economy was subject to violent fluctuation and to long periods of stagnation as a result of overproduction, disruption of its labour supply and indebtedness.” By the late 1840s the clove sector had already reached its apogee; the decline was relatively

long-term, and recovery was delayed well into the 1870s. Increasingly, urban growth was sparked by the rising value and importance of trade in commodities originating on the African mainland, which the Omanis did not control.

In 1811 Smee had already recognized the prominence of Indians in Zanzibari trade, and as time went on they only continued to displace smaller Arab and Swahili merchants. In 1843, Browne observed that Hindu merchants had “numerous shops, with goods and wares exposed for sale, such as Persian rugs, Madras cloths, combs, beads, queensware, spoons, knives, coffee, spices, and every thing required by the mass of the citizens. The Banyans occupy separate streets, and are large dealers in gum copal, ivory teeth, honey, sugar, and other articles of commerce” (1846, 361). Subsequent observers all agreed that South Asians largely controlled foreign trade through Zanzibar as well as running most shops and retail trade (Rigby 1932 [1860]; Burton 1872; Christie 1876; Robb 1879). Indians had little involvement in the plantation sector, preferring mercantile and artisanal pursuits; later, as Anglo-Indian or British “subjects,” they were forbidden to own or work slaves. Sultan Said had relied upon Indian merchant capital in Oman to bankroll his operations, and he continued this practice in Zanzibar. Around 1819, following the death of the Abyssinian *hakim*, Yakut, Zanzibar’s customs began to be farmed out to the Hindu firm of Sewji Topan. Over time this became arguably the most important and lucrative office on the island. For a yearly fee paid to the sultan, the customs master had control over all foreign traders and agents and exclusive rights to set duties, transshipment fees, and the like. The customs post was eventually taken over by Sewji’s son, Jairam, and for half a century he played a crucial role in the Zanzibari commercial system, amassing vast wealth: his profit in the mid-1860s at Zanzibar alone was said to exceed \$1 million (Sheriff 1987, 107).

Nor was Sewji the only one. Indians increasingly dominated the import and export trade of Zanzibar, and the capital they amassed increasingly underwrote the whole system, allowing them to expand operations into India, China, and Europe. Indian merchants were the principal bankers of the Arab and Swahili caravan trade that reached far into the interior. The foreign firms that were established at Zanzibar from the 1830s on—Americans from Salem, Boston, New York, and Providence, as well as the English, French, and Germans—also depended at

one time or another on Indian capital, taking loans to continue their operations in the region. The Indian merchants were well positioned to benefit from Zanzibar's monopolization of East African commerce as well as the highly favorable balance of trade that existed for much of the nineteenth century. In Europe and the United States, there was rising demand among middle classes for ivory goods that marked bourgeois status—piano keys, combs, billiard balls—and copal gum was a key ingredient in coach varnish. But while there was high demand for African commodities shipped through Zanzibar, raising their value there, improvements in manufacturing processes and stiff competition among foreign merchants in Zanzibar combined to lower the cost of imported industrial goods (Sheriff 1987, 102). These favorable economic trends applied in sectors where Indians predominated—ivory and copal—but not in clove agriculture, where overproduction around midcentury began to drive prices down sharply.

Due to the vagaries of the clove sector, many Arab landowners ended up owing considerable sums of money to the Indians who had capitalized their plantations during the mania of clove expansion. In the early 1870s, Captain Colomb, like other observers, wrote that Indian agents were gradually absorbing the property of Arab nobles, finding “a process of mortgage foreclosure going on which was slowly, but very surely transferring the ownership of the land to natives of India” (1873, 378). Indeed, the sultan himself became deeply indebted to Sewji, and as there was no distinction between his personal income and state revenue, this had important political repercussions. The absence of primogeniture also significantly contributed to the dispersal of Omani landed wealth; even a considerable fortune could be dramatically diminished by its dispersal to a large number of heirs. These processes of land and wealth transfer from Arab to Indian hands would continue well into the following century, as high levels of indebtedness proved to be an enduring burden to Arab planters. Because Indians had little incentive or inclination to repossess plantations, urban properties were often used to settle mortgage debts, and many tracts in Ng'ambo and houses in Stone Town passed from Arab to Indian and European hands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Between 1820 and 1870, the Indian population of Zanzibar grew fifteen-fold to nearly three thousand. Hindus were prominent early on,

migrating to the city in such numbers that a quarter was known as “Hindustan” in the 1830s (Browne 1846, 360). Because of caste restrictions, they could not bring their families to Zanzibar, and it was only in the last decades of the century that they overcame this obstacle and settled as a permanent residential community (Sheriff 1995, 19). Browne observed in 1843 that the southern part of the city was already occupied by “Banyan, Hindoo, and Muscat merchants” who had amassed great wealth in the ivory and copal trade and who were “now building large and commodious residences” in the city (1846, 331–32). There were also smaller groups of Parsis, Goans, Bohoras, Memons, and Sunni Muslims, but by far the largest community consisted of Khojas.

“A new quarter of town, entirely inhabited by these Indian Mahomedans, has recently sprung up, and is rapidly increasing; each bungalow from Kutch usually brings a number of Khoja families as settlers,” Rigby reported (1932 [1860], 329). From the 1860s, the interior districts of the triangular peninsula were being built up to accommodate the increased Indian population, becoming marked by their commercial presence. Robb noted the “steady increase” of Indian settlers in the 1870s, arguing that economic distress in India, greater communication, and enhanced “knowledge of the place and its promises of lucrative trade” were drawing South Asians to Zanzibar in greater numbers (1879, 7). In the city, Hindus were concentrated in the area behind the fort, market, and Customs House, while many Khojas settled in the quarters behind the royal residences, from Kiponda to southern Malindi, stretching back to the creek. Over time this section evolved into a series of commercial bazaars, its narrow streets and shopfront buildings converging on Darajani, the bridge over the creek linking Stone Town to Ng’ambo.

By the 1870s, poorer Khojas, Bohoras, and Sunni Muslims had already moved across the creek into the “other side” of the city, living in more straitened circumstances. As this reflects, despite the prominence of Indians in the financial sector, only a few were large-scale merchants (both Burton and Robb counted around a half dozen or so). As Sheriff (1987, 147) makes clear, among the Hindus alone, there were many artisans (barbers, tailors, goldsmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths) as well as small shopkeepers, pawnbrokers, and moneylenders. Most lived in simple fashion and worked long hours, rarely taking a siesta unless they were wealthy enough to afford it (Burton 1872, 1:331–32). Aside from

the tiny elite, Indians lived in structures that were uniformly described as small, unpretentious, and commercial in character. Dwellings were typically two stories or less, crowded together in narrow streets without intervening spaces or inner courts. The ground floor front was open as a shop during the day and often used as sleeping quarters at night; interior rooms were given over to storage, workrooms, cooking, or scullery.

Robb described the homes of British Indian subjects as “a collection of rooms and holes and corners on a ground floor and upper floor, the connection between which is usually a rickety and uncertain trap-ladder, alongside of which dangles a greasy forbidding rope by way of hand-rail.” They were “more or less filthy,” rarely representing the owner’s true wealth (1879, 5). The living quarters were minimal and sparsely furnished, more functional than fashionable: “The apartment, called the bedroom, is destitute of all but the necessary articles of furniture, and contains only one or two bedsteads, a few stools, a swinging cradle, a rickety American chair or two, and a chest. It is very difficult to understand where all the members of the household are stowed away at night, for the family is often large, and not unfrequently there is a grandfather and grandmother to be accommodated” (Christie 1876, 338). Indeed, in Khoja and Bohora households, Robb wrote, the more modest the premises, “the more thickly do they seem to swarm with inmates of all sexes and ages, among whom are domestics drawn from the slave population. How such households pass the night may be more easily imagined than described” (1879, 5).

Urban Hybridity and Heterogeneity

South Asians in urban Zanzibar were quite diverse in terms of origins, wealth, work, status, and locale. In the nineteenth century, this heterogeneity was altogether characteristic of the city’s inhabitants as a whole. Many of the categories of identity that later writers took for granted as bounded and fixed were instead very much in flux. While in theory it might seem easy to distinguish an “African” from an “Arab” or a slave (*mtumwa*) from a freeborn person (*mwungwana*), in practice the lines between these identities were both subtle and shifting.⁴ Viewing urban worlds in terms of stark contrasts makes it easier to grasp and analyze social complexities. But at the same time, these definitive oppositions

convey a false sense of unity and coherence, blinding us to the internal complexities within groups and the fluidity of the boundaries between them. The question of identity gets reduced to a binary product, rather than being seen as something produced through dynamic historical processes and cultural practices. Setting Arabs over against Africans makes it all too easy to overlook the fact that not all Omanis were plantation owners or aristocrats, nor were they unified in outlook or allegiance. There was conflict among them even as they contended with older, more established Arab settlers in the coast and islands. Moreover, the Omani elite certainly sought to distinguish themselves from more recent Arab arrivals, Hadramis and Shihiris especially, who were engaged as small traders, caravan leaders, and sailors. Many of these later Arab immigrants lived in poorer and more humble circumstances, essentially indistinguishable from their Swahili counterparts who were employed in trade, at the harbor, and in portage.

Cultural identity and social status in nineteenth-century Zanzibar were never clearly demarcated along stark lines of race and class. Social practices and relationships were far too nuanced and shifting to be subsumed within crudely opposed categories. Intermarriage between Arabs and Africans had long been common, as the existence of the large Swahili or Shirazi population attests. While Khojas tended to marry within their community from a rather early date, until the late nineteenth century there were no Hindu women on Zanzibar, and the men frequently cohabited with African slaves—a subject of some scandal (Burton 1872, 1:329). Sanctioned by Islamic law, Arabs also had numerous African concubines. Indeed, as Frederick Cooper has noted, the “children of these concubines may well have outnumbered the offspring of free wives.” Following Muslim practice, the children of such liaisons were legitimate and belonged to their father’s communal group; they were not “regarded as half-castes but as Arabs, and were the legal equals of their half-brothers and sisters by freeborn wives” (1977, 196). Within this social milieu, a good deal of the population could be plausibly described as either African or Arab depending on what criteria were used.

Nineteenth-century Western observers lacked a finely honed sense of local social distinctions. Limited by essentialist notions of race and culture, they tended to rely on phenotypical features or outward appear-

ances to distinguish between various Zanzibaris. As a result of the fixed and rigid distinctions they drew, they often tended to miss crucial differences, lumping diverse peoples together in catch-all groupings: African, Arab, and “mixed.” Captain Smee’s confusion about the relationship between Swahili and other Africans early in the century was typical. While visual and social cues might be sufficient to separate out the extremes, the fine gradations of social and cultural difference were easily lost. “The inhabitants are of various races,” Browne confidently asserted, “from the light-complexioned Hindoo to the darkest African: Banyans, Parsees, Malays, Bedouin Arabs, Oman Arabs, Sowhelians, Africans, &c.” (1846, 335). This listing of stock types became a staple of later European accounts, slotting urban Zanzibaris into bounded, distinct, and easily identifiable groups. Anything that didn’t fit into these neat categories or that blurred the lines between them was simply ruled out of bounds. By emphasizing the ends of the spectrum, these descriptions of the populace made little room for other permutations and possibilities. And yet in Zanzibar, between the two extremes of “Arabs” and “negro slaves,” noted Captain Colomb, “there is that infinite division of Negroid which is seen whenever a black and a white race come together” (1873, 368). These “infinite” gradations, however, were rarely discussed, as outsiders failed to pick up on crucial differences between established Swahili and newer arrivals, freed Africans, diverse slaves from an array of mainland peoples, Wahadimu or Watumbatu, and even Comorians or Malagasy. In the urban context, differences between slave and free were difficult to discern; in terms of appearance, work, and mode of life they were virtually indistinguishable. As Colomb wrote of freed slaves, “No one knows the number of this class, nor has anyone yet been found capable of making a visible class of them, or of separating any of its members . . . from the actual slave class” (368).

Western observers were often confused about the makeup of even a single category. Browne defined the Swahili, for instance, as a “mixed race,” part African and Arab, claiming they were “the original settlers of Zanzibar” (1846, 335). Elton called them “the mulatto descendents of the Arabs and Persians who in pagan days first colonized Mrima” (1968 [1879], 49).⁵ Christie observed that Livingstone identified them as Arabs or black Arabs, but he himself firmly rejected this view: “They are no more Arabs than the West Indian negroes are Englishmen,” he insisted.



3. The seafront, looking toward Forodhani, with Malindi quarter in foreground filled with huts. Zanzibar National Archives.

“They may be described as a Negroid, or a mixed race, but the distinction between them and the negroes is very slight indeed.” Instead, they were really just “Islamized negroes” (1876, 333). If the historical origins and racial outlines of the Swahili seemed variable, it was equally difficult to pin them down in terms of class and status. Some Swahili, Burton noted, made “considerable fortunes,” investing in estates. Others were “commercial travellers of no mean order.” On a more modest scale, they harvested *boriti* (mangrove poles, used as ceiling supports in building) along the coast and cut firewood; dug for copal; and acted as middlemen or agents in the interior trade in hides, ivory, and slaves. Swahili were also “rough masons, boat-builders, and carpenters,” producing “rude hardwares” for the mainland. And the poorest were engaged as simple fisherfolk: “Many may be seen by day plying about the harbour in little ‘Monoxyles,’ which they manage with admirable dexterity” (1872, 1, 432–33).

Social Power, Subordination, and Slavery

Many of the sharp oppositions that allegedly structured Zanzibari space and society in the nineteenth century turn out to be more complicated than they seem at first glance. Social position and place were not determined by the color of one's skin; race and ethnicity never correlated neatly with urban location, status, or wealth. Whom one was connected to—and how—were far more crucial than who one “was” in coastal society. From patrician elites down to the lowliest slave, nineteenth-century Zanzibar was a deeply paternalistic world structured by diverse relations of obligation and subordination. Social power was manifest in the capacity to exert control over resources and command the allegiance and productive capacities of people. Negotiating these relationships, struggling over the terms by which they were established, and maneuvering to achieve more favorable positions were the stuff by which urban social life was defined.

The cultural impetus to cultivate allies and clients started at the top of the social order and ran throughout, structuring political and social affairs. Later in the century, British colonial officials often disparaged the sultan as an “Oriental despot” for ideological reasons, but in fact, as some earlier observers noted, his authority was anything but unlimited or unchecked. No question, his rule was personalized, and Westerners often touched on the lack of formal bureaucracy, institutions, and administrative hierarchies. But while the sultan held considerable sway over decisions, he had to consult, convince, or co-opt others to accept his views. Colomb described the sultanate as “a kind of patriarchal republic.” The sultan, he remarked, “is no despot as we understand a Turkish governor to be; he is rather the father of a family whose sons are all of age, who therefore have opinions of their own, and who must be consulted on all family matters very nearly as equals” (1873, 365). The kinship idiom deployed here creates an idealized portrait, but it fairly well captures the way that the sultan's power was contingent on and constrained by others.

Rival Omani clans had long-established ties to the coast predating Busaidi hegemony and owned considerable property in plantations and slaves. The Harthi and Mazrui were especially prominent, competing for power and prestige with the sultan and his allies—new arrivals on

the scene who were increasingly throwing their weight around. Among these leading Arab *shaykhs*, the sultan was essentially the first among equals. He controlled wealth, but so did other Omanis; he had mercenaries, but they could also arm clients or kin and rise up to oppose him; he had precedence in terms of rule, but his decisions had to conform with Islamic law, local belief, and customary practice. His pronouncements and positions were always open to contestation and dispute. As Burton noted, “Whenever a new measure is brought forward by the Sayyid it is invariably opposed by the chiefs of clans, who assemble and address him more like an equal than a superior” (1872, 1:261).⁶ Disagreements and factional maneuvering were common, leading at times to outbreaks of armed resistance.

The sultan conducted his affairs in consultation with his principal officers—Islamic judges (*qadis*), the customs master, and trusted advisers or kin—as well as other leading *shaykhs*, trying to reach consensus on major decisions (Bennett 1986, 23). Court life was quintessentially an urban phenomenon. Regular attendance at audiences at the palace was politically and socially crucial, and elite social life echoed the conduct of the court. Just as Arab patricians came to debate public issues with the sultan or press claims, so too they made regular visits to the *barazas* of peers, circulating from house to house, maintaining urban networks of friends, kin, and associates. “The Seyyid, or Lord, the representative of the Al-bu-Said clan, sits daily in Durbar to receive the stated visits of the Sheikhs and the leading Arabs resident in the city, and to discuss public matters, although the visit may be ostensibly for congratulation only. The Sheikhs have also their own private Durbars, attended by the members of their own tribe, family, and friends; and a large portion of the time of a city Arab is taken up with such visits” (Christie 1876, 324). This social circulation had multiple purposes—from cementing business ties to engaging in political and religious debates, making social calls, performing ritual displays of respect (*heshima*), and looking in on the sick.

At times when consensus failed or the sultan was perceived as overstepping the limits of the legitimate exercise of his authority, “the least reliable group he could call upon consisted of his own Omani subjects, for the notion of a central state to whom all subjects owed loyalty was poorly developed. People supported their own kinship groups in time of

trouble, and the Sultan was regarded as an al-Busaidi as well as a Sultan. He had a degree of legitimacy as a ruler, but it was still necessary for him to rely on followers attached to him personally” (Cooper 1977, 191).

The sultan possessed a heightened capacity to amass wealth and use it as a means of cultivating allies and dependents, both slave and free. State revenues were indistinguishable from his personal fortune, and he had a diverse array of sources at his command: royal monopolies, customs revenues, personal involvement in the caravan export trade, extensive clove plantations, and commercial treaties with foreign powers who were prohibited from trading directly with the *mrima* coast. As Pouwels describes it, the personal wealth of the sultans was the “key-stone of their government,” the “lubricant which facilitated their rule of the Arab tribes of Zanzibar and the coast” (1987, 103–104). Both in terms of consolidating power internally and extending relations far into the interior, the sultanate rested on a shifting mix of commercial inducements, cultural hegemony, and limited coercive means.

Due to his position, the sultan did not need to actively develop assets or invest in production. Instead, he could simply grant concessions or rights to others, claiming annual payments or services. This is precisely what Said did when he began to farm customs out to prominent Indians in the 1820s. Similarly, the sultan’s control over large tracts of unoccupied land could be used as a means of accumulating social capital. Islamic law regarding land tenure in nineteenth-century Zanzibar effectively cast the sultan as the steward of a large territorial *wakf*, or religious trust. Land was owned solely by God and could not be treated as alienable property. The sultan, however, could distribute rights of occupancy to unoccupied land as he saw fit. Those who procured such rights only became vested in the land as they began to build or plant tree crops on it. Investments on the land constituted property and could not be taken away without paying compensation. By dispensing rights of occupation to his allies (who in turn could simply settle lower-level clients or dependents upon the land), the sultan managed to amass considerable social capital, constructing elaborate networks of obligation and deference (Fair 1994, 51–52). The sultan may have possessed greater means to use wealth to extend his sovereignty and amass followers, but he was by no means alone. Other Omanis followed suit, and Indians increasingly took over as patrons as the century wore on. The wealthiest

South Asian merchants became creditors of the sultan, and these obligations extended to many of the Arab planter class. Debt, of course, was a formidable instrument of social obligation and clientage, and Indian merchants were primary sources of credit for indebted planters as well as for those Arabs and Swahili willing to risk speculative journeys along caravan trade routes into the interior.

One of Sultan Said's daughters, Emily Ruete, reminisced that almost a thousand people resided at Beit al Mtoni, the royal palace north of the city where she spent her early childhood. "To understand this," she explained to her European readers in a memoir she wrote after eloping with a German merchant and leaving Zanzibar, "it must be remembered that great numbers of servants are employed in the East by all people of quality and by those who want to appear rich" (1989 [1888], 4). The households of elite planters and merchants were constituted by kin and clients arrayed along a broad continuum of status and position. No man could claim to be great without having large numbers of dependents whose fealty and services he could call upon, ranging from trusted associates to hangers-on and newly acquired slaves.⁷ "The entourage of a powerful man, as well as a communal group, included, among the people from whom support was expected and who were involved in a network of social relations, light-skinned Arabs or Swahili, black slaves, black freed slaves, perhaps a few light-skinned slaves, and black clients recruited from nearby societies" (Cooper 1977, 267).

These relations of subordination and dependence were hardly restricted to the high and mighty. Even individuals with far more modest means who wanted to make a statement about their rising position in the world could acquire a servant or two, hoping thereby to "appear rich." And investing in slaves, of course, and then hiring them out was a prominent means for urban strivers—Arab, Swahili, Comorian, or African—to gain some capital and get ahead. Rigby, like Colomb and Christie, delineated some of the ways the slave system in Zanzibar confounded conventional notions about servitude: "Frequently a man who is a slave himself is the owner of several other slaves; and even a servant who is receiving four or five dollars a month wages is frequently the owner of one or more slaves. An Arab who is the owner of three or four slaves frequently lets them out to labour, and will live on what they earn, scorning to apply himself to any industrious pursuit, and lounges about

all day with dagger, sword and shield, considering himself a man of property” (1932 [1860], 334). “Scorning” manual labor was a primary way for urban Swahili, poorer Arabs, and Indians to assert their superiority over slaves and recently arrived Africans; “lounging about”—avoiding soiling one’s finery or breaking into a sweat—and having others labor for you was to appropriate (at least in appearance) the lifestyle of landed gentry.

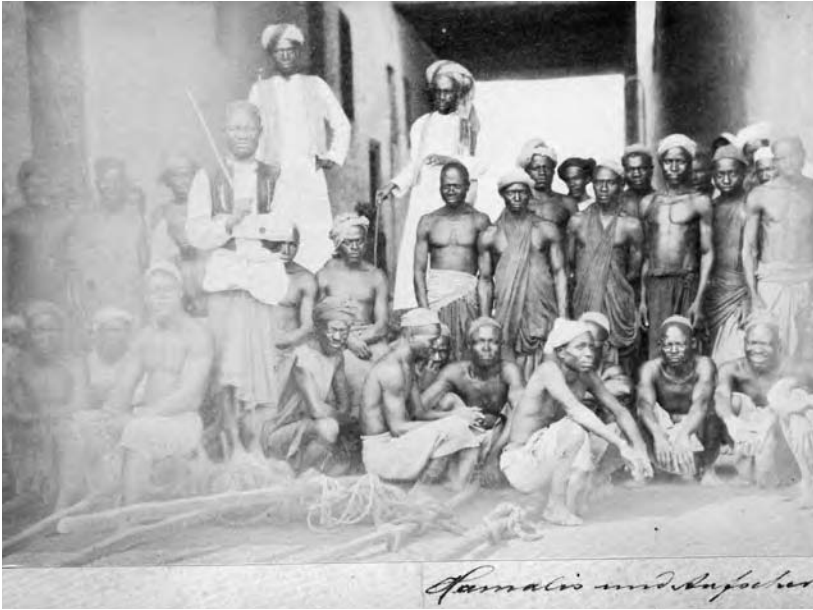
More than anything else, the complexity of Zanzibari society was reflected in the diverse positions and places occupied by slaves.⁸ From Burton on, most visitors to Zanzibar in the late nineteenth century said that slaves constituted between two-thirds and three-quarters of the population. In a milieu where relations of dependence structured ties among both slaves and freeborn, those whose loyalty had been proven over years of service (especially slaves) could be placed in positions of considerable authority, even serving as governor of the islands, as Smee’s account reflects. Later in the century slaves were still accorded positions of considerable authority as plantation supervisors, caravan leaders, traders, dhow captains, or skilled artisans. “The negroes of Zanzibar are variously employed,” remarked Christie, “from occupying situations of trust, through all the grades of labor, to the lowest menial services”—a description that applied equally well to both slave and freeborn (1876, 311). During times of conflict between clans, slaves would be armed and called upon to defend their masters, much like poorer kinsmen or free clients. As we’ve seen, owning a slave and hiring him or her out was a prominent means for the landless or newly arrived to improve their position and status. Slaves could even own slaves and profit from their labor. They could also purchase fixed property and obtain loans from moneylenders. And there were finely drawn social distinctions among slaves. Those owned by more prestigious masters treated the slaves of lesser houses as social inferiors, and “the town negroes look down upon their country cousins with a good deal of contempt, and consider themselves a superior class” (311).

Slavery was a form of social dependence that coexisted with other paternalistic modes of indebtedness or clientage, being constituted by a whole series of cultural distinctions and differences along a sliding scale. The Kiswahili term for slave—*mtumwa*—could also be used for a “delegate” or a “representative.” The *mtumwa* was seen as an exten-

sion of the self, someone instructed to act in one's name or interests.⁹ It comes from the root form of the verb *-tuma* commonly used to designate employing someone on an errand or task and was used for laborers and servants as well. "There is in Zanzibar no distinction between 'slave' and 'servant,'" observed Colomb, "the same word is used for both" (1873, 368). A related word—active rather than passive in construction—is *mtume*, a messenger of God or prophet, commonly used as an honorific for the prophet Muhammad (Glassman 1995, 85). As this range of association suggests, slavery was not understood on the coast as a uniform status. Instead, slavery—and clientship—extended all along a continuum of subject positions.

The primary distinction was between *wazalia*, slaves born in Zanzibar, acculturated and raised in local households, and newly imported or raw slaves, often coded as savage (*washenzi*), ignorant, and uncivilized. In ideological terms, new slaves were cast as absolute outsiders, the bottom of the cultural order; utterly disconnected from kin and social networks, devoid of prestige and power, unfamiliar with Swahili ways and the urbanity of coastal life, non-Muslim, and associated with the wildness of the bush. Even these slaves, however, were not relegated to ascribed positions or a fixed status. It is crucial to understand how radically this system differed from contemporary European notions of race and culture. For Zanzibaris, identity was shaped through social processes and was therefore both relational and malleable over time. African and Arab, slave and free, savage and civilized, outsider and insider marked the ideological poles of the system, providing the terms by which struggles over citizenship and rights to the city were actively engaged. Rather than fixed essences, identities were crafted through social relationships and actively constituted by cultural practices and performances. This negotiated and nuanced sense of social being was perfectly suited to the dynamism and expansiveness of the nineteenth-century city—a cosmopolitan space where people came to step up in the world and find their fortunes, reimagining themselves and remaking the boundaries of culture and community.

Over time, by adopting Zanzibari cultural practices, embracing Islam, acquiring skills, speaking Kiswahili, and becoming savvy in local ways, slaves could become Waswahili or *wastaarabu* rather than *washenzi*—shedding their status as uncultured beings, gaining accep-



4. A work crew of *Mahamalis*. Note the bare chests of the porters and the way that their overseers wear Arabicized dress to mark their higher status: *kilemba* (turban), *kanzu* (white robe), *kizibau* (waistcoat), and *bakora* (cane). The photograph shows how Western notions of “race” were crude and poor guides when seeking to distinguish “Arab,” “Swahili,” or “African.” Zanzibar National Archives.

tance within the master’s house, and winning greater autonomy, if not freedom itself. Christie noted that if a slave has “proved himself to be a person of intelligence and trust, he is generally freed, assumes the Arab dress, and associates with his master on the footing of an Arab of inferior family. He generally remains in the service of his former master, and is devotedly attached to his interests, the relationship between the two being almost identical with patron and client” (Christie 1871, 35). In a related vein, poorer and more recent immigrants to the city could mark their rise in fortune by acquiring a few slaves and hiring them out. Hadhrami Arabs arriving in the city found a labor niche as porters, or *mahamali*, and largely took over this sector. But as they managed to put a little capital aside, they marked their rise and distanced themselves from menial labor by buying slaves to act in their stead. By the 1870s, Hadhrami Arabs were being described as the largest slave owners in the

city, and all portage was being carried out by slave *mahamali* (Christie 1876, 330).

A select group of Arab males may have occupied the top of the social hierarchy, but their power was always dependent on others. Those who were most privileged were anything but autonomous and self-determining; indeed, they relied on and had to respond to a wide range of subordinates, spending a good deal of their time managing these complicated social relations and an array of demands. “An Arab’s wealth seems to be indicated by the number of his domestic slaves,” Christie found (1876, 328). In the master-slave relationship, dependence ran in both directions, even if the balance of power was inherently unequal. If the master’s position rested on his slaves, servants, and clients, he was in a real sense obligated to them; to be regarded as a proper master and pious Muslim, he had to fulfill their needs and support them materially, listen to their claims, and honor social expectations. Social injunctions to act as benevolent patrons may have been honored more in the breach, but they were nonetheless important in defining boundaries and limits. If masters violated them, they were subject to scorn or social sanction, and slaves could always run off, demand to be sold, or engage in other forms of resistance.

A slave, of course, was typically defined in Western belief by the fact that he or she was alienable property—more “thing” or commodity than human being. But in the Zanzibari context, slaves weren’t just bought or sold at will. When a slave was acquired, precisely what was purchased was always an open question—one determined by his or her status, talents, and experience and subject to negotiation and maneuver. When a master buys a slave, observed Colomb, he generally “does not buy the man at all, but only a defined portion of his labour, and that on conditions over and above the price paid down” (1873, 373). Urban slaves and those with long service or skills had greater latitude to win more autonomy, retain a higher portion of their wages, or have more days to work on their own account. But even rural slaves managed to gain two days a week when the master could not claim their labor. At the same time, not all slaves could be easily sold. There were limits on the power that masters wielded, especially with more senior and skilled slaves who had obtained hard-won rights. Selling an *mzalia* slave, for instance, was widely understood as disreputable—a shameful act that would only be

prompted by sharply declining fortunes, something that no master could admit without considerable embarrassment. Or again, the harem often figured in antislavery discourse as the very emblem of Arab despotic power and sexual license. But the authority of a master over his concubines was anything but absolute. While wealthier masters relied on concubines for sexual services or to enlarge their communal group, they also had to accept and provide for any progeny that resulted, who had the status of freeborn kin. And for a concubine, producing male heirs was a primary means of gaining access to property through inheritance, the first step in leaving slavery behind and gaining stakes in local networks of kin and community.

Grasping the fine distinctions involved in slavery does not mean denying that it was oppressive or onerous. The mere fact of being cut off from one's social milieu and kin and violently delivered into a strange world was serious enough—suffering a fate of deprivation and dispossession that is difficult to conceive. Greater autonomy and opportunities were mostly enjoyed by urban slaves and were won only after protracted negotiation and struggle over time. These expanded possibilities did not exist for the vast majority of rural slaves who were largely consigned to hard agricultural labor on the plantations. Most slaves longed to leave this scorned status behind, working hard to become something else—freeborn Muslims, citizens of the coast, participants in urban life on their own terms, cultured folk worthy of dignity and respect. While recognizing the force of these longings, and understanding the very real constraints they operated against, we cannot simply ignore how diverse slaves were or erase the agency they exercised to make space and lives for themselves in the city.

Crowds and Street Life

If modern cities have been defined by anything, crowds and spectacles would be near the top of the list, and Zanzibar certainly abounded in both. Travelers' accounts typically included an almost cinematic panorama of the urban types encountered in the streets, trying to visually evoke the feel of the city and place readers in the scene. Narrating his arrival in 1873, Elton described the crowd that greeted him in vivid (if stereotypic) terms:

As we land, . . . a bevy of white-gowned Arabs and slaves rush down to the wharf and besiege us in the manner of the East. Broken English is freely spoken, even to interjections, seafaring phrases, and strong expletives, and guides are legion. Picking out one and escaping from the abuse of the disappointed, we stroll up the narrow oriental lanes—not broad enough to take in three abreast—past every variety of tribe, costume, and complexion. . . . [There are] caste-marked Hindus; hooked-nose Banyans; swaggering swashbucklers; slaves of men of position swelling with the reflection of borrowed importance; masked and closely-veiled women; brightly clad, over-bedecked, painted-browed slave girls; sore-eyed children; here and there an Indian woman, in marked contrast with her regular features to the recently imported African; and a sauntering multitude of slaves of both sexes; hewers of wood and drawers of water, hawkers, attendants, beggars, loafers, camels and their drivers, lean hydrocephalous cats, and pet monkeys. The crowd is dense, lazy, unsavoury, and it is difficult to progress without jostling, but we are long since hopelessly engaged in a tortuous labyrinth of narrow, ill-paved lanes striking in every direction. (1968 [1879], 35–36)

This was very much an outsider's perspective on the crowd, painted from a distance. For the most part, Euro-Americans rarely possessed the cultural ease or fluency in Kiswahili to plunge into the crowd, to join it or try to understand it from within. In an imperial age, many travelers to Africa of European descent—especially those of a particular class—were possessed by a strong sense of racial superiority and cultural chauvinism, seeking to distance themselves from others, the great unwashed. Exercising the gaze and surveying the street-scene from outside or above was a key element of colonial privilege, manifested in the power to look down on or at others arrayed below you, assessing and representing them at a safe remove—from the veranda, a balcony, the club, or consulate.

From the seafront to its bustling markets, Zanzibar was a city of crowds in the late nineteenth century, fueled by expansive commerce and construction. Most of the work that enriched and built the city was performed by hand, and this meant that urban Zanzibar was filled with laborers and slaves. First of all, it was quintessentially an entrepôt and port city, and all the things coming in and out by sea had to be carried by porters, loaded and unloaded. These *mahamali* were joined by even more extensive numbers of slave *vibarua*, or unskilled laborers. Coming into the harbor in the early 1870s, Captain Colomb was struck by the chanting he heard among slave gangs who were “shipping, landing, or



5. The colonial gaze: *Bwana Mkubwa*, in pith helmet, on the veranda. Zanzibar National Archives.

transshipping the ivory, copal, mats, spices, cocoa-nuts, and rice which are by-and-large to be carried away by the fleets of dhows” following the monsoon trade winds (1873, 362–63). Due to the narrowness of the streets, porters hefted by hand virtually anything that moved in the city—everything from household goods to all the commercial trade between the Customs House, the major merchant premises, warehouses, bazaars, and retail shops.

Second, urban construction was taking off at an increasing pace, and building in stone was nothing if not labor-intensive. Sultan Barghash undertook significant public works and building projects in the city, including the House of Wonders, completed in the mid-1880s, and by that stage in his reign there was a rush of building, as an American merchant noted. “The building boom goes on with unabated vigor,” wrote Edward Ropes Jr. in 1882, “and new houses are springing up in all directions” (1973, 31). Large crews of free artisans, workers, and slaves were engaged at building sites, using rhythmic work chants to pace their labors. “The most popular of all work is the pounding of floors and roofs of houses, at which singing and yelling is freely indulged in,” found Christie (1876, 311). All the coral rag used for stone construction was quarried out-



6. Portrait of Zanzibari women's work gang, with shovels. Into the twentieth century, many working-class women and those of slave descent were engaged in urban building trades. Zanzibar National Archives.

side of town and needed to be transported through the narrow alleys to any building sites. Getting materials in place by hand was both costly and time-consuming, a “tedious process” requiring large numbers of slaves (Elton 1968 [1879], 51). The lime, or *chunam*, used for wall plaster and whitewash was brought to town and burned in kilns near Shangani point, and it had to be carried in small loads, often across significant distances. Women specialized in many of the more arduous and heavy tasks associated with building, including transport and plastering, and raucous crews of female laborers were common sights in the city. Workers and slaves in the building trades also required services, and women slaves developed a niche as water carriers and sellers.

Beside shipping and building, a third factor brought large numbers of slaves to the city, emphasizing urban-rural connections. Any item



7. Crowds and commodities flowing into the city from the *Shamba* (countryside) on market days. Zanzibar National Archives.

brought to Zanzibar by sea triggered a 5 percent tax, and this duty was levied even on produce shipped from agricultural estates on the island itself. As a result, goods from the country plantations were transported into the city by land—mostly on the heads and backs of male slaves. These flows of commodities and people into and out of Zanzibar city were greatly intensified on Thursdays and Fridays, when rural slaves had gained the right to work on their own account and sell any surplus they might be able to generate. As a result, these days became the chief market days in Zanzibar, and long before dawn the roads leading into the city were thronged with rural folk bearing animals, foodstuffs, and other goods for sale. On these days, Christie described the numbers of people coming into the city as “immense,” bearing goats or chickens, bananas, sweet potatoes, diverse vegetables, and an array of fruits. These goods would be hawked for sale through the streets or brought to the central market, or *Soko Kuu* (Great Market), located just behind the fort. At the height of a market morning, the press of the crowds was so great that one could barely move through it: “From eight till ten o’clock the large open



8. Market day crowds at the Soko Kuu (Great Market), Forodhani, with the fort in the background. Zanzibar National Archives.

space is a dense and impassable mass, through which it is impossible to elbow one's way" (1876, 318).

There were other local and specialized markets in different *mitaa* of the city—Soko ya Muhogo, or cassava market, or the fish market in Malindi. But Soko Kuu was where the main action was: the primary meeting point between country and city. On market days urban slaves were drawn to the Soko Kuu to trade with their rural counterparts, bringing clothes, crafts, or ornaments, and were joined there by freeborn laborers and artisans, traders and captains, Swahili, Africans, lower-status Arabs, and Indians. Patricians disdained descending into the market and often depended on their slaves to provision their households, which added to the bustle and crush. The wealth of commodities available, the range of services, the rush of bargaining and trading, the spectacle and hubbub—such market exchanges and encounters were the lifeblood of the city and one of its key delights. “The public market-place is to the negro what the custom-house is to the mercantile classes, and thither all who can do

so resort for business or pleasure. The approaches to it are lined with negroes selling betel-nut, pepper-leaf, lime, and tobacco, for the convenience of those addicted to the Oriental custom of chewing; there are also rows of barbers who, without the aid of soap and water, shave the negro scalp and axilla with saw-like razors, or ordinary sheath-knives; there are also the water-girls disposing of the faecal-smelling water for drinking purposes, and others selling small square pieces of that highly-prized delicacy, semi-putrid shark” (Christie 1876, 319).

The everyday rhythms of urban life were regularly punctuated by performances and parades that attracted crowds of onlookers. “It is customary for the Africans here to have dances at which from a hundred to a thousand attend,” reported a missionary from Salem who visited in 1839. He described one such public dance he saw, with about two hundred people standing in a circle around the musicians. Two percussionists played on drums of hollow wood, stretched with rawhide at the ends. Another stood on a kind of “native bed” blowing “a rude instrument in shape resembling a common tin horn.” A fourth player beat with lengths of rope on a flat brass vessel overturned on a wooden platter, and, as the clergyman concluded, “they made strange music” (Hume 1840, 61). Similar *ngomas* or dances were a common feature of life in the city’s neighborhoods, especially in Ng’ambo, and sprang up in more impromptu circumstances. In the 1870s, Christie described the shore fringing the city at low tide as “the native Bois de Boulogne, the place of assignation, and the ball-room, at which the negroes assemble on moon light nights, when summoned by the irresistible music of the tom-tom and fife” (1876, 275). Similarly, at low tide, the ground at Mnazi Mmoja (“one coconut tree”) served as a public park. Europeans promenaded there in the late afternoons, and wealthier Arabs and Indians would drive there in their carriages to take the air, while younger Arabs raced their fastest steeds across the flats.

Sultan Barghash initiated a thirty-five-piece Goanese band that gave weekly concerts on Wednesday evenings from 5 to 6 PM and accompanied him on official visits. Parading through the streets on calls to the English consulate, for instance, the sultan would be accompanied by a train of followers and his personal retinue, flanked by lines of richly uniformed soldiers, fifes, and drums and preceded by the Goan band, which would strike up “God Save the Queen” for the assembled specta-

tors, described as “the greater part of the natives of Zanzibar.” “This parade every Friday is a nuisance,” grumbled Ropes, the New England merchant. “You can hardly compel the men to work if the band comes near them. They get perfectly wild” (1973, 15–16). He was perhaps even less thrilled by some of his other musical experiences. He witnessed an “extraordinary” street procession assembled to ritually mark the dramatic recovery of a neighbor, an elite Arab woman, from serious illness. He detailed the spectacle at length, writing of the band and performers, incense burners and silver sprinklers filled with perfumes, slaves in gold lace and finery, horses and bells, elaborate singing and dancing, as the celebrants wound their way down to the beach under his window. After more than an hour, they took a break for coffee, and Ropes went to bed, but not for long: “I turned in about 9:30 and had just got asleep when I was woke by a most infernal noise. Girls yelling, dancing, blowing horns, pounding their old tin pans. It was terrible. There must have been a thousand or more in it. They kept this up til 4 a.m. When they were tired and wanted a change, something quiet like, they pounded on the three cast iron empty water tanks belonging to the P. & O. Co. This was delightful. . . . I hear that they propose to repeat this thing tonight and tomorrow. If they do Gatling guns will be in order” (11–12).

Religious festivals and observations transformed urban space periodically throughout the year, drawing large crowds and gatherings into the city. The Hindu community celebrated Diwali with fireworks and house visits, while Ithnasheri believers solemnly mourned the death of Husain during Muharram, with groups of flagellants marching through the streets. But by far the largest holidays were Id el Fitri and Id el Hajj, marking the close of the Ramadan fast and the pilgrimage to Mecca, respectively. The end of Ramadan was marked by intense excitement and expectation. Its arrival sparked three days of celebration, with a large fair held at Mnazi Mmoja and attended by thousands. “Here there were whirligigs—the true whirligig of the old British fair—camel races, dances going on within a ring of dusky spectators, donkey and horse races, all carried on with the utmost of merriment,” wrote Elton in 1873 (1968 [1879], 69–70). On the first day of the festival, all who could afford to do so would turn out in their finest new clothes, making the rounds and visiting friends, relatives, and neighbors. It was also the occasion for slaves and the poor, children and clients, to make claims



9. Parade in celebration of *Siku Kuu* (*Id el Fitri*), which marks the end of the Ramadan fast. Zanzibar National Archives.

upon their patrons or elders—appearing at the door and asking for their *siku kuu*, or gift—demands that were resented by at least some whites: “Everybody you have ever spoken to comes up for a rupee,” complained Ropes. “Gall? I never imagined that people could have so much nerve. Everybody in Z. seemed bent on how much they could *bum* and that’s all” (1973, 31).

The anticipated sighting of the moon that marked the conclusion of Ramadan was itself a major public spectacle that drew crowds to the palace square. Ropes described the scene in 1883, with troops lined all along the seafront as far as the eye could see, a battery of guns arrayed in front of the fort and palace:

I should think that there were 20,000 people in that square & such people! All dressed up in every conceivable color, red and white being the most prominent & a great many with painted faces & yellow stuff on their hair. . . . Some of the slave girls were dressed up very richly in striped satins & gold & silver arm & leglets, but of course in poor taste. A little before 6 the man in the tower saw the moon and fired three shots & then they all yelled and shouted, the batteries at the point in the square & near our house fired a salute of 101 guns each and the men-o-war 21, and the soldiers 10 volleys. The holiday flag was run up on all the consulates & palaces & vessels in port. The band played "God Save the Sultan" and everybody fired and altogether it was the biggest circus I ever saw and they kept it right up. (1973, 31)

Urban crowds and ritual spectacles always seemed to invoke questions about some of the characters that constituted or circulated through the festival throngs. Simmel noted that the modern metropolis was characterized by specialization and a highly refined division of labor, citing the Parisian *quatorzième*—an individual for hire ready to turn out on a moment's notice in correct attire to join a dinner party so that it might consist of fourteen rather than thirteen souls (1950 [1903], 57). With its diversity and density, the city could give rise to all sorts of niches and employments—including those content not to be employed at all, living off others, occupying the margins, or getting lost in the crowd. Nineteenth-century Paris certainly had its *flâneurs* and *boulevardiers*, but other cities had their touts and buskers, hustlers and grifters, drifters and sharps—people who knew the lay of the land and learned to live by their wits. Zanzibar was no exception. In fact, Western visitors often remarked that things were not quite what they seemed in the city—especially people encountered in passing on the streets. In particular, they seized on the fact that the public face that Zanzibaris often presented to the world bore little connection to how or where they lived. An Arab or an Indian man, for example, might live in dank or dirty conditions or even reside in a hut or a hovel—and yet when he stepped out into the street, he was invariably crisply dressed and impeccably attired, often in white.

To some, this perceived disjuncture between domestic space and public style provoked a sense of indignation, as if locals were putting on airs or appearances that they in no way deserved. In the city, people couldn't be trusted to reflect their "true" selves. This discourse on urban

deception merged imperceptibly with a range of narratives on shiftless types in the city, loafers or spongers who floated about with no visible means of support. A classic feature of Zanzibari architecture—homes, mosques, and public buildings alike—is an external *baraza*, a stoop or low veranda that Christie called “a stone bench for loungers during the day” (1876, 328). Much earlier, Browne complained that the doors of mosques were “public loafing places for all the idlers in town.” Warming to this theme, he singled out Arabs as layabouts, though he may well have confused them with Swahili or others:

The Arabs are second to no people in the world in the art of loafing. A worthless scoundrel, who has gambled away all his property, and who is too lazy to work, will saunter up to the mosque with the air of a sultan, and join in the topic of discussion as if he were the millionaire of the place. He can swindle, at the same time, with the ease and grace of an accomplished London sharper. Poor, indeed, is the Arab who cannot appear with a flashy turban, a gold-mounted *jambaa*, and a jeweled sword; and dull is he who cannot live by his wits. In all their poverty, these people have a haughty air. There is nothing like sprightliness or vivacity about them, and never a want of self-confidence. Their motions are slow, measured, and dignified. Nothing startles, nothing astonishes them. (1846, 333)

Dress and fashion were critical markers of social identity and status in nineteenth-century Zanzibar (Fair 2001). By adopting or appropriating the styles of others, urbanites sought to express their aspirations and allegiances. But Browne seems utterly oblivious to these nuances and social signals. It is somewhat difficult to identify precisely what offends him more—the fact that natives were dignified, conversant, and supremely self-possessed in public or the way they conveyed confidence and a sense of “flashy” style. While centering on the perils of indigenous laziness, living off others, and lounging about, at heart this is a discourse concerned with fraud and manipulation: the fact that natives don’t reliably represent their “true” selves. It is as if Euro-Americans believed that the poor or improvident should appear and act in ways that were “appropriate” to their station in life. But this reflectionist theory of identity only holds if there is an essential social self that can be outwardly modeled or mirrored. Such a view denies the ways that subjects remake identities through creative acts of self-fashioning, playing with selves and signs.



It also disregards how crucial these signifying processes were in the context of the city, where strangers lacked deep personal knowledge and responded to others on the basis of external signs. In this milieu, a large part of being an Arab was looking like an Arab and acting like one—a domain of practice and presentation open to many.



10a (*facing page*) and 10b (*above*). Modern self-fashioning: urban elegance and style in early studio portraits, early-twentieth-century Zanzibar. Zanzibar National Archives.

At the root of these stories there was always the implicit fear of being taken advantage of—being conned or swindled by urban sharps, natives who were simply too smart for one’s own good. Burton, for example, characterized the Swahili as shrewd and self-concealing, warning, “They excel in negro duplicity; they are infinitely great in the ‘Small wares and petty points of cunning,’ and they will boast of this vile eminence, saying, ‘Are we not Wasawahili?’ men who obtain their ends by foxship?” (1872, 1:417). Figures who came particularly in for opprobrium were men hanging around the harbor and seafront, waiting for their ship to come in. “The bumboat-men and the beachcombers are Comoro rascals, who sometimes gain considerable sums; there are also some half-a-dozen negroes, speaking a little bad French and worse English who offer themselves to every stranger and who fleece him until turned away” (1:326). Comorians especially were “singular scoundrels” who “completely mastered the knack of cajoling Europeans—no Syrian Dragoman can do it better” (1:339).

Nor was Burton the only one expressing these urban anxieties. At times of tension, some Europeans complained of rough or rude treatment in the streets. Others of a more racist mind-set, accustomed to shows of black deference rather than defiance, spoke in more aggressive ways: “Labor here is fast becoming a very serious question,” Ropes objected in 1883. “The natives are insolent, big headed & overpaid. They have lost all respect for white men and canes have to be freely used in walking through the town” (1973, 27). Even later, after the imposition of British colonial rule, arriving travelers continued to complain about the floating population that serviced and suborned incoming passengers. Steeped in urban wiles, wise in the ways of the world, these “boys” certainly seemed to know how to take it to the bwanas. “On landing, one is besieged by dozens of boys, offering in more or less broken English to guide one around; they are scamps, but clever scamps, and speak a number of languages. . . . Many of the dusky scamps lie in wait for Jack Tar, and guide him to all sorts of places, good, bad, and indifferent. I have seen a sailor more than half-tipsy being persuaded to come somewhere or other, for no good I felt sure, by one of these boys; somehow it was particularly disgusting to see the money-making black, alert and keen, with a persuasive tongue, leading astray what ought to be his superior” (Younghusband 1910, 213–14).

Space and Society: Stone Town and Ng'ambo, Arab and African

Nineteenth-century Zanzibar was never the sharply divided and dualistic city that later writers have claimed. Postrevolutionary accounts have often mistakenly assumed that there was a neat correspondence between social position and spatial location, architecture and identity. As a result, the city has often been depicted as segregated and split in two, with Arabs and other elites in stone mansions occupying the center, while Africans, slaves, and workers were consigned to huts in Ng'ambo, cast as a "native quarter." This vision of the city suggests that the relationship between Arab identity and architecture was far simpler than it actually was. At the same time, it also leaves a great deal out of the picture, effectively erasing all those subalterns from the urban landscape who made Omani power and elite wealth possible in the first place. It is as if the built fabric in Stone Town consisted entirely of stone houses, occupied by the powerful, invariably coded as Arab, who constructed elaborate monuments as signs of their wealth and sophistication. This portrayal certainly mimics elite views and follows on later British stereotypes of Omanis as natural aristocrats.¹⁰ It also mirrors an older tradition in Swahili cultural analysis that seized on the multistoried stone house—*nyumba ya ghorofa*—as the defining feature of Swahili urbanism. Swahili towns, then, were depicted as "stone towns" even in the majority of instances when mud and wattle dwellings surrounded a few stone structures. Similarly, concentrations of stone houses were typically singled out as "Arab" quarters, in distinction to "native" huts because of Western beliefs that African urbanity was a contradiction in terms (Glassman 1995, 34).

Appearances in the city were often not quite what they seemed. Treatments of the urban landscape in Zanzibar invariably started with something called the "Arab house"—square, multistoried, flat-roofed structures that were said to define the street network and loom large over the city. But until quite late in the nineteenth century, large stone mansions or palaces were the exception rather than the rule, and even those occupied by the minority of wealthy Omanis were hardly straightforward. Even to call them "Arab" (as Euro-Americans routinely did) was

to be partial to elites and highly selective. After all, those who built them, those who generated the wealth that paid for them, and the vast majority that inhabited and serviced them were African slaves and clients or servants of African descent. To label structures as Arab was to reify the owner's alleged origins, thereby excluding laborers and everyday social uses from the building's fabric. The term "Arab house" neatly concealed an entire world of differences, taking a tiny segment of elite homes and making them stand for the whole.

"Arab houses," like those of South Asians or Africans, were never in fact a unitary class. Indeed, most of them were neither massive nor permanent. While palaces or royal homes might have stood out and claimed a lot of attention, many observers also described Arab houses as "ruins" or as being in a ruinous state (Rigby 1932 [1860]; Devereux 1869; Colomb 1873). Even for Zanzibaris of means, constructing in stone was the task of a lifetime, consuming huge amounts of resources, capital, and time. To build a house was to engage in an extended and protracted process that unfolded in stages, depending on the availability of materials, money, and labor. Burton stated that the usual "Arab" dwelling took around a dozen years to complete and was seldom finished while the owner was still living (1872, 1:251). Because of both cost and the nature of the coral rag used in construction, houses were often left to settle and harden in an incomplete state or would be built a story at a time with long intervals between stages. If the owner suffered commercial setbacks or the flow of capital dried up, construction would come to a halt, and the structure might decay or even collapse.

And, of course, when outsiders spoke of the "Arab house," they typically excluded the far more humble dwellings of recent immigrants and smallholders from consideration because they blurred the lines between "Arab" and "native," patrician and plebian. The slaves of Hadhrami Arabs, Christie noted, "usually live in the houses or huts of their masters, in the native quarter of the town, and if the master be poor both fare and lodge much alike, the house and the hut being invariably crowded" (1876, 330–31). As this suggests, Arabs as well as Africans occupied huts, which came in various forms and sizes and were found throughout the city, from elite compounds to the brothels of Vuga, across Ng'ambo to the fort and back again. As Christie found, dwellings depended on the *uwezo* (means or capability) of their owners. The vast majority of the

population had limited *uwezo* and lived in quite modest circumstances, with slave and free sharing essentially the same conditions. As Christie found, there was no such thing as a “slave hut proper,” and these structures were never restricted to a particular class or part of the urban milieu: “The Negro huts are not confined to any distinct part of the city, but are scattered over the whole place” (303). But then why call huts “Negro” at all? If bonded Africans and free but poor Arabs lived and supped together in them, and the lines between Swahili, Arab, Comorians, and other African communities were hard to discern, how could one even speak of a “Negro hut”? By associating housing form with race, Christie was reflecting popular stereotypes, elevating casual observations into absolute truths. Africans indeed might have been concentrated in non-stone dwellings, but then again “African” was a catch-all category that tended to erase crucial cultural differences and distinctions.

Many of African descent, of course, lived in the stone houses of their patrons or owners or owned single-story structures. But if Africans and huts were assumed to be a natural pair, it became all too easy to erase the African presence from Stone Town, casting Ng’ambo as a “native quarter.” Contemporary accounts occasionally mentioned native districts, and these references became increasingly common after the imposition of formal colonial rule. But invoking the alleged existence of such spaces was far easier than it was for elites or the colonial state to make segregation a reality. European invocations of native quarters tended to be geographically imprecise as well as silent on the question of just whom they meant when they spoke of “natives.” Indigenous islanders? Swahili? All Africans? As early as the 1850s, Burton claimed to find a native town, informing his readers, “To our right, in rear of the fronting ‘dicky,’ and at both flanks of the city, is the native town,—a filthy labyrinth, a capricious arabesque of disorderly lanes, and alleys, and impasses, here broad, there narrow; now heaped with offal, then choked with ruins. It would be the work of weeks to learn the threading of this planless maze, and what white man would have the heart to learn it?” (1872, 1:96)

One suspects, of course, that Burton learned very little about it. After all, if he couldn’t be bothered to enter it or follow its winding ways, how much could he really know about the place? The area is vaguely defined and crudely dismissed, painted with a few broad brushstrokes, more caricature than anything else. In nineteenth-century Zanzibar,

there was no such thing as a distinct or formal “native quarter.” No question, the city was almost sundered in two at high tide by the creek. “There is an old and a new town,” declared Robb, “and they are divided from each other naturally by a tidal creek” (1879, 2). The crucial thing to note, however, is that “old” and “new” are not the same as “rich” and “poor” or “African” and “Arab.” Many of the distinctions later taken as characteristic of the split between Stone Town and Ng’ambo did not yet exist. Besides, creeks could always be crossed, and traffic on bridges went both ways: the separation between the two sides of the city was hardly absolute. Indeed, the same patron-client ties that infused social relations in the city structured spatial connections between the triangular peninsula and the area to the east.

Until at least the 1860s, urban development concentrated in the western sections of the city—the areas of original settlement that much later became known as “town proper” or “Stone Town.” As commercial wealth expanded in the later decades of the century, stone houses began to proliferate on the peninsula, gradually replacing or surrounding mud and wattle dwellings. This growth in commerce and construction fostered a more diversified urban service economy, fueled by greater numbers of slaves (domestic and otherwise), craft workers, and laborers. Increasingly many of these took up residence across the creek, on what became known as “the other side.”¹¹ Around midcentury, much of Ng’ambo was still bush and plantation, unbuilt land that was largely held by the sultan and a few of his closest allies. But in the 1860s, as population grew elsewhere in the city, land there began to be cleared and settled by the slaves, clients, and dependents of the elite, who lived rent-free in exchange for the services they provided. By 1870, Bishop Steere reported that the area had a population of at least ten thousand, located in twelve wards or quarters (*mitaa*). Over the next two decades, Ng’ambo expanded considerably, nearly doubling in population. Around the turn of the century, the “other side” had surpassed Stone Town in both size and population.

Growth in both sections of the city was typically uneven. Over time the initial western area of settlement gradually consolidated its position as a commercial and political center. Mercantile expansion concentrated wealth in the “stone town,” producing more (and more imposing) homes and businesses on the triangular peninsula, while huts of slaves and the



11. Crossing the creek at low tide, with the “two sides” of the city: Stone Town on the left, Ng'ambo on the right. Note the proliferation of identical clusters of huts on both “sides” in the foreground. Zanzibar National Archives.

emergent working class spread across Ng'ambo. In other words, as Stone Town was built up, Ng'ambo was built out. It is important to note, however, that this was a slow and incomplete process. Rather than separation or segregation, both sides of the city were interdependent as well as symbolically and materially linked in all sorts of ways. Indeed, the term used to describe land in Ng'ambo clearly expresses this sense of interrelationship. As Fair (2001) explains, property in Ng'ambo was known as *kiunga* land, a word often used to describe agricultural lands close to or adjoining town. In some sense, the word expresses close connections between city and country and comes from the root *-unga*, which means to join, cement, or unite. By settling their slaves and dependents on land they controlled, elites were honoring their obligations to clients, while extending their households across the creek, enlarging their following and deepening the ties that bind. While the two sides were unequal, they remained intrinsically interrelated.

Even in the 1890s, after the British had undermined and finally taken over the sultanate, Stone Town was still anything but an exclusive preserve of the wealthy and powerful. The first colonial survey of the town, completed in 1893, reflected the continuing mixed character of Stone Town.¹² The survey listed over thirty neighborhoods on the peninsula, grouping them arbitrarily into six districts (Ng'ambo being classified as the seventh). Everywhere in the city—with the sole exception of the area around the palace complex—huts far outnumbered stone dwellings, 5,179 to 1,506 (the comparable numbers for Ng'ambo were 9,134 and 169, respectively). Huts and stone dwellings were interspersed

to a remarkable degree, and neither category was uniform in quality or consistency. Only a few stone houses had three and four stories. And the single-story buildings, especially the more ramshackle warehouses, stables, and workshop/residences, were not all that distinguishable from the more solidly built huts (which in any case were frequently grouped inside a compound, surrounded by stone walls). Zanzibaris drew upon a common pool of materials to construct their dwellings, using various combinations to allow for greater or lesser durability and permanence. Rather than strict types, various structures should be seen as part of a continuum. At the extremes, differences were profound. But most buildings were grouped toward the middle, where hard and fast distinctions were much more difficult to draw (Donley-Reid 1984).

Residential concentration existed to a certain degree, but there is no evidence of strict segregation on the basis of either race or class. In the survey, one finds pockets of inhabitants in a contiguous area sharing the same origin, loosely considered. In Shangani, for example, around Tippu Tip's residence, there were about twenty houses in which "Arabs" predominated. Three of them were three-storied, described as "new," "big," and "fancy," but most were one- or two-storied, with scattered huts. Further on, in Vuga, near Gomes Photographers and the Sultan's Gardens, there were similar clusters of Swahili homes, most of them ground-floor only. Groups of Hindus could be found in the interior behind the palace, or Khojas in the bazaars leading to Darajani. These concentrations dotted the urban landscape, set within a more general pattern of intermixture and diversity. Near the Cosmopolitan Hotel, for example, we come across a Banian tailor in a two-story house surrounded by three compounds of Khojas, with one, two, and three stories, respectively. Then there are a Swahili *mishkaki* (kebab) seller, Bohora Oil Mills, an Indian, a Chinese carpenter, and a Goan tailor, all in ground-floor premises. Next door are three Indian homes (again, one, two, and three stories, successively); a house owned by Lady Janbai, wife of one of the wealthiest Ismaili merchants, Sir Tharia Topan; a *dhobi* (launderer, presumably Indian); camel and cattle stables; four "good" huts followed by eight more along the road; and, finally, three ground-floor dwellings inhabited by Arabs.

This mix was hardly atypical, as another example drawn from the area around the German Consulate shows. There, in two two-story

buildings we find living Suleiman bin Abdalla, a Goan, a *dhobi*, a Greek tobacco seller, and a Banian broker. These are followed by an auction house and the tobacconist's retail shop. We then come to the Goldstein Hotel and a Parsi spirit seller and a Greek living in ground-floor quarters. After another Greek and a ruined house, we encounter a mosque, an Arab in a three-story house, Said bin Majid (a member of the royal family, also living in a three-story house), an Indian shopkeeper, and the Gazette Printing Press building, in which two colonial officials, Captain Hardinge and Strickland, were living. Further on we come to two retail Indian shops, a European compound, three ground-floor dwellings inhabited by Ismail, an Arab, and an Indian, respectively, and then Fazul Ismail Goldsmiths. Granted, this section was relatively more privileged than Malindi, with its "salt and stinking fish sellers," or Vuga, where at least some Indians lived in huts, and there were a good number of Swahili prostitutes. But its heterogeneity was echoed almost everywhere in Stone Town. In this urban mix, race and class were not yet fused into the landscape. Sheriff (1995, 22–23) underlines the point nicely: "During the nineteenth century, the so-called 'native quarter' existed on the peninsula itself on which the Stone Town is located. It was not exiled across the creek until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and the so-called 'cordon sanitaire' between the Stone Town and Ng'ambo that the creek was to become developed largely during the colonial period." Dreams of splitting the city in two and sanitizing both sides would linger long into the colonial period, driving British pursuits for much of the first half of the twentieth century.

TWO

Uncertain States: Colonial Practices and the Ambiguities of Power

Just as Euro-American observers found Zanzibar's streets irregular and irrational, so too did they view the *ancien régime*: as European colonialism tightened its hold over the region in the later nineteenth century, the Omani sultanate was increasingly represented as the pure antithesis of a modern state, characterized by absence and lack. Before the British protectorate was established in the early 1890s, a colonial officer claimed that "no organised Government really existed" (Lyne 1905, 190). With this blanket assessment, he was merely echoing what had already emerged as the dominant view. Seeking to legitimate imperial control, the British consistently deployed images of order, organization, and systematicity to describe their new administration, casting the sultanate as absolute other. Using familiar Orientalist terms, they derided the sultans as creatures of whimsy, governed by arbitrary passions rather than "proper" rules and procedures. Instead of protecting the public interest, they alleged, al-Busaidi rulers had grabbed assets for their own aggrandizement, enriching themselves and doling out "bribes" to those they hoped to influence or sway. The sultanate had no bureaucracy, code of administration, or fixed offices, let alone courts, barracks, police, or municipal services. By dismissing Omani rule as degenerate and despotic, British authorities sought to create a sharp contrast with the more enlightened order they claimed to represent.

Indeed, from the earliest days of the colonial protectorate, British officials argued that they had successfully worked to create a system of governance where none previously existed, revolutionizing the sultanate

from the ground up in the short span of a few years. The consul general most often associated with this dramatic reorganization, the ambitious Sir Gerald Herbert Portal, may have summed it up best when he wrote that he sought nothing less than “to hammer some sort of cosmos out of the chaos previously existing in this country.”¹ In numerous dispatches back to the Foreign Office, the consul general outlined his efforts to infiltrate or insinuate British control into the farthest reaches of the sultanate, promising to institute a series of efficient, rational, and modernizing procedures. “There is a very great deal to be done here if this town is to be properly governed as it ought to be under our Protectorate: there are many crying abuses to be remedied, there are many corrupt practices to be abolished, & there are still more important reforms to be instituted,” he wrote. “We must proceed very quietly and gradually, & for that reason I have as yet made no sign, but am busying myself in trying to get to the bottom of things & to get all the lines of the whole mechanism into my hand.”² Nothing less than a totalizing and methodical restructuring would do, as “the whole Govt of this country has to be organized & created from the bottom to the top.”³

Portal’s comments have an oddly contemporary ring, with his emphasis on the quiet and gradual mastery of power and his insistence on the value of stealth and surreptitiousness. In some sense, he seems to steal a page from Foucault, anticipating recent shifts in discussions of colonial power. Once characterized by an emphasis on coherence, scholarly analyses of colonial rule have come to focus on far more inchoate and indeterminate processes. The state and its institutional forms have been displaced by colonial governmentality, treating European imperialism as a mode of power that was pervasive, systematic, and capillary in its reach (Burchell et al. 1991; Mitchell 1991; Pels 1997). Echoing Portal, a contemporary theorist like David Scott similarly portrays British colonial control as a decisive break or rupture with the past. And much like the consul general, he views colonialism in terms of subtle disciplinary techniques that were insinuated into the fabric of everyday life, insidious and imperceptible, altering conditions from within. “What interests me about the problem of colonialism in relation to the political forms of modernity,” writes Scott, “is the emergence at a moment in colonialism’s history of a form of power . . . which was concerned above all with disabling old forms of life by systematically breaking down their

conditions, and with constructing in their place new conditions so as to enable—indeed, so as to *oblige*—new forms of life to come into being” (1999, 26).

Disabling old forms, systematically breaking them down, creating novel conditions, and remaking consciousness: these are all common threads in Portal and Scott’s narratives of how colonial power worked to refashion indigenous worlds. How can we make sense of this unexpected convergence between the colonial consul general and a critic of colonialism writing a century later? Coming from such different vantage points—a modernist proponent of imperialism and a postmodernist theorist of power—why do they end up speaking much the same language? The common ground shared by these discourses points to a broader problem in the study of colonial rule and the state more generally. Treatments of colonial governmentality might seem to represent a real advance, innovative and insightful about the diffuse and subtle workings of power. The concept certainly draws our attention to the constitutive capacity of power, rather than the merely coercive. And it points to a much broader social terrain of contestation and conflict beyond the state, fitting in well with recent trends in social history, African studies, ethnography, and cultural analysis. But at the same time, it operates at a level of ahistorical abstraction that largely leaves the state behind, obscuring the critical difference between the aims of colonial governance and actualities on the ground.

A significant body of work has developed in recent years on colonial forms and processes of rule, but the colonial state itself has remained something of a mystery, its study curiously neglected (Berman 1997). There are important exceptions, of course, but by and large the state either has been left untheorized or simply taken for granted, “its unity and coherence assumed” (Cooper and Stoler 1997, 20). But states, like cities, are far more ambiguous entities than they might seem at first glance, and their impact on indigenous lives and spaces was much more uncertain than either modernist or poststructuralist accounts might seem to allow (Stoler 2009). While colonial regimes may have sought “systematically” to deconstruct and refashion indigenous worlds, were they indeed as successful as Portal or Scott seem to suggest? In what sense did they actually possess the ability to pervade and saturate social lives, “obliging” new forms of being into existence? Were they really

quite so canny and capable in practice? As Corrigan and Sayer warned some time ago, we should beware of taking “the state’s statements at face value” (1985, 6). Colonial regimes certainly *claimed* to possess the kind of systematic and rationalizing powers Scott outlines—and indeed these claims were an integral part of colonial power—but we cannot lose sight of the crucial difference between pretensions to rule and the reality thereof.

Despite holding divergent views on the impact and import of colonial rule, many scholars still seem to agree that at least at some level colonial rule *worked*: it altered the historical terrain, introduced new conditions, impacted consciousness, provoked resistance, and so forth. Even if particular regimes failed to achieve their rationalizing aims in specific instances, few doubt that states themselves were modernizing instruments, categorically different from the cultural worlds they sought to order and organize. Like Portal and Scott, these analysts take the instruments or agencies of power largely for granted, implicitly assuming that we already know fairly well what the state is and what it does: standing above or outside society, acting upon it in particular ways to achieve certain ends. In their view, states are removed from everyday life, the messy, disorganized, and difficult-to-describe forms of daily practice and habit that constitute much of social existence. And they operate through bureaucratic procedure, relying on techniques of abstraction, rationalization, and efficiency to remake cultural worlds in quintessentially modern ways.

In what follows, I advocate a different approach, treating the colonial state as an arena for ethnographic inquiry in its own right. I examine a detailed case of state formation—the establishment of the British protectorate in Zanzibar—in order to suggest new directions for analyzing colonial forms and processes of governance more generally. By regarding colonial rule itself as a form of cultural practice and process, I hope to show how sustained archival scrutiny of state claims can challenge conventional understandings, both modern and postmodern, of the state and its powers. Making use of the critical possibilities of historical anthropology, I argue that the rationality, regularity, and reach of colonial states have been vastly overrated. Colonial governance was far more inconsistent, incomplete, and incoherent than is commonly assumed.

Everyday Enterprises: Rethinking State Power and Practice

Long ago, Weber recognized that “sociologically speaking, the modern state is an enterprise (*Betrieb*) just like a factory: this exactly is its historical peculiarity” (1968, 3:1394). At an early stage, he warned about the risks of reifying the state, setting it outside or beyond other domains of social existence. It is precisely this insight that Corrigan and Sayer echo when they observe that “the repertoire of activities and institutions conventionally identified as ‘the State’ are cultural forms, and cultural forms, moreover, of particular centrality to bourgeois civilization” (1985, 3). As a mode of rule, the state is both historically produced and culturally conditioned, varying considerably across time and space. But if we can speak of something like the “culture of the state,” viewing institutions of rule as cultural objects to be explored, we need to recognize that states are also primary means of intervening in cultural life and regulating it. The state is deeply enmeshed in what might be called cultural projects, encouraging certain beliefs and practices while disallowing others (Steinmetz 1999; Cohn 1996; Thomas 1994). As endeavors in moral regulation and making order, states are always already intrinsically cultural in this dual sense.

Rather than reifying states, we need to approach and analyze them as cultural worlds akin to and enmeshed with other arenas of social practice and power. Above all, we must beware of regarding “the state” as a cohesive and singular thing. The state is less a site of agency than a more or less coordinated nexus of agents—different cultural actors seeking to exercise authority, influence others, and achieve certain visions. What states do, as Corrigan and Sayer remind us, “is *state*; the arcane rituals of a court of law, the formulae of royal assent to an Act of Parliament, visits of school inspectors, are all statements. . . . Indeed, in this sense, ‘the State’ never stops talking” (1985, 3). While the state might be voluble, it rarely speaks with a singular voice. It is less an instrument of power or tool of capital than a series of sites where diverse human subjects argue over and about what can and should be done.

Beyond question, states often seek to present themselves as unified and monolithic, but this is typically the public face of power. Behind the scenes, what we discover is a babble of tongues—contending views, conflicting claims, and competing accounts. Indeed, colonial archives

are remarkable less for the abundance of state projects to be found there than for the profusion of arguments surrounding policies and goals. By tracing in the archives the tangled course of initiatives, we can begin to construct a patient and careful archaeology of state efforts. (Archives, after all, are themselves artifacts of state construction, simultaneously products of and monuments to colonial governance.) In the bureaucratic paper trail lying behind most plans and programs we find little evidence of concentrated state power and coordination but numerous signs of prolonged struggles to achieve them, as plans were overtaken by endless debates, disagreements, and deferrals.

As Ann Laura Stoler suggests, there is much unexplored ethnographic material to be found in “drafts of proposals, in unrealized plans, in short-lived experiments, and in failed projects” (2002, 157). These archival materials are “historical negatives,” undeveloped or latent images that can reveal a great deal about state concerns and the colonial order of things. When interpreted in this way, these texts offer up novel views of colonial governments, allowing us to explore aspirations or anxieties of rule as much as “actual” activities. In the colonial context, as elsewhere, the reach of the state rested on its capacity to convince and seem compelling. And while outright violence and threats of force always informed colonial rule, statecraft hinged on far less tangible forms: the stuff of ideology, of imagination, of representation. State making and governance were not only cultural projects, but also exercises in cultural projection. Picking up on Weber’s view of the state as a “claim to legitimacy” (1948, 78) and Abrams’s discussion of it as an “ideological project” (1988, 76), John Comaroff argues that the colonial state “was always an aspiration, a work-in-progress, an intention, a phantasm-to-be-made-real. Rarely was it ever a fully actualized accomplishment” (1998, 341). Indeed, representation and other modes of state stagecraft seem to gain importance precisely in instances when colonial power was most tenuous or uncertain.

By focusing on the inchoate nature of colonial rule, we can begin to rethink the state as an unfolding practice or process of becoming, drawing attention to the gaps and inconsistencies of power across space and time. Colonial states, after all, were internally diverse if not divided. They were spatially diffuse as well—stretched out over large swaths of territory, straddling great distances between metropole and colony.

Elongation in space also translated into temporal lags and disjunctures, introducing complications that made it difficult to respond in any immediate or integrated fashion. Moreover, in external terms, local administrations found themselves compelled to address quite different audiences, speaking in divergent tongues. As Lonsdale and Berman (1979) showed three decades ago, colonial states were fundamentally shaped by contradictions not of their own making. On the one hand, any state that neglected to secure the conditions necessary for capital accumulation was cutting off its own economic lifeblood. But while working to attract capital and secure vital sources of revenue, colonial regimes also had to seek to achieve political legitimacy in the eyes of their indigenous subjects—and, in the African context, these competing demands were fraught with tension, as administrations struggled to manage conflicting imperatives.

These contradictions were manifest at a very early stage in Zanzibar, marking the protectorate from the very moment of its formal establishment in 1890. Indeed, “the colonial state” seems far too imposing a term for the handful of British officials sent out to the Indian Ocean periphery with ambiguous aims and divided responsibilities. Their territorial reach was unfixed, the nature and form of their rule uncertain; rather than exercise a singular will or intention, what officials did was argue over policy and plans, both among themselves and with the Foreign Office. Instead of remaking Zanzibar from the ground up, officials were preoccupied with merely keeping their heads above water; ambitious schemes of social reform got sacrificed so that the regime could confront a complicated external agenda and serve its own needs—consolidating its rule, assiduously promoting trade, and containing European rivals. The protectorate’s ad hoc creation, contingent status, and hybrid form belie any unified notion of state power and go far in accounting for the incoherence of colonial policy that ensued.

Vowing to create an entire cosmos was one thing, but actually achieving this goal was quite something else. The assertions of Portal and others who followed in his wake convey much more about the self-understanding of British administrators than an accurate assessment of their impact on indigenous lives. No question, colonial officials insistently sought to portray the assumption of British control in Zanzibar in the most favorable light, drawing sharp contrasts with the prior sultan-

ate. The cultural terms they selected tended to emphasize the rational, reformist, and far-reaching character of British rule, seeking to justify and legitimate colonial expropriation by treating it as a philanthropic enterprise. These representations were part and parcel of the ideological apparatus of rule, framed by the symbolic oppositions that informed the colonial imaginary in the late nineteenth century: civilized versus savage, rule-governed versus despotic, rational versus irrational, modern versus traditional. “State formation,” as Fernando Coronil reminds us, “is part of a global project of modernity that claims for itself a singular universality, rationality, and morality” (1997, 17). But in fact the British colonial regime did not make a clean break with its Omani predecessor, and in many respects the differences between the protectorate and the sultanate were far less than officials cared to allow.

British colonialism in Zanzibar did not emerge as a result of a long-term strategic plan conceived and carried out with the goal of extending imperial hegemony into new territorial domains. Within the metropole there was little popular or official consensus on the desirability of colonial ventures, and there was considerable debate about potential risks and costs. Zanzibar’s internal affairs were largely incidental to the metropolitan government, which was more concerned with guaranteeing its access to the sources of the Nile and protecting its hold over the sea routes to India. Finding their hands forced by an aggressive German presence on the mainland, the British backed into the establishment of a protectorate, less concerned with possessing Zanzibar for its own sake than making sure no one else could. When the protectorate was declared in 1890, none of the parties to the accord had the slightest notion of what it might entail in practical terms. The substantive details were left to be determined later, as metropolitan “politicians and officials had no clear idea of any positive policies to be pursued in Zanzibar” (Flint 1965, 641).

As protectorate officials labored to cobble together a new administration in the early years, formulating plans and policies on the fly, they were torn between competing impulses. As a political form, the protectorate was ushered in under the sign of stability. The British promised that they would respect the status quo, maintaining the sultan in power, defending his dominions, and not interfering in domestic affairs. These pledges—which were frequently and flagrantly violated whenever

it served British interests—were necessary to smooth the way for the accord, mollifying the sultan and local elites. The British also vowed to their competitors in the region, especially Germany, that nothing would change, promising to protect their commercial interests and to respect the foreign treaty rights (especially extraterritoriality) these countries had won from previous sultans. A hands-off approach also served the interests of important domestic constituencies, especially the Foreign Office and Treasury. As local officials recognized, metropolitan authorities cared little about Zanzibar except that it remain quiescent; what they sought was a cut-rate and low-maintenance form of colonialism (Lyne 1936, 208).

A *laissez-faire* approach, however, could only go so far. Throughout Africa, British colonialism in the late nineteenth century was predicated on notions of European superiority, ranging from cultural prejudice to chauvinism and outright racism. By attacking the sultan as despotic and portraying Arab rule as degenerate, the British portrayed themselves as representing a higher form of civilization, which meant that they could not just sit back and do nothing after seizing the reins of control. At the very least, an ideological commitment to free labor and humanitarian pressures against the continuance of slavery would dictate some form of intervention in the economic and social fabric of the sultanate. Local colonial officials also sought to avoid the appearance of inactivity or inertia, pointing to “reforms” or “improvements” in order to justify their presence to Foreign Office superiors. Take Portal, for example, who arrived in Zanzibar in August 1891 charged with the task of making the protectorate a “reality.” Almost from the moment of his arrival, he lamented the existing state of affairs, charging that “no progress or even attempt at progress had been made since [Zanzibar] became our protectorate.”⁴ The new British consul general claimed to discern a marked decline since he had last been in Zanzibar two years earlier, describing matters as a “satire on the assumption of the English Protectorate” (quoted in Hollingsworth 1953, 58). In letters to the Foreign Office he complained about a “general deterioration,” writing that “the town was dirtier than ever, the streets utterly dark at night, Robberies occurring daily, & Europeans being knocked about.”⁵

By highlighting conditions of instability and insecurity, Portal may well have been seeking to justify his repeated requests for additional

resources and staff.⁶ But more important he was also laying the ground-work for a more aggressive and interventionist British policy. Portraying the sultan's regime as irregular and corrupt served to undermine an opponent while simultaneously casting British rule in the most favorable ideological light—as impartial, evenhanded, and orderly. As Timothy Mitchell (2002) has argued, Western colonialism often represented itself as universal, the embodiment of uniform rules and general laws. “Local” regimes in this sense were necessarily constructed as exceptions to the (European) rule—arbitrary forms that had to be reshaped to accord with “civilized” norms and “fair” procedures. This ideology served to mask the specificity of European practices, while cloaking particular acts of colonial expropriation and exploitation in the guise of rationality and regularity.

Of Accounts and Authority: Assaulting “Arab Despotism”

From the very beginning, the new consul general believed that the sultanate had to be broken down and fundamentally reconstructed. In this respect, Portal, like other officials engaged in the formation of the protectorate, had no doubt that British political practices were the measure and model of progress—standards of advancement and civility that were vital and valid everywhere. From this Eurocentric perspective, the problem with the sultan's rule was that it was degenerate, not simply different. Indeed, the British resolutely refused to acknowledge the historical specificity and cultural distinctiveness of political organization in Zanzibar. Portal was perturbed above all by what he saw as the personalized and irregular nature of the sultan's power, describing it in classic Orientalist fashion as another instance of “Arab despotism”:

I am sure that hardly anyone in the F.O. [Foreign Office] or out of it realize what a thoroughly barbarous & iniquitous style of Govt this is. There are no ministers, there is no distribution of authority nor of responsibility, the Sultan is everything. He settles everything, from the issue of a decree affecting 100,000 persons to the punishment of a slave with 20 strokes of a stick for stealing a Rupee. He sends every now & again to the Custom House & demands every farthing of money that may be lying there, & he renders no account of it to anyone. No one knows whether he has £100,000 in sacks in his palace, or whether he has nothing. No one can tell what is his yearly income, nor his expenditure.⁷

This is a deeply ideological account of power relations under the sultanate, erasing much of the subtlety and significance of a far-flung political and economic order. As we saw in the previous chapter, the sultan occupied the position of first among equals and ruled through a mixture of consultation, co-optation, and the cultivation of allies and clients. State wealth, resources, and offices were central to his ability to manage a dynamic and flexible system premised on clear notions of reciprocal (if unequal) obligations, rights, and entitlements (Pouwels 1987; Bennett 1986). But British officials had little interest or ability to grasp the negotiated political logic of the system they had long worked to undermine. Rather than understanding the sultanate on its own terms, Portal dismissed it out of hand as barbaric, lacking the bureaucratic organization, clear division of powers, and regular accounting procedures to be expected of any modern state. In his estimation the entire government hardly merited the name; indeed, as he stated to Lord Salisbury, the sultanate was solely dedicated to “encourage and facilitate robbery, extortion, corruption, and iniquity of every description” (quoted in Hollingsworth 1953, 61).

To establish the protectorate, the consul general’s first goal was to gain an overall comprehension of the financial affairs of the sultan, motivated by the belief that “all economies, reforms of administration, and improvements will be absolutely useless if the profits are all to be paid in to the Sultan.”⁸ Only by seizing hold of the purse strings would Portal be able to exercise some sort of control, inserting himself as the bureaucratic power behind the throne. Seeking to undermine the old basis of politics and patronage, he wanted to introduce a new distinction between the public domain of the state and the private affairs of the sultan:

I have come to the conclusion that it is useless to go on tinkering in this place any longer. We must have some sort of settled & almost constitutional Govt. There must be division of responsibility & different people in charge of different depts. of Govt. It is useless to contrive means for increasing the revenue of the country if every additional dollar we collect goes into sacks under the palace. Seyyid Ali of his own accord will never spend a farthing for the good of his town, country or people. The Sultan must therefore be given a Civil List, a fixed allowance for his own private & household expenses; a regular Budget must be made year by year & be unchangeable except by consent of the English Consul General.⁹

Budget, allowance, civil list: such was Portal's prescription for a "proper" administration. An "almost" constitutional government would suit colonial purposes admirably, given that its strictures could hem in the sultan without constraining the consul general himself. In one stroke Portal sought to reduce the sultan to a ceremonial monarch while appropriating most of his income and assets for British purposes. Whereas all revenues formerly accrued to the sultan, these would now flow to the protectorate. The state coffers would be reconceptualized as an official treasury, held by the British agent and consul general. From this fund, government expenses would be paid in accordance with an annual budget. The diminished power of the sultan was indicated by the way in which he could now be said to possess a private persona, with personal and domestic affairs that merited an allowance in addition to official compensation. All the rest of his functions and prerogatives would be taken over by the British, constituted as guardians over a new "public" realm.

Portal believed that palace elites would "fight like wildcats" against the civil list, alleging that "every change, every reform, every improvement will have to be forced down the throats of the Sultan and his entourage: they will help in absolutely nothing; they will oppose everything, & even after consenting they will lose no opportunity of creating difficulties, impediments, intrigues, treachery, & even of inciting the active hostility of others."¹⁰ While initially resistant, the sultan had little choice but to eventually accede to these demands.¹¹ As James Hevia (2003) has shown in the context of China, the rule of law and violence were not opposed but complementary tactics in the British colonial arsenal, as accords and warfare were simply alternative means of forcing compliance—a thesis amply supported by the long history of agreements forced down the throats of Zanzibar's sultans in the nineteenth century.¹² The sultan ultimately was compelled to give up more than two-thirds of his revenue and accept a civil list amounting to some 250,000 rupees a year, to which was added some 65,000 rupees from his "private" income, mostly profits from plantations and house properties in the city. All the rest of the sultanate's revenues were diverted into the British-controlled treasury to fund the costs of an expansive colonial administration (Hollingsworth 1953; Pouwels 1987).

In the end, Portal had managed to make the sultan effectively agree to pay for his own dispossession. But was this top-down reorganization

really as revolutionary as he claimed? As he crowed to Salisbury in the Foreign Office, “The changes which have been effected here during the last few weeks have been very rapid, and I hope, complete. The primitive old Arab despotism with its retrogressive policy, its patriarchal cunning, & its picturesque but scarcely veiled robbery & corruption, is dead.”¹³ But Portal here was a bit premature: his “reforms” fell far short of a new colonial enframing (Mitchell 1991), governmentality, or state legibility and simplification (J. Scott 1998). Rather than reconstituting an entire apparatus and radically reshaping basic conditions of existence, all the consul general managed to do was to substitute his oversight for that of the sultan. Instead of a total departure, the protectorate was in reality little more than a graft or parasitic growth upon the sultanate itself, a clumsy mechanism constructed on the back of existing political forms.

Protection and the Logic of the Graft: Ruling Contradictions

In working to give shape to new administrative modes, the British were expedient rather than farsighted. Instead of rationalizing and regularizing matters, the formal imposition of colonial rule in Zanzibar unleashed a series of contradictions that subsequent administrators long struggled to contain. The most serious constraint they faced, of course, was the fact that they could not simply wipe the slate clean and start out from scratch. The protectorate form and its ideological successor, indirect rule, were largely developed out of the British experience in India (especially with regard to the princely states) following the rebellion of 1857. As modes of rule, they represented awkward attempts to mediate some of the central inconsistencies inherent in colonialism, especially the recurrent tension between the interventionist impulse of the “civilizing mission” and the need for economy and maintaining a stable social order. Early on, Portal advocated abolishing the sultanate and making Zanzibar a crown colony, but the Foreign Office quickly rejected this proposal. More than anything else, Lord Salisbury was worried about the geopolitical implications of such a move in the broader empire. Zanzibar, he observed,

is a native, non-Christian territory, ruled by a native ruler under the protection of the English Govt. It belongs therefore to a class—a class which

is very influential, very numerous in H.M. Indian Empire. The terror and the bugbear of all these Indian princes is the possibility of annexation. They dread the danger of being swallowed up and their territories being converted into British territory. Five and thirty years ago that dread drove some of them into mutiny, and ever since the necessity of avoiding any step that would suggest this terror to their minds has been a cardinal principle of Indian polity.¹⁴

The need for imperial order and stability meant that the interests of “native rulers” had to be outwardly respected. The sultanate in Zanzibar could not be abolished outright without provoking the threat of an uprising in India or elsewhere—an early version of domino theory, where events in one place could have unexpected and far-reaching consequences elsewhere. Upholding the sultanate, however, meant the introduction of a complicated and hybrid form of rule, producing a government that ultimately proved to be unwieldy and inefficient. As a British missionary summarized the complications this introduced,

The complexity of our Eastern Protectorates lies in the presence of the Mohammedan Power. The Arabs are but a small portion of the population, yet it is through their machinery that we exercise control in Zanzibar and Pemba. . . . The strange anomaly is therefore presented, of a strong democratic Power, accustomed to legislate through representative institutions, placing itself in intimate relationship with an antique despotism that was formerly a tyranny. . . . It is not easy, logically, to defend our position. . . . The Sultan signs a decree, the Englishman guides the hand. A Mohammedan judge pronounces a verdict, the Englishman predicates the decision. (Newman 1898, 88–89)

Ostensibly the British had no internal authority or power in Zanzibar, and all decrees had to be issued by the sultan, signed under his name. The British had to appear as if they were simply advising the “native ruler” or serving as officials in his employ. To this end, Portal “convinced” the sultan to appoint English officers to key positions. For instance, Seyyid Ali was compelled to “offer” General Lloyd Mathews the post of first minister, while a handful of other Europeans were installed in charge of the sultan’s police, customs and port, treasury, and public works. These officials, while paid by the sultan, could only be removed by the consul general and did nothing without first clearing it with him. “Although these officers draw their pay from Zbar revenues,”



12. Sultan Seyyid Hamed bin Thuwain (1893–1896) and his court, with colonial officers “appointed” to the sultanate. Seated at right is First Minister Lloyd Mathews. Zanzibar National Archives.

Portal observed, “they are practically serving H.M. Govt, taking their orders on every detail, great and small, from myself, & working in an English Protectorate.”¹⁵ The sultan’s government was set up as a kind of Potemkin village, with Portal being the real power behind the throne, calling all the shots, as he frankly described it in a letter to Anderson: “In your letter you say that you hope that before long I shall be practically ruler of Zanzibar with a puppet sultan. I hope so too, and we have very nearly arrived at the point already. But my puppet is not yet quite well trained; he sometimes still shows an inclination to throw his legs and arms about without waiting for the string to be pulled.”¹⁶

British officials consistently represented the protectorate as a constitutional advance based on a more rational and just separation of powers. Yet formal designations of “Treasury” and “Executive” departments were little more than fancy names, masking the ad hoc dominion of a few Europeans overseeing small numbers of Goan and Parsi clerks. The nominal organization of the sultan’s government into separate depart-

ments was intended to create the appearance of bureaucratic order. The personal sway of the sultan was to be replaced by a modern administrative “system,” at least in theory. Actual practice, however, was rather different. R. N. Lyne, who arrived in Zanzibar in 1896 to be the first head of agriculture, serving under First Minister Mathews, described his boss as having a “patriarchal disposition.” The British officials working for Mathews, he continued, “regarded themselves as his personal staff” (1936, 209). Or as a later colonial officer phrased it, the protectorate was run as a “family affair with Mathews conducting the daily business like an Arab patriarch ruling his household” (Hollingsworth 1953, 171). The personalized, informal, and ad hoc character of administration was necessitated by chronic shortages in personnel, which “seemed strangely inadequate” to the task at hand, as Portal’s successor, Rennell Rodd, observed (1922, 293).

One of the most marked features of the early protectorate was the large gap between ambitious proposals for rule and the colonial administration’s limited capacity to carry them out. Indeed, from the outset British consul generals were stretched quite thin, confronting a complex array of duties. Portal, for example, was supreme British authority in the region, with responsibility for all diplomatic, commercial, and consular affairs. This meant he had to take charge of the British community, including British Indian subjects—mediating disputes, concluding the estates of those who died, prosecuting and hearing cases against Indians, and so forth. He was also the Foreign Office’s chief representative in the region, and he had to manage diplomatic relations with the Germans and Portuguese on the mainland as well as take on all political work relating to the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) along the coast. As if this was not enough, he was also the *de facto* sultan of Zanzibar, conducting foreign affairs and overseeing all aspects of internal rule.

To stay on top of these divergent agendas, Portal possessed a barebones staff, many of whom he regarded as incompetent. The protectorate was in reality a ramshackle affair, and Portal was forever complaining to his superiors about the inadequacy of personnel, trying to beg, borrow, or steal more officers (preferably “gentlemen”), and pleading exhaustion: “I can’t get on like this without a constant danger of a breakdown.”¹⁷ While his staff was never sufficient to begin with, a good number of of-

ficers could be absent at any one point in time. Zanzibar at this stage had no high court, continuing to refer all such cases to Bombay. When capital crimes or other serious offenses occurred, legal proceedings would shift to India, with many officers being called away to testify. The resolution of a single murder case in 1891 required a majority of the European officers to depart for Bombay, including a junior consul, the consular doctor, the chief of the sultan's police, the head of customs, and a policeman, leaving Portal to protest: "As you may imagine this unhinges the whole administration, besides leaving me fairly on my back with no staff but Churchill & nobody even to give us pills and pick-me-ups."¹⁸ Nor did the situation soon change. As he complained to his wife in 1892,

My own darling, oh dear oh dear I think these people will end by very soon driving me into a lunatic asylum. . . You remember what the hustle and worry used to be sometimes: lately it has been worse than ever and I have no one to help. Cave is honeymooning, Salmon has gone away with his wife—who is seriously ill—to England, Smith is up country making a frontier, and Robertson, the only man who had brains in the Zanzibar Government has gone home, having suddenly lost the sight of one eye. I have to look over every detail both of this office—which is more than enough—and of the whole Zanzibar Govt—and the combination is impossible.¹⁹

Portal's regime was premised on the idea that it embodied the ruling forms of a higher civilization, replacing personal despotism with the rule of law. In actuality, his practice flatly contradicted this assertion, as he in effect became a new kind of sultan, centralizing authority in his own hands and involving himself personally in matters down to an absurd level of detail. Early on in his tenure, Portal had decreed summarily that householders in the town must put lights on their dwellings to enhance security and surveillance capacities at night. Suspicious that his orders were being disobeyed, Portal prowled about the town at night, knocking down the doors of miscreants, conceptualizing himself as a sultan of old: "I go round occasionally at midnight, like Haroun al-Raschid, & on the first occasion roused up dozens of sleeping inhabitants who like the foolish virgins, had not got their lamps, and next day we fixed them all. Now they are more careful."²⁰

If being the power behind the protectorate gave Portal the opportunity to fancy himself a bureaucratic potentate, much of everyday life

remained beyond his reach. While he could seize the sultan's regime and rework it from the top down, his capacity to shape a broad social landscape remained much more limited. In an 1892 letter asking for missionary assistance in the suppression of alcohol sales to natives, he himself seemed to explicitly acknowledge this fact. A decree against this commerce had been issued, but the sale and consumption of spirits continued, and Portal was unable to stop it: "It is however one thing to issue orders, decrees etc. of this sort, & quite another matter to carry them out through the medium of my half-dozen English officials, & the native Zanzibar police."²¹

Colonialism on the Cheap: Economy and Politics in Conflict

If the protectorate was personalized, irregular, and ad hoc, its incapacity did not result from simple incompetence. The difficulties experienced by administrators had a decidedly more structural source. Contradictory aims drove the British to assume control of Zanzibar, and this historical process in turn produced a set of unanticipated consequences that restricted the scope and reach of subsequent officials. In particular, a disjuncture between economic dictates and political demands strongly marked the course of colonialism on the East African coast. To be effective, colonial rule had to strive for legitimacy at home and abroad, presenting itself as more than force and fraud. At the very least this legitimation involved being able to gesture toward innovations and improvements—or the future possibility thereof. To show the alleged benefits of European rule, nascent colonial regimes needed to establish the rudiments of a state, providing at a minimum basic security and social order. To do otherwise would be to threaten the stability of colonial control, raising costs and undermining future economic prospects. State-building exercises, however, were expensive affairs, and therein lay the problem: how could colonial states underwrite the costs of their own creation?

From the late nineteenth century on, officials faced a common set of dilemmas across much of British colonial Africa, and Zanzibar was no exception. Private investment, of course, was one potential source to fund colonial expansion. Chartered companies had a long career in the British Empire, but their moment seemed to have largely passed. They

were always speculative ventures with uncertain returns, and indeed soon after the protectorate came into being, the Imperial British East Africa Company summarily collapsed because of mismanagement and lack of capital, dragging the British government into a commitment to take over what is now Kenya and Uganda. Throughout the continent, private funds lagged well behind the hopes of imperial apologists.

Outside South Africa, as Cain and Hopkins (1993b) make clear, City financiers mostly avoided investing in the continent, seeing few opportunities for viable returns. Manufacturing interests hardly took up the slack, and in general private capital lagged well behind in its impact. Public sources of funding might have filled the gap, but this flew in the face of official British policy. In the metropole, domestic constituencies were rarely in agreement about the value or utility of British colonial possessions, and the government was reluctant to pay for colonialism with public funds. Colonial policy in Africa followed a course already established by the Treasury, which imposed an orthodoxy of free trade, sound money, and self-sufficiency, following the golden rule enunciated by Earl Grey in 1852: "The surest test for the soundness of measures for the improvement of an uncivilized people is that they should be self-sufficing." As a result, local colonial regimes were consigned to a perpetual search for sources of revenue, trying to strike a precarious balance between economic need and political demands:

The fundamental and persistent difficulty faced by colonial officials in tropical Africa was how to generate taxable resources in territories which were generally poor and rarely came with a ready-made tax base. The fact that revenue was essential to pay for the colonial administration, the largest single item of expenditure, no doubt concentrated the minds and ordered the priorities of successive generations of officials. But it also has to be remembered that the colonial governors were engaged in a large state-building exercise involving long-term capital investment. To make the sovereignty they had acquired effective, the colonial authorities were obliged to build an infrastructure as well as to extend the machinery of state. An undertaking of this magnitude depended on foreign loans, and these could be raised only if revenues were available for debt-service and if investors were confident that there would be no wavering over repayment. The link between revenues and borrowing-power prompted the colonial authorities to take a keen interest in promoting exports because overseas trade was the most promising source of revenue and could be

tapped efficiently by means of tariffs. The poorer colonies were, by definition, those which failed to generate a sizeable taxable trade. There, colonial rule laboured on the harder and more contentious task of levying direct taxes, and borrowing power was consequently severely constrained. (Cain and Hopkins 1993b, 204–205)

It is in this light that we can begin to grasp the full significance of Portal's budgetary and bureaucratic assault. By seizing most of the sultan's assets and revenues, he found a way to extend British control and the means to fund this expansion. The perverse ingenuity of British "protection" lay in making the sultan pay for his own domination. Consular officers, including Portal, were of course paid by the British treasury as servants of Her Majesty's Government. The "protectorate" administration, however, including all English officials the sultan was forced to appoint to "his" government (and the police, military, and other forces through which they ruled) were compensated out of Zanzibar's coffers. This stratagem enabled the consul general to put together the rudiments of an administration while conforming to the requirements of a cut-rate, low-cost form of colonial rule.

Portal himself touted this economy of rule as one of his main accomplishments. "I wish, with some self-complacency, to point out that although in 2½ months we have revolutionized this country till it hardly knows itself," he wrote to the Foreign Office, "yet that I have not spent in so doing a brass farthing of English money, from S.S., or in presents or any other way whatever." In the same letter, he laid out his plans for the future, hoping to achieve a perfect union between political and economic domains. "I have now, I hope, laid solid foundations for a better system of Govt, & have even completed the structure as far as the ground floor. . . . But I am really aiming at a good deal more than a philanthropic improvement of administration—even though I say that this too is incumbent on us for the sake of our reputation. I believe that if very carefully managed and administered, Zanzibar may turn out to be a property of considerable value."²² But careful management was something difficult to achieve in the protectorate, and this harmony of political economy proved illusory. While Portal had bought some time with his reforms, the need for additional sources of revenue proved to be a persistent problem.

Much like colonial adventurers and speculators before him, Portal was quite sanguine about the possibilities for future profits in East Africa. “Zanzibar may be & with ordinary care will be a rich town and island,” he declared to Lord Salisbury. “Of the natural value or innate resource of Zbar I venture to think that I have proved there can be no doubt.”²³ At times the exaggerated nature of these assertions was nothing less than astonishing. Early on, for instance, he wagered that he could whip the country into shape in the space of a few short months, following this up with the boast that he could double the protectorate’s income by relying just on “honesty and a few hitherto neglected sources of revenue.”²⁴

Portal was to be sorely disappointed in these hopes, but he kept up his barrage of proposals, insisting that he could transform Zanzibar into the “East African Hong Kong.”²⁵ Portal’s plans for commercial development hinged upon three interlinked strategies with far-reaching internal and external implications. He wished to remake Zanzibar into a prosperous agricultural colony, a great port of transshipment, and the central market for all of East Africa. Despite his frequent predictions of the ease with which this could be accomplished, success in these projects eluded him, confounded by problems that would long haunt the colonial regime. The grandeur of his ambitions led him to believe he could readily surmount the many structural obstacles that stood in the way, not the least of which were the contradictions created by the imposition of the protectorate itself.

Gaining suzerainty over Zanzibar was one thing, making it pay another. The mode and form by which Britain seized hold of Zanzibar rendered it a much less valuable and economically viable “property” than before. That is, the protectorate accord paved the way for British colonialism, but it also awarded the majority of the sultan’s dominions to the Germans, cutting Zanzibar off from its huge hinterland markets and compromising its role as a commercial entrepôt and nexus of transshipment. Since the 1830s, Zanzibar’s wealth had been based on a plantation sector dominated by Arabs and commercial trade led by prominent Indian merchants. Clove production had long been subject to cycles of boom and bust, and these periodic shifts masked signs of more long-term structural decline. By the end of the century, the commercial trade with the coast and hinterland was by far the most expansive and

dynamic segment of the economy, overtaking agriculture in importance (Sheriff 1995; Gilbert 2004).

On Zanzibar this fact was reflected in the increasing amount of Arab properties in town being transferred to Indian ownership and in the high levels of mortgage debt incurred by plantation owners. Indians had little incentive to take over these plantations because they were legally forbidden to own slaves; rather than foreclose, they tended to maintain Arab “owners” in place almost as resident managers or overseers, seizing portions of the annual crop as payment for debt—a structural problem that was to continue long into the colonial period. In essence the protectorate exacerbated these long-term trends by weakening the most vital economic sector. And worse than merely cutting off access to wider markets, the agreement served to establish the Germans on the coast, providing rivals with the base they needed to develop into vigorous commercial competitors. By fostering Dar es Salaam and other ports, the Germans might manage to steal away Zanzibar’s entrepôt role, rendering British “holdings” much less valuable. With its dominion reduced to two islands, Zanzibar might consist of little else besides a declining plantation economy and a small internal market.

A Hazardous Experiment: The Free Port

Portal understood the nature of the dilemma, outlining the stakes involved in late 1891: “I consider, and know that now is the critical time for Zanzibar. Now & the next few months are to decide whether Zanzibar is to be a valuable possession—the most thriving commercial center of East Africa—or whether it is to be only a small Arab clove-growing island.”²⁶ He had little room for maneuver, being powerless to overturn the protectorate accord, and he turned to one of the few options available, using assiduous promotion to stimulate commerce. Many of his letters were devoted to public relations, trying to attract capital and private firms to the islands. He offered glowing assessments of the future prospects, even in cases where the recipient had good cause for doubt. For example, Portal wrote to the chief manager of a London bank who wanted to abandon operations in Zanzibar. The consul general sought to persuade the firm to stay, arguing that any retreat at that point would

be premature—despite the fact that business was slow and many of the bank’s resident staff had died within a matter of months:

I venture to submit to you that either at the present moment or in the immediate future Zanzibar will offer an opening for a good deal of banking & like business. The country is just now in a transition state, it has not yet felt any of the benefits of the new English Protectorate, and the merchants are generally rather nervous about the possible establishment of a German Port on the mainland as the chief center of East African trade. I feel fairly certain that this state of things will soon pass away, and that under a strong administration Zanzibar will not only hold its own as the chief commercial centre, but that its prosperity will increase largely and rapidly.²⁷

Portal was largely mistaken in this last assumption, as there was not much he could do in the economic sphere. Since Germany had taken over the *mrima* coast in January 1891, Indian commercial firms on Zanzibar were compelled to pay double duty on transshipment goods—once on the islands, then again on the mainland. If this continued, Portal feared that the Indians and others would forsake Zanzibar and shift their headquarters to the German sphere, lowering their costs by avoiding the double duty. To prevent this setback and secure the allegiance of merchant interests to Zanzibar, he proposed to abolish import duties and make Zanzibar a free port. Given the competitive threat, he had little choice in the matter, but this “solution” posed new difficulties insofar as it would sharply curtail protectorate revenues. If the free port were instituted, the regime would be largely dependent on the 25 percent export duty on cloves (which fell disproportionately on the plantation sector), together with some interest income and rent from the IBEAC.

New sources of revenue were urgently required, but the consul general believed that the free port could not wait until he found a means to garner them. “Unfortunately, the future value of Zanzibar depends I think on prompt or even rapid action now,” he stated.²⁸ Unless the British moved quickly to respond to the new competitive realities thrust on them by the Germans, Zanzibar would continue to lose value. In February 1892 the free port was declared, and Portal praised the ceremony as an “immense success.” Here, state success seemed to hinge on carrying off a convincing show as much as anything else. Policy and performance were inextricably intertwined:

The actual pageant was imposing & calculated to impress the oriental mind—a point which I considered of some importance. But what is of more importance is that I see evident signs of this excitement & change having roused the mercantile community from the lethargy which, as I have said in dispatches, I considered one of the greatest dangers to the future of Zbar. At the present moment the whole community, of every nationality, is enthusiastic, & I hope that this enthusiasm added to rather exaggerated hopes of immediate & rapid progress, has taken practical form in the transmission of largely increased orders of goods from Bombay, Europe & America.²⁹

Exaggerated hopes, indeed. The mere ceremonial dedication of the free port, he thought, could advance him halfway toward his goal of making Zanzibar a great central market and node of transshipment. To Anderson, he similarly enthused about the picaresque and imposing official display, praising himself for “taking the plunge” while also admitting to a certain anxiety: “Now it remains to be seen whether I am right in saying that we can well afford this step.”³⁰ In the end, however, Portal’s hopes for a magical increase in commodity flows did not materialize and the temporary surplus generated by squeezing the sultan only brought a brief respite. Despite Portal’s glowing predictions for the Free Port measure, his successor, Rennell Rodd, recognized the scheme for what it truly was: “a rather hazardous experiment” forced on the British by the “menace of competition” from German East Africa (1922, 288). The free port declaration failed to arrest the decline of the transshipment sector brought on by European colonialism, and the experiment was abruptly terminated in 1899. The search for sources of revenue, however, continued long into the future.

Foreign Treaties and Fiscal Woes

There was a further structural constraint that only exacerbated matters: the foreign treaties, which Portal viewed as the main source of the financial difficulties faced by the regime.³¹ These included all the pacts that the foreign powers—chiefly the United States, Portugal, France, and Germany—had extracted from the sultan over the course of the nineteenth century and which Britain had pledged to uphold when establishing the protectorate. The accords included most-favored-nation clauses granting trading rights and exemption from payment of duties,

with the exception of the 5 percent tax on all imported goods (which the free port deal reduced to nothing). They also extended to the foreign powers rights of extraterritoriality, meaning that foreign nationals were subject only to the jurisdiction of their consuls, and that their persons, dwellings, and businesses were outside the sultan's control.

While the British agent and consul general could coerce the sultan, Europeans in the isles remained beyond the reach of his authority. Initially, Portal was vexed at the way that this undermined his authority, making him appear weak to his Arab adversaries. "It is not only exasperating but greatly increases the difficulties of the situation to have to pose before Sultan and Arabs as the representative of Power and authority, & then to find myself bound hand & foot by Treaties with Foreign Powers—Treaties which were made for the protection of Europeans from a barbarous Arab despotism, and which are now used as means to prevent the improvement of that very Govt."³² He conceded that the treaties had once served a purpose, but was irked that they now could be turned against him and used to thwart British aims: "These treaties, which were originally forced down the throats of former Sultans of Zanzibar for the protection of subjects of Christian powers from the exactions or oppressions of a barbarous Arab despotism, are now, under the new regime, capable of being used, and are indeed being freely utilized, by the Representatives of certain Foreign Powers as weapons directed against reform & development under the auspices of an English protectorate."³³

In actuality, the treaties were the only leverage the consuls possessed in their dealings with the British agent and consul general. They had no reason to cooperate in measures inimical to their interests or to give up established rights. And in many cases the consuls were simply acting on instructions from their home governments to deploy the treaties as a bargaining tactic to gain British compliance elsewhere—in Madagascar, Mozambique, and the German sphere on the mainland. With the Portuguese, the French, and especially the Germans, relations were both awkward and competitive, and Portal was fooling himself if he expected them to simply roll over and do his bidding. This is particularly true insofar as what Portal desired was their willing participation in his efforts to reduce them to bit players in the region economically and politically.

The obstacles posed by the treaties were both legal and fiscal in nature. All decrees issued by Portal through the sultan only applied to His Highness's "subjects" (principally Arabs and most Africans), while the consul general himself could enact regulations binding on English residents and British Indian subjects. Most Europeans and Americans, however, remained beyond his writ. Portal's early decree requiring property owners in town to pay to light their houses and sweep the street in front illustrates this nicely. Trying to save expenses, he opted against having the government pay for public services, instead using legal measures to compel private citizens to fund the enhanced security and sanitation he desired. This order was not binding on foreign nationals (who almost exclusively resided in the city), and Portal had to write to the foreign consuls asking for their cooperation in issuing similar regulations—but he had no means to enforce this request, and they were free to do as they pleased.

By ignoring the new regulations, Portal felt that Europeans threatened to make a mockery of the rule of law, undercutting white authority and provoking resentment among indigenes due to the unfair burdens they had to shoulder while other residents went scot-free. As he noted,

In the town itself, I have effected an immense improvement by making every Indian & every native & every Englishman put a good lamp over their doors, & keep their part of the street both clean & in good repair. If there are any hideous pools of mud now or rotting vegetation in the street, or dark houses at night, these are before the houses of Germans or other Europeans. This is very hard on the others, as this lighting & clearing order entails considerable expense on them, & presses heavily on the poorer ones. With a small municipal sliding-scale house tax on all alike, I could have the town well-lighted and cleaned, & a sanitary corps started like that in Cairo. The want of jurisdiction over foreigners becomes everyday more irksome, & more of a hindrance in all improvements and reforms.³⁴

This lack of compliance was hardly an isolated incident, as Europeans took advantage of the treaties to evade or eviscerate regulations whenever it suited them. Another prominent example was the prohibition against the sale of alcohol and arms to natives, which generated a tidy sum for those involved in the trade (including the Portuguese consul, who, the consul general alleged, made up for his low official salary by

making thousands out of his consular and judicial powers). As Portal groused, “At every step I have a fight, not against the Sultan or the Arabs, but against these foolish and narrow-minded Consuls.”³⁵ The ban against liquor was flouted to such a degree that Portal was reduced to asking the Foreign Office to lodge diplomatic protests to stop the sales, which he claimed were being “carried on with feverish activity by every conceivable sort of German and Portuguese out at elbows loafers.” In the same letter, Portal lamented the fact that foreigners continually frustrated his efforts to rationalize and regulate the port, which lay at the heart of his economic hopes: “I am most anxiously waiting for the result of negotiations with the European powers. At present we have no control over Foreign ships, they refuse to obey Captain Hardinge, they anchor where they choose, they disregard all regulations, and go when it pleases them, and there is no such thing as a port clearance. We have to keep up an extensive Harbour police and office, and lights, and get not a farthing in return.”³⁶

As this last passage reflects, the treaties presented considerable fiscal difficulties as well as legal and political ones. Portal was unable to impose any levies on the foreign powers, curtailing his ability to generate new sources of revenue through either taxes or user fees. He was well aware that this created a fiscal system that was both unequal and unjust, frankly admitting that current practice was highly unsatisfactory. As he stipulated in mid-1892:

House tax (5% on assessed rental) is urgently needed to enable us to make the streets decent, and to light the town, and help to pay the police. I am doing what is possible with the very limited means at my command, but it is terribly anxious work, and a desperate struggle to cut down expenses, and scramble for every rupee of revenue. Moreover the present system is very hard and unjust to the Arabs. These, with their Cloves and produce, support the whole edifice of the Govt., & the Foreign residents get all the benefit without contributing a farthing to the cost of administration.³⁷

Government revenues continued to depend largely upon the 25 percent export duty on produce, which fell almost exclusively upon Arab clove growers in the countryside. This amounted to a rural subsidy for the city, as the growers were paying the most and receiving the least in return: most of these revenues went to pay for administration and services in the

capital, benefiting wealthy merchants, Indians, and Europeans who were not contributing anything. But if Portal seemed to recognize the injustice, he did little to address the situation. Indeed, he met Arab requests for a reduction in duty with furious reprisals, seeking to humiliate them while privately conceding the rightness of their cause.³⁸

Portal struggled to find a means to make foreign residents and private firms pay for some of the privileges they enjoyed in the city, hoping to impose a 5 percent house tax on assessed rental value. But he lacked the administrative means to even begin an ambitious assessment survey, something that would only finally be achieved more than twenty years later. Even if he had been able to do so, the treaties still exempted Europeans from payment, and the consuls resisted his complicated legal maneuverings to use the Brussels Act and free zone provisions of the Congo Act to enforce a house tax by other means. Alternatively, Portal hoped to replace the clove duty with a land and house tax, brashly predicting that he would complete a total land assessment of the entire islands within a year. Floating ambitious proposals to appear as an inventive administrator was one thing, but actually fulfilling them was quite another. It would require many decades before this monumental assessment could be undertaken, despite repeated insistence throughout the colonial period on the necessity of surveying all land, demarcating property lines, and registering titles.

The problems remained, resisting the easy resolutions Portal brought up time and again. As late as October 1892, he continued to harp upon the same themes, wearily acknowledging in a letter to the new foreign secretary, Lord Rosebery, that “the whole fiscal position here is an absurd anomaly—we are bound by old Treaties made under totally different circumstances to protect the European against Arab despotism, under these treaties certain taxes are allowed, principally taxes on produce brought from a part of the Sultan’s dominions which has since passed out of his hands. Luckily for us, cloves [are] grown on the islands only; were it not for that we should be in the position of being debarred by Treaties from having any revenue at all!”³⁹

If the treaties could not be changed or subverted, Portal feared that Zanzibar indeed would be reduced to a small Arab clove-growing colony, compromising his plans for making it the dynamic and expansive center of a new transnational colonial economy. Anyone with the slightest ex-

perience of Zanzibar “could point to half a dozen reforms, enactments, measures which would be ‘expedient’ or ‘calculated to develop trade,’” he wrote to Masfen. “Yet it is by no means so easy to decide which of these reforms or enactments has the best chance of running the gauntlet of foreign Powers armed with their Treaties and exterritoriality.”⁴⁰ The heart of the dilemma was that without these “reforms,” Portal would be unable to generate the additional revenue he needed to stimulate trade.

A magical calculus, anticipating the kind of symbolic logic that sparked cargo cults in the Pacific decades later, motivated the British approach. The consul general believed that he could pave the way for new flows of commodities by investing in the port and new infrastructure. “All our energies should be devoted to increasing the facilities for navigation, to improvement of the harbour and its approaches, and, generally, to the assistance of the ingress and egress of goods at Zanzibar.”⁴¹ By smoothing the path for ships to arrive, he hoped to attract heightened levels of commerce, thus conjuring away the competition. As he declared to Salisbury, “If I can establish this place as not only a mere port of transshipment but also a great market, all idea of rivalry and opposition as regards Germans, Portuguese, or English coasts disappears at once.”⁴² But constrained by the treaties from raising other revenues and with the free port further diminishing income, Portal lacked the means to make the kind of productive investments he desired. Unable to extract fees or compliance, he refused to spend any money beyond the minimum required for safety to improve the port so long as the foreign consuls refused to waive their treaty rights. As Portal bickered with the consuls, insisting, “If ships don’t pay, the Zanzibar Govt cannot do anything,” bureaucratic infighting occupied his attention, and his plan for making Zanzibar the port of East Africa became increasingly remote.⁴³

Abolition, Labor Supply, and State Revenues

Long into the future administrators were forced to rely on a sole (and highly unpredictable) source of revenue: the export tax on produce, principally cloves, which fell disproportionately on Arab plantation owners who were already burdened by high levels of mortgage debt. This narrow base was threatened from yet another quarter: the ideological need to legitimate British rule by abolishing slavery. Fearing a loss of social



13. Colonial officials and crowds in the wake of the destruction wrought by the British bombing of the royal palace, August 1896. The ruins of the sultan's former palace are at left, with damage to the Beit el Ajaib (House of Wonders) at right. Zanzibar National Archives.

control, disruptions in labor supply, and reductions in vital revenue, British officials resisted going ahead with emancipation until 1897 and then tried to dampen its effect on a vital source of income.

In the end, it was hardly coincidental that the decree was imposed in the wake of a decisive show of force. Following the death of Sultan Seyyid Hamed in August 1896, the palace was seized by forces loyal to a royal claimant to the throne, Seyyid Khalid. When threats failed to dislodge them, British gun ships wreaked havoc on Khalid's troops, killing an estimated five hundred and destroying much of the royal complex by heavy naval bombardment. Marines occupied the city, as Khalid fled to the German embassy for refuge. Having crushed the resistance, and with a new, more compliant sultan in place, protectorate officials were confident that abolition could then proceed without undue risk.

Freeing the oppressed was the least of official British concerns—indeed, the issue was insistently framed in terms of how to formally end slavery while continuing to bind “freed” slaves to the land and their for-

mer masters. If authorities were no longer so concerned about provoking Arab hostility and resistance, they continued to fear that abolition might disrupt the labor supply, ruin clove harvests, send planters further into debt, and eventually bankrupt the government. With the West Indies example in mind, they asserted that granting freedom would curtail labor and social discipline, creating a shiftless population of ex-slaves who would desert the rural areas and flood into the city, forming a restive mass.⁴⁴

In consequence, the emancipation decree was crafted in the most restrictive way possible, establishing onerous conditions for slaves to win their liberty. They had to apply to district courts headed by Arabs or English officials, demonstrating proof of residence and viable means of self-support. Otherwise they would be subject to the penalties of new vagrancy laws. If they wished to remain on the land of their former masters, they would be compelled to pay rent (one of several conditions intended to force slaves into wage labor). The law exempted all concubines from consideration and granted masters compensation for freed slaves, which cost the government 500,000 rupees (£33,333) between 1897 and 1907. As Cooper (1980) and Fair (2001) have argued, the decree was created to benefit Arab slave owners as a social class, with numerous incentives for slaves to maintain their dependence on their masters or mistresses. Here again, officials on the ground found themselves constrained by contradictions that British colonialism had worked to shape. Rather than being all-powerful and pervasive, they possessed few options, finding their hands largely tied. For moral and ideological reasons, the British felt bound to abolish slavery. And yet freeing the slaves threatened the sole sector of the economy from which state revenues could reliably be extracted. It also risked provoking social unrest and instability, undermining Arab elites whom the British viewed as native rulers, a source of order and tradition. The conundrums colonial officials faced could not be readily resolved; in characteristic fashion, they were forced to muddle through, managing as best they could.

Bureaucratic Increase and Involution

Largely dependent upon clove exports to fund its operations, the administration failed to develop significant alternative sources of income

or diversify the economy. Revenues were unpredictable and left little margin for error. In good years, the plantations might produce a surplus for local investment, while poor harvests or falling prices necessitated heightened stringency and belt-tightening. This is precisely why Portal's successor, Rennell Rodd, so strongly objected when the Foreign Office summarily decided to use £200,000 of the sultan's funds to pay off British investors in the IBEAC; such "compensation," he stated, was "bitterly resented by us on the spot who knew how advantageously this capital might have been utilized for local development" (1922, 312). For his part, the consul general blamed the sultan and his court for causing economic constraints, arguing, "From the revenue of the islands, the main source of which is the clove duty, collected in kind, it was difficult to squeeze a little surplus when the Sultan's civil list and the salaries had been paid, to apply to general purposes" (295–96). Zanzibaris had rather different views, asserting that British officials themselves were the cause of bloated costs and straitened budgets. On the expense side, there were recurrent efforts to cut back the sultan's personal income and civil list, but savings here were outpaced by the growing cost of bureaucratic enlargement.

At its inception in 1891, only four European officials served in the protectorate administration; by 1912 this figure had jumped to thirty-four, and their disproportionate salaries were an increasing drain on government coffers. Initially the "sultan's government" consisted merely of Treasury, Customs, Military and Police, Public Works, and the Post Office. By World War I, however, the number of departments had grown to include Collectorate, Agriculture, Education, Electricity, Legal and Judicial, Veterinary Science and Public Health, and Hospitals and Medicine (Hollingsworth 1953, 191). Administrative extension was one form of "local development" that authorities were all too ready to provide for, and if this left little capital for "general purposes," other things would have to wait.

The steady growth in European staff and the burden of their salaries was a subject of frequent criticism by Arab plantation owners, who objected to the high taxes imposed on them as a result. Colonial officials responded by claiming that such growth was absolutely necessary in the interests of unspecified social improvements. Hollingsworth (who served in the Education Department from 1922 until 1944) adopted a typical position on this point, as he insisted, "No satisfactory advance



14. Colonial leisure: a day in the country. An early health officer (and later curator of the Peace Memorial Museum), Dr. A. H. Spurrier, is pictured at right. Zanzibar National Archives.

could have been made in that period in the development of various social services without the employment of an adequate number of European officials” (1953, 215). But while the formation of new departments created a bigger administration, “social services” did not advance to any significant degree.

The expansion of government did not entail enhanced services or heightened efficiency. Colonial administration was conducted in a desultory fashion in Zanzibar, leaving plenty of time for sporting life and leisure in the English club. Until 1907 the government was only open five hours a day, and there were twenty-nine public holidays—in addition to generous leaves and allowances for sick time. Rather than promoting services or social welfare, departments largely existed to serve the bureaucratic needs of colonial rule. Even the sole office with a clear connection to social welfare—Education—amply demonstrates this point. In 1907 the British proposed to create an education department as an

expedient to train “locals” (principally Arab male youth) in clerical and related work, so that they could replace Goans and other “foreigners” who held a “virtual monopoly” on civil service jobs. In 1908 a plan for the department was completed, and a number of schools were opened. The program was hampered, though, by the lack of teachers and low attendance. As late as 1913, the number of pupils being trained at the government schools was still only 348 (Hollingsworth 1953, 186, 201). Several decades would pass before the first school for females would even be attempted, and the government’s record in public education continued to be abysmal.

As to the quality of available personnel, many heads of departments were chosen for reasons of practical exigency rather than being selected for their particular expertise. The chief of Collectorate, for example, Luiz Antonio Andrade, entered the sultan’s service as a veterinary officer and commander of His Highness’s bodyguard. (Later he became district officer and then district commissioner.) Lloyd Mathews, of course, was just a lieutenant in the British navy when hired to lead the sultan’s troops in the 1870s. He received the honorific rank of general and subsequently was appointed first minister when the protectorate came into being. He had no head for figures, was a poor administrator, and seemed generally ill-suited for the job. He gained the post primarily because he was on the spot and was regarded as an “old hand,” someone familiar with “native custom” (Lyne 1936; Hollingsworth 1953). In Zanzibar, if an official stayed long enough in service without showing glaring signs of incompetence or immorality, his rise through the ranks would be guaranteed. In any case, with frequent (and long) leaves and periodic illnesses, the administration was often shorthanded; subordinates had to fill in for their superiors, or senior officers would simply double up on duties, trying to cover for those absent. In the middle to junior ranks, personnel shifted regularly, as individuals were let go or transferred elsewhere in the empire.

From the beginning of the protectorate, Portal emphasized how he sought to attract “gentlemen” to take up positions in Zanzibar, showing typical class bias. His field of choice was rather restricted, however, and he was often forced to make do with whatever candidate lay closest to hand. Long after his departure, the situation remained much the same. As Hollingsworth commented, the administration was still endeavor-

ing in 1906 “to attract a better type of man into the Service” (1953, 185). He lamented the fact that during the early protectorate “some of the Europeans appointed to the Zanzibar Government Service fell short of the high standard of integrity and efficiency set by the officers sent out to the Sultanate by the Foreign Office. Their conduct certainly adversely affected British prestige in the eyes of the local people” (213). In Hollingsworth’s view, “Europeans” caused problems in the protectorate government, not the British officials (including himself) sent out by the Foreign Office. Clearly the government was shaped by cleavages of class and national origin; there was a definite hierarchy between consular staff and those employed in the “sultan’s service.” The dual system worked to create a kind of symbolic distance and sense of privilege, allowing the more upper-class consular representatives (chosen from within Foreign Office ranks and paid by the British government) to lord it over their “local” counterparts.

The enlargement of administration created more difficulties than it resolved. In colonial Zanzibar, as elsewhere in Africa, there was an inverse relationship between state expansion and effectiveness, showing all the signs of what John Comaroff has defined as Minogue’s paradox: “While states in general have had a history of cumulative growth—in their institutional complexity and the range of their formal authority over the lives and property of citizens—their elaboration has been accompanied by a contrapuntal decrease in the efficacy of their control. . . . The more powerful they became, the more they monitored and managed the life-worlds of those over whom they ruled, the less effective they seem to have been, over the long run, in realizing their own objectives” (1998, 336–37). As the aims and ambitions of rule expanded, the scope of government grew, but so too did the complexity and scale of administrative challenges, and this was especially apparent with the state’s urban designs, as we shall see.

In Zanzibar, new bureaucratic departments were formed to carry out additional functions, extending colonial government into areas hitherto ignored. The gradual assumption of novel powers inevitably led to further demands and heightened expectations. The success of any one branch of administration came to depend increasingly on coordination with others, something that growth rendered all the more difficult. Bureaucratic offices could not justify their existence and cost unless they

produced “results,” identifying areas of concern and proposing courses of action. Yearly reports marked the progress made and outlined future plans. Such reports, of course, depended on empirical analysis of relevant data. And this, in turn, required the arduous and labor-intensive collection of basic information by means of censuses, surveys, maps, and other enumerative techniques. The growth in staff produced not least a proliferation of reports, raising more (and more significant) subjects of concern and responsibility. Bureaucratic increase readily fostered a perverse form of involution.

In this milieu, as Arjun Appadurai (1996, 117) has argued, “Statistics were generated in amounts that far defeated any unified bureaucratic purpose. . . . Numbers gradually became more importantly part of the illusion of bureaucratic control and a key to a colonial imaginary in which countable abstractions, of people and resources at every imaginable level and for every conceivable purpose, created the sense of a controllable indigenous reality.” The extension of the regime created new flows of information, “uncovering” problems previously unnoticed. Addressing such issues, however, was exactly what an inadequately funded and poorly coordinated collection of agencies was ill-suited to do. Performing this task required the kind of concerted focus, coordinated planning, and sophisticated cohesion that bureaucratic expansion made it difficult to achieve. The data generated by different offices was often contradictory and far outpaced the administration’s capacity to respond.

Moreover, until at least the mid-1920s, successive rounds of tinkering with administrative structures made the practice of governance all the more complicated. Beginning in the mid-1890s, the consul general in Zanzibar also served as the commissioner for British East Africa, dividing his time and attention between the two. In 1904, a consular representative was finally appointed for the mainland, leaving the consul general in charge of the islands alone. In 1905, the head of the African department at the Foreign Office, Edward Clarke, arrived in Zanzibar to recommend a thorough reordering of local affairs. His proposals for a new constitution were accepted in 1906, bringing Zanzibar closer into line with the format used in Crown colonies elsewhere. The constitution strengthened the hand of the consul general, granting him powers similar to a resident. Maintaining the fiction of the dual system and separation of powers was no longer so vital a concern. The consul general’s

heightened control over local affairs came largely at the expense of the first minister, who was reduced to the role of a chief secretary. Many of the first minister's duties were devolved into two new offices: a secretary for finance and trade (dealing with all commercial and financial matters) and an attorney general (responsible for overseeing the judiciary and drafting legal acts and regulations). The constitution attempted to strengthen lines of authority by constructing a clear hierarchy with the consul general at the top. He could henceforth veto any measure, issue recommendations, and call for reports from the three senior officials in the protectorate government. He was responsible for approving all estimates of revenue and expenditure, transmitting them to the Foreign Office. At the same time the civil service was rationalized and graded into five classes, with new rules put in place regarding recruitment, salaries, home leaves, and pensions (Pouwels 1987, 166; Flint 1965, 653; Hollingsworth 1953, 185).

Ironically, Clarke soon became the beneficiary of the enhanced powers he proposed. As one of his junior officers later observed, during his visit to Zanzibar, Clarke "was so taken by the country and the fact that he was saluted by all the police—a recognition of his importance that he said the London police failed to appreciate"—that he got himself appointed as consul general in 1908. He was known as "Pipsqueak" by his diplomatic colleagues and combined a petty devotion to form with a "great idea of his own dignity and that of his office . . . at the end of his dinner table he had small native boys clad in scarlet waistcoats (*visibau*) waving fans over his head and that of his wife." Clarke relished the exercise of power, "strut[ting] about the office and making drastic and often very amusing remarks" to his staff in attendance.⁴⁵ His first minister, Captain Barton, accustomed to running his own administration in New Guinea, was less than amused. He chafed under Clarke's authority and openly criticized his constitution, asking the Foreign Office to clarify their respective positions. Barton attempted to reconstitute the government yet again, advocating a ruling council consisting of the consul general, first minister, attorney general, consul, treasurer, and the collectors of Zanzibar and Pemba. Clarke, however, adamantly opposed the change, saying that he did not wish to be reduced to a "mere member of a committee," and the Foreign Office backed him on this point (Hollingsworth 1953, 189).

This latest permutation only lasted until 1913. From the beginning of the protectorate, the foreign powers with their treaty rights stood in the way of the consolidation of British rule. A succession of consul generals had tried various pretexts for subverting their revenue prohibitions but had succeeded only in gaining a few limited concessions. Over time, the legal difficulties presented by the treaties began to take on greater significance. Rights of extraterritoriality and consular jurisdiction limited the reach of British courts. Certain consuls, moreover, had the power to bestow foreign national status on Zanzibari residents: Comorians and Malagasy applying to the French, for example, and Goans to the Portuguese; given the high rates of intermarriage, even individuals of Swahili descent could advance such claims. British authorities became increasingly vexed that this placed “natives” beyond the reach of their law, creating constant “difficulties” for the police. Such exemptions threw the legitimacy of English rule into question and subverted racial hierarchy, allowing locals to turn fissures between different European nation-states to their own advantage.

Negotiations with the foreign consuls and their home governments continued, but progress was slow. Bargaining was protracted largely because the consuls used their leverage in Zanzibar to extract diplomatic concessions elsewhere. By the time of Edward Clarke’s tenure, the tide had largely turned, as the Foreign Office offered significant inducements for the powers to alter the treaties. France was the first to give way, agreeing in 1904 to surrender its consular jurisdiction and submit to the British court. Between 1905 and 1907 the other powers—Germany, the United States, Italy, Portugal, Austria, and Belgium—followed suit. The treaties, however, were not completely terminated until 1913. In that year a new administrative reorganization took place. Clarke’s constitution had made Zanzibar more closely resemble a crown colony in many respects. For some time the Foreign Office had contemplated turning Zanzibar over to the Colonial Office, extending this logic a step further. The dual protectorate system was cumbersome and irregular, and the weakening of the foreign treaties made it thoroughly obsolete. When Clarke suddenly died in 1913, leaving his office vacant, London finally decided to go ahead with the change Portal had proposed two decades earlier, bringing the sultanate into line with other colonies in the empire.

Colonial Office control involved a series of changes, implemented locally in 1914. The offices of consul general and first minister were abolished, their powers being combined in a new post, British resident in Zanzibar. Serving under the resident would be a chief secretary and assistant chief secretary. District officers and assistants were appointed for Zanzibar and Pemba. Many of the old departments continued as before, but with additional layers of officers and a number of new posts tacked on. Regularization and extension of the bureaucracy changed the names of departments, adding, dropping, or shifting functions or personnel, but this basic structure would last for much of the colonial period, with one exception: the resident was not granted sole authority over the islands. He had to answer to the governor of the East Africa Protectorate (Kenya), who was appointed as the “high commissioner” for Zanzibar.

The sultan at the time, Khalifa bin Haroub, who would reign until 1960, initially objected to this arrangement, arguing that it placed the islands under the authority of the mainland, which his predecessors had formerly owned and ruled. He received assurances that no amalgamation would ever be attempted and was granted a further “voice” in the islands’ affairs. There was no substantive alteration in his position, but a new protectorate council was appointed. The council was filled with colonial officers and unofficial members appointed by the resident, who was “vice president.” The sultan received the honorific title of president, and the purpose of the group was to “advise” him on issues of state broached by the resident.⁴⁶ The sultan had no real power, and the council served as a mechanism for smoothing the way for decisions already reached elsewhere. In the end, the sultan need not have worried: the control exercised by the high commissioner soon proved irksome to British officials on Zanzibar. Residents resented the intrusion upon their authority, and the system was nothing if not cumbersome. The post added another layer of bureaucracy between Zanzibar and London, complicating communications and delaying action. The commissioner had only a tenuous connection or familiarity with local issues. His primary responsibilities were in Kenya, and the distance between Nairobi and the coast prevented him from making frequent inspections. The office was a hindrance on all sides and was finally abolished in 1925.

Rather than increasing productive capacities or extending services, attempts to re-engineer the colonial state produced yet more bureaucracy

(Ferguson 1994). The proliferation of offices and functions introduced more and more complicated fissures between various wings of the state, and this disarray in turn called out for further bureaucratic study and redesign. Commissions, boards of inquiry, and official reports came and went in regular bursts, providing ample evidence of the colonial state's enduring faith in administrative rationality. As exercises in bureaucratic legitimation (Ashforth 1990), however, persistent efforts to reorganize government ended up being both circular and self-involved. Redrawing the lines of administration became almost an end in itself, producing a larger but less coherent state. And as we shall see, this contradiction between bureaucratic enlargement and effectiveness was especially acute in the urban sphere, as the regime's spatial designs took on an increasingly convoluted and confused character.

THREE

Colonial Cartographies: Struggling to Make Sense of Urban Space

Among the cultural projects that colonialism entailed, the remaking of space played a critical role. If nothing else, colonial rule hinged on efforts to refashion cultural landscapes, seeking to induce new modes of behavior by altering the contexts in which conduct could take place. At some level, geography might seem to be an obvious issue of concern for colonial studies—after all, how can it be possible to analyze empire without reference to the ways Western powers mapped out new spatial relations on a global scale? But while older accounts certainly recognized that territory was a basic imperial concern, they mostly tended to treat space as either inert or incidental. More recently, however, the anthropology of space has combined with cultural geography, urban studies, environmental and landscape histories, and local/global analyses to place questions of culture, place, and power front and center.

Much of this work has been inspired by the contributions of Foucault and Lefebvre on the cultural politics and social production of space, recognizing that geography is more than a neutral grid or backdrop against which the real action—culture, history, politics—unfolds (Soja 1989). While this is a diverse body of research, much of it builds on Lefebvre's insight that "an already produced space can be decoded, can be *read*" (1991 [1974], 17). As he recognized, spatial arrangements are neither accidental nor purely functional. Layouts—whether of the house, street networks, neighborhoods, or the city as a whole—are expressive forms that are culturally evocative and symbolically laden, and they need to be understood as such. Within any given milieu, however, not everyone has

access to the same spaces or the means to define and shape them, and much more than symbolism is at stake. While space is socially meaningful, then, it is also inherently material, deeply connected to production, differential access to resources and opportunities, and questions of community, consumption, and class. And these political economic issues are linked in complex ways with broader landscapes of power and politics. It is precisely the polysemic and multivocal qualities of space—the way it opens up to divergent and overlapping layers of interpretation—that makes it so engaging as an interdisciplinary arena of inquiry (Rodman 2003; Bender 1998).

The spatial turn in the social sciences has been especially significant for recent analyses of colonialism. Colonial spaces have been described as laboratories of modernity and zones of experimentation where European powers explored new forms and norms of urban regulation (Wright 1991; Rabinow 1989a). Colonial cities in particular have been depicted as zones of contact, confrontation, and conflict between cultures—Western and non-Western, white and black, ruler and ruled, rich and poor, modern and traditional (Home 1997; King 1990). A good deal of this work focuses on the concept of “contested spaces,” looking at prolonged struggles to seize and shape colonial landscapes (Chattopadhyay 2005; Bender and Winer 2001; Yeoh 1996). If nothing else, colonial powers sought to put indigenes “in their places,” while locals worked to evade, resist, or redirect these efforts. Who had rights to the city; what positions people occupied; who could live or labor where; who was displaced, marginalized, or excluded? These were all spatial questions that lay close to the heart of colonial rule, and they had tremendous political, economic, and cultural consequences.

Colonial Space: Legibility and Enframing

Colonial attempts to achieve political domination had a critical spatial dimension. In the African context, as elsewhere, European powers sought to consolidate control not only by exercising command over people but also by mastering and maneuvering through space. Once the bloody work of conquest was over, European powers faced the far more enduring and expensive task of establishing sovereignty within newly forged territories. They were challenged not only to seize turf but also to



15. Colonial enframing: Victoria Gardens decorated for the celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, 1897. Zanzibar National Archives.

render it sensible and remake it in conformity with their own cultural designs. Recent academic writing has emphasized how colonialism, as a form of modern power, depended on spatial techniques intended to rationalize urban zones, rendering them more “readable” or comprehensible, thus facilitating outside occupation and rule. Scholars have used various terms to describe these processes of classification and containment, including enframing, legibility, and simplification (Mitchell 1991; J. Scott 1998). As Mitchell succinctly describes it, “The colonial process would try and re-order Egypt to appear as a world enframed. Egypt was to be ordered up as something object-like. In other words it was to be made picture-like and legible, rendered available to political and economic calculation. Colonial power required the country to become readable, like a book” (1991, 33).

But if colonialism hinged on efforts to rewrite spatial relations and impose intelligibility, bringing these ambitious designs to fruition posed formidable problems. Especially in cases where colonial authorities found themselves occupying existing cities, making urban space conform to a preconceived pattern, like a neatly composed text, was by no means an easy task. Moreover, in places like Zanzibar, political contradictions and incoherence made the gap between urban aims and achievements all the more profound. As we've seen, British colonialism in Zanzibar took shape as an awkward graft upon the sultanate and its political forms, introducing enduring complications into the practice of colonial rule. This political situation had a very real spatial and material complement, as the British were compelled to confront an already existing urban order, entering into the city and accommodating themselves to its established framework. Colonial authorities had little room for maneuver, as their hands were tied not only by political and economic constraints but also by the dead weight of the urban past—the stone structures and mud dwellings that constituted the built environment, which they had no hand in shaping and could not easily alter or appropriate. In this respect, Zanzibar reflected many of the challenges that old world urban sites presented to modern planners and colonial authorities alike.

In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott relies on two contrasting urban images to make a point about the modern state, modes of knowledge, and spatial forms. The first represents a painting of Bruges seen from above around 1500; the second is a bird's-eye map of downtown Chicago, circa 1893. These cities are linked by neither common history nor a shared culture, and it is unclear at first why the comparison might be meaningful. To Scott, Bruges stands as the very emblem of the pre-modern city: unplanned, organic, and structured by local practice and knowledge. Like other medieval towns or *medinas* (including Zanzibar), it appears disorderly and chaotic when seen from the outside. Labyrinthine and complex, its routes seem to follow no formal logic, taking twists and turns like loops of intestines. By contrast, Chicago figures as the precise image of modern planned order: the rationale of the city can be readily grasped from above, as it consists of a gridlike predictability. As Scott argues, while Bruges may appear externally “illegible” or unintelligible, it was certainly comprehensible to its residents, who knew

the city “like the back of their hands” as the proverbial saying goes. In its layout, the city privileges local familiarity and embodied knowledge, wielding its mazelike complexity as a defense mechanism against the invasion or control of outsiders. Chicago, on the other hand, reflects the post-Enlightenment trajectory of the modern state, as administrators sought to eradicate unplanned or unpredictable spaces, making cities abstract, uniform, and regular to facilitate policing, social management, and the commodification of land (1998, 53–59).

Scott brings these two images together to provide an object lesson about modernity, spatial practice, and the state, hewing rather closely to Weber’s notion of the “iron cage” of modern life. In some sense, then, these pictures serve to provide us with a parable about how bureaucratic states sought to regularize, rationalize, and reorder urban spaces, making them more readily comprehensible and controllable. But while this portrait serves to create a compelling contrast between stereotypical extremes, it works less well as a model of actual developmental processes. These images, after all, are largely abstracted from historical dynamics and can only serve to mislead if they are interpreted as a visual commentary on modernization and the rationalizing reach of bureaucratic administration. The passage from premodern to modern did not entail a process whereby medieval Bruges literally became Chicago. Indeed, as Scott acknowledges, plans to radically revise existing cities remained highly exceptional even in the era of high modernist ambition. Most Old World cities combined a highly variable mix of old and new, and while states certainly tried to rework existing quarters (the Haussmannization of Paris is often cited), piecemeal intervention was far more typical than wholesale reinscription.

If enframing or legibility remained elusive goals for most colonial regimes, how should we seek to account for such lapses? Certainly, one could cite the prohibitive amounts of capital required for extensive reconstruction, as well as the profound social disruptions involved. Without authoritarian powers and deep pockets, few regimes in Africa could manage to actually embark on such widespread programs. Beside these factors, there is an alternative explanation that Scott proposes, pointing to the ways that local experience often eludes the totalizing grasp of the modern state. No doubt, any account that emphasizes the triumph of practical know-how and embodied wisdom over bureaucratic abstrac-

tions and formal rationality has an appealing ring; as an explanation, it engages our sympathy for the little guy, the underdog, and the uncanny outcomes of popular struggle. Without diminishing the importance of resistance or the richness of improvisation, however, it seems to me that Scott's resistance model simply grants too much power and rationality to the state. In effect, he takes the self-understanding of bureaucratic authority largely at face value, accepting it as reality rather than representation.

While modern states certainly claimed to embody the forces of rationality, logic, and efficiency (and expressed great confidence in their capacities to reorganize social worlds along those lines), scholars need to engage these propositions as questions rather than treating them as foregone conclusions. It is not that ordinary practice, canny and elusive, slips through the iron grasp of the bureaucratic state. Instead, I argue that our notions of the state as a rationalizing and organized instrument of administration are both misplaced and misleading—a myth of modernist social science long overdue for reexamination. Opposing everyday life and the state as categorically different only serves to blind us to the ways in which states are themselves spheres of everyday practice, often working in ways that are elusive, disorganized, and inchoate. In contexts like Zanzibar, this is what makes the historical anthropology of spatial practice so revealing. In the urban milieu, we learn something crucial about modern states when we begin to trace just how difficult it was for colonial regimes to simply classify and define city space. And it was not just uneven or resistant terrain that caused these dilemmas of rule, but instead the diffuse and disjunctive character of the state itself.

Drawing Lines of Distinction: Formulating the Basic Architecture of Urban Rule

By the 1890s, Zanzibar's "stone town" was largely built up along the peninsula, densely inhabited, a kind of indigenous occupied zone. Large-scale physical intervention or urban clearance would require massive administrative and fiscal resources, which the British colonial regime could in no way command. Establishing even the barest rudiments of a municipal order was challenge enough: the paucity of officials, difficulties in consolidating rule, and lack of external investment left little room

for authorities to contemplate grand urban schemes. Seizing hold and making sense of the city presented real problems for colonial authorities, as they struggled to merely orient themselves in space and inscribe some sort of bare order in the municipal sphere.

From the outset of protectorate rule, colonial officials represented the city in dire terms, seeking to legitimate British control. Indeed, in reading their accounts, one might get the impression that colonial rule was in fact little else than an exercise in benevolent philanthropy and urban improvement. Hollingsworth, a later colonial education officer, for example, complained about the “maze of tortuous streets,” claiming that before the British took over the city, there was

a complete lack of even the most elementary sanitary arrangements. Heaps of rubbish and filth were allowed to litter the streets and alleys, many of which were blocked with parts of ruined houses which had fallen across them and had never been removed. Buildings were hastily erected anyhow and anywhere without any Government control. At night-time the entire town was in darkness, for the regulation whereby residents were required to keep a light burning in front of their premises has been allowed to fall into abeyance. Although conflagrations were of frequent occurrence in the Ng’ambo quarter, there was not a single fire-engine or any form of fire-fighting service available. (1953, 59)

Such narratives paved the way for stereotypical “before and after” accounts that emphasized how an enlightened colonial administration worked to clear out and cleanse the city. In symbolic and material terms, these descriptions often equated alleged spatial disorder with political disarray (if not moral dissolution). The cumulative impression they present is of a city allowed to lapse into literal and figurative darkness—left in ruins, without regulation, devoid of sanitation or services.

Colonial complaints about chaos and confusion went beyond mere surface appearances, however, extending to the essential fabric of urban structure. Early on, Consul General Portal established the tone, objecting to what he interpreted as the involuted and intermingled character of Zanzibar city. He was particularly disturbed by what he saw as a promiscuous mix of functions—the way that sites seemed to blur and blend together, fostering all sorts of improper activities. In his view, place and politics went hand in hand: the “despotism” of the sultanate had a spatial complement in the lack of clear separation and specialization in

urban space. The sultan's "personal" affairs were intermingled with his official capacities, just as administrative and commercial or domestic arrangements might be conducted simultaneously in the same urban structures or sites.

Portal found these intermixtures problematic and sought to introduce sharper lines of distinction. As he set out to impose his administrative coup d'état, he seized on several spaces that he deemed especially troubling. First and foremost was the sultan's palace, which he viewed as the corrupt heart of the old regime, a center of opposition and resistance. He was convinced that the absence of separation between private and public affairs served as a cloak for subversive transactions. Portal feared that command of the sultanate would elude him so long as the sultan continued to spatially control the disposition of revenues, calling on his customs agents and secreting every "dollar" he collected "into sacks under the palace."¹ There was no distinct treasury building or public coffer that the British could simply seize. Without a fixed site or physical books to commandeer, there was no easy way to seize the purse strings, let alone obtain a basic sense of accounts. Conjoining domestic space, political functions, and a treasury in the palace allowed the sultan to keep control over his court, cultivating followers and "hangers-on," and the consul general wanted to eradicate these spatial practices, eliminating any room for maneuver.

Other spatial confusions equally perturbed the consul general. The fort along the seafront (later called the Old Fort or the Arab Fort) was adjacent both to a major produce market and to the place where public executions were held. It functioned simultaneously as a jail and a garrison for the sultan's Baluchi bodyguard. Just as the Anglican cathedral had been built as a symbolic statement in the 1870s on the exact site of the old slave market, so too Portal wanted to symbolically refashion the fort, "which has been so frequently held up to obloquy as the origin of all disease & the very nest of torture, maltreatment & iniquity." Soon after his arrival, Portal announced his intention to transform the site into a market and exchange, which, he hoped, "will furnish another little triumph over barbarism."² Such little triumphs, however, would have to wait. Rationalizing the urban layout was a complicated issue, and Portal's immediate task was to establish the basic trinity of colonial rule: prison, court, and barracks. At the time, troops had no central barracks but were left to



16. Hybrid spaces, intermixed uses: fruit market adjacent to the Old Fort. Zanzibar National Archives.

find their own quarters as best they could throughout the city, making mobilization for emergency defense or security measures difficult. There were also no fixed law courts, hospitals, or asylums. Throughout the city, residences were commonly intermingled with burial grounds, cattle and camel sheds, workshops, and offices of various kinds.

Untangling these lines and sorting out the spatial mix would require considerable staff, resources, and time—all of which the early protectorate lacked. Given the economic constraints and the scope of more immediate needs, an extensive building program was well beyond the capacity of colonial authorities. Indeed, early on, the consul general struggled simply to come up with the basic elements of municipal order, trying to formulate a crude system of sanitation. The casual and informal nature of the administrative process was often striking. Learning that a naval officer was bound for India, Portal wrote to him, asking him to take care of some odd jobs, including looking for a Parsi clerk, obtaining about fifty scavenger hawks, and paying off a few debts. In an offhand way, he

then concluded, “See if you can pick up any wrinkles from the Bombay system of sanitation, especially as regards the filling in of swamps with rubbish, and the general disposal of sweepings.”³ So much for sanitary expertise. This was in 1891. Two more years would pass before the government could manage to obtain handcarts and organize a hundred sweepers.

The protectorate’s first consul general, Colonel Charles Bean Euan-Smith, had estimated that the British would need to spend £10,000 on basic urban works in Zanzibar, but the Treasury refused to fund anything near this level of expense. Portal argued with the Office of Works to obtain the money, but to little avail. Even housing his own consular staff was a problem. To an incoming vice consul he warned, “Good—or even possible—houses are as difficult to find as are peaches in a turnip field.” The British government had sold the old consulate in 1890, and as Portal complained, “The Treasury have got the money [from the sale] but they are not giving or building any house in its place for the Vice Consuls to live in.”⁴ In a series of letters, he kept returning to the point that “there really ought to be accommodation for staff; it is impossible to find anything decent or healthy for them in town.” Strict economy brought the housing shortage closer to home, as Portal lamented the fact that he was compelled to put up his own servants: “For goodness sake build some new servants accommodation for European servants. There is none & my man, & my wife’s man occupy the guest rooms. I can’t even take in a bachelor and his servant & you know how many travelers do come here.”⁵ Such complaints were futile, failing to loosen the Treasury’s tight grasp on the purse strings or to lessen its insistence on the moral value of budgetary self-sufficiency in the colonies. More serious problems, directly impacting the conduct of administrative functions, hardly fared better. In an earlier letter Portal objected to the cramped working conditions his staff had to endure, stating, “At present the Vice-Consuls and the Judge have barely room to move, & the Court & offices are crowded like the Black Hole of Calcutta.”⁶ Despite his importuning, Portal was left largely to his own devices, forced to make do as best he could. In the end, significant new construction only got under way long after his death. The British Residency (now State House), the seat of government, was not completed until 1903 on the edge of town adjoining the

open land of Mnazi Mmoja. The Law Courts were opened in 1904 and expanded further in 1908. The Post Office was finally built in 1906–1907, on the site of the royal stables and police station in Shangani.⁷

Defining Districts: Seeking to Fix Urban Space

Constructing the basic building blocks of colonial rule in the city consumed far more of the regime's attention and took much longer than anticipated. Most structures of governance were located on the periphery of what came to be known as "stone town," a pattern of colonial intervention that would long endure. Architecturally and otherwise, the British imprint was most marked on the edges and along the seafront, avoiding the heart of the city with its narrow alleys and enclosed spaces. From the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, European observers often remarked on the insalubrity of the interior bazaars and the bewildering maze of streets. If the interior of the city was not exactly hostile territory, it certainly was *terra incognita* to most Europeans. The urban layout, like the architecture itself, provoked a certain degree of trepidation. Noting that it was "not always the Europeans who imagine these things," a later resident, Major F. B. Pearce, explained that houses in Zanzibar city lent themselves to the "generation of superstitious fears." "They have the appearance of being very old, and many of them possess dark gloomy staircases, strange recesses, and blind passages which seem to lead nowhere, and dark corners where shadows lurk" (1920, 207). Superstition aside, the "shadowy" interior was shut off in at least another sense: densely crowded with bodies and buildings, it was seen as a dangerous source of miasma and contagion, lacking proper light and ventilation (see chapter 4). There was precious little open land for building, and the costs of acquiring and removing structures encouraged colonial officials to focus elsewhere.

In early colonial accounts, the city is depicted in the most nebulous terms. Protectorate authorities had a hard time gaining a fix on urban space, using a curiously imprecise and amorphous lexicon to apprehend it. Permanent landmarks were few and far between, boundaries were in flux, and a profusion of different names drifted back and forth across the landscape. Nineteenth-century European observers typically referred to the town as an undifferentiated whole or mentioned two or three vaguely

defined sections (Rigby 1932 [1860]; Robb 1879). “The irregularity of the place is excessive,” wrote Richard Burton, “and it is by no means easy to describe its peculiar physiognomy” (1872, 1:83). He was by no means the only one who had difficulty with definitions and descriptions. Around the same time, the resident European medical practitioner, James Christie, made reference to eighteen quarters in the city, but neglected to go into any detail, deeming the mention of local names to be unnecessary (1876, 270). Well into the colonial period, Europeans overlooked or remained oblivious to indigenous practices of distinguishing and naming places, attempting repeatedly to superimpose their own sensibilities.

During the first decades of protectorate rule, the most significant geographical feature of the later colonial city—its division into two sections separated by the tidal creek—was relatively unmarked. In bureaucratic terms, Ng’ambo was not as yet separated out from the rest of the city. Instead, the administrative division of Zanzibar rested initially on broad urban/rural contrasts. The island was split into four districts, three of which covered rural areas: Mkokotoni, Mwera, and Chwaka. The fourth, called “Town Districts” or “Zanzibar Town,” included Ng’ambo within its precincts, treating the urban milieu as a single, unified zone that started on the peninsula and continued across the creek. The administrative mechanisms of rule were not yet sufficiently elaborated to recognize internal differentiation within the city to any great degree. Over time, however, the growth of Ng’ambo and its extension outwards called established boundaries into question, shifting the lines between city and country. Rather than fitting neatly into one or the other category, Ng’ambo seemed to bridge both, coming to occupy a liminal position.

Accordingly, alongside the old system a new tripartite division came into being. It recognized rural and urban districts as before, but dealt with Ng’ambo as a separate unit, classing it together with the nearer *shambas* (agricultural lands) and “suburbs.” The logic of treating Ng’ambo as interstitial was then extended a step further, emphasizing the cleavage between the eastern and western portions of the city. In 1917 officials made the first move in this direction, dividing the urban zone itself into four administrative districts. The first three were located in what is now Stone Town, consisting of A (Shangani, Baghani, and Vuga), B (Hurumzi, Sokomuhogo, and Mkunazini), and C (Malindi, Kokoni, and Funguni). The

“other side” was singled out in the following terms: “D or the Ngambo district is separated from the other three districts, which are the town proper, by the Creek.”⁸ As the regime continued to try to fix the boundaries of meaningful municipal units, a precedent seems to have been set with regard to Ng’ambo. By the 1920s, the “other side” was officially divided from the heart of the city, cut off from the “town proper,” despite the fact that it far exceeded the old core in both geographic area and population size. Ng’ambo was increasingly represented as a “native” town or “African” quarter and described in more or less pejorative terms, glossing over the area’s heterogeneity. The official colonial *Guide to Zanzibar* captured the tone well, advising visitors who dared to cross the creek that they were entering into “a different world.” “You need a compass and a clear head to penetrate it, for the huts straggle around, conforming to no coherent scheme, a confusing maze of endless twisting alleyways” (1952, 31), the guide warned tourists.

New legal requirements and administrative reorganizations often provoked renewed attempts to redraw municipal lines. In the 1920s and 1930s, the geographical content of districts continued to shift, as did the categorical basis for constituting areas. For the purposes of the 1929 Towns Decree, for example, Zanzibar city was split into five subdivisions. While the actual areas differed significantly from those declared in 1917, they were similarly labeled alphabetically (from A to E), for “simplicity and convenience” and in “view of the multiplicity of areas in the town and their varied nomenclature.”⁹ In the mid-1930s, with legislation for building rules under way, the contours of the districts were once more altered and their number again reduced to four. But different wings of the administration rarely managed to maintain these distinctions consistently in practice, as medical officers and others continued to refer to just two or three urban districts.¹⁰

Moreover, throughout this period, geographical classification coexisted with other means of calculating boundaries, including race, architectural type, and functionality. As we’ve seen, Ng’ambo was increasingly identified as an “African quarter” as the colonial period progressed, and references to Stone Town or parts thereof as a “European quarter” began to crop up around World War I, when sanitary surveillance became a crucial preoccupation. Taking his lead from local officials and prior reports, H. V. Lanchester, the first town planner to reach

Zanzibar, confidently asserted that “the creek separates the European and business quarters from the native town” (1923, 57). Calling Stone Town a “European quarter” was little more than a colonial projection—an ideological fantasy that had little basis in social fact. Elsewhere in his plan, Lanchester acknowledged that the “European quarter is merely an occupation of the southwestern end of the Arab city” (13). Moreover, he made it clear that this “occupation” was spread pretty thin on the ground, writing that Zanzibar was “exceptional among tropical towns in that hardly any houses have been built for Europeans,” most of whom were forced to find lodgings in Arab dwellings in long established neighborhoods (67). European residents were far too few and scattered too widely in the city to ever constitute an entire or exclusive quarter.

In later years, the colonial regime increasingly tried to make the urban landscape conform to its own categories rather than vice versa. Authorities relied more and more on formal legal mechanisms to separate the peninsula from the rest of the city. Through building codes and zoning laws, among other techniques, officials worked to create distinct “townships” in the city—sundering Ng’ambo from “stone areas to the west of the creek.” Issuing different sets of rules and regulations, they deployed diverse terms to distinguish Stone Town from Ng’ambo, opposing “business areas” to “nonbusiness areas,” “stone areas” to “native locations,” and “areas of permanent buildings” to “residential or hutting areas.”¹¹ With all of these efforts, however, the ideological goal remained much the same: to cast the city as a dual world, something readily known and knowable—mapping a kind of homogeneity and uniformity that was little in evidence in the actual streets and alleys of Zanzibar’s neighborhoods.

Surveys and Street Names

The 1893 “Survey of Zanzibar Town” represented the first comprehensive attempt by colonial officials to gain some sort of understanding of the city’s intricate layout, and it amply reflects the difficulties they faced. First Minister Mathews charged a Goan functionary in the sultan’s service, Rahmtulla Allarakhia Vallee, with the task of conducting the survey. (Around the same time, Imam Sharif, of the Survey of India, sketched out the first rough colonial map of the city; see figure 17.) It is



17. Plan of Zanzibar, conducted by Imam Sharif of the Survey of India, 1892. The only structures labeled on the western peninsula are the jail, palace, barracks, English church, and French mission. Note how many of the *mtaa* (quarter) names have been crossed out, corrected, or shifted (in red pen on the original). National Archives, Kew, Richmond, UK.

unclear whether or not Vallee performed his work alone, wandering the alleys of the city with ledger and quill in hand, transcribing its myriad detail into page after page of stenciled columns. But the survey certainly seems to be the idiosyncratic product of an individual consciousness, and the lone copy was clearly compiled and handwritten by a single scribe—initial entries in the account book surrounded by filigreed corrections and additions flowing into the margins, all in the same hand. As a piece of bureaucratic craft, it rises to the level of art, but of a strange sort—something straight out of a Borges tale, a sprawling catalog that seeks to mirror an urban world in such detail that it ultimately becomes surreal.

Bernard Cohn (1996) has analyzed the array of “investigative modalities” that came to constitute modern states. In a crucial sense, diverse types of knowledge production about places and people—censuses, land surveys, property ownership and tax rolls, ethnological and linguistic classifications—gave shape to bureaucratic regimes and modes of rule. These forms of investigation and inspection developed in the transnational context of empire, where techniques from the colonial world flowed back to the metropole and vice versa. Both at home and abroad, state control came to hinge on huge cultural projects of data collection and assessment. Amassing this data was a laborious and long-term task, marked by setbacks and inconsistencies. And Vallee’s survey work certainly reflects some of the central difficulties involved in trying to construct an encyclopedic compendium of urban space.

As the new power in town, British authorities required a sense of what the city contained, the location of things and people in space (and the relations between them). Fixing basic addresses, street names, and numbers was a prerequisite of rule. Without these essential orientations in space, the colonial regime could not exercise basic functions ranging from policing to taxation, building control and public health. Hence the Goan functionary needed to describe the city as he walked through its streets, encompassing the confusing array of local names and place markers, showing the extent and overlap of *mitaa* (quarters or districts) and listing everything contained therein. As a result, much of the survey is a catalog of objects and occupants, an inventory that is overwhelming in its devotion to detail. In its pages, then, we enter into a cosmopolitan urban swirl, encountering a parade of figures described by Vallee in all their heterogeneity: Indian Barker, Banian broker, Parsee spirit seller, Arab Wahabi, China carpenter, Persian Gulamhusein, Mshihiri salt and stinking fish & fuel sellers, Bohora Tinmaker, Captain Kassam, Gomes Photographer, Swaheli Prostitute, Astamati Greek breadmaker, Nurbhai Crockery seller, Khoja fruitseller, Swaheli Mishkaki Seller, Goa Tailer, Betelnut Paan Sellers, and many more besides.¹²

At the same time, however, colonial authorities required that the city be laid out for them in a fashion they could grasp. If it was to be of any use, the survey had to render the mass of urban data comprehensible by making it conform to an organizing system and overarching conceptual order. Consequently, Vallee attempted to impose an overall structure on

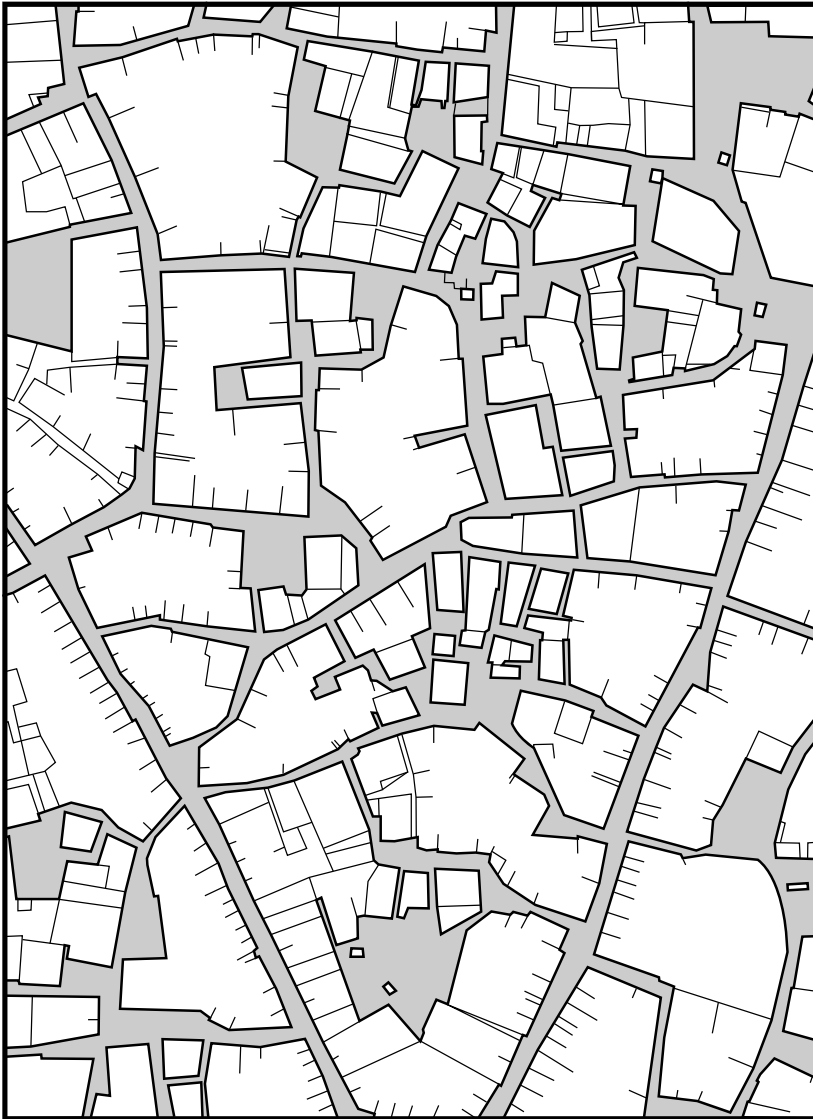
the labyrinth, cutting through the confusion of local terms and substituting new ones. Place-names, as Brenda Yeoh reminds us, embody “the social struggle for control over the means of symbolic production within the urban built environment” (1996, 221). They can reflect the conceptual images of a dominant cultural order, as the power to name is linked to processes of appropriation and possession (Robinson 1989; Myers 1996). No wonder, then, that new regimes often seek to place their stamp on the urban scene, toppling statues, taking over buildings, erasing old monuments, and instituting new names. In a gesture presumably intended to please his superiors, Vallee proposed to reconstitute the city into seven districts, taking the opportunity to suggest new English colonial names for some of them, including Sir Gerald Portal and General Mathews Circle (Portal’s wife, Lady Alice, merited only a street), English Church Circle, Palace Circle, Khoja Circle, and Tennis Circle (also called Barkoat Circle).

These obsequious designations did not move much beyond the drawing board; ultimately, the survey failed to achieve its planned re-mapping. It foundered precisely in the gap between an abstract order of the city imposed from above and the kind of streetwise knowledge produced through everyday practice (de Certeau 1984). The survey was the product of local practice, presuming an immersion in the particularities of place. It could only serve as a map or guide if those using it already possessed considerable intimacy and familiarity with the city in all its myriad detail—something European officials obviously lacked, since the survey would not otherwise have been necessary. Take the following description of a quarter called Khokoni, which is quite typical of Vallee’s work: “N.E. from Jafferbhoy Kassambhoy Ganji’s house up to the bridge including the Persian breadmakers shops and Eastwards the crockery seller Bohora’s shops up to Alibhai Somji’s and then Datto Hemani’s house.” Or try to follow the outlines of one of the four sections of Mkunazini: “D. *Mkhunazi Bana Shoka* from the limits of the English church up to the tree known as Mkhunazi Binti Khamis Mawli (near the house of the late Kazee Abdullla bin Ali) and further beyond up to the house of Khoja Musa Kurja (the two-story house) and Eastward up to the English creek bank all houses and huts included.”¹³ Without knowing precisely who lives (or used to live) where, or the

particular names of trees, shops, and other quotidian landmarks in the urban landscape, an outsider would be utterly lost. By itself, each section seems to take on vague outline, but multiply these textual descriptions over forty or more quarters, all of which combine and interrelate in the most complex manner, and the problem of orientation becomes almost insurmountable.

No city is ever truly unplanned (Holston 1989, 125). What is typically understood as a lack of order is often the product of planning by other means: informal land use patterns, neighborhood norms, customary usages, and everyday practices that unfold over time and leave their accumulated imprint on the built environment. With its evolved complexity, Zanzibar city could not be readily assimilated into an external abstract schema. Its layout carried not the least hint of grids, patterns, or other geometric regularities. Garth Myers (1997, 258) has written of the “disorderly order” of early Ng’ambo, a quality shared by much of Stone Town. (Even today it is extremely difficult for strangers to find their way to a specific destination in the interior of the city; whenever outsiders ask Zanzibaris for directions from point A to point B, residents usually dispense with the pointless exercise of attempting detailed explanations. It is simply easier to personally guide visitors through the city, walking them all the way to their destinations.) If the British sought to codify and contain the city, “translating it into a spatial language they could ‘read like a book’” (Myers 1993, 212), this would prove to be quite an elusive task. The challenge of mastering urban space—setting boundaries, naming streets, and numbering houses—continued to preoccupy the regime for years to come.

The 1893 city survey never left a lasting impression on the social landscape. Indigenous names continued to proliferate as before, as the administration sought periodically to reimpose its writ in the initial decades of colonial rule. By 1905 the Health Department had started the whole process all over again. Confronted by an outbreak of plague, medical authorities found it difficult to carry out systematic and regular sanitary inspections. There was no consensus on addresses, and determinate locations could not be expressed in precise terms. To facilitate disease surveillance, the department came up with a new plan of twenty-four districts and a list of street names, this time drawing on local usage.



18a (*above*) and 18b (*facing page*). Disorderly order: labyrinthine street pattern, Mji Mkongwe. 18a, Adapted from colonial street map of Stone Town, 1924, Mkunazini (Ministry of Water, Construction, Energy, Lands, and Environment, Zanzibar); 18b, Street pattern in Malindi quarter, late twentieth century. Adapted from figure in Aga Khan Trust for Culture, *Zanzibar: A Plan for the Historic Stone Town* (Geneva: Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 1996).



Once the immediate crisis had passed, this initiative faded into the background, and by 1909 another attempt was already under way. This time the effort was led by Major Cartwright, the commandant of police, who created a structure more suited to the surveillance needs of his department: four large districts, with many of the old district names demoted to streets. Given the maze of roads, the commandant ran out of names, and there remained “some four hundred alleys in the town which require designations by numbers.”¹⁴ By 1914 stone buildings (but not huts)

had been numbered for assessment purposes, although some streets and many alleys still lacked official designations, and district names would continue to shift widely over time. In Ng'ambo the difficulties the British faced were considerably greater, lasting well into the 1930s: "One of the most significant problems the British had in attempting to establish their sense of geographical order in Ng'ambo was that they got lost in its streets and alleys. This was a great irritant for the police, who claimed they couldn't tell one 'Juma Ali' from another without a numbered hut address. It also bothered the Public Works Department and Health Department, especially for the work of the Building Authority in 'locating huts in connection with building applications and sanitary nuisances'" (Myers 1993, 213).

In 1928 a new round of street naming commenced in connection with the 1929 Towns Decree, which granted the British resident or his authorized official the right to name streets. "It is necessary for this, among many other reasons, that streets in the town of Zanzibar should be given names and numbers," an official announced at the time. A list was produced and presented to the chief secretary in 1930, ultimately being approved by the Executive and Legislative councils. And in 1950, they started all over again, as a Sikh junior official, Teja Singh, was instructed to produce a memo on "Names of Roads and Streets in Zanzibar." He came up with some new suggestions, opting mostly for the bureaucratic and functional: Residency Road, Museum Road, Cathedral Street, Nyumba-moto (Firehouse) Street, Health Office Road. In composing his list, Singh had compared the 1910 and 1930 lists, finding real differences between official names and those in public use. "These changes in names are very likely to continue," he commented, "so long as no system is devised by which approved names of various places, roads, and streets are made popular among the public." He argued that a board should be appointed "so that such names are clearly assigned with the areas to which they exactly refer," but his European boss mocked this idea. On the back of Singh's letter, his superior scribbled: "A Board or Council never gets very far in such matters, unless to produce such unpalatable names as 'Health Office Road.' This file has been going since 1910, I see, and I am sure that any attempt to name every one of the streets, lanes and alleys of Z'bar town will never go far."¹⁵ Words of wisdom, indeed, but they came roughly sixty years too late.

A “Peculiar Form of Decentralized Administration”: Town Boards and Bodies

The ad hoc formation of the protectorate left a lasting stamp on the character of urban administration. From the beginning, there was no unified body overseeing urban affairs, but instead a series of separate departments charged with specific tasks (collecting revenue, public works) that were not exclusive to the city. As a later attorney general noted, this made for a “peculiar form of decentralized administration,” one that was especially prone to overlaps, disjunctures, and lack of coordination.¹⁶ It was not just inertia or the reluctance of department heads to give up their separate fiefdoms that prevented the formation of a unified urban authority. Instead, colonial officials in Zanzibar feared that the creation of a municipal body would place questions of urban representation front and center—and ultimately unleash popular demands for local self-rule. But the problem of creating effective bureaucratic oversight for the city remained, and the British sought to surmount this difficulty by forming a series of secret bodies or unofficial boards and advisory groups, which cropped up and disappeared at regular intervals (see chapter 7).

The first of these groups to form was a town council that Consul General Edward Clarke convened in 1909. It consisted of the consul (Sinclair) and first minister (Barton), together with the heads of various departments concerned with the city: the town collector (Andrade), director of public works (Galbraith), director of agriculture (Lyne), commandant of police (Major Cartwright), and the health officer (Dr. Spurrier). From August 1909 to July 1910, the council met on a weekly basis, but then it was disbanded as abruptly as it had been formed sometime before 1914. As the first urban institution in Zanzibar, it fell prey to the confusion of powers that characterized the broader government. Like later boards, it possessed only advisory powers and had no executive authority or means of enforcement. Any action recommended by the body had to be approved by Clarke and issued not under its name but under that of the relevant department head. The council’s unofficial status and shadow existence within the government served a broader purpose: deflecting criticism about its unrepresentative nature. Soon after the council started, Lyne observed “that the name of the council is

exciting a good deal of criticism among the Indians and also the nonofficial members of the British community. They consider that as it is in no sense a representative body it should not be called "Town Council." In a haughty note, the council members summarily dismissed these concerns: "It is not considered, however, that the matter is one which calls for any notice."¹⁷

The council was largely a forum that provided Clarke with the opportunity to call his junior officers together and hold them to account. Something of a martinet, he was described by Sinclair as a "little man with a large head by no means devoid of brains. . . . Bursting with energy, he soon woke up the older officials who had been accustomed to long siestas after the luncheon hour. Even after office hours he insisted on their accompanying him on visits to all parts of the town and country making notes of the various things he wished done."¹⁸ The council was precisely a setting where he could pursue his pet projects, expressing random and personalized concerns. In many ways the council anticipated later colonial efforts in town planning, insofar as it was conducted "like a favorite hobby of particular people: more like a jolly foxhunt than a serious attempt to improve the quality of life" (Myers 1993, 204). Nuisance control was central to the council's agenda. The subjects raised included the inadequacy of street watering; the poor condition of roads near Estella Market; the importance of properly maintaining Mathews's Memorial; the lack of fire protection; "the promiscuous posting of private notices and advertisements"; inadequate control of dairies and native doctors; the bad state of drains in the Indian bazaar, which constituted a "rat run"; the disgraceful condition of the Customs Sepoy Lines; the need for night soil disposal and a government rickshaw service; uncleared ruins; overgrown graveyards; and encroachments on public space.

Discussion, of course, did not necessarily translate into decisive action: often deliberations in council only produced further committees, requests for reports, or pleas for studies. For instance, Clarke complained to the members in March 1910 about the "dirty conditions of the streets and existence of several dangerous and unsightly ruins on the road toward the saluting battery." He acknowledged that it was "impossible for the Public Works Department to deal properly with the question at present." Nonetheless, he insisted, something *had* to be done. So rather than attacking the problem, Clarke resolved merely to study its extent,

advising “that a Committee consisting of Drs. Andrade and Spurrier, Mr. Galbraith, Major Cartwright and himself should devote several afternoons to an inspection of the town noting for action as occasion serves any ruins or obstructions or unsightliness.”¹⁹

Given the state’s limited capacity for urban intervention, the appearance of action, rather than its reality, often held sway. Indeed, council deliberations were frequently drawn out over an extended series of meetings, resolution being deferred until further information might be available. Depending on the area concerned, one of the department heads would be charged with the responsibility of investigating the issue and eventually reporting back. On numerous occasions officers claimed that particular initiatives were at a standstill because basic materials were lacking; the absence of a reliable and up-to-date census, land survey, urban maps, and guidebook came in for specific mention.

The council suffered from a clear lack of concerted focus and institutional continuity, pursuing trivial subjects in a scattershot way. Moreover, it often seemed to exist for its own sake, placing undue emphasis on bureaucratic procedure and points of order. At times the council also made it possible for members to try to enlist or co-opt the staff of other departments. Spurrier, for example, came up with the idea of using “police as sanitarians,” suggesting that their surveillance duties be expanded to include notifying the Public Works Department about standing water, leaking taps, blocked drains, bad roads, and dangerous structures. The members endorsed the proposal, but it is unclear whether it ever went anywhere. The minutes reflect that the only decision taken was to have Galbraith, the public works director, draw up a list of suggestions for eventual “review” by the commandant of police.

Laying Down the Law: Rule by Decree

During its brief existence, the council managed to demonstrate many of the flaws of British urban policy in Zanzibar. These shortcomings predated its formation and lasted long after it had been abandoned. Most revealing, perhaps, was the way the council relied almost exclusively on decrees as a means of enacting its will in the urban sphere. The town body repeatedly demonstrated an almost boundless faith in the power of formal law to constrain behavior. By issuing written regulations, of-

officials hoped to make cultural practice conform to their dictates, using codes to reshape the social and spatial environment. More frequently than not, they determined the principles of desired conduct in advance and declared them without due consideration of the costs or complications of enforcement—beating a hasty retreat when the difficulties became more than apparent, threatening ultimately to undermine British authority.

The process of framing a decree could be remarkably insular and self-involved. In the first meeting of the council, for example, officials discussed the need for regulations to control the use of Victoria Gardens (formerly the Sultan's Gardens) as a public space. They formulated and circulated a draft, then discussed and revised it, and eventually approved a set of regulations, deciding in the end to put the rules in force by merely tacking them up on the grounds. One member of council objected to this procedure, saying that the rules really “ought to be legalized by means of a decree”; without publication, he alleged, it would be impossible to prosecute anyone for violations. The members debated and rejected this idea as inconsequential. Hence the council decided to post the regulations in the gardens in English, Arabic, and Gujarati, summarily finding (without seeking court advice) that they were “legal and enforceable” under existing statutes.

But declaring a fact did not necessarily make it so, as was proved to the council time after time. And yet, when confronted by the failure of law to alter behavior as anticipated, authorities stubbornly insisted on hewing to the same path, issuing decrees that were either impractical or unenforceable. While they were eventually compelled to give up, such reversals rarely caused them to question their faith in the power of formal rules. In August 1909, Dr. Spurrier complained that the recent decree requiring “natives” to register all births with the government was being routinely disregarded. He believed that the law needed to be brought to the attention of the “natives,” proposing the hiring of a town crier. Although the doctor did not say so, the lack of compliance was entirely predictable, and the fault lay squarely with the administration. Following long-standing habit, the council announced the decree by printing it with little fanfare in the *Official Gazette*, a publication whose readership was largely restricted to official and commercial circles. Furthermore, decrees were written in English with Arabic and Gujarati translations,

the officially favored languages that specifically excluded the Swahili-speaking majority, especially so-called natives.

The government's legal practice was in this sense altogether divorced from the very social reality it sought to manage. After several months a town crier was finally employed, but matters did not improve. Dr. Spurrier came to suspect that "natives" might well have other reasons for evading or resisting the government's intrusions upon their lives. In April 1910, he brought up the subject again, frustrated that the law was still being ignored. This time he suggested a more cunning mode of exacting compliance. He wanted to pay part of the penalty involved to informers as a reward for turning in their neighbors, believing that respect for the law might somehow be fostered by the use of stool pigeons and bribes. Major Cartwright criticized the proposal, but hardly on moral grounds: instead, he thought natives were so untrustworthy that it would be "impossible to obtain reliable evidence." With no solution in sight, the council elected to drop the matter and turn to other business. As the last word on the subject, Dr. Spurrier reported the discouraging conclusion of a European attorney in town, Mr. Lascari, who "expressed the opinion that nothing can be done, it was forty years in Bombay before a similar law there was generally observed."²⁰

The government did not often take this advice to heart and generally failed to learn its lesson. While garden rules or native births might seem incidental, these episodes reflect much more general processes. The issuance of decrees was one area in which the administration had long excelled. The making of rules (in contrast to carrying them out) did not require any extensive staff or financial outlay. In a context where there were significant constraints on government action, nominal regulation could provide the illusion of bureaucratic efficacy and order. Developing an integrated and comprehensive legal framework was well beyond the means of local officials; as a result, decrees were typically framed in patchwork fashion, responding to particular exigencies as they arose. Protectorate authorities seemed to content themselves with putting laws on the books but paid remarkably little attention to the difficulties of subsequent enforcement.

In the early years, the process of deciding on laws could be strikingly casual. Mathews, for instance, issued the following "notice" in the *Official Gazette* in late February 1892: "With a view to the improvement

of the health and sanitary conditions of the town, and to the better maintenance of roads and buildings, I am authorised to inform the public that His Highness the Sultan decrees that no new buildings whatever are to be [*sic*] commenced from this date without written sanction from the duly appointed authorities for that purpose. Application for permission to build should be sent to my office.”²¹ “Should” is the operative term here: the decree specified no penalties for violations and seems more a statement of faith than anything else. The purpose of the decree may have been to inculcate the principle that the government was in charge, a kind of colonial pedagogy intended to instruct residents that they were henceforth subjects who had to apply for state permission before proceeding with any construction. Yet protectorate officers had no means to compel obedience. There were no “duly appointed authorities”; the first minister’s office was hardly competent in issues of engineering and architecture, lacking even a single building inspector; and what constituted “new building” was not even specified or defined. Building control continued to elude the administration for years to come, despite successive attempts to write more and better regulations in 1895, 1909, 1911, 1918, 1922, 1924, and thereafter.

Lawmaking in the protectorate was very much an amateur affair. As Sinclair later observed in his memoirs, at the time “the laws were in a very bad state. During the Mathews regime, he had been in the habit of issuing orders rather in the form of the Ten Commandments commencing ‘Thou shalt not’ but often with no definition of penalties in the event of their infraction.” The situation improved somewhat after 1906, when an attorney general was first appointed to advise the government on legal questions. But there were distinct limitations on what any individual could do. The mix of foreign treaties, Islamic law, and protectorate legislation had created confusions that took many years to untangle. Only in 1911 did Sinclair begin to take the first modest steps toward setting the protectorate’s legal house in order. He managed to collect all the decrees published in the *Gazette* and filed in the British Agency, together with the “Orders in Council and subsequent Decrees and Orders applying to Zanzibar.” On leave in London, he took all the collected documents to the Foreign Office and obtained legal assistance in drafting yet another decree, “repealing all the obsolete and contradictory orders.” The laws

selected to remain in force were then published as the “Laws of Zanzibar 1912.”²² While Sinclair cleared away some of the confusion, excising the less relevant statutes, the administration’s problems with law were by no means over.

The reasons for this are not difficult to discern. Take, for example, the elementary urban concerns of street lighting and sanitation. As mentioned in chapter 2, soon after arriving in Zanzibar city, Consul General Portal issued a decree in the sultan’s name requiring residents to place lights over their doors and keep the street in front of their premises clean. He claimed that recent assaults in dark corners of the city required this measure, pointing to the decree as a sign of the beneficial impact of colonial rule. But, if anything, the decree was a testament to the regime’s limitations, showing the inability of the state to undertake and fund basic municipal functions. Portal promised that “of course, when the whole Govt becomes more civilized, some of this duty will be undertaken by the Govt and these regulations will be relaxed,” but the state continued to evade its responsibility to provide essential services, trying to compel private individuals to foot the bill.²³ As a result of the foreign treaties, European subjects were free to ignore the consul general’s orders. British officials expressed concerns about the potential consequences if fellow Europeans were seen as getting away with thumbing their noses at British law; white evasion might have disruptive effects, encouraging others to display open contempt for authority. They fully understood that these loopholes highlighted the unevenness and inequity of colonial power, stoking indigenous resentment. But in the British view, forcing at least some Arabs, Indians, and Africans to comply was preferable to letting everyone evade their exactions; an imperfect decree, unevenly enforced, was better than doing nothing.

The irregular application of decrees only served to highlight the arbitrary and capricious character of colonial law. Portal, if you remember, took the enforcement of his street lighting regulations into his own hands, randomly prowling the streets at night and banging on the doors of alleged violators. These abrupt night visitations may have provoked a few startled property owners to put up lights, but quixotic personal campaigns were no substitute for regular and sustained inspections. With staff levels constrained, the state could do little more than single

out a few residents now and again. But rather than serving as salutary examples, these cases could lead urbanites to draw precisely the opposite conclusion: officials could in no way police several thousand dwellings, and the costs of complying outweighed any risk of ignoring the rules.

Evasion also had a temporal component: periodically, the administration would undertake campaigns to enforce certain edicts, often in response to an official coming across violations by happenstance. Authorities would make concerted efforts for a time to ensure compliance, and then their attention would turn to other problems or more pressing matters. This pattern was often replicated in the early decades of colonial rule. The regime declared laws in the abstract and entered them into the *Official Gazette*. Authorities would initially concentrate their efforts on implementation, eventually encountering resistance and difficulties in practice. Lacking the means to ensure regular compliance, they eventually backtracked, allowing the laws to fall into disuse. But these regulations routinely remained on the books, eventually being revised or revoked much later. The administration only rarely managed to acknowledge its limited capabilities, restricting itself to measures that could actually be carried out. Instead, colonial officers pursued some laws at particular moments while simply overlooking others, being selective and arbitrary in their application.

The early street-lighting decree was widely ignored. Rather than going to the trouble and expense of seeing it through, the government found it easier to simply light many of the main streets while ignoring the rest. The provisions on street lighting and cleaning remained in force, however, and came once more to the attention of officials when they were included in the Consolidation of Laws Decree of 1909. The debate in council at that time shows the degree to which the force of the law had become attenuated, depending solely on the exercise of informal pressure to persuade residents to comply. Major Cartwright outlined the problem, drawing attention to the “great difficulty he has in dealing with the smaller streets of the town, the provision of the Consolidation of Laws Decree compelling every person to maintain a light over his house door generally having fallen into disuse, and the Indians being well aware that the Courts will not enforce them.” Cartwright expressed concern that the “police will not go into these dark places” and that

“persuasion is no longer of any avail with the Indians.” The chair of the meeting, presumably Sinclair, recognized the “difficulty of enforcing the decree against certain persons when the Government has relieved the residents in the main streets from the liability by themselves undertaking the lighting of those streets.” Indeed, this was precisely the substance of a protest a group of Arabs lodged with Mr. Lyne several months later. They argued that the lighting regulations were patently unfair insofar as “the Government lights the rich quarters of the town while in the poorer parts the people are compelled to do so themselves.” Awareness of the inequity involved did not stop the administration from pressing ahead with its efforts to reimpose the regulation. If numerous Zanzibaris came to the conclusion that there was one law for the wealthy and quite another for the poor, one can hardly blame them. Indigenous complaints about injustice were duly noted, but government practice continued on much as before.

In this instance, the police began to serve unofficial notice on several European commercial premises, warning them to keep the streets properly lighted, and these firms, anxious to maintain good relations, readily complied. Major Cartwright was also instructed to sternly admonish “the Indians,” but a door-by-door campaign was beyond the capabilities of the police. So he contented himself with overseeing the distribution of two thousand leaflets, “calling on people to undertake lighting of certain streets.” As a result of this informal pressure, fifty-six lights were privately put up, and the government decided to pay for seventeen others. Officials relied on whatever means they could to extract voluntary compliance, as the law could not be formally enforced. Sometimes the results were better than expected: “In many cases where the lights were weak,” Cartwright reported, “the owners have replaced them with stronger and more powerful lamps but there is nothing in the law defining the strength of the light so that it was merely bluff on the part of the Police.”²⁴ For the foreseeable future, such ruses would have to suffice. In 1913–14, a compulsory sanitary and lighting rate was finally imposed on all stone dwellings, the obstacle of the foreign treaties having been removed. For the first time the government formally acknowledged its public responsibility to clean and light the city; it only did so, however, while increasing its exertions to make local residents bear the brunt of the expense.

Profits, Produce, and Promiscuous Markets

Decrees were frequently motivated by the need for revenue as much as the desire for control. In June 1901, the administration had issued a notice requiring that all agricultural produce be brought to the government markets in Zanzibar town for inspection and sale. Vendors had to pay rent to operate out of these markets, and without the monopoly, officials feared the loss of a tidy source of revenue. Alternative markets might spring up anywhere, and the state would have to give up charging rents. The custom of selling in government markets had been established incrementally, despite the fact that it had no formal basis in law. In March 1911, First Minister F. R. Barton wrote to Sinclair, expressing his doubts about the wisdom of continuing to rely on convention or habit alone. "That the people at large would sooner or later discover that they are not bound to sell their produce in the Government markets was a foregone conclusion." Stating that "it will be a serious matter if the people give up taking their produce for sale into the Z'bar town market," Barton recommended that the town council should pass a law making this compulsory as soon as possible.²⁵ The council took up the matter and chose instead to endorse the status quo, declaring that legislation was unnecessary.

Two years later, Barton returned to the issue, marshalling further evidence to substantiate his position. "At present there is no legal compulsion upon persons to bring such produce for sale to the markets, and though till now it is probable that the great majority do follow the unwritten law there is reason for anticipating that they will all soon become aware of the fact that they cannot be punished for selling outside the markets," he wrote to Sinclair. He reported that residents in Chake Chake, a town in Pemba, were already taking advantage of the situation and that government market rents there had declined by two-thirds in the previous two years. As the markets on Unguja (Zanzibar island) were then bringing in annual rents of £2,200, he argued that any increase in evasion could have serious consequences.²⁶ Prompted by this concern with protecting a needed source of revenue, senior officials then decided to have the attorney general draw up a public markets decree. Because the bureaucracy was so decentralized, creating urban legislation was a time-consuming affair, as drafts had to pass through the hands of relevant officers in various departments for review and revision. As was



19. Seyyidiyeh Market, officially opened in 1904, with creek and huts in Ng'ambo in background. Zanzibar National Archives.

often the case, the markets measure was delayed until well into 1914. Andrade, the district commissioner, eventually inquired what had become of the decree, claiming that matters were getting worse in the markets with each passing day. Sinclair, then the chief secretary, also expressed his irritation over the delay, and the resident emphasized that passing the law soon was “highly necessary for financial and health reasons.”

The decree was eventually completed in 1915, and Pearce, as resident, transmitted it to London for approval. To his metropolitan superiors, he identified the rationale behind the new measure: “Hitherto the existence and monopoly of government markets had been accepted without question as a matter of usage and custom but Arabs and Indians have lately realised that no law exists which makes the use of such markets compulsory; and the result is that a situation has arisen which makes the promulgation of the enclosed decree imperative.” The law was now “urgently”

required for two reasons. First, “the revenue derived from markets has seriously declined of late.” Second, Pearce cited public health considerations, stressing that “to allow promiscuous markets to be set up in any direction would obviously, especially in a hot climate like Zanzibar, lead to disastrous consequences.”²⁷ The law was subsequently approved and published in the *Official Gazette* in June 1915.

At least one officer, Director of Agriculture Frank McClellan, had cogently argued that there was no need for the decree, but his criticisms were brushed aside. Two years previously, he had written to the attorney general, outlining his objections to the proposed market decree:

The preamble will dwell on Public Health: it does not state it, but the object doubtless is, like that of (to my mind) the iniquitous Liquor Decree of 1912, to increase the Revenue of the Collectorate. The Decree will create the maximum of disturbance with the amenities of the life of the shamba people, and produce the minimum financial result to the government. . . . From a P. H. [Public Health] point of view it cannot be properly carried out in shamba districts for want of supervision and inspection, unless the expenses exceed the revenue: and from other points of view it is impractical. . . . To conserve the Public Health it is unnecessary that the eggs and the cassava of the native should be inspected by the H. D. [Health Department] in a market. The Public's health suffers from far more important causes than this.²⁸

As decrees moved through the complicated process leading to passage, they took on aspects far removed from the intentions that had originally motivated them. By the time they had been debated back and forth in the upper echelons of the administration and repeatedly amended, they became increasingly distanced from social realities on the ground. No evidence was ever cited of a rise in food poisoning between 1911 and 1915, and the public health provisions of the decree simply could not be enforced. Doing so would have required the government to institute regular inspections throughout the countryside, a costly and tedious task with few likely benefits. The administration was incapable of carrying out the letter of its own law, controlling the sale of produce in every hamlet and byway of the islands. But this did not stop the authorities from proceeding, largely because public health considerations were merely a convenient rationalization for the measure. As McClellan surmised, the decree was motivated by the desire to protect government

revenues. Shoring up the regime's monopoly, rather than guaranteeing food safety, was the crucial point. But there was also an additional factor, as the spread of popular markets seemed to threaten a more general loss of social control. Arab and Indian vendors had realized that the government was relying on unwritten custom to impose its will. There was no backbone to the law, and they were free to sell where and how they pleased, ignoring the unenforceable 1901 notice. If the administration stood by and permitted these practices to become widespread, some officials believed it could establish a dangerous precedent. Allowing subjects to exploit lapses could be taken as a sign of weakness, encouraging others to show contempt for the law. More than rents, what the government ultimately feared was losing face in public and thereby the semblance of control. In the official view, lawlessness, once unleashed, might become contagious. Better to stamp it out at an early stage before things got truly out of hand. As a result of this mentality, minor points of order were often inflated into major crises. Seemingly insignificant issues were blown far out of proportion, provoking an overdetermined—and unworkable—legal response.

Losing Ground: Law, Land, and Levies

The government's legal struggles were by no means restricted to garden rules, street cleaning, and public markets. With regard to land and tax policy, where the law was used much more directly as a tool of socio-spatial engineering, officials found the results even more frustrating. British officials envisioned an ideal order in which the incentives and penalties stipulated in law would restructure indigenous behavior. Legislation was cast as the means of modernizing outmoded social relations and norms, instituting a new rationality based upon a Western calculus of costs and benefits. But with a few exceptions, colonial authorities in Zanzibar devoted little time or effort to exploring the dynamics of the cultural worlds they hoped to remake. They rarely acknowledged the complexity of the domains they sought to intervene in, demonstrating only a slim grasp of indigenous practices and values. Time after time the state showed its inability to use formal law as a means of altering conduct across a broad social terrain. And yet when authorities framed decrees that attempted to override or counteract established understandings, they seemed quite

surprised by the ensuing results. They were taken aback by the extent of resistance they provoked when they ignored deeply embedded notions of moral economy, justice, and respect. Rather than reexamine their aims or rein in their ambitions, though, officials tended to hold local agents at fault, accusing Africans, ex-slaves, or peasants of “irrationality.” In a few cases, officials acknowledged that their own clumsy efforts in social engineering had backfired, but these tended to be rather marginal voices, located well down the colonial hierarchy.

Colonial conflicts often broke out over seemingly mundane or minor initiatives. Yet issues that seemed innocuous to British officers or local elites were understood quite differently in the alleys and back streets of urban Zanzibar. By confronting the state, local communities came to understand quite well that the administration was divided and would retreat or retrench in the face of widespread resistance. By the late 1920s, an anonymous European complained in the *Official Gazette* about frequent struggles over custom, or *desturi*: “It is *dasturi* [sic] to do this and not *dasturi* to do that, and between the two the finicking path of conduct and action is mapped out with the extreme of accuracy. Experience having failed to show the African that any appeal lies to the softer side of the *mzungu* [white person], he employs as the only weapon in his armoury, this accursed *dasturi*. . . . And yet the *mzungu* has only himself to thank for this, since he . . . venerates *dasturi* as he does nothing else. . . . *Dasturi* to the Englishman assumes almost the attributes of the Deity, and it is not surprising . . . that the African elects to meet him on his own ground and with his own weapon” (quoted in Myers 1997, 252).

Desturi, of course, did not mean the same thing to colonizers and colonized alike. Indeed, what the English often venerated were customary practices of their own invention (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). But far more than incidental issues were involved; everyday disputes often were sparked by broader contradictions that lay at the heart of colonialism itself. In Zanzibar as across much of Africa, the British had to consolidate their rule while making colonialism pay for itself. The absence of external subsidy put pressure on the whole question of revenue, which generally meant export crops. And therein lay the rub. British officials were utterly dependent on the production of cloves, and yet the reliance on plantation slave labor compelled them to reorganize this sector in profound ways. Across the continent, colonialism certainly involved

efforts to remake indigenous subsistence patterns, social relations, and modes of production. Zanzibar was no different, but the whole question of abolition made issues of land, labor, and law especially pressing and problematic.

As Frederick Cooper (1980) and others have argued, while grudgingly proceeding with emancipation the colonial government was concerned above all with preserving the economy. To the British, freeing the slaves did not mean giving them the right to work when and how they wished. Officials in Zanzibar expressed concern that liberated slaves would desert the plantations and crowd into the city, forming a shiftless (and restless) mass. Accordingly, they adopted a range of measures intended to tie ex-slaves to their former owners and plantations, instituting laws against vagrancy among other controls. At the same time, the regime moved to use both new taxes and rents as a means of undercutting peasant subsistence and enforcing labor discipline. In 1898, for example, the government imposed a hut tax of 2.2 rupees per annum, hoping to force ex-slaves into the wage economy. As elsewhere in Africa, authorities hoped that the tax would force people to pick cloves to earn the money to pay the tax, not only producing revenue for the government but inducing “proper” conduct as well. The result of this policy, however, was exactly the reverse of what the British expected, as market compulsion came up against deeply rooted cultural resistance.

As Laura Fair (2001, 130–32) has shown, targeted workers drew the conclusion that this policy was tantamount to forced participation in the clove harvest, which they associated with conditions of slavery. Both free peasants and newly emancipated slaves deeply resented what they viewed as efforts to reimpose bondage by other means, and they dug in their heels accordingly. When many refused to pay the tax, the administration redoubled its efforts to enforce compliance. But rather than bow to pressure, laborers upped the ante, refusing to work as well. By 1902, work avoidance had progressed to the point where officials estimated that almost half of the crop on private estates and one-third on government plantations remained unharvested, left to rot on the trees. Increasingly, the state found itself trapped in a vicious circle. Far from enhancing revenues, the hut tax was only generating widespread political resistance. When the state moved to stiffen penalties and enforce greater compliance, this only added to the administrative and court costs while

deepening the economic effects of work stoppages and boycotts—a self-defeating process. By asserting the moral force of their own cultural logic, workers and peasants in effect forced the regime to bow to a different economic rationality and end the tax. By 1911 the Zanzibar government was managing to collect only about 65 percent of the revenue they gathered in 1898 when the tax was first imposed, and when factoring in the costs of prosecuting the 52 percent of the population who refused to pay, the state was actually losing money. As a result, officials finally acknowledged the futility of their efforts in 1912 and reversed themselves, ending all attempts to collect the tax.

The colonial administration faced similar legal difficulties with regard to its land policy. In 1902, for instance, the administration issued the Crown Lands Act, which summarily declared that the sultan's plantations and all unoccupied lands were henceforth to be considered state property. It was one thing to stipulate this in law, but quite another to make it a reality. A full decade later, it was clear that officials were still incapable of defending the rights to lands they had formally declared in law. They could provide no proof of the extent of their properties, having made little progress in marking out and establishing the boundaries. As the commandant of police reported to the Crown Lands Committee in 1912, he had great difficulty in preventing squatters from encroaching on and taking over government property because there was no material evidence of state ownership. He delicately suggested that “the Government might advantageously demarcate all their properties in the town as soon as possible,” and then “contemplate” the more vexing task of carrying this out in the rural areas.²⁹ His advice went unheeded. In 1921, the director of public works was still expressing frustration about the lack of control over land, describing the matter as urgent: “The question of the Survey of Zanzibar Town is becoming acute,” he wrote. “Surveys of small isolated plots & sections are continually required, and each has to be done as a detached survey. . . . The D.P.W. [Department of Public Works] has now been made responsible for all unoccupied Govt. land in the Town and all these blocks of land must be surveyed. At present no one knows what land belongs to Govt. except the D.C. [District Commissioner].”³⁰

Moreover, even on government properties, the authorities had long struggled to collect ground rents from tenants. Much like private land-

lords, they found this nearly impossible to accomplish prior to World War I. The legal requirement of paying ground rent was stipulated in the 1897 abolition decree, but “because the state lacked the power to enforce eviction orders even after taking people to court it rarely received more than 10 percent of the rents it demanded from squatters on its plantations” (Fair 1994, 100). The government’s ineffectual response to this situation was to issue yet another law simply reiterating its position. In April 1909, Captain Barton put forth a notice on “Payment of Ground Rents” stipulating that all occupants of government land—Wahadimu, Swahili, Arab, or “foreign subjects”—had to pay the rents or their property could be attached by court order.³¹ The lack of compliance continued unabated.

In 1912, Clarke ordered yet another attempt, calling on the attorney general to draw up a proposed ground rent decree. The most significant change was a new clause stipulating that when rents were in arrears more than three months, a dwelling could be removed and dismantled, the materials being auctioned off to settle the debt. This provision proved unworkable in several respects. First, the higher degree of leverage it promised against individual tenants was undercut by the fact that there was safety in numbers. Evasion was so widespread that the law would require mass seizures of homes. The courts refused to sanction this practice because it would throw a massive amount of building materials on the market at the same time, depress prices, and cause severe losses to the owners. Given that most of these tenants possessed limited means in the first place, such draconian action could hardly be justified. Second, the decree was predicated on the idea that alleged violators were living in huts that could be readily and cheaply dismantled. But officials drafting the decree seemed unaware that most structures on government land were “not little huts worth 50 or 60 rupees” as Collector Andrade later observed. Many were substantial mud and wattle dwellings or stone structures that could not be torn down without great trouble and expense. The tenants were well aware of this fact and continued to refuse demands for rent, “knowing that nothing or very little can be done by the Govt.”³²

For numerous reasons the changes recommended in 1912 by Clarke were eventually rejected by the Foreign Office, and the decree never passed. In the ensuing years, officials could do no better than weakly

suggest that the failed measure be resurrected. In 1913 one officer noted that nothing had changed, lamenting that the “ground rents are just as troublesome as ever to collect.” The following year, the director of agriculture underlined that the “present system is intolerable” but made no suggestion as to how it should be improved. Unable to frame a decree that could actually be enforced, the administration elected instead to issue yet another notice, in the vain hope that it just might work better this time around. The official text “ordered” tenants on government farms in Marhubi, Mtoni, and Beit el Ras to come to the Agricultural Department offices and sign rental agreements. Sinclair, as chief secretary, endorsed the move, even while admitting that it was little more than a bluff: “I see no harm in issuing the proposed notice even though it may not be legally enforceable. I agree . . . as to the importance of preventing natives from acquiring rights to holdings on Government properties and whilst taking a firm attitude on this point it should be possible by the exercise of [a] certain amount of tact and by personally explaining matters to get them to fall in with the Government’s views.”³³

The notice might not have caused any harm, but it certainly did nothing to help. Sinclair knew very well it could not be defended in court, which was precisely why he was willing to adopt extralegal means. Given the government’s previous record, his faith that tact and personal explanations might suffice seems rather misplaced. Resorting to another notice was largely an empty exercise, performed in defense of an abstraction. To Sinclair, the firm stance of the government had to be maintained even if, in practical terms, this was little more than an empty gesture. By 1917 officials were once again suggesting that dusting off the 1912 proposals was the best way forward. The attorney general pointed out that the amendments had already been rejected as useless, stating that he was “very doubtful as to whether the proposed decree would ameliorate the situation to any appreciable extent.”³⁴ No change in law could alter the fact that the government still could not manage to reliably locate tenants on its properties and serve them with proper notices:

The old difficulty arises of serving of the demand notices and of finding the persons on whom demand notices should be served. The Crown Solicitors advise me that it is useless issuing a summons unless we can satisfy the court that a demand notice has personally been served on the proper person, and they add “the collector should call repeatedly until

he has found his man." I myself suggested that a demand notice posted on the door or a general notice issued in the Gazette should be sufficient. But the Crown Solicitors do not agree. The difficulties of repeated calls on so many people and the difficulties of proving to the satisfaction of the local Courts that the right person has been served are so great that once again I bring these difficulties to the notice of Government.³⁵

Bringing these problems to the attention of authorities did not mean that anything was done to resolve them. By 1918, the law was still being characterized as "most unsatisfactory," and officials eventually gave up the attempt to rationalize it. They admitted that a certain amount of arrears was unavoidable and moved simply to write these off as bad debts that were irrecoverable. The administration continued to try to collect ground rents from those who were susceptible to threats or informal pressure, while simply giving up on the rest. The last line in the file on the proposed ground rent decree provides an elegant epitaph for the government's limited powers: "More than this cannot be done."³⁶

Making Order, Over and Over

The devil, as the saying goes, lies in the details. Beyond question, it was certainly the details that bedeviled the British as they sought to comprehend and control urban Zanzibar. And indeed, it is only when we depart from the abstractions of policy and delve into the gritty details of spatial practice in the streets that we begin to grasp the full complexity of the city, the difficulties of urban rule, and the disarray of the colonial state. In the process, what we gain is a much more complicated understanding of the tangled intersection of colonialism, space, and power. Over time, of course, districts were eventually defined, streets named, and buildings numbered. It is not as if colonial governments in Africa were completely incapable or incompetent in the urban milieu. But they were far less potent or penetrating than most accounts allow. In Zanzibar, British administrators did not fail to rule; what they lacked instead was the capacity to seamlessly impose their own order, ruling as they wished. This difference is by no means slight. We should be struck not by the absence of order but by the fact that it had to be (partially) achieved over and over, again and again. And the consequences of this recurrent unraveling are anything but minor. By following the disjunctures of urban

rule, its uneven rhythms and textures in daily practice, a very different understanding of modernity and colonial power emerges.

Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (1997, 8) phrase the point perfectly: “As we engage the colonial archives further, we see how much protracted debate, how much political and cultural energy went into defining dichotomies and distinctions that did not have the predicted effects.” Drawing distinctions in space was ultimately what ruling the city was all about, and the unintended consequences that resulted from the forms and norms of the early protectorate only became sharper over time, giving rise eventually to the bureaucratic chaos of urban planning.

FOUR

Disease, Environment, and Social Engineering: Clearing Out and Cleaning Up the Colonial City

Surveying the scene in 1920, the first resident of Zanzibar, Major F. B. Pearce, pronounced his satisfaction with the progress the British had wrought in the urban milieu. “Zanzibar Town,” he confidently stated, “is being improved every year.” By way of illustration, he proceeded to cite a singular example. “Until quite recently clusters of insanitary native huts surged up to the very walls of the houses occupied by Europeans. Such areas are being cleared, and open spaces so obtained are laid out as gardens.” According to this self-serving logic, “town improvement” was synonymous with clearing the “natives” out of the city. Here, segregation and sanitation seemed to go hand in hand, as separating Europeans from others—creating a kind of cordon sanitaire around their dwellings—was counted as an achievement in “public” hygiene. Pearce readily admitted that the pace of urban reform had been slower than he might have liked. But he asserted that colonial officials had been hampered by the absence of oversight or planning in the past: “Progress may appear slow, but it is far from easy in a crowded native city to rectify the results of the haphazard methods of building of the past, when every builder was free to erect his house exactly where and how he pleased, without the slightest consideration for either his neighbour or the common weal.” In his view, the root of the problem lay in a lack of foresight and public spirit on the part of the indigenes. Now that the British were in charge, however, things would be very different. “Matters are improving year by year,” Pearce reiterated, “and it is hoped that Zanzibar, once the City of Dreadful Night, may in course of time become the City Perfect” (1920, 211–12).

Colonial discourses about urban improvements often returned to the same themes, consistently emphasizing the importance of clearing out and cleaning up the city. In an array of accounts and memoirs, British officials drew stark contrasts between urban disorder and despotism under the sultans and the improvements enacted by colonial rule. The “city of dreadful night” loomed large in the colonial imagination, as urban disarray and disease were insistently linked and projected onto “uncivilized” natives, either past or present. In the Public Health Department report for 1913, an early health officer provided a classic example, complaining about “the appallingly unsanitary condition” of Zanzibar “not so many years ago.” Referring to mid-Victorian-era travelers’ accounts, the report blamed the prior state of the city on the fact that “a primitive population is content to throw out upon the streets its refuse, and, what is more, is by no means averse to allowing it to be left there.” Overlooking the contemporaneous lack of basic sanitation in metropolitan Europe, the official singled out Zanzibar as a special case where the inappropriate disposal of all sorts of matter had led to a disgusting if not dreadful state of affairs:

Dirt, filth and rubbish of all kinds was flung on the streets, and if one went out of one’s house, one was compelled to wade through a dreadful mess. Dead bodies were cast out on the beach in many instances, or, if the corpse were fortunate enough to be buried, the grave was dug anywhere in the town, whilst the richer and more important persons were buried in their own back gardens, so to speak. Slowly but surely, however, sanitary education has progressed among all classes of the native community, and although at the present time the standard is still considerably below what is desirable, yet it is improving year by year.¹

In these progress narratives, sanitary practice and urban order were regularly linked, and this conjuncture was anything but accidental. From the colonial perspective, the lack of an enlightened and modern administrative apparatus in Zanzibar under the sultans had necessarily produced a chaotic and unclean city. Oriental despotism in the urban milieu had as its “natural” complement decay, disease, and disorder. Instituting a new regime of “civic hygiene” meant adopting principles designed to alter indigenous behavior and more properly arrange bodies in space. Indeed, throughout the colonial world, urban spatial technologies and techniques were shaped more than anything



20. The Rat Patrol: medical staff dissecting rats as plague control. During the colonial period, the Health Office became popularly known as *Ofisi ya Panya*, or the Rat Office. Zanzibar National Archives.

else by an obsession with hygiene and health—what Maynard Swanson has neatly termed the “sanitation syndrome” (1970, 1977). It was by no means coincidental, then, that the notion of town planning was first broached in Zanzibar in 1913 in the annual report of the Public Health Department.

For such a materialist, bricks-and-mortar profession, town planning was preoccupied with a host of evanescent issues, especially light, airflow, and health. Both at home and abroad, planners’ obsession with surroundings and salubrity meant that the field was deeply informed by an “environmental determinism that pursued physicalist solutions to social, economic, and political ills” (King 1990, 54). Of course, by the time Pearce was writing, planning was already being touted in the colonial world as the latest form of modernizing and scientific improvement, capable of solving a host of social problems in an efficient and economic manner. But if the discipline was being ushered in under

the sign of the new, the field in fact had been decisively shaped by a far older set of concerns. To grasp the roots of town planning, we must first go back to a moment when it did not exist as a distinct practice, being combined instead with related modes of inquiry that only later developed into distinct fields (medicine, anthropology, geography, natural history, and biology, among others). Without tracing the connections between late Enlightenment philosophy, the emergence of the natural and human sciences, and the growth of Western imperialism, we cannot fully understand the preoccupations that eventually drove urban planning.

Late Enlightenment Environmentalism

By the end of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thought had produced a set of linked discursive fields that were saturated with environmentalist concerns. These speculations took different forms and focused on diverse aspects from the physiological to the climatic and anthropological, but in essence they all sought to connect habitat to habits in various ways. At a time when the lines between the natural, medical, and social sciences were by no means firmly drawn, there was a burgeoning literature seeking to fathom what L. J. Jordanova has called the “laws of the organism–environment relationship” (1979, 120). Here, the strands of what later became different modes of knowledge production were closely intertwined.

CLIMATE AND CONDUCT: PROTO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL INQUIRIES

First and foremost, by the end of the eighteenth century, there was an already well-established tradition of travel narratives that connected the products of a country or the milieu of a people with their manners or customs. Although there are numerous examples, Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) stands out as perhaps the most exemplary work in the genre during this period. These proto-anthropological accounts were first prompted by travel in Europe itself, but truly flourished with Western colonial expansion into other parts of the globe, becoming staples of American, Asian, and African exploration.

Second, this widespread engagement with strange customs, conduct, and climates was later joined by more formal efforts to account for human variation, particularly in the wake of Pritchardian ethnology in the mid-nineteenth century. Scholars were equally preoccupied with understanding how humans fit within nature (biology, physiology, medicine) as well as grasping the relations between humans (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). And these discourses had distinct moral implications as well, raising pressing questions for biblically centered views of the world. If humans were all divinely created, children of Adam and Eve, why were they so different now across the world? Had humans in certain areas degenerated from an originary condition? If so, how? Or had they migrated and adapted to local conditions or climates? Or perhaps they were not all the same, having being created as different sorts or types? As debates raged between adherents of monogenesis and polygenesis, the outlines of anthropology emerged more sharply, produced in and through a complicated set of disputes on the links between environment, race, and difference (Marks 2002; Stocking 1987).

MEDICINE AND THE BODY

If travel narratives and early anthropology were pervaded with environmental concerns, they were by no means alone. Indeed, among the modes of inquiry that shaped later urban planning, geographic and social perspectives were joined by wide-ranging genres of medical writing. At least as far back as the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, and Places*, medical thought in the classical Greek tradition was deeply engaged with the ways external surroundings impacted human well-being. As Jordanova (1979, 121) argues, late Enlightenment environmentalism was premised on a natural philosophy that saw different components of nature as inter-related. Living beings were more or less flexible and adaptive, adjusting to their surroundings and being affected by a whole range of influences, seen and unseen. The relationships involved were complex, multiple, and shifting. In terms of individual health, for example, any number of factors could be involved—bodily constitution, temperament, habits, diet, moral dispositions, and climatic or geographic factors. Classical humoral theory saw the body as permeable and interactive. Different parts and functions had to be kept in balance, and this involved inter-

nal adjustments as well as the regulation of flows and forces externally. “The body was seen as governed by inputs and outputs—water, air, and food balanced against perspiration, respiration, and excretion” (Curtin 1985, 597). Disease resulted when a dislocation or disjuncture occurred between person and place. By the end of the eighteenth century, maintaining health involved various techniques ranging from management of the self to manipulation of the surrounding milieu. And no concept captured this relationship better than that of hygiene.

HYGIENE

In its original use, hygiene was a far more expansive concept than it is now. Pervasive in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *hygiene* invoked a whole series of regular practices and procedures deemed necessary for the preservation of human well-being rather than just simple cleanliness. As Jordanova notes, hygiene embraced both individual and more social or public aspects and was particularly shaped by a long tradition of French thought. In a manner that seems to anticipate Foucault, proper hygiene involved instituting particular forms of individual and social discipline, inculcating habitual practices typically glossed as a *régime* or regimen. These terms “contained a range of meanings from the medical one implying the regulation of diet, exercise, in fact of mode of living in general, to the more general ones of the act of governing, a particular form of government, or a prevailing system” (1979, 127). As we shall see, it is precisely this conceptual leap that made it possible for later colonial officials to attribute urban disarray in Zanzibar—in particular the absence of proper sanitary procedure and systems—to misrule by the sultans. Because the discourse of hygiene was so synthetic and broad, it shifted easily from medical to social and geographic considerations, including micro issues of individual practice as well as more collective questions of social pathology. A propensity to drink might indeed be viewed as the result of moral flaws or personal temperament, but local environs, social class, or national character might be cited as equal if not greater causes.

And far more than individual lives were at stake: if unhygienic habits were allowed to fester and spread, they could become sources of social contamination, sapping the vitality of the body politic. In this

sense, concerns about “public hygiene” opened up into much broader issues regarding the proper maintenance and management of the social order. Hygienic discourses endowed medical figures with authority and expertise, just as allegations of widespread or insidious threats to public health could be used to justify more intrusive interventions. Behind the reformist impulses of philanthropic experts, there always lurked the harsher vision of medical police, sanitarians licensed to inspect and enforce the sanitary laws of the state. Especially in the colonial world, the enlightened paternalism of health experts readily translated into acts of force and compulsion carried out, of course, in the interests of the “public good.”

TERRAIN AND THE TOPOGRAPHY OF DISEASE

Long before any precise causes were understood, Western medical discourse was deeply engaged with the spatial sources of disease, attributing the distribution and diffusion of illness to either geographic or atmospheric factors. From Hippocrates on, certain kinds of atmospheres and environments were thought to provoke illness, and understanding how and why this occurred was a primary preoccupation of the emerging physical and human sciences. Well before any vectors of transmission were identified, analysts empirically understood that there was a relationship between particular spaces and the extent or spread of sickness. Outbreaks of contagious illness or the course of epidemics seemed to lend credence to such beliefs, leading to a range of efforts to tabulate and map rates of mortality and morbidity. As Felix Driver (1988, 278) observes, patterns of disease were “read through the landscape,” as variations in environmental conditions were held responsible for the incidence and intensity of particular diseases. Within the British isles and elsewhere in the empire, this produced a vigorous tradition of what Driver calls “medical topography” that assessed specific localities—“geology, landforms, drainage, vegetation, climate, industry, and customs”—and linked climatic conditions with the sicknesses they allegedly produced. In the colonial milieu, this genre merged with land surveys, ethnological or travel accounts, and assessments of the produce and commercial prospects of a country. This was medicine in its collective mode: a new sort of biopolitics, as Foucault has argued, aimed at managing the health

of “populations”—a newly constituted arena for state investigation and intervention. Medical topography also shared with later urban planning a comprehensive set of aims as well as hybrid concerns that cut across spatial, anthropological, and medical boundaries.

Tropical Maladies and Medicine

The diverse environmental emphases of Enlightenment thought were stimulated and sustained by the course of Western imperialism. Without reference to colonial experience, it is impossible to understand the emergence of these interlocking discourses. Certainly, within Europe itself, speculations about geographic or climatic influences on states of health had a long history, but with the increasing movement of Europeans into the tropics, these inquiries took on a different shape and intensity, commingling anthropological, geographic, and biomedical aspects. The colonial expansion of the West was accompanied by “staggering” relocation costs, and as Philip Curtin (1989, 161) observes, the statistics alone fail to capture the full weight of the human tragedy involved. From a very early juncture, high rates of European mortality and morbidity in the tropics lent support to emergent environmentalist assumptions. Taking West Africa as an example, during the eighteenth century anywhere between 25 and 75 percent of Europeans died within the first year of their arrival on the coast (Curtin 1964, 1:71). Insofar as indigenes were not seemingly affected at anywhere near the same levels, many concluded that either Europeans were unsuited to the tropics or there was something particularly dangerous about movement into a tropical milieu (leading to visions of Africa as the “white man’s grave”).

As we’ve seen, biomedical thought during this period focused on the problem of maintaining harmony within the body internally as well as keeping bodies in balance with each other and their immediate surroundings. Ill health was caused by either poor practices or being out of place, and both these issues seemed especially acute in the tropics. Authorities believed that disease was deeply influenced by climatic, atmospheric, and geographical factors. Trying to isolate these causes or insulate people from them became a leading concern. Two forms of disease were generally recognized during the nineteenth century. On the one hand there was miasma, which included conditions like ma-

laria (literally, “bad air”) that were seen as endemic to certain regions or geographic areas. Unhealthy soils, swamps, low-lying topography, heat, or decaying matter were all cited as sources of illness. On the other hand there was contagion, which embraced maladies like smallpox or plague that were thought to pass somehow from one person to the next. It is crucial to note, however, that contagion “was not thought of as an organism that moves from one person to another nor was it necessarily a specific cause of a particular disease. Rather, it was an emanation from the body of a person who had the disease, or from that of a person who had died of it, or from the bodies of people who were not even ill, if they were crowded together without enough ventilation” (Curtin 1985, 596).

The high incidence of European disease and death in the tropics came to be calculated as one of the costs of engaging in commerce or exercising control over foreign lands. If many individuals succumbed, others survived “seasoning” fevers, adapting to their new circumstances (though of course the worrisome threat of tropical “degeneration” remained a frequent source of debate). Over time, an accumulated lore grew up outlining a range of procedures and practices that Europeans should adopt if they hoped to survive the rigors of a tropical environment. Elaborate and often conflicting advice on clothing, diet, exercise, and other minute details of conduct became common fare in manuals and other guides aimed at protecting Europeans from malevolent influences.

Here, the lines between medical and moral prescription were never clear. Maintaining both mental and physical discipline was crucial to hygienic regimes in the tropics. A late Victorian traveler in central Africa, Joseph Thomson, highlighted common themes when he wrote in 1881, “It is a well-known fact that the only way to resist successfully the enervating effects of a humid tropical climate is by constant exertion, and by manfully fighting the baleful influence. The man who has nothing to do, or won’t do what he has to do, is sure to succumb in a few months, and degenerate into an idiot or a baby. . . . Hard constant work is the great preserver. Sweat out the malaria and germs of disease, and less will be heard of the energy-destroying climate of the tropics” (quoted in Fabian 2000, 58). If internal dispositions—force of will or determination—could make for good health, inoculating Europeans against

tropical threats, by extension those who “succumbed” were somehow to blame for their own sicknesses: too weak or “unmanly” to “resist successfully” and survive.

Such moralizing judgments were part and parcel of a hygienic regimen that gave Europeans the comfort—or illusion—of believing they had at least some control over their fates. By adopting certain attitudes and performing specific rituals, they hoped to purchase protection against the tropics, warding off the “baleful” influences that surrounded them. In these medico-magical practices, there was much shared ground with the philosophy and logic of African witchcraft beliefs. If changing personal habits or practices was one tactic Europeans adopted, others included altering the environment itself, shifting location to higher or drier ground, or providing improved microclimates. The latter included anything from specifications for ideal European house designs in the tropics (on stilts, or with wide verandahs and extensive openings for ventilation) to site conditions or the layout of settlements, and these spatial or architectural efforts obviously had significant implications for the development of urban planning.

Social Pathology, Spatial Determinism, and Sanitary Reform

If the natural world was seen as a source of disease in Europe and especially in the tropics, this does not mean that social causes of sickness were by any means ignored or neglected. Following along the lines of Rousseau, there was ample precedent in French Enlightenment philosophy to blame civilization itself as a source of illness. During this period, a great deal of energy was devoted to the improvement of specific social milieus or institutional settings—workhouses, asylums, prisons, hospitals, and factories. Social experiments in these settings were fueled by faith in the almost limitless possibilities of reform, spatially deterministic and quintessentially utopian in character. As Jordanova observes, social pathology was typically framed as a problem of poverty, and nowhere was poverty more concentrated than in the space of the city: “The fear of the urban poor classes was a well established facet of British and French social commentaries in the second half of the eighteenth century. Paris and London had acquired the reputation of dangerous, depraved cities. It was thus already part of the common currency of middle and

upper class culture to note the association between overcrowding and poverty, and between moral and physical degradation” (1979, 133).

Bourgeois alarm about the state of the city loomed large in Britain throughout much of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Felix Driver (1988) argues that attempts to remake urban environments were absolutely crucial to the formation of the social sciences during this period, preoccupied, as they were, with practical issues of amelioration and improvement. If creating a better, more orderly Zanzibar was later seen to be tantamount to clearing out and cleaning up native quarters, these twin themes had much earlier precedents in efforts to reform the slums of London and other cities in Europe. But finding points of origin here is not quite so simple, for the language and tropes of urban reportage in Victorian England were often powerfully informed by missionary tracts and the popular literature of African exploration. Civilizing the slums and uplifting the savage were seen in remarkably similar terms, as a colonial discourse on race abroad translated easily into the language of class at home (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992).

If a lack of civilizing influences—commerce or Christianity—was often depicted as a reason to bring light to “darkest Africa,” exploring and exposing the continent to European control, so too with the poorer quarters of urban England. In these discourses, images of uncultured, animal, or natural life abound, with urban spaces being described as “dens,” “breeding grounds,” “hot-beds,” “plague-spots,” “swamps,” “rookeries,” “wilderness,” and “jungle.” Echoing colonial preoccupations with the Orientalized or labyrinthine recesses of urban Zanzibar, Driver writes that “what seems to have most concerned middle class commentators was their own lack of control over and within such areas; indeed, their obsession with hidden recesses, narrow turnings, dark alleys and shadowy corners was quite overwhelming. The literature on the rookeries of London, for example, was [predicated] on the assumption that they were located beyond the public gaze, outside the ambit of official surveillance” (1988, 281).

Much more than surveillance was at stake, of course. Drawing on the legacy of Enlightenment environmentalism, most nineteenth-century observers believed that spatial settings greatly influenced social behavior. Urban slums in this sense were believed to spawn disease, and in an era when there was endemic overcrowding, little housing regulation, impure

water supply, and no mass systems of waste disposal, there was plentiful empirical evidence that seemed to confirm this claim. But as we've seen, ill health was understood as simultaneously material and moral. As in the tropics, medical writers believed that pestilence was caused by both habits and habitat, transcending the boundaries between physical and social pathologies. Indeed, the risk of allowing places of urban poverty to "fester" unrelieved was that they were potential sources of "contamination" on any number of levels. Left untreated, such sites threatened to worsen and spread, infecting other parts of the social fabric.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, widespread movements for sanitary reform managed to "place the problem of pollution at the very center of public consciousness. Sewage itself acquired a cosmic significance" (Driver 1988, 280). Sanitary movements embraced an array of efforts to remove offensive matter or reorder spatial environments to prevent things from coming into improper contact. In metropolitan cities, morbidity was framed as a problem of proximity. In the course of everyday life, bodies produced miasmas, and if people were packed together too closely, these emanations could rise to dangerous levels. Not just the surroundings but even the air itself was tainted, infecting those forced to inhale it. Hence disease was intimately related to the question of urban density, but not just on a physical level. Certainly, sanitarians and reformers in Europe were preoccupied with ventilating older quarters and using slum clearances to reduce overcrowding—tactics that colonial planners from Asia to India and Africa later obsessively pursued. Density and disease weren't just scientific concerns; they were also social and spiritual, because they were thought to go hand in hand with demoralization. Slums sapped the body and spirit just as surely as sickness did, and these pathologies were socio-spatial in origin.

As in the tropics, it was believed that the strong or the saintly living in slums might surmount their surroundings by force of will, but most would succumb when immersed in a swamp of social ills. Crowding in poor quarters fostered contiguity, which meant that dwellers there would be exposed to a steady diet of immodesty if not immorality. Conditions virtually guaranteed a lack of civility, creating a climate where vice and criminality could flourish—at least in the imaginations of middle- and upper-class reformers. In their view, a lack of space and privacy meant that all sorts of acts might be conducted in the same room or take place

in public before the eyes of all. Bodies and functions could not be kept properly separate or contained. Even a usually astute urban analyst like Friedrich Engels, writing about conditions in English cities in the 1840s, was not immune to the slightly shocked and moralizing tones of the Victorian reformer. Drawing on an article about a poorer section of Edinburgh, Engels emphasized the complete lack of sanitary provision, underlining the social and moral consequences involved. Because residents were forced to throw their waste into the streets, the gutters were clogged with

an amount of solid filth and foetid exhalation disgusting to both sight and smell, as well as exceedingly prejudicial to health. Can it be wondered that, in such localities, health, morals, and common decency should be at once neglected? No; all who know the private condition of the inhabitants will bear testimony to the immense amount of their disease, misery, and demoralisation. Society in these quarters has sunk to a state indescribably vile and wretched. . . . The dwellings of the poorer classes are generally very filthy, apparently never subjected to any cleaning process whatever, consisting, in most cases, of a single room, ill-ventilated and yet cold, owing to broken, ill-fitting windows, sometimes damp and partially underground, and always scantily furnished and altogether comfortless, heaps of straw often serving for beds, in which a whole family—male and female, young and old, are huddled together in revolting confusion. (Engels 1958 [1845], 43)

Sanitation and the City in Nineteenth-Century Zanzibar

In colonial spaces like Zanzibar, environmentalist beliefs, tropical hygiene, and sanitary preoccupations all came together, and this mix was especially potent when Europeans found themselves confronting the cosmopolitan maze of “Oriental” or African cities. Mid-Victorian-era travelers in Zanzibar made obligatory reference to the dangerous effects of the climate, often focusing on the unsanitary state of water or air. And yet like their metropolitan colleagues, they linked offensive matter to disease in a reflexive manner, jumping quite quickly from physical conditions to social meanings and moral conclusions.

When Richard Burton arrived in Zanzibar in the late 1850s, he found the seafront of the city a mere façade, concealing the “uncleanness” within. “The foreground is a line of sand fearfully impure,” he wrote.

“Corpses float at times upon the heavy water; the shore is a cesspool” (1872, 1:80). He asserted that the tidal creek on the other side of the city was even more sickening, observing that the receding tide there “left behind a rich legacy of fevers and terrible diseases; especially in the inner town, a dead flat, excluded from the sea breeze, and exposed to the pestiferous breath of the *maremma*” (1:97). Livingstone echoed these themes in his journal when he passed through in 1866, describing the foreshore and tidal creek in vivid terms that later writers rarely failed to quote: “The stench arising from a mile and a half or two square miles of exposed sea-beach, which is the general repository of the filth of the town, is quite horrible. At night it is so gross or crass, one might cut out a slice and manure a garden with it: it might be called *Stinkibar* rather than Zanzibar. No one can long enjoy good health here” (1875, 21).

Dr. James Christie, who served as physician to the sultan in the 1870s, concurred that “the sanitary condition of Zanzibar is as bad as bad can be, and so long as the inhabitants are content with the existing state of affairs they must reap the consequences—disease and death” (1876, 298). He too singled out the beach as a “pestilential mass of corruption,” claiming that at low tide, “gaseous fumes bubble up all along the shore, and poison the atmosphere” (276). The city was surrounded by its own waste and filled with ruins, dumps, and graves, he said—all of which testified to the absence of proper sanitary controls: “There are neither sanitary laws nor regulations regarding the cleansing of the place, and everyone is left to do precisely as he thinks proper, without let or hindrance” (271).

In a later medico-topographical report published in Calcutta, Dr. John Robb, a surgeon in the Bombay medical establishment who came to work at the British agency in Zanzibar, substantially agreed with this assessment, decrying the lack of sanitary measures in the city. Given the absence of efforts to preserve health, he expressed his surprise that the island had escaped any major epidemic over almost the past decade, implying that little more than dumb luck was involved:

Any one fairly well acquainted with Zanzibar knows how ready the insanitary condition of the town is to give length and breadth to the spread of an epidemic, and it has been well said that a plague can do terrible mischief in the congenial sphere of an Oriental city, when it settles down to its work among the dirt and the inhabitants. One or

two leading thoroughfares are swept and in order, and a passing visitor, whose duty or pleasure limits his wanderings to these, expresses himself well satisfied that Zanzibar is greatly abused. It is not in such well-kept streets that epidemic disease lingers and grows; they are but as a clean front put on to cover filth and wretchedness lying thickly behind.
(1879, 8)

But if plague or other epidemics seemed to loom over the islands like a perpetual threat, why was it that mass death didn't occur more often? If Zanzibar was as sulfurous and suffused with poisonous air, noxious emanations, and foul waters, how indeed did it manage to sustain life at all? Such questions rarely seemed to trouble medical authorities. The links between insalubrious surroundings, sickness, and urban disorder seemed so obvious as to be beyond doubt. If people appeared to live longer than they should in Zanzibar, that could only be an accident; if certain streets seemed orderly and well swept, that was only in order to conceal the even greater filth that must inevitably lie behind. Sanitary discourses were constituted on the basis of diffuse and unseen threats. Moreover, at least until the revolution wrought by germ theory at the end of the century, sanitarians and tropical hygienists often failed to make careful distinctions between conditions that were simply offensive to the senses and those that posed significant risks to health. While the smell of night soil or decaying waste at low tide could hardly have been pleasant (especially to those, like Livingstone, who happened to reside downwind), they did not pose the same danger as impure drinking water, plague, tuberculosis, or even malaria. Nor did they have much to do with twisting streets or unplanned structures. And yet all were lumped together as looming (and intrinsically related) socio-spatial threats to human health.

Later colonial writers seized on these texts and cited them as clear evidence, creating a reified portrayal of nineteenth-century Zanzibar city as dirty and diseased. Much like the 1913 public health report, they substantially ignored sanitary improvements initiated under Sultan Barghash, especially with regard to waste disposal and water supply. The result was a stark portrait of the city before and after the British, emphasizing the modernizing and enlightened character of the colonial regime. By the later colonial period, allegations about unsanitary conditions, haphazard building, and urban disarray under the sultans had be-

come commonplace. Hollingsworth, who long served as colonial education officer, expressed the key elements of this dominant discourse best. Before the British assumed control over the city, he maintained, “There was a complete lack of even the most elementary sanitary arrangements. Heaps of rubbish and filth were allowed to litter the streets and alleys, many of which were blocked with parts of ruined houses which had fallen across them and had never been removed. Buildings were hastily erected anyhow and anywhere without any Government control. At night-time the entire town was in darkness” (Hollingsworth 1953, 59). Over time, these claims took on the character of established historical truth as they were circulated and cited in successive colonial reports and publications.² But ruins, rubbish, basic sanitation, building control, and street lighting were not all problems of the same order, nor could they be uniformly resolved in one fell swoop. In the colonial imagination, however, spatial disarray, sanitary threats, and social disorder were insistently linked, and these connections only became stronger over time. Sanitary discourse certainly took on new guises in the early decades of the twentieth century, but with the emergence of town planning as a totalizing means to address both public health and urban order, dreams of achieving environmental control and social engineering became ever more tightly conjoined.

Tropical Medicine and Colonial Terrains: The Rise of Sanitary Segregation

By the turn of the century, understandings of tropical health and the colonial contexts in which they were circulating had shifted in crucial ways. The development of germ theory in the late nineteenth century had opened up untapped possibilities for understanding the causes and spread of disease. But these innovations weren’t widely accepted or assimilated at the time (Curtin 1985). They were subject to debate within scientific circles and continued to compete with other, preexisting modes of belief. Science, moreover, never occurs in a social vacuum, and discourses about tropical hygiene were directly influenced by colonial ideologies of race, deep cleavages of class and social inequality, and insistent beliefs about inherent differences between civilizations. Consensus was slow to form even among experts, and recent theories by no means

displaced the accumulated social lore about the persistent influence of climate or environment on human health.

Conventional wisdom and experience were as important as formal scientific knowledge in shaping European approaches to tropical medicine and colonial sanitation. For example, while the precise causes of malaria remained unknown, observers had long understood that the disease was connected to the environment. If in actuality malaria has little to do with miasmas or emanations of the soil (as was widely believed at the time), it is indeed fostered by warm, wet, and low-lying areas—because marshes or swamps provide good breeding conditions for mosquitoes. Even before the specific vector was identified, trial and error established that geographic relocation could diminish rates of malarial infection. Resorting to higher and more arid ground reduced exposure, producing results that only seemed to confirm established beliefs about the risks of miasma.

Alfonse Lavernan had identified malarial parasites in human blood in Algeria in the early 1880s, but it was not until the end of the century that Ronald Ross pinpointed anopheles mosquitoes as the precise vector of transmission. These discoveries, however, did little to end environmental approaches to malaria; instead, the spatial strategies simply shifted. While older tactics and theories continued to find favor, three principal routes of attack on the disease gradually emerged: through environmental means, using swamp drainage and sanitary policy to eradicate the source, containing or killing mosquitoes where they bred; fighting the disease within the body itself through drug therapy (the value of quinine, of course, had been recognized by Europeans at least since the 1830s); and through various modes of population management and control (for instance, relocating garrisons from low-lying areas to higher ground). Advances in scientific knowledge and medicine had created the conditions for a more precise understanding of the causes of malaria. But the disease continued to be viewed in light of the prevailing colonial conditions, and the measures chosen to combat it were deeply constrained by historical precedent, political economy, and deep-seated racism.

By the early twentieth century, the problem of the tropical environment had been transposed mostly into a native problem, becoming both internalized and interiorized within the bodies of others. As we've

seen, from the earliest stages of European expansion into the tropics, higher rates of death and disease drew attention to the problem of the European body—the weakness of its constitution or its vulnerability in a tropical environment. But with gradual improvements in empirical tactics, engineering, and especially sanitation over the course of the nineteenth century, Europeans fared much better in comparison with local populations. As disparities in death rates by race seemed to decline, the terms of debate dramatically shifted. And these shifts coincided with a heightened sense of cultural exclusivity and superiority among Europeans, as well as the fullest expansion of their colonial empires. For Europeans, maintaining health in the tropics became less a question of geography than of adopting a hygienic regime and avoiding contact with harmful influences. But by this juncture the perceived locus of harm had shifted in significant ways from places to people—and particularly those seen as less civilized, poorer, or racially other. Indeed, from the later nineteenth century on, a newly assertive scientific racism only served to reinforce established colonial beliefs and practices, as security fears, sanitary concerns, and segregationist planning all came together to promote policies seeking to isolate and insulate Europeans from native influences.

Medical insights made possible a new politics of the body, but these advances were invariably understood in light of prevailing colonial categories—emphasizing the need in colonial spaces to constitute a more protected and exclusive (European) body politic. Sickness still had an environmental component, linked to social conditions and spaces, but increasingly it was also seen as something inherent in particular bodies. Colonial contexts proved to be especially fertile grounds for this kind of racist scapegoating, singling out Africans or Indians as sources of disease. “So closely associated indeed are malaria and the native in Africa, and so wonderfully constant is the presence of anopheles where natives are collected in numbers, that we doubt whether any operations, now possible, directed against anopheles will do much to diminish the danger of malarial infection,” announced two doctors from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, sent out by the malaria committee of the Royal Society to conduct research in West Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. “In fact, in Africa the primary aim should be to remove susceptible Europeans from the midst of malaria. To stamp out native

malaria is at present chimerical, and every effort should rather be turned to the protection of the Europeans” (quoted in Curtin 1985, 598).

In the colonial milieu, medical discourse was never far removed from the language of moral panic, animated by the threat of imminent contagion or contamination. In large part, colonial public health measures involved little more than trying to separate out and protect Europeans from a “public” seen as diseased and dangerous. Urban planning and sanitation were never just technical measures or tools for improvement, but instead were strategies of power intimately linked to the essential inequalities of colonial rule. As Anthony King observes, these interventions took the basic divisions of colonial society—between European and native, white and black, rich and poor, ruler and ruled—as natural givens. “In this situation, the ‘techniques,’ and goals of planning—‘orderly’ development, easing traffic flows, physically ‘healthy’ environments, planned residential areas, reduced densities, and zoning of industrial and residential zones were introduced, each according to the standards deemed appropriate to the various segregated populations in the city—and all without disturbing the overall structure of power” (1990, 54).

Sanitary conceptions were by no means the sole cause of segregationist colonial urban policies. But the preoccupation with health in crucial respects echoed cultural or political rationales for separation, reinforcing and extending older practices. British colonialism developed in Africa at a relatively late stage, and the course it would take was strongly influenced by imperial precedents elsewhere. In the case of sanitary practice and urban policy, India was especially prominent as an exemplar. In India, the British had deployed military cantonments since at least 1817, though the majority of these were constructed around midcentury. The cantonments were contained and self-sufficient communities, laid out on strictly ordered and regimented lines, set apart from indigenous cities in such a way so as to emphasize the internal solidarities of the troops. The militarization of space involved in the cantonment system was only heightened following the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Fearing for their security, civilians decamped from the Indian cities where they had resided, copying the military by forming segregated settlements known as “civil lines” (Home 1997, 122ff.).

Hill stations in cooler, more mountainous regions were also developed in India—places of separation and ventilation to which Europeans

could retreat. Military and aesthetic principles—the desire to seize the high ground, which allowed for surveillance of the surrounding countryside and was easily defensible—coincided with cultural ideologies of health, of isolation from alleged sources of contamination. (Such factors also motivated the location of colonial administrative structures and residences within existing cities.) In other contexts, such as North Africa and the Levant, segregated settlements were a long-established part of the urban fabric prior to European control, with different quarters of the city being set aside for different groups of merchants and traders (a structure adopted by Stamford Raffles in the layout of early Singapore). In general, French colonial policy took over this established spatial form, constructing “new towns” along European design principles outside existing cities—model sites of modernity set apart from walled *medinas*, ossified as preserves of tradition (Çelik 1997; Wright 1991).

If segregation was motivated by a confluence of factors, drawing upon ideologies of racial exclusivity, health, and security at various turns, this does not mean that these policies were by any means implemented in a uniform or even coherent manner. The degree to which sanitation-as-segregation was imposed varied widely throughout colonial Africa, producing a whole range of forms: green belts, garden suburbs, and administrative districts; native locations, reserves, and townships; mining and industrial enclaves. Achieving strict segregation was, of course, easier in a newly laid out site than in an established city. Within already existing urban zones, the rationalization of occupied space could only be achieved at great cost, and colonial administrations mostly lacked the necessary financial capacity to underwrite projects of urban segregation on an extensive scale.

Public Health and the Emergence of Planning

Despite their dramatic rhetoric about unsanitary conditions in Zanzibar, British officials moved very gradually during the first decades of protectorate rule to address what they described as the insalubrious state of the city. Policies were shaped in response to localized domains, having only a limited impact. The colonial regime arrived at decisions mostly on an ad hoc or situational basis, depending on the particular interests or inclinations of whatever medical officer happened to be in

charge at the moment. Structural, sanitary, and social issues were not consistently linked, nor was there any attempt to resolve them comprehensively throughout the city as a whole. At the end of 1913, the public health officer, Major Dudley Sheridan Skelton, summed up the current state of affairs with regard to urban reform initiatives. In his annual report, under the heading “Town Planning and Improvement,” he observed, “No very striking work has been put in hand, although a lot of quiet and exceedingly useful work has been done in cleaning up and clearing away ruins by the Public Works Department.”³

Over the next decade, managing to get by with “quiet and exceedingly useful” efforts no longer seemed enough. Before and after World War I, public health discourse and urban planning increasingly began to intersect throughout Britain’s African colonies, assuming a more prominent position on the agenda. The discipline of town planning was gaining steam at home, attracting adherents, academic respectability, administrative interest, and a more established institutional base. While promoting the field in England and the continent, many of its earliest and most charismatic practitioners were also quick to seek contacts and employment in the colonial world, exporting their craft to imperial spaces across Asia and Africa.

The developing field of town planning certainly held clear attractions for sanitarians, especially in the colonial world. As we’ve seen, sanitary reform in the nineteenth century was driven by zeal and ambition in equal measure, saturated with environmental preoccupations. By altering the physical context in which people lived, it was believed that it would be possible to transform their behavior, morality, and culture—engineering better bodies, a more regulated social order, and a stronger body politic. This older tradition of spatial and environmental determinism was powerfully reinforced by the growth of town planning, which seemed to offer a comprehensive means to engineer better health through the rational and scientific arrangement of physical space. As town planning was transported into the colonial world, aesthetic ideals (spatial order and regularity) came together with notions of proper hygiene and beliefs in cultural separatism and European chauvinism. Proponents of public health and planning sought nothing less than to remake the landscape to accord with colonial hierarchies of race and class.

This potent ideological mix was certainly present from the very outset in Zanzibar when public health and planning began to be discussed in tandem just before World War I. In 1913 Zanzibar was transferred from Foreign Office control to the Colonial Office, its position within the empire regularized. To bring Zanzibar in line with similar colonies, new administrative mechanisms and procedures were put in place. This change in oversight also meant that local colonial officials would henceforth have to answer to different standards, conforming to orthodox practice elsewhere in the empire. In 1913 the Colonial Office appointed the foremost sanitary expert of the day, Professor W. J. R. Simpson, to undertake an official mission to assess sanitary conditions and advise the administration on proper policies throughout its East African possessions, and Zanzibar was belatedly added to his itinerary.

Simpson's East African sanitary inspection tour initiated a series of analyses and reports on the relationship between planning and public health in urban Zanzibar. Over the next decade, medical officers, planners, public works and Colonial Office officials fitfully debated the priorities and parameters of a more organized agenda for a sanitary city. This discourse shows how persistent sanitary obsessions shaped the outlines of an eventual planning agenda and reveals the manner in which policies were ultimately driven by colonial stereotypes and the perceived needs of those in power. Overall, these debates serve to remind us, as King (1990, 54) notes, that colonial planning was all too often "a strategy of power exercised by municipal authorities to alleviate what were defined as social pathologies." This discursive terrain was marked by technical hubris and cultural ignorance, motivated by the belief that social ills could be engineered out of existence (or relocated elsewhere) through material tactics. Sanitary experts consistently sought to scapegoat sickness, associating it with racial others and the structures or spaces they were seen to inhabit. Excising these others from the social fabric and sending them elsewhere was invariably the preferred colonial solution. At the nexus of planning and public health, we can glimpse many of the enduring concerns that would define colonial planning across Africa and Asia for decades to come: the threat of huts or other "native" housing forms; the obsession with congestion and the need for clearances; the need for straight streets, regular patterns, and the value of abstract order; and the ultimate desire of separating Europeans and indigenous races into separate quarters.



21. Clearing huts from Stone Town. Note the variegated texture of the urban built environment, which ranges here from the Anglican cathedral to stone dwellings, modest Swahili houses, and the proverbial “hut,” which is both solidly constructed and quite substantial in size. Zanzibar National Archives.

Huts; or, The Horrors of Native Housing

Among the concerns that emerged with the articulation of planning and public health, huts stood at the very top of the list. Sanitarians and spatial experts alike showed a marked tendency to associate health risks with specific housing types, conflating culture, social conditions, class, and health status in a neat package. For example, when the public health officer attempted to lay out an initial agenda for town planning in 1913, he advocated a routine form of prophylaxis, singling out for attention structures stereotypically linked with Africans. As the first order of business, he stated, “No makuti hut, or rather no hut built in the native fashion, that is without any sort of proper lighting or ventilation and with its ‘choos’ [toilets] in the back kitchen, shall be allowed to remain within certain areas of the township.” As justification for this logic, which anticipated later developments such as apartheid removals and

ethnic cleansing, he cited a rationale replete with racial insinuations: “These dark houses are the hiding places and reservoirs of all sorts of mosquitoes, whilst the cess-pits inside them are found to be the breeding grounds of both culex and stegomyia.”

In this way, teeming biological processes—of breeding, waste, and the spread of disease—were associated with secrecy and darkness and symbolically tied to the figure of the native. This was a colonial discourse par excellence about race and European fears of proximity and pollution: “These native huts, where they exist, as they do, near European and respectable Indian houses must be removed,” the public health officer declared.⁴ The sites he singled out for treatment were located in what later became Stone Town, adjacent to colonial offices or the homes of European officials. In his remarks we can find the echoes of Resident Pearce’s subsequent anxieties about “unsanitary native huts” surging up against the walls of European homes. As the first of many to endorse hut clearances as a reflex response of colonial policy, Public Health Officer Skelton set the stage for later attempts to carve out new zones of order and sanitary separation.

Congestion and Crowding: Colonial Configurations of Race and Class

In the colonial imagination, closed and congested spaces also loomed large as threats. Skelton objected to huts, after all, because they were allegedly dark and unventilated—shut off from circulation and the inspecting eyes of authorities. His successor as medical officer, Dr. Henry Curwen, concurred, stressing the risk of infection posed by the “many large native households residing in dark unventilated houses in the densely overbuilt Shangani district.” Throughout the colonial world, planners and public health officials incessantly trumpeted the need to infuse native cities with new flows of light and air. But the mode of housing seen as dangerous often shifted according to context. Curwen singled out *chawls* as slums, lamenting the “many ramshackle structures favoured by the poorer British Indian residents and the old dwelling houses converted by them into unwholesome lodging houses.”⁵ Skelton also criticized “Indian” builders for their architectural designs, describing another housing type—shopfront dwellings—as inherently diseased:

The types of houses proposed by the local Indian architects are in general bad. Their idea appears to be anchored to a scheme of building a kind of doll's house three rooms deep. The central room has no light or ventilation, except through the other two; as regards the ground floor, the front room is usually the shop and is therefore closed at night. The excuse always made by the builder is that the middle room is meant as a store room and not as a living room. But even if that plan is adhered to, the result is almost as bad as if the room were used as a living or sleeping apartment, because, if it is used as a store, it soon becomes rat ridden and flea infested, and, if as a living or sleeping room, it is usually indescribably dirty, filthy and stuffy.⁶

Lack of light and ventilation in the central bazaar districts—often blamed on inhabitants of South Asian descent rather than on prevailing economic and political conditions—would be a persistent trope of planners and public health personnel in the years to come. Indeed, these themes figured prominently in the first urban plan for Zanzibar, put together by the architect H. V. Lanchester in the 1920s. “The area on which Zanzibar town is built is far too congested,” Lanchester wrote in the chapter on health and hygiene, “and every effort should be made to preserve such open spaces as remain and to prevent the erection of new buildings in crowded areas.” He asserted that tuberculosis was particularly prevalent and that “it owes its endemicity, one might almost say epidemicity, to the bad housing, with huts and houses so closely built together as to prevent free ventilation, and to overcrowding in dark and badly ventilated rooms” (1923, 54). Clearances were one way to address this situation (at the expense of local residents, usually the poorer ones), while new building regulations (with provisions requiring flows of light and air and restrictions on rebuilding in established areas) were another means to the same end.

Lanchester's analysis of the causes of urban congestion was highly revealing. Sanitary reformers and colonial planners alike tended to naturalize social conditions, treating particular historical configurations as if they were the result of essential or inherent forces. “With the present influx of immigrants and the limited housing accommodation,” he declared, “it is difficult to prevent overcrowding,” making it seem as if these factors were beyond the regime's capacity to control. But in fact overcrowding was an almost entirely predictable product of colonial policies. Since the early protectorate, officials had worked to seize unoc-

cupied urban land, clear out huts, place restrictions on new building, and protect established landlords—measures that tended to reduce available building areas, discourage new construction, and render existing accommodations more expensive, especially in central business districts.

More glaringly, for three decades the authorities had failed to make any effort to provide new and affordable housing, abandoning this responsibility to the private market. By World War I, the pent-up demand for affordable housing had far outstripped the existing supply, and landlords responded to the shortage by sharply increasing the rates they were charging. By the time Lanchester arrived in 1922, rents in Stone Town had risen from 100 to 400 percent above their prewar levels (Fair 1994, 108). Rent gouging fell hardest upon the poor, forcing tenants to share space in ever more crowded quarters. The mostly Indian landlords that the authorities had once assiduously championed as forces for progressive capitalist change suddenly found themselves being blamed by the regime for their excessive greed. In 1918 and again in 1922, the administration moved against them by passing rent restriction decrees that restrained profit gouging while leaving its underlying causes, the lack of affordable housing, largely untouched.

For numerous reasons, Lanchester failed to take these basic urban realities into account. Rather than analyzing colonial policy or political economy, he blamed overcrowding on the culture and racial character of the inhabitants. Much of his attention centered on the so-called Indian problem in Stone Town. South Asians, it seemed, were themselves responsible for the congested and unsanitary conditions in which they lived—especially the poorer Indians living in *chawls* or *gurfas*, large structures broken into multiple units with single rooms rented out to workers and their families. “It is to be regretted that the average poor-class Indian is deficient in any sense of hygiene,” Lanchester asserted. “To shut out all light and air, to crowd together, and to expectorate seem to be ingrained habits with them. They have a complete disregard of laws for the public welfare and are quite prepared to hide a case of infectious disease if they think that its notification to the authorities will cause them inconvenience” (1923, 54).

By placing stress on “ingrained habits” and alleging that Indians lacked any sense of proper hygiene or respect for public welfare, Lanchester combined colonial understandings of race and culture with

issues of class and status. But to his mind, Indian proclivities and preferences were the real root of the problem: “The Indian is too prone to accept inadequate quarters, and every effort should be made to impress on him the dangers of overcrowding as well as those of insanitary habits in respect to the disposal of refuse and tolerance of dirt, in which matters he is also apt to be negligent” (1923, 54).⁷ This effort to naturalize social conditions had clear implications. If hygienic traits or deficiencies were inborn or ingrained, serious tactics would be required to eradicate them. Indeed, only comprehensive socio-spatial engineering, attacking entire classes of buildings and the behavior they spawned, would suffice. Naturalizing discourse ramped up the urgency of public health considerations and served to legitimate the need for planning. “All the more extreme cases of overcrowding and congestion are found in the Indian quarters, particularly in the area where many of the lofty houses are occupied as chawls with five or six persons in one small room, frequently badly lit and underventilated,” Lanchester declared. “Were it not that the flat roofs sometimes offer a refuge in the hot weather, it would be inconceivable that people could live and children be reared in such habitation; as it is, the incidence of disease and the virulence of epidemics prove that it is of the first importance to deal with these buildings” (69).

Streets, Straight Lines, and Strict Order

Regulating structures was one means of clearing natives out; remaking the streets was another. From Baron Haussmann in Paris to colonial planners in Bombay or Cairo, narrow alleys and twisting lanes were routinely condemned as unhealthy; widening the streets was a routine strategy that municipal authorities pursued to achieve several ends at once. In the name of public health, sanitarians advocated broader and straighter streets as a means to reduce congestion, clear out poor or working-class quarters, provide broad vistas for security or surveillance, and regularize the street plan. For example, without citing any real evidence, Public Health Officer Skelton asserted that streets ideally should have a standard width of forty to fifty feet. But in a built-up city like Zanzibar, he acknowledged, “this is an impossible figure to suggest for the more crowded business quarters of the town.” Zanzibari roads could be considered fairly wide if they were fifteen to twenty feet across,

and he conceded that it would be quite an achievement if officials could even manage to widen them to twenty-five feet. Existing streets, he asserted, could be broadened by compelling owners to set back their residences when they applied to repair or rebuild, reducing the site coverage, although the actual mechanisms of instituting this policy remained unspecified.⁸

In these discussions, the need for building regulations led quite readily into broader considerations of zoning. In the planned city, straight lines, regular patterns, and abstract order were elevated into paramount values, regularly praised for their hygienic properties. To Skelton, for example, it was not enough to simply excise a few huts here and there from the built environment; instead, he insisted that public health conditions would only improve if *all* huts were laid out in a more rational and regular fashion. By this he meant that huts uniformly had to be “aligned properly” along roadways at least 20 feet wide, with 16 feet of space in the rear and 9 feet separating each domicile from its neighbor. How these precise measures—as opposed to, say, 15 or 11 feet—guaranteed the public health was not at all clear. Haphazard layouts, it would seem, posed clear health risks and could no longer be tolerated: “To go on allowing huts to be built as we are doing . . . is simply to ask that the general hygienic condition of the poorer classes shall be kept at its present low level.”⁹

The perceived absence of organizing principles or patterns in the urban landscape was often cause for alarm to Europeans, who consistently seemed to associate disarray with disease, danger, and social disorder. Spatial irregularity was seen as a sign of a lack of proper regulation, betraying the incapacity or irrationality of those in power. Hence, when Professor Simpson issued his final report on sanitary conditions to Secretary of State for the Colonies Lewis Harcourt, he attributed the prevalence of disease in East Africa to two main factors: a lack of spatial control and the heedless intermingling of different races:

Lack of control over buildings, streets and lanes, and over the general growth and development of towns and trade centres in East Africa and Uganda, combined with the intermingling, in the same quarters of town and trade centres, of races with different customs and habits, accounts for many of the insanitary conditions in them and for the extension of disease from one race to another. It is necessary that this haphazard

method should be ended and that town planning schemes embodying separate quarters for Europeans, Asiatics and Africans together with regulations for and control of buildings should be adopted.¹⁰

Nowhere does Simpson ever bother to explain the precise benefits of roads, rational layouts, and regularities to public health. Nor, evidently, did he feel that any elaboration was necessary: the horrors of haphazardness seemed obvious. Among planners and sanitarians alike, the value of geometric order and grids was simply taken for granted, as was the inherent worth of openness, light, and air. What is most striking here is the insistence on technocratic approaches to social and health issues. Simpson insisted that sanitary reform in Zanzibar hinged on a more effective and organized state mastery of space. He criticized the neglect of town planning and devoted much of his report to issues of spatial control, starting with swamp drainage and creek reclamation and moving on to the need for “adequate” building laws and a “definitive” town plan.

Racial Containment: From Native Locations to European Quarters

Ultimately, the point of controlling space and planning a new urban order was to “sanitize” the city—in the more contemporary sense of ethnic cleansing. The goal was to regulate and rationalize social space, replacing intermixture with racial containment. Across the colonial world, planners and public health authorities embraced the racist logic of the day, agreeing on the benefits of segregation and separation. Throughout his imperial career, Simpson was in the forefront of those advocating segregation as a pillar of sanitary policy, and his East Africa report amply reflected these biases. “In the interests of each community and of the healthiness of the locality and country, it is absolutely essential that in every town and trade center the town planning should provide well defined and separate quarters or wards for Europeans, Asiatics, and Africans,” the professor wrote. Despite his invocation of “each” community’s interests, it was quite clear that he hoped to isolate and insulate Europeans from native others. For instance, he stipulated that East African towns should have “a neutral belt of open unoccupied country of at least 300 yards in width between the European residences and those of

the Asiatic and African.” But he didn’t specify that Africans and Asians should be similarly protected from each other. Why not? Because in his view Africans and Asians posed risks to Europeans insofar as both groups served as reservoirs of disease, acting as sources of contamination: “Malaria is common among Asiatics and Africans, so are dysentery, relapsing fever, and smallpox,” he flatly declared. “Recently there has been an epidemic of cerebro-spinal fever and the infection has been conveyed to Europeans.”¹¹ In his imagination, the vectors of transmission only seemed to run one way, with whites never considered as hosts or sources of infection.

Of course, an established city like Zanzibar, with its hybrid population and intermixed layouts, presented real difficulties for the implementation of this rationalizing and racializing vision. Simpson wanted nothing less than to split the city in two, heightening distinctions between Stone Town and Ng’ambo. To this end, he seized upon the creek as an ideal cordon sanitaire, a line of demarcation that should be strengthened and sharpened. As he phrased it in the report, “The creek which runs through the town from north to south separates the European and business quarters from the native town and in this respect is an advantage.”¹² But the invocation of “European quarters” or a “native town” bore little relationship to the actual space of the existing city. There were only a few hundred Europeans living on the island at the time, and they were too scattered and small in number to constitute a residential enclave, let alone an entire quarter. The vast majority of them lived in indigenous structures in built-up areas surrounded by neighbors of Arab, Indian, and African descent.

Purity of conception and purpose drove his vision of planning, seeking to compose and cleanse the social order of the city. If a native town couldn’t quite be located as yet, it would have to be created, and that was precisely the point of sanitary policy: drawing clean lines and keeping things crisply separate. With this in mind, Simpson made sure that many of his recommendations dovetailed together, trying ultimately to fashion a dual colonial city. He noted that operations had recently commenced to fill in the tidal creek at its southern tip in Mnazi Mmoja. He applauded this initiative, writing that its completion “will secure a dry open space as a recreation ground, on which under no conditions should houses or huts be permitted to be built.” Reclaiming this land and us-

ing it as a border zone could serve to create precisely the distinctions he sought. The cleared ground, he wrote, “should remain an open space and a neutral zone between the European and the native quarter of the town; and no huts in future should be permitted to be erected on the west side of the creek and neutral zone, and those that now exist should be gradually and systematically removed.”¹³

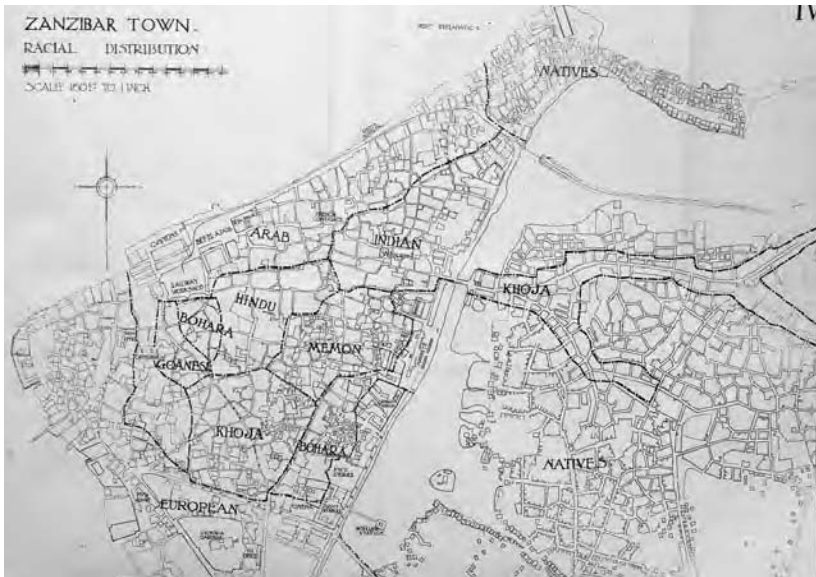
Using the creek as a cordon sanitaire and splitting the city in two was a project that long propelled the bureaucratic pursuit of planning in Zanzibar. Like other colonial officers, Dr. Curwen emphatically endorsed Simpson’s proposal to reclaim land on both sides of the creek and keep it clear as “a neutral zone between town and native quarters. . . . It is also a neutral zone between the town and plantation breeding anopheline mosquitoes and for this additional reason should be kept open and wind swept.” Town planning should be used to carve out a distinct European quarter west of the creek, reserving the entire southwestern section of the town along the sea for their use: “Taking the main road to begin with as a line of demarcation, all Swahili residents, Arab families with their large native households, and Indians should gradually be evicted from the area West of this line, from the shore backwards towards the bazaars, insanitary buildings should be demolished or improved and every opportunity taken to widen the streets and acquire open spaces.”¹⁴

In the interests of colonial power, it may have made sense to keep Europeans apart from—and above—others. Notions of cultural superiority and racial privilege worked to justify such a policy, as did sharp distinctions of class and status. By contrast, the biomedical justifications for spatial segregation seemed rather tenuous—often asserted but rarely well argued. In terms of altering morbidity or mortality rates, the rationale for a European quarter was never clear. All the experts concurred on the value of pursuing a policy of residential segregation. But how did they think that removing native residences could actually have an effect on the incidence of disease? If natives, as they claimed, were infectious agents and their houses the breeding grounds of disease, didn’t it make sense to exclude indigenes completely from “white” areas? But few Europeans went so far as to take the argument to its logical conclusion. Colonial officials and residents were not so obsessed with their health and the “threat” posed by natives that they were willing to dispense with their native servants and to wash their own dirty laundry. And yet if natives

caused disease, and proximity to them posed a risk, why did Europeans continue to surround themselves with native domestic labor?

A similar policy of residential segregation had been attempted in Sierra Leone after the turn of the century, when the government laid out an exclusively European suburb, Hill Station, near Freetown. It was surrounded by a wide cordon sanitaire, and Africans, mainly servants, were only allowed in during the day—largely due to the mistaken belief that mosquitoes bite exclusively at night and cannot fly considerable distances across cleared land. Unsurprisingly, Europeans living in Hill Station continued to contract malaria at about the same rate as those living outside (Curtin 1985, 600–601). This evidence was not widely acknowledged even a decade later and in any event could be readily dismissed. Explicit racism, a sense of ruling privilege, and anxieties about security all fed the belief in sanitary segregation. The absence of real debate over the utility of European segregation shows the degree to which it had become a normalized and routine reflex of colonial power. The sanitary advocacy of a European quarter on Zanzibar came out of a deeply rooted colonial tradition, as Dr. Curwen noted: “A time has come in the history of nearly all old Eastern towns, built and continually added to without any regard to the tenets of hygiene, that Europeans, realizing the unhealthiness of obstructed houses thronged round by native dwellings, have emigrated to open districts beyond the town’s confines and there built themselves suitable well ventilated houses in country surroundings.”¹⁵

Of course, that time never quite arrived in Zanzibar—even while European and native quarters continued to be invoked as if they were already in existence. Perhaps there is no more graphic example than the initial urban plan for Zanzibar. Throughout the text, Lanchester’s social descriptions were animated by scientific confidence, seemingly precise and definitive even as they were largely abstracted from everyday urban lives. Just as he divided the population into neatly bounded and monolithic groups, so too with the geography of the city: identity, cultural forms, and urban location all seemed to run together. Lanchester purported to always know who is who and who lives where. He repeatedly invoked the fantasy that Zanzibar was composed of a series of distinct and homogeneous quarters—the European, the Indian, the Arab, and the Native—mapping these racial categories on the physical milieu of the city in clear-cut ways.



22. Colonial fantasies of racial containment. Lanchester’s map IV, showing “racial distribution” in neatly contained zones. H. V. Lanchester, *Zanzibar: A Study in Tropical Town Planning* (Cheltenham: Burrow, 1923).

Echoing earlier sanitarians, for example, Lanchester wrote, “The creek separates the European and business quarters from the native town” (1923, 57). But this vision of the dual colonial city—where Stone Town and Ng’ambo were divided by culture and race—had little basis in social reality. It was a projection of colonial ideology, and even Lanchester had difficulty keeping his categories straight. If “European and business quarters” accurately described Stone Town, why then did he write that the “European quarter is merely an occupation of the southwestern end of the Arab city” (13)? Moreover, he made it clear that this “occupation” was spread pretty thin on the ground, declaring that Zanzibar was “exceptional among tropical towns in that hardly any houses have been built for Europeans,” most of whom were forced to find lodgings in “Arab” dwellings in already established neighborhoods (67).

This odd conjunction of clarity and confusion reached its peak in Lanchester’s attempt to visually represent the city’s population in the form of a map entitled “Racial Distribution” (see figure 22). The map

divides the city into a series of contiguous segregated communities, each occupying their own irregularly shaped urban zones. In visual terms, it looks very much like a chart of gerrymandered urban voting districts, but rather than following arbitrarily imposed borders, it claims to trace the “natural” boundaries of race. The map makes the city seem utterly composed and demarcated, even if it fails to cohere with Lanchester’s remarks elsewhere in the text. The entire southwestern section of Stone Town running from the markets to Vuga and all the way to Shangani—a quarter or more of the total area—was marked out as an exclusively “European” zone. This would seem to suggest, given the considerable number of houses included within its boundaries, that several thousand Europeans resided in that quarter of the city. Yet Lanchester himself cited population statistics from 1921 showing that only 270 Europeans lived on the island. The extensive area that Lanchester marked out as “European” was in fact one in which they were a distinct minority, far outnumbered by and interspersed among Arab, Indian, and African neighbors.

Figure 22 was certainly a projection of colonial desire, presuming to dissolve complexity and intermixture into bounded enclaves that were easily located and assimilated. Drawing neat lines on paper allowed Lanchester to treat the city as legible and coherent, consisting of an easily identified and limited range of communities. In this way he could make proposals to deal with “group areas” as a whole, inscribing clear differences between residents and claiming to resolve their collective social needs at a single stroke. But this early inscription of apartheid was merely latent—a projection of how things ideally should be ordered, rather than a description of how they actually stood. The tax assessment files listing the owners and occupants of every stone building in 1924 shows the entirely ideological nature of Lanchester’s map. These residential records reveal a strong degree of continuing intermixture in the neighborhoods, streets, and even individual buildings of Stone Town, belying colonial attempts to fix racial boundaries and spatially enclose groups.¹⁶

Expansions of Scope and Scale: The Complications of Socio-spatial Regulation

In the spatial prescriptions of sanitary experts, there was a surprising degree of agreement. Part of this had to do with the confluence be-

tween tropical medicine and town planning. They were transnational disciplines that were conjoined in the colonial world as they sought to reshape the empire on social and spatial lines. Both fields had scientific pretensions, offering comprehensive ways to improve the regulation and arrangement of the social body. But, as we'll see in the next chapter, modern innovations could introduce their own forms of irrationality. The rise of specialized disciplines and the reliance on expertise made colonial administration a much more complicated affair. At the time, few foresaw these effects. Consider, for a moment, the implications of the recommendations offered by sanitary experts. All agreed on the outlines of what needed to be done. From a series of fundamental precepts, they constructed a case for sustained intervention where diverse proposals came together to dramatically expand the scope and scale of state involvement. Bit by bit, spatial management became inextricably mixed with all sorts of temporal and logistical complexities. Without rejecting the basic premises, which were offered by experts and constituted a colonial commonsense, it was difficult to avoid getting caught up in ambitious schemes.

In Stone Town, Professor Simpson declared, "The building laws are not such as to secure, as a rule, a sufficiency of air space for the house or hut or the prevention of the crowding together of houses or a suitable alignment of streets and lanes." On the west side of the creek, matters were bad enough, he declared, but in Ng'ambo, "it is infinitely worse."

The whole area is covered more or less with huts, good and bad, separated by a confusing labyrinth of narrow lanes, and as the town extends eastwards, the same irregular formation is repeated. This portion of the town, which is the part that is increasing, is developing on no definite plan, and there is no good wide road in the whole of it. It is densely crowded with people. There is a project for cutting roads through this area. It has been on the *tapis* for several years, but the cost had delayed matters. Before any scheme of this kind is considered, a thorough survey of Ng'ambo and its surroundings should be made, and the road contemplated should fit in with a definite town plan affecting not only the crowded area, but also the suburbs, so as to control future development and secure it on sanitary lines.¹⁷

Think about some of the difficulties involved in adhering to these principles of sanitary practice and scientific administration. In Simpson's

view, it was pointless to go ahead and lay out roads to facilitate transport and commerce in particular parts of the city as and where they were needed. Instead, he insisted that the regime must first carry out a complete survey of Ng'ambo *and its surroundings*, making sure that all urban initiatives accord with a "definite town plan" capable of controlling future development in both city and suburbs.

By this logic, the government could no longer work to make localized or ad hoc improvements in light of current conditions. Before moving ahead with any urban interventions, the administration would have to survey and map the urban totality (a enormous task in itself), attempting to ensure that current policies conformed to the projected outlines of the future city (which might, of course, never come into being). Simpson's proposal essentially entailed an exponential increase in the complications of urban policy, as intervention in any one area would be dependent on what was happening in many others. And anything done in the here and now had implications for the future, which had to be estimated and accounted for in advance. Even so simple a task as laying a road at once became a much more complicated and unpredictable exercise. In this sense, a scientific discipline with its specialized expertise produced delays and deferrals rather than development.

FIVE

Development and the Dilemmas of Expertise

With the rise of tropical medicine and town planning as specialized fields, we can begin to see how colonial power in Africa was shaped by emergent modes of twentieth-century expertise. But from the very outset, colonialism always entailed a cultural project—one involving complex flows and forms of knowledge (Thomas 1994). The traffic here was reciprocal and ran both ways: colonial expansion was facilitated by cultural knowledge even as it produced new forms of it. European expansion made the Enlightenment possible, supplying a new socio-spatial context where “discovery” and “reason” could be discursively linked. In this sense, imperialism facilitated the exercise of a certain kind of scientific imagination: “It was through discovery—the siting, surveying, mapping, naming, and ultimately possessing—of new regions that science itself could open new territories of conquest: cartography, geography, botany, and anthropology were all colonial enterprises” (Dirks 1992, 6).

Emergent fields of knowledge spurred by colonial expansion came to eventually coexist with more technical and specialized modes of expertise—the rise of professions associated with the growth and spread of colonial cities on a global scale: land surveyors, sanitarians, civil engineers, mapmakers, architects, and planners, among others (Home 1997). Colonialism was fueled by the growth of these disciplines and their increasing application both at home and abroad. In this sense, as Jennifer Robinson (2006) notes, the relationship between modernity and development became altogether crucial in the colonial sphere. Modernity

was part of a European self-understanding that marked some Western societies as creative, advanced, and dynamic, while depicting others as static, backward, or primitive. Embodying modernity meant occupying the cutting edge of progress, cultivating knowledge, and commanding the latest advancements in science and technology. It was intrinsically wrapped up with notions of innovation and improvement, especially in material and spatial terms.

Modernity, after all, served to mark the fault lines of distinction between colonizers and colonized, ruler and ruled, civilized and savage. Europeans justified colonial control by claiming that it entailed the efforts of more civilized and advanced peoples to exercise authority over those who were less able or active. It was the responsibility of those in the forefront of history to usher others along the road to progress, as Lord Lugard argued in the 1920s: “As Roman imperialism laid the foundations of modern civilisation, and led the wild barbarians of these islands [the United Kingdom] along the path of progress, so in Africa to-day we are re-paying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress” (1965 [1922], 618).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the modernizing impulse inherent in British colonialism in Africa became intertwined with a thoroughly developmentalist logic. “To the twentieth century belongs the heritage of the tropics and the task of their development,” Lugard announced at the outset of the *Dual Mandate* (1965 [1922], 6). In its initial guise, development invoked economic stewardship, implying the proper control and deployment of resources. The turn-of-century colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, was closely associated with this policy, and, like Lugard, he was an enthusiastic advocate of imperial “duty”: “[It is] not enough to occupy certain great spaces of the world’s surface unless you can make best use of them, unless you are willing to develop them. We are the landlords of a great estate; it is the duty of the landlord to develop his estate” (quoted in Cowen and Shenton 1996, 275). This more purely extractive and economic vision later came to be supplemented by a different sense of the term: the notion of development as trusteeship, an idea implicit in the doctrine of indirect rule. In both the British and French spheres, however, this involved a more paternalist stance, with colonial rulers presenting themselves as custodians—overseeing

the welfare of their wards, protecting indigenes from corrupting influences, and supervising their growth and education. As the imposition of capitalism in colonial Africa proved far more destabilizing and socially corrosive than anticipated (Berman 2006), and colonial officials grew more alarmed about losing control, this more welfare-oriented version of development grew more prominent over time.

In colonial urban Zanzibar as elsewhere in Africa, the nexus between modernity and development played a critical role, especially with regard to colonial initiatives to “improve” the city. British interventions were premised on knowing what was needed to remake Zanzibar into a modern city. In terms of engineering or architecture, sanitation or planning, the colonial administration promised to wield scientific and technological advances, drawing on the latest expertise. England had already modernized, and British officials conceived of themselves as representing an enlightened administration, well positioned to deliver the benefits of development to native peoples. As in Europe itself, however, the standard narrative of modernization never quite worked out as planned or predicted (Bissell 2008).

The ideas touted by the British weren’t inevitable or even superior—just simply different. And the “modern” techniques they relied on introduced a whole series of contradictions and complications that they never foresaw. In terms of public health or planning, for instance, the British hoped to regularize or rationalize the city. To achieve this aim, however, they had to draw on a whole range of specialized fields, coordinating efforts. Moreover, they became dependent on external experts motivated by aims and ideologies not necessarily consistent with the needs of colonial rule. The reliance on consultants and experts critically hampered the course of development. And the conditions of modernity—specialization, an advanced division of labor, bureaucratic organization—introduced unforeseen fissures and tensions, producing an involuted process rather than linear progress.

The dynamics of colonial development in Zanzibar anticipated much that was to come. Indeed, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of a development industry that was remarkably consistent. “Through Africa—indeed, through the Third World—one seems to find closely analogous or even identical ‘development’ institutions, and along with them often a common discourse and the same way of

defining ‘problems,’ a common pool of ‘experts’ and a common stock of ‘expertise’” (Ferguson 1994, 8). This standardization of development and its global diffusion are very much an outgrowth of colonialism, and the results have been anything but encouraging. Speaking specifically of Lesotho, Ferguson adds, “Again and again development projects . . . are launched, and again and again they fail; but no matter how many times this happens, there always seems to be someone ready to try again with yet another project.” The causes of these repeated failures were inherent in colonial modernity itself, sparked by the very modernizing techniques that were intended to produce greater efficiency and economic growth.

Linear Knowledge and Ethnocentric Limits

British attempts to modernize the city were premised on allegations of indigenous ignorance, incapacity, or indifference. Colonial rule was better, they vowed, because of its scientific and improving character. Yet they presumed the universality of European ways of knowing, consistently oblivious to their own ethnocentrism. British officials failed to understand the principles and rationales that informed indigenous urban ideals. Prior to British rule, the city was not disordered; it was simply differently ordered, and the British never grasped the guiding cultural logic at play. With consummate arrogance, they condemned what they failed to understand and set about the task of imposing their own spatial norms and values.

Urban planning comes in many forms and need not be official or centrally organized to leave an imprint on the city. Indeed, the informal micro-practices of ordinary residents are often less discernible than the decisions of ruling authorities, but cumulatively and collectively they have far greater impact, structuring urban layouts and flows organically over time (Hakim 2008 [1986]). Numerous scholars have emphasized the capacity of ordinary Africans to creatively make and remake their urban worlds through everyday cultural practice (Malaquais 2006; de Boeck and Plissart 2004; Simone 2004; Enwezor et al. 2002; Gondola 1999). In Islamic contexts, Hakim has laid out the customary planning principles that have shaped urban layout and form (2008 [1986], 19–22). And in Zanzibar itself, Myers (1993, 2003) has discussed the informal cornerstones of neighborhood planning decisions in Ng’ambo: *uwezo* (power or

capability), *desturi* (custom), and *imani* (faith or righteousness). Myers came across these concepts in the 1990s, and we certainly don't want to reify them or treat them as cultural constants, projecting them back into history as if they applied at all times and places. Still, it is possible to look back at the historic city and to get a sense of the central values and aesthetics that animated Zanzibari planning, unearthing elements of a framework that consistently eluded the colonial regime.

When colonial officials complained about disorder, they failed to grasp that the urban landscape was shaped as an expression of changing social relationships and an index of power. Initial settlers distributed land and access to kin who built in close proximity, and over time the paths informally established between sites became streets and alleys. Neighborhoods or *mitaa* developed from these clusters, taking on distinctive character from the identities and practices of social groups who came to predominate in the area. Rich and poor, clients and patrons, freeborn and slave were clustered together in different dwellings that signified a continuum of social status and wealth, ranging from *vibanda* huts to multistoried stone houses (Myers 1993, 121–28). Contiguity and interrelationship were privileged rather than regularity or abstract grids. And as in preindustrial cities in Europe, intermixture was the rule, creating a variegated mixed-use urban fabric with domestic residences interspersed with camel sheds and potters, dried shark dealers, warehouses, shops, work spaces, markets, mosques, tombs, and gardens. While confusing to outsiders, as we've seen, the irregularities of distinct *mitaa* were readily negotiated by Zanzibaris, who were intimately knowledgeable about their many twists and turns. Urban variety rather than uniformity was the established pattern of the city. The unpredictable flow of the built environment was an altogether apt expression of its informal historical production.

Colonial authorities decried native spaces as too closely built and congested, but density was a defining element and desirable feature of indigenous social life. *Mitaa* were organized around the public life and rhythm of neighborhood mosques, with the call to prayer and daily movements back and forth between work, home, and sites of worship. Social life was constituted by frequent exchanges of visits to friends, neighbors, and extended kin, and cultural emphasis was put on reciprocity, respect (*heshima*), and privacy. Usam Ghaidan (1976) has written of

the “intimacy gradient” of Swahili architecture, which stretched from an outer reception area (*daka*) to an interior reception space (*sebule*) and a more formal gallery (*majlis*) where important guests might be received. Most visitors (and especially male strangers) were never permitted beyond the outer reception area, and access to the inner and upper domestic quarters was only allowed to insiders and intimates. Hence the city was architecturally structured according to an intricate dialectic between inner and outer, private and public, known and unknown, familiar and strange—opening up certain possibilities for social interaction while simultaneously maintaining a scale of social distance, status, and spatial separation of the genders. When British officials characterized the city as closed off or walled up, they completely failed to appreciate these cultural dynamics of access and seclusion. Nor did they grasp how density was entirely an appropriate environmental and technical response, as the coral-rag stone walls of neighboring buildings supported each other, not to mention offering shade and insulation against the tropical sun.

Colonial discourse about urban “improvement” entailed the imposition of alien norms and forms, not a linear advance. Given their lack of knowledge about local socio-spatial patterns, colonial pretensions to scientific mastery or technical control seem especially ironic. Experts conveyed their knowledge about local worlds with utter assurance. Yet the confidence they displayed in their findings was rarely matched by any real depth of exposure or insight. Colonial officials themselves fell prey to the mystique of modernization, rarely acknowledging their limited knowledge. European faith in the powers of science, progress, and their own superiority all too often held sway, papering over gaps and contradictions.

Conflicting Evidence, Contradictory Expertise

Let’s start out by taking a closer look at the expert testimony used to construct a case for sanitary segregation. Taken together, the evidence was less than compelling, replete with conflicting or unsubstantiated arguments. Huts, as we’ve seen, were considered health risks—but why exactly? Because of their materials or layout or the people housed within or possibly all three? Authorities like Skelton or Simpson represented native huts as reservoirs of contamination and disease, arguing that



23. Street in Ng'ambo, with huts. Zanzibar National Archives.

they had to be cleared from “European” areas. Yet other experts disputed these findings. Curwen, the later medical officer, flatly rejected the idea that native huts could be described as insalubrious. In fact, he wrote, “the wood-work of native huts is renewed practically every time they are rethatched, the thatch roof always allows of ventilation no matter how closely doors and windows are sealed, and the natives are naturally cleanly both in person and in the sweeping of their rooms and surroundings.”

If huts and natives were “naturally cleanly,” there could be no public health justification for clearing huts out of Stone Town or properly aligning them in Ng'ambo. Indeed, much of the sanitary rationale for planning would be undercut. But if Curwen saw the concern with huts as misplaced, he was by no means a defender of “native interests.” He just had different (and inconsistent) views on the nature of the native

threat. In their own huts, or the “airy” and “open” hospital, or working in European houses as domestic labor, “natives” didn’t seem to pose much of a health risk. Yet in the same report the doctor readily granted that “natives, who do harbour malarial and filarial parasites, should in tropical stations always be segregated apart from European residents.” And he represented “large native households” occupying “dark unventilated houses” in “densely overbuilt” districts like Shangani as infectious. Earlier, as we saw, he also objected to the “ramshackle structures” and “unwholesome lodging houses” inhabited by the “poorer British Indian residents.” Moreover, in the end, he expanded the category of native risk considerably, recommending that all *Swahili* residents, *Arabs* with large native households, and *Indians* should be evicted from the Shangani quarter in Stone Town between the main road and the sea.¹

Such inconsistencies rarely served to undermine faith in the value of expertise itself. The precise details of expert testimony were largely irrelevant to the broader issue at hand. The native in essence functioned in these texts as a floating signifier with no clear referent, moving easily between generality and particularity. The term inscribed a shifting, necessarily ungrounded field, open to a variety of interpretations. If there was little agreement on who exactly constituted the natives, there was little doubt that the native constituted a problem. The very imprecision of the category served to create the impression of an ill-defined and undifferentiated threat. If the experts didn’t agree on the details, this didn’t mean that there was any reason to doubt the validity of their knowledge, especially when they concurred on overarching goals. In this climate, sanitary imperatives didn’t require a consistent logic to seem compelling. Much more than pure scientific reason or medical evidence was at play. These discourses were animated by powerful cultural and political logics that drew on the language of science for ideological ends.

Expert findings were always supported by more than just the facts. Outside consultants were appointed with the imprimatur of the Colonial Office, and their conclusions were always accompanied by the aura of their scientific authority or expertise. Professor Simpson, for example, wielded considerable institutional power, official support, and scientific prestige when he arrived in East Africa. He was trained in medicine at the University of Aberdeen and then served as health officer in Calcutta from 1886 to 1897. He later became professor of hygiene and public

health at the University of London and was a founder of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. In addition to authoring the canonical text on tropical hygiene and public health (*Principles of Hygiene as Applied to Tropical and Sub-Tropical Climates*, 1908), Simpson was a member of the medical and sanitary committee advising the secretary of state for the colonies on policy throughout the empire. He also had served on a series of commissions appointed to investigate disease outbreaks in various parts of the empire, including West Africa (Home 1997, 43–44). His extensive experience, high status in the profession, and official support all worked to endow his sanitary proposals with the aura of authority.

Colonial reliance on scientific expertise came with its own costs. Simply locating a qualified and available expert introduced delays. Professor Simpson was engaged by the Colonial Office in May 1913, but didn't arrive in East Africa to collect data until the end of the year. He transmitted his initial findings to the Colonial Office in July 1914, which were then sent out to the resident in Zanzibar for review in September 1914. And the local analysis and response to Simpson's proposals was not completed until July 1915, with a final decision arriving from the Colonial Office in June 1916. While World War I was certainly a factor, these delays were by no means unusual. Both in the 1920s and again in the 1950s, master plans for urban Zanzibar were postponed for years on end as the administration sought to locate suitable planners. The hiring process itself was often ad hoc and prolonged. As early as 1916 the colonial secretary had called for urban planning to start in Zanzibar, but as Chief Secretary R. H. Crofton later explained, "There was no one in Zanzibar fit to prepare such a plan—it was a town planner's job—and nothing more was done." In the colonial milieu an elaborate division of labor didn't necessarily produce greater efficiency; the lack of suitable specialists often served as an excuse for prolonged inaction. Finally, while on leave in London in 1919, Crofton took it upon himself to visit the Ministry of Health and request assistance with town planning. A contact there referred him to Henry Vaughan Lanchester, a London architect and colonial planner who supplied the chief secretary with a stack of background reading on planning, including his own book on Madras. Lanchester later "intimated privately" to Crofton that he would be available and could conveniently stop in Zanzibar on his way home

from India in 1922, and through the auspices of the chief secretary, “this was eventually arranged” (Crofton 1953, 158).

Expertise and the authority of science proved to be something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, for a colonial regime committed to development, consultants promised to help deliver on vows of modernization. They arrived with all the benefits of specialization—greater depth of knowledge, experience, and a full command of technical issues. But specialists were also inevitably specialized: focused on the immediate task at hand, abstracted from local concerns, and driven by the professional demands of their fields. Take Simpson’s work, for example. Sanitary abstractions were the professor’s stock in trade, and he had little regard for or connection to the specificities of local circumstances. His inspection tour of Zanzibar was necessarily cursory, part of a more general survey of all the British protectorates in East Africa. Under these conditions, any detailed and nuanced immersion in the particularities of place was excluded from the outset. Local officials such as Skelton and Curwen possessed neither Simpson’s prestige nor his experience. When reviewing his work, they were unlikely to challenge him in any serious way. And as medical officers they embraced many of his preoccupations, elevating sanitary issues into paramount concerns. From a series of first principles—huts as breeding grounds of disease, the value of broad and regular streets, the need for greater building control and geometric layouts, the imperative of European segregation—these specialists constructed a case for urban intervention that was difficult to challenge even though it was largely ungrounded. To reject their findings would be to contravene expert opinion, denying the value of science, and fly in the face of established wisdom. And to do so would undercut the reformist and modernizing claims of British colonial rule.

While the specific applications of sanitary principles might be disputed to one degree or another, the value of planning as a technique of modern governance was beyond question. What the new science made possible was the systematic and comprehensive institution of a sanitary regime throughout an entire area by means of the regulation and control of space. Only an inefficient or backward regime would ignore this expertise, continuing to respond to disease outbreaks in a reactive and ad hoc fashion. Advances in knowledge demanded a change

in administration, attacking problems at their very source and using rationality and foresight to lay the foundations of far-reaching urban reform. If the Zanzibar government continued to do nothing, it could only be held accountable for the higher rates of morbidity and mortality that would surely result. In this sense, local colonial officials were caught up in contradictions between their limited means and the promises of modernization they were compelled to make.

Rather than seeking partial solutions, the discipline of town planning was constituted to resolve a host of technical and social ills all in one stroke. A similar sort of totalizing ambition and zeal also marked the work of sanitary reformers in nineteenth-century cities. Hence the entire premise of urban surveys was to solicit expert advice, assess conditions, and then outline the reforms that were essential to restore collective health. As a result, these exercises were motivated by the question of scientific ideals above all else: in what way could planning serve to create the City Perfect, ordered and regimented along sanitary lines? Finding out what the experts thought *should* be done came first, and cost or practical considerations would be factored in afterwards. Outside experts were not expected to see their recommendations through or to keep the larger picture in mind while framing proposals. Expert knowledge presumed a certain distance and abstraction from local worlds. The very innovations associated with modernity—the division of labor, specialization, and bureaucratic organization—paradoxically produced results that were anything but streamlined or efficient.

Specialization made expert knowledge possible, but it also fostered bureaucratic segmentation, especially in a colonial context structured by strict hierarchy, distance, and an elaborate division of labor. Differences and disjunctures—between Zanzibar and London, the metropolitan and colonial states, superiors and subordinates, academic life and administration, doctors and planners—meant that no one ever had command of the entire review process, being able to connect all the dots. The agenda for the sanitary mission was determined at the outset by those at greatest remove from the local scene—higher-ups at the Colonial Office. Once the requirements were set, the outside consultant and officers down the chain of command began to carry out their segmented tasks. Specialized roles and technical knowledge created significant gaps. Simpson was an academic, while Curwen and Skelton were midlevel medical officers.

None of them had any experience with urban planning, nor were they expected to create an actual plan. Their role was to broadly assess the sanitary situation, sketching out the general goals that should eventually inform planning efforts. As a result, there was little objection to the ideal nature of their proposals; indeed, framing matters in the abstract was the entire point. Colonial reliance on external consultants also greatly contributed to this distancing from reality—establishing a trend that has continued with development in postcolonial Africa. Outside experts such as Simpson or Lanchester occupied structural positions that guaranteed they would never have to live with the practical consequences of their findings. Dealing with longer-term political issues, financing difficulties, or problems of implementation were not part of their brief. As short-term external advisers, all they needed to do was to fulfill the basic terms of their contracts: to tour the area, collect data, and then head home to write up their reports before moving on to the next project. So long as the tenor of their findings was broadly acceptable to the Colonial Office, they never had to confront the challenges of actually implementing their proposals.

Colonial Planning: Multiple Agendas and Divergent Aims

In its modernizing guise, colonialism came to depend on specialized branches of knowledge driven by interests and imperatives that were not necessarily consistent or consonant with colonial rule. Administrators were drawn to disciplines like town planning because they were presented as more advanced and efficient ways to govern space. Practitioners in the field promoted their services by promising a comprehensive science that would solve multiple urban ills through an integrated approach. By turning to expert consultants, colonial administrators ended up embracing an agenda that they couldn't control or fully evaluate in advance, especially at the local level. In pursuit of development, colonial officials found themselves depending on professions that ultimately committed them to ambitious and complicated programs of reform.

From the outset, planning was driven by divergent aims and goals, sharing ground with other emergent domains of knowledge in the colonial sphere, not least among them anthropology. Both fields sought

to be simultaneously academic and applied; they were holistic in scope, bridging technical and humanistic issues, and each was caught up in the effort to establish its scientific authority, social worth, and practical utility. And like anthropology, planning came into being within the context of empire, indelibly marked by colonial experience and engagements.²

No one can better illustrate the transnational connections and colonial character of early planning than Lanchester, the British expert who eventually created the first town plan for Zanzibar in 1922. Lanchester was an established London architect who became intrigued by the possibilities of town planning around the turn of the century. His interest in colonial planning intensified after 1910, when the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) decided to mark the passage of the British Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 by organizing the First International Conference of "Town Planning." The conference consisted of exhibitions, plans, models, and papers; it drew about thirteen hundred attendees, including delegates from the colonies—most prominently, Lord Kitchener of Khartoum and the Maharajah of Baroda (Home 1997, 141–42). The meetings served to promote town planning in Britain, while providing a key platform for transnational urbanists to come together to exchange ideas, debate strategies, and organize programs for future work.

Conferences offered aspiring practitioners the chance to cultivate networks and establish connections in the colonial world. Through the RIBA proceedings, Lanchester developed contacts with a number of prominent figures, including Raymond Unwin and Patrick Geddes, a biologist and social evolutionist who was an early and influential colonial planner. Shortly thereafter, in 1912, Lanchester made his first visit to India, traveling to Gwalior and Lucknow; later in the year he returned to Delhi as a member of the planning committee sent out to make recommendations on the formation of the new imperial capital. By 1913 he had managed to become the vice president of RIBA, collaborating with Geddes and others to form a town planning group that later developed into the Town Planning Institute.

Geddes himself was based in Edinburgh, using the city as a hub for urban proselytizing, education, and redesign. By chance, the Scottish governor of Madras, Lord Pentland, was familiar with Geddes's work

there, and in 1914 he invited him to come to India, touring with his traveling exhibition on cities (created as an outgrowth of the 1910 conference). Geddes was well received in India, and the empire provided a context where he could experiment and ply his craft. Unsurprisingly, he decided to stay on. During this period, Geddes produced numerous town planning reports, trained local surveyors, consulted, and lectured in Madras, Bombay, and Bengal; later, he was even appointed to a chair in sociology and civics at Bombay University, holding the position between 1919 and 1925 (Home 1997, 148).

Because of Geddes's work in India (and Unwin's recommendation), Pentland appointed Lanchester to serve as the first town planning adviser to the presidency of Madras, a post he held in 1915 and 1916. During this time he collaborated with Geddes on a number of plans and projects, most notably carrying out a fairly extensive social survey of Madras. He later published this research as a study in city improvement and development, *Town Planning in Madras* (1918). Long after his Madras consultancy, he continued to work in India both in collaboration with Geddes and on his own, establishing branch offices in Lucknow and Cawnpore while maintaining his London practice (J. Burchell 1987; Meller 1990; Home 1997). It was ultimately as a result of his Indian planning experience that Lanchester was brought to Zanzibar.

In the early twentieth century, town planning was marked by significant tensions. The field sought to be as comprehensive and all-embracing as the city itself; if urban problems were intertwined, planning would take them all on and treat them in a unified manner. In this respect, planners inherited the utopian hopes and reformist spirit of their nineteenth-century counterparts—sanitarians and urban reformers who believed that spatial reworking and scientific improvement could wipe out the widespread social ills of poverty and disease, overcrowding and congestion, pollution and immorality. But if planning was infused with the progressive intentions and comprehensive aims of Enlightenment science, it came into being at a moment of increasing specialization. As Lanchester noted, the planner had to master many skills and subjects, including “topography, history, economics, housing, communications, hygiene, education, recreation, aesthetics, and administration” (1925, 95). Encompassing and managing urban life in all its complexity meant that

planners had to be Renaissance figures, displaying expertise in widely dispersed domains. And yet they had to acquire this breadth of knowledge at a historical juncture marked by heightened technical sophistication and more narrow professional niches.

Town planning, Lanchester observed, is “essentially an art of coordination,” bringing together the various sciences concerned with “human welfare” to treat towns as a whole (1925, 87–88). Yet if he thought the field had united the scientist and the social reformer, conflicts between social goals and economic or technical needs only widened as the profession developed. In the formative period, charismatic founders like Geddes sought to bridge these gaps, but as time went on, this task became increasingly difficult. Indeed, in many ways Geddes was a transitional figure, supplying technical experts—engineers or architects like Lanchester—with a broader sociological rationale for their work. Much like Ebenezer Howard, the leader of the garden city movement, Geddes was a social visionary, a committed internationalist who proselytized and promoted his idealistic vision for the urban future. The mere physical manipulation of city space held little interest for him; what he wanted was to profoundly transform human society by reimagining its relationship to the external environment in all respects.

Planning for Geddes was ideally a form of applied sociology—an activist and engaged practice that depended on exhibitions, lectures, and other educational media to spark a broad-based “civics movement” for reform. In the end, his utopian program failed to gain wide currency or political support. In the wake of the carnage of World War I, the perfectibility of urban worlds, the promise of European civilization, and the inevitability of scientific progress all seemed much less tenable than before. Abroad, in the context of empire, the realities of colonial oppression also thoroughly undercut many of Geddes’s hopes for urban renewal. Nonetheless, he continued to push for a more comprehensive and informed sociocultural approach to planning. His belief in the possibilities of planning remained undiminished, as his 1918 report on Indore reveals:

The town planner fails unless he can become something of a miracle-worker to the people. He must be able to show them signs and wonders, to abate malaria, plague, enteric, child-mortality, and to create wonders

of beauty and veritable transformation schemes. Sometimes he can do this in a few weeks, or even in a few days, by changing a squalid slum into a pleasant courtyard, bright with colour-wash and gay with old wall-pictures, adorned with flowers and blessed again by its repaired and replanted shrine. Within a few weeks he can change an expanse of rubbish mounds, befouled in every hollow and defiling every home with their germ-laden dust, into a restful and shady open space, where the elders can sit in the evening watching the children at play and watering the new trees they have helped to plant. (Quoted in Home 1997, 141)

It is not easy to reconcile this glowing portrait of social regeneration with the colonial context in which Geddes was working. Indeed, British India, like Zanzibar, was an especially inauspicious space to support such quasi-populist sympathies. Geddes could argue that his approach made for a more successful form of European control by winning the sympathies of indigenes and binding them more effectively to the social order, but such views were by no means general, and he found himself increasingly marginalized in official circles.

Planning's Best Intentions: Professional Ideals, Social Models, and Conservative Surgery

Within the field of planning itself, Geddes left an ambiguous and shifting legacy. Mostly forgotten by the 1940s, many of his insights only found favor with scholars following the 1970s (Rubin 2009). To some, Geddes stood as a pioneer in championing a regional perspective in the analysis of urban formations. Others viewed his emphasis on the need for civic and social surveys prior to planning as prescient, and recognized him for focusing on environmental sustainability long before its time. Geddes also comes in for praise as being more sensitive to the role that history and local cultural traditions play in shaping particular built environments. But as Noah Rubin (2009, 349) notes, Geddes's name has become "synonymous with Planning's best intentions, even if not with its greatest accomplishments."

It is not difficult to see why, especially in the colonial milieu. Geddes was well suited to abstractions and professional ideals, but never managed to translate his theory into actual practice. He propounded a social charter for planning, but its dimensions were so ambitious that it

was wholly impractical—and utterly antithetical to the needs of colonial rule. Take his model for social surveys. To plan a site, he argued, one first needed to amass and assess the data concerning each of the following categories: topography and natural features; means of communication and transport; industries, manufactures, and commerce; population; town conditions past and present; and suggestions and designs for town planning. Each of these areas was further divided into numerous detailed subcategories. “Population,” for instance, included such diverse elements as “Movement, Occupations, Health, Density, Distribution of Well-Being (Family Conditions, etc.), Education and Culture Agencies, and Anticipated Requirements,” which made the social survey an elaborate and sprawling enterprise—more an extended research program to be carried out by a large team than the work of a single individual (Meller 1990, 180–81, 210). Unsurprisingly, Geddes never managed to actually conduct one of these detailed surveys in India, and they remained a rarity throughout the colonial world—too costly and complicated for regimes to carry out, even if they cared to do so.

Other colonial planners neglected to embrace Geddes’s social vision. His notion of the town planner as social miracle worker certainly reflects the degree to which he was at odds with the more authoritarian and controlling impulses of orthodox planning. In India, he received initial support from high-placed Liberal patrons such as Pentland, but as time passed, he increasingly came into conflict with the colonial apparatus. Geddes ridiculed sanitarians and municipal engineers for their blind adherence to procedures of rationalization and regularization and their casual destruction of neighborhoods through mass clearances, their insistence on imposing regular sanitary lanes, and their faith in the necessity of driving broad thoroughfares through native cities, creating a monotonous grid. Many of his critiques anticipated the terms and tactics that Jane Jacobs later embraced in opposition to “urban renewal” policies in U.S. cities in the 1960s.

In no uncertain terms, Geddes rejected the tactic of routine urban clearances as “one of the most disastrous and pernicious blunders in the chequered history of sanitation.” Sanitary lanes, he declared, had produced “such disastrous effects during the past century that they are hardly equaled by the savagery of war.” Elsewhere he wrote of the “death-dealing Haussmannising” of the sanitary authorities in Madras,

saying that he had to battle not only the “callow, contemptuous bureaucrat at Delhi” but also the “well-intentioned fanatic of sanitation.” Geddes pointed out the perverse irony that British officials showed greater sensitivity in replanting their own gardens than they did working with human settlements. Playing on these horticultural sympathies, he urged colonial officials “to give people in fact the same care that we give when transplanting flowers, instead of harsh evictions and arbitrary instructions to ‘move on,’ delivered in the manner of officious amateur policemen” (quoted in Home 1997, 149–50). His stance was hardly likely to endear him to officialdom, and eventually he had to turn to Indian rulers in the princely states to support his commissioned work.

Geddes tried to foster an approach to the planning of established sites that he called “conservative surgery” (Home 1997, 148). He conceptualized cities as living social organisms, using the biomedical model to illustrate the planner’s ideal role. The notion of “surgery” implied deftness, precision, and a detailed scientific knowledge of the social body. He believed planners should operate in a careful and cautious way to improve urban health as needed, abstaining from more radical and invasive procedures. He was a cultural conservationist before his time; prompted by the violence done to Indian cities by British rule, he came to emphasize a low-cost and low-impact form of planning that emphasized the value of urban preservation. In certain ways, he shared ground with the more patrician and paternalistic proponents of indirect rule in colonial Africa—not to mention later anthropologists seeking to defend the integrity and interests of “their” people. His vision was essentially rooted in Durkheim, but with a spatial twist: he sought to craft urban environments that would shore up social cohesion and stability.

Lanchester’s collaboration with Geddes over the years might seem to have prepared him well to apply this strategy in Zanzibar. The “conservative surgery” approach seemed precisely suited to address the problems of existing colonial cities, while promising to lower the costs and administrative burdens of planning. In many respects, Geddes’s planning philosophy seemed to fit the requirements of the Colonial Office while allowing for local constraints. In the context of the Bombay Town Planning Act of 1915, Geddes had defined what he saw as the crucial elements of town planning. It involved, he wrote, “conformity to a definite plan of orderly

development, into which each improvement will fit as it is wanted. Not the immediate execution of the whole plan.” In his view, planning served to create new and regular building plots, bringing additional land to market; it facilitated increased trade rather than interrupting it, providing enhanced services and amenities. Moreover, planning was premised on preservation of local landmarks and traditions, utilizing what was best in local sites and shaping cities that were worthy of “civic pride”—not just pale imitations of European cities. In Geddes’s definition, planning should be more than “expensive roads and parks available only for the rich” or “wholesale alterations at great expense, with no assured financial returns.” Instead, it had to offer “control over the future growth of your town with adequate provision for future requirements. Not haphazard laying out of buildings and roads with resultant costly improvement schemes.” The discipline, in other words, was all about “economy. Not extravagant fads” (quoted in Home 1997, 143–44).

Colonial Constraints: Comprehensive Sciences and Segmented Roles

In outline, the essential elements of a potential Zanzibar strategy were all here: an emphasis on economy rather than extravagance or mere beautification; the need for a definite plan to guide future improvements, which could be carried out gradually as budgets permitted; the facilitation of commerce rather than its disruption; the stress on conformity and control, rationalizing urban development so as to end haphazard and chaotic growth. And no question, Lanchester’s eventual town plan for Zanzibar certainly invoked Geddes’s principles. The purpose of his study, he announced, was to “indicate the lines to be taken in investigating conditions in the Town of Zanzibar and in setting forth proposals calculated to improve these conditions without injury to its more characteristic features.” The methods he chose were “designed to give the maximum benefits with a minimum of destruction and a consequent economy of expenditure.” And he stated that the ultimate purpose of the plan was “to enhance the efficiency and amenity of Zanzibar as a civic organism”—all strategies borrowed straight from the master himself (Lanchester 1923, 1, 2). But Geddes’s prescriptions about economy and efficiency were embedded within a larger and more complicated social

vision that conflicted with colonial realities. Short-term consultants were ill-prepared to see these strategies through, and it is no surprise that Lanchester abandoned the overall program when he worked in Zanzibar.

The yawning gap between Lanchester's theory and practice was not caused by simple oversight. To a large degree these problems were rooted in the formation of planning as a specialized field. Due to the extension and organic unity of the city, Geddes and others had argued that town planners necessarily had to embrace the totality, treating the urban sphere as an interconnected whole. This comprehensive approach was crucial to the field's success, central to its appeal and scientific authority. And yet it also dramatically expanded the role and responsibility of planners, requiring them to master a broad range of technical knowledge while also demonstrating a local's grasp of the detail and nuance of particular places. As the discipline developed, this totalizing mode of planning proved to be much more than any single individual could reliably control and carry out. Encompassing the urban totality required nothing less than the elaboration of an extensive planning apparatus.

And therein lay the source of an enduring conflict: as planning was elevated through the efforts of Geddes and others into an all-embracing science, it came to rely on an ever more specialized division of labor, which made coordination between the various parts all the more imperative yet impossible to achieve. Instead of being a "miracle worker" guiding the whole, the town planner was effectively reduced to the position of just another technical expert to be brought in and consulted as needed. Rather than bringing together the disparate forces involved, the planner was relegated to operating in a complex field marked by significant degrees of bureaucratic, political, and cultural disjuncture. If planning was supposed to be a social practice, most planners seemed to pay little heed to the liminal social and political position they mostly occupied, especially in the colonial world. Like Lanchester, many planners were hired from the outside and had to navigate their way around divisions within the local bureaucracy, between diverse department heads and residents, and between regional authorities and their superiors in the metropole. And as the figure charged with uniting these diverse political and ideological interests in an overall plan, the planner himself possessed no real political leverage, authority, or staying

power. Being located precariously in this political no-man's-land made the planner's challenge all the more difficult, as he tried to mediate the contradictions between the state, external capital, and diverse private interests across an entire urban sphere. Instead of controlling the totality, he ended up functioning as just another cog in a rather large and ungainly machine.

Planners, unlike anthropologists or natural historians, never developed a tradition of fieldwork involving long-term residence, immersion in place, deep cultural knowledge, and linguistic fluency. But in certain respects, the social position of colonial urban planners vis-à-vis local administrations was similar to that of their anthropological counterparts. Both sets of specialists were dependent upon and yet peripheral to local officials, typically being sponsored by and sent out from the metropole. They could hope to achieve little without some degree of collaboration with officers on the ground. Their particular expertise bought them a foothold in the colonial world, but also made them somewhat suspect. Colonial regimes were willing to make guarded use of their services if they could provide functional advice concerning the maintenance and stability of rule. But even the most sympathetic officials were less than thrilled by the prospect of having an outsider looking over their shoulders and potentially meddling with how they managed their affairs.

If external consultants or academics on short tours minded their own business and stayed within the boundaries of official support and patronage, then they could be tolerated for a time. After completing their studies they would move on, leaving behind recommendations or plans that the administration could take up or ignore as and when it saw fit to do so. But if planners or anthropologists instead adopted a more critical stance, they would quickly find themselves excluded or marginalized; in personal terms, they would be ostracized and ridiculed for having "gone native," and their work would be summarily rejected. Their embrace of principled advocacy would bring them into direct conflict with colonial administrators, and their sources of access and assistance would rapidly disappear (not to mention the hope of gaining viable employment elsewhere in the empire).

Urban planners, like architects, required official support or elite patronage to practice their craft, and this was especially true in the colonial world. If they believed that planning should serve social goals,

they faced a persistent dilemma. It was by no means easy to curry favor, demonstrate the utility of planning, and serve social interests all at once. Crafting a plan that promised to meet administrative needs, support economic interests, and deliver social improvements was a formidable task. Making promises, of course, was one thing; actually delivering on them was another. As short-term consultants, planners could frame proposals without having to worry about the detailed practicalities of implementation or financing. Given their segmented roles, they rarely had to live with the consequences of their recommendations. In his approach to cities, Geddes had emphasized the need to study the past and present of any urban zone, showing deep cultural and historical awareness. Lanchester certainly voiced his support for these principles, yet he never had any responsibility for implementing them in Zanzibar. He was on a short-term contract, simply passing through. His knowledge of the site was limited, his input intended to be both technical and temporary. He was hired to create a plan and hand it over; it would be up to the colonial government to carry it out thereafter. He claimed his goal was to improve the amenities of the city as a “civic organism,” but if officials cared little for this form of social engineering, they were free to ignore it, focusing only on those elements they found more amenable to their interests.

Shallow Knowledge and Shoddy Construction: The Underside of External Expertise

Despite British pretensions to embody scientific progress, expertise, and the most advanced techniques, the first urban plan produced for Zanzibar is most striking on two counts: the shallowness of its cultural knowledge and the shoddiness of its construction. In *The Art of Town Planning*, Lanchester acknowledged that many of the questions engaged by planners might be considered to lie more properly within the domain of sociologists. And indeed, he allowed that sociologists and town planners might work well in tandem, each making their distinct contributions. “At the same time,” he wrote, “the technique of our subject so invariably turns on the social influences that dominate it, that a town planner is not worth much who is not something of a sociologist.” Driving the point home, he concluded, “Social well-being, fundamental to sound

town planning, is thus the criterion to which every proposition must be referred” (1925, 93–94). While Lanchester invoked these principles, he certainly never applied them in Zanzibar, and this failing was all too characteristic of colonial planning in Africa.

If the plan slighted social concerns, this was largely because its sociological understanding was so meager. The social and reformist aspirations of planning were undercut by glaring limitations in practice. Lanchester’s urban “research” in Zanzibar was limited to a short stopover in the islands in August 1922 while returning from Lucknow to London with his wife. He stayed in the isles for a grand total of seventeen days, which left precious little opportunity to frame an urban plan, let alone grasp even elemental sociocultural issues. As Chief Secretary R. H. Crofton later wrote, “I acted as his staff during the period. [Lanchester’s] practice was to go over the ground with the Town Survey and other records, between 7 and 9 a.m. The morning was given up to interviews, paper work, and submissions from and to Government: the late afternoon to trips to the country or further inspections in the town” (1953, 158–59). Working as a short-term consultant may have been lucrative (Lanchester was eventually paid about £525 for his efforts) and furthered his career, but it came with a significant cost: accepting the contract from the colonial government inevitably involved planning without any deep social knowledge or familiarity with local urban culture and history.

Because his tour of Zanzibar was so limited, Lanchester ended up being heavily dependent on colonial officials and documents as sources of information—a pattern that would long endure with other outside consultants and experts. In the introduction to the plan, he offered a general acknowledgment, thanking government officers for “the most valuable help” they provided. He wrote that “a large proportion” of chapters 1 and 2 (on topography, ethnology, and history) were simply taken from Resident Pearce’s 1920 volume, *Zanzibar: The Island Metropolis of Eastern Africa* (which itself was largely based on earlier colonial sources and accounts). For material in other chapters, he was in “no small measure indebted to reports made by Mr. N. B. Cox, Mr. R. H. Crofton, Mr. A. McClure, Dr. A. H. Spurrier, Dr. B. Spearman, and Dr. W. M. Aders”—respectively, the colonial treasurer, acting chief secretary, director of public works, and three medical officers in the Zanzibar service. He also thanked the

district commissioner and his staff for conducting him on inspections of the city and then offered a final note of appreciation: the chapter on health and hygiene was mostly based on the “1914 report by Professor W. J. Simpson, C.M.G.” Indeed, Lanchester borrowed so much material from other sources that he said it would be “inconvenient” to use quotations or footnotes (1923, 1).

After providing these initial acknowledgments, Lanchester felt free to appropriate or copy material without indicating he was actually doing so or providing any citations. In the hygiene chapter, for example, long passages from Simpson’s report suddenly reappeared, word for word, without attribution. This habit of lifting material resulted in a colonial discourse that was particularly insular and self-referential—an enduring characteristic of colonial knowledge production. Lanchester based his work on a world of documents rather than immersing himself in the shifting dynamics of actually existing urban conditions. He excised passages from the specific contexts that produced them, reinscribing them in a different historical moment. Reiteration served to collapse distinction and difference into a timeless textual present. It was as if nothing had changed in the city between 1913 and 1923: what Simpson wrote a decade before was simply taken over and repeated as if it still applied in the present. Simple errors made by Simpson were trotted out again and reproduced without scrutiny. In this way, suspect claims were elevated to the status of established opinion simply by being repeated often enough in later official accounts.

The town plan itself initially took shape in the form of twelve project proposal sheets that Lanchester left behind with the Zanzibar government in August 1922. After his return to England, he took these drafts and stitched them together with the materials he was able to cull from Pearce, Simpson, and others, publishing the whole assemblage in 1923 under the title *Zanzibar: A Study in Tropical Town Planning*. In the book, he sought to flesh out his original proposals, reviewing the extant literature in a cursory way and adding some topographical, historical, and social background. The difficulty with depending on all these sources was keeping what they said straight and maintaining a coherent story. Divergent discourses and a jumbled mix of data made for awkward reading. The published version fails to hang together and is clearly marked by the hasty mode of its composition. More like a series of sketches or short

studies, it was compiled out of bits and pieces—a kind of *bricolage*—and cut through with both lapses and inconsistencies. These gaps and lacunae, however, were anything but apparent. The plan was not written for either an indigenous or an academic audience and did not receive any anthropological, sociological, or historical scrutiny. The initial proposal sheets were commissioned by colonial officials and intended for them; they themselves either were responsible for the social misconceptions Lanchester labored under or broadly shared his views. And the published text was largely aimed at an audience of other colonial planners and architects—“those who are responsible for the improvement and organization of tropical towns” (1923, 1). Hence the ethnographic emptiness of the plan was not generally understood or remarked upon either then or for a long time to come.

This was Lanchester’s first visit to Africa. Like many development experts in the years to come, he had little familiarity with the social and historical specificities of the coast and understood not a word of either Kiswahili or Arabic. He had only the most superficial acquaintance with the city itself, having little chance to immerse himself in its social and spatial complexities. His “fieldwork,” after all, was limited to a few walking tours with official guides, as the colonial government sought to keep his presence and purpose in the islands from becoming widely known. In the end, Lanchester had very little to go on: his narrow time frame and limited resources made it impossible to engage in the kind of detailed social and civic survey that Geddes insisted was a prerequisite for informed planning. While constructing the plan, he was operating in a vacuum, making proposals that had no basis in socially grounded research.

Lanchester was certainly aware of the lack of detailed social data available to him, but he attempted to finesse the problem by distancing himself from it. His proposals, he wrote, “though general in character,” were also “fairly definite.” At the same time, he acknowledged at least some limitations—not in his own work but in the data he was given.³ He pointed out that his scheme for road alignments in Ng’ambo was necessarily incomplete; until an accurate survey of the area was finished, this task could not be accomplished in any detail. And he underscored the fact that “in some respects the statistical information was not sufficiently complete for my purposes,” highlighting the need to carry out extensive

civic surveys prior to planning. But rather than actually conducting such a survey or insisting that it be carried out, Lanchester simply reprinted extracts from a 1922 government order in Madras “as a guide to the form that should be taken by civic surveys preparatory to planning” (1923, 2). In other words, he was content to pass this responsibility off to Zanzibar officials, admonishing them to conduct a survey before embarking on any planning program.

The government order required municipalities in Madras to conduct civic surveys and quoted no less an authority on the subject than Lanchester himself: “In his book on Town-Planning in Madras, Mr. H. V. Lanchester has pointed out the need for basing town improvement and town extension schemes on an accurate knowledge of the social and economic facts relating to the town” (Lanchester 1923, 3). But invoking the survey rather than implementing it seemed to be the norm. The order noted that Lanchester’s call for social surveys had been endorsed by the Local and Municipal Conference of 1920, but had not yet actually been carried out by even one municipality—a failure “attributable in part to the want of guidance in the concrete and in part to apathy” (3). Given the complexity of the civic survey schedule from Madras that Lanchester reprinted in the book, it is hardly surprising that such surveys were rarely performed in practice. Issuing calls for social surveys—while leaving them to others—was much easier than actually seeing them through.

These lapses might seem incidental, but they carried real consequences. Imperfect methods necessarily curtailed the kind of social knowledge available to frame a plan. Short-term contracts and specialized roles limited planners in very real ways, and the neglect of ethnographic immersion made for strikingly shallow sociological analyses. Certainly we can see these flaws in Lanchester’s account, which foreshadowed later urban research and analysis. Indeed, in some ways he stands as an apt model for the waves of development consultants that would descend in the postwar era. The plan was astonishingly disengaged from social relations and realities on the ground, reflecting much broader limitations in colonial knowledge. When it came to even basic issues like assessing the city’s population, Lanchester drew heavily on conventional categories, repeating the kinds of stereotypes and simplistic distinctions that had long characterized colonial discourse. The

sociological confusion and slippage in the text was both characteristic and revealing.

Colonial administrators, as we've seen, often discussed the "native" with great confidence as if it was a self-evident category, but nailing down precisely who counted as a native proved to be a vexing task. Swahili society had been constituted by extensive cultural exchange and intermarriage for centuries, and drawing strict lines between Africans and Arabs was not as simple as it might appear. Most urban residents could plausibly advance claims to belong to either group or embrace alternative identities such as "Shirazi," among others. "Arabs" and "Indians" were by no means monolithic or unitary categories either. Nor were the spatial borders between groups clear: many "natives" lived in Stone Town, and many Zanzibaris who could claim Persian, Arab, or Indian ancestry lived in Ng'ambo, which was labeled a "native town" or quarter. Should they be classed as natives? Or should the term instead be restricted to Africans? If so, the question remained: which Africans? As a category, "Africans" ignored multiple lines of difference between indigenous groups like the Wahadimu or Watumbatu, former slaves and their descendents with widely diverse points of origin in East and Central Africa, and more recent immigrants from the mainland. And moreover, these groups had combined and intermixed in different ways over time. Where then precisely should one draw the lines? The colonial administration was long troubled by the difficulties of classifying and categorizing the native. When experts such as Lanchester showed a striking lack of sophistication about the social complexities involved, they were only reproducing an enduring colonial conundrum.

Of course, part of the work of an expert consultant is to make their knowledge and expertise manifest. Despite his scant knowledge, Lanchester never hesitated or betrayed any signs of doubt. Even when he was confused, he wrote with utter confidence. In the first chapter of the plan, "Physiognomy and Ethnology," Lanchester listed population groups at length, going through Washihiri Arabs, Comorian Arabs, Shatri, Mafazi and coastal Arabs, and Omanis; Indian Ismaili Khojas, Ithnasheria Khojas, Bohoras, Memons, and Hindus; Cingalese, Parsis, Goanese, Baluchis, and Persians; Native Swahili; and of course Europeans. The city, he initially conceded, was a surprisingly diverse cultural space: "It will thus be seen that the population of Zanzibar is of a mixed

character to an extent unusual even in the East” (1923, 15). But while he invoked the cosmopolitan character of the city, hybridity and social complexity presented real challenges to a short-term consultant trained as an architect rather than an anthropologist or sociologist. Lanchester lacked the time and training to master the detail of this rich cultural milieu, and so he followed colonial precedent and instead sought to rationalize it. With specific reference to planning *colonial* towns, he asserted that it was utterly appropriate “to deal with particular communities as corporate bodies rather than as individuals” (3). In this way it became possible to render the social space of the city in terms of a few broad brushstrokes, reducing complexity and cultural difference.

Bounded and cohesive urban communities, each with its own distinctive area, identity, and needs, were far easier to administer—or plan—than a shifting urban swirl, and so Lanchester simply proceeded to divide urban Zanzibaris into a few sharply delineated groups. As we’ve seen, his racial mapping of the population made it seem as if the cultural order of the city was crisply and clearly delineated—readily comprehensible at a glance. And yet, within the text of the plan itself, Lanchester had difficulty keeping his categories straight. “In making any study of Zanzibar,” he confidently declared, “there are four main groups of inhabitants and their buildings to be considered”: Arabs, Indians, Natives, and Europeans (1923, 12). But these broad categories were fairly simplistic, and on questions of cultural identity the text was not even internally consistent. In a later chapter on housing, for instance, Lanchester went on to discuss six distinct communities of “individuals and their buildings,” laying out separate sections on the “European,” “the Goans,” “the Arab,” “the Indian,” “the Swahili,” and “the Migrant.” This last category covered not the large and diverse population of African migrant laborers from the mainland—who appeared nowhere on the list—but the smaller numbers of mostly Arab dhow crews who came to Zanzibar with the seasonal monsoon, settling temporarily in Malindi and Funguni (67–71). Yet it was never clear why conditions of labor—being migrants—disqualified these migrant Arabs from being included in the racial category “the Arab.” Similarly, Goans were treated separately from “the Indian,” perhaps because they were mostly Roman Catholics, while “Native” and “Swahili” were deployed in the text as if they were interchangeable. Even at the most fundamental level, the social vision

of the plan was superficial, its grasp of basic sociological issues rather suspect. But the text, like other colonial reports, was not produced as an anthropological treatise, nor was it intended for an academic audience. It was the work of an alleged expert, aimed at serving specific interests: a colonial administration seeking ways to make the city conform to an overall, more modern design, and others interested in the specialized concerns of “tropical” town planning. Lanchester’s work came stamped with external expertise, and no Zanzibari was even allowed to see the plan until decades later. Local knowledge and cultural analysis were excluded virtually from the outset.

Conclusion

A European order of knowledge had been produced, but progress was hardly the result. Distinct disciplines had come into being and been transported into a colonial context. These fields were trumpeted as signs of progress. Colonial officials vowed that techniques of modernization, if adopted, would inevitably produce development. But these hallmarks of alleged progress were anything but straightforward in practice; in the colonial world, bureaucratic organization, specialization, expertise, and scientific aspirations introduced unexpected complications that delayed or derailed “advancement.” And in an imperial milieu that prided itself on its capacity for rational foresight and calculation, it is especially ironic that these dilemmas were rarely foreseen or understood.

At the outset of the process in Zanzibar, when colonial officers were first called upon to consider planning as a specialized mode of modern development, the public health officer warned that the pursuit of a town planning agenda would be anything but easy. “To ‘town-plan’ in an old city like Zanzibar,” Skelton observed in 1913, “is one of the most difficult problems that can be found. It is a problem, too, which is dependent on the prevailing financial conditions, because it involves the demolition of buildings and the acquirement of land which may not belong to Government. It is almost as expensive as swamp drainage and, in its way, it is just as important.”⁴ But while specific officials may have expressed concerns about the economic costs at different points in time, colonial administrations rarely went so far as to cut back or abandon their overarching ambitions for planning. Spurred by expert advice and fueled by

modernizing assumptions, imperial regimes continued again and again to pursue an expansive set of aspirations that were difficult to implement and ill-suited to local conditions. Reports and reviews generated a wealth of information, but much of it was ungrounded, ideologically driven, or incomplete; specialists produced expert findings, without coordinating or comprehending the broader whole; and a bureaucratic mechanism premised on rational calculation and efficiency increasingly foundered as means and ends became more and more disconnected. In this sense, an altogether modern apparatus served to generate its own conditions of irrationality, spiraling out of control even as it allegedly sought to impose greater order.

“Students of the colonial consistently have argued that the authority to designate what would count as reason and reasonable was colonialism’s most insidious and effective technology of rule,” notes Ann Laura Stoler. “Viewed in this frame colonial states would seem to conform to a Weberian model of rationally minded, bureaucratically driven states outfitted with a permanent and assured income to maintain them, buttressed by accredited knowledge and scientific legitimacy and backed by a monopoly on weaponed force” (2009, 57). Appearances, however, can often be deceiving, and recent anthropologists have begun to chip away at this conventional façade. Michael Taussig (1987) has eloquently explored the arbitrary and unpredictable uses of terror and disorder as instruments of colonial rule. Johannes Fabian (2000) has revised our understanding of the European exploration of East Africa, showing how these journeys were driven less by scientific rationalities than opiates, alcohol, fever, incomprehension, and outbursts of violence. And Stoler herself has done much to challenge the reasoned basis of colonial rule. European indices of reason were rarely stable, she argues, and categories of knowledge failed to cohere or be neatly contained. Invocations of rationality were “neither pervasive nor persuasive,” and both fantasies and feelings powerfully infused the colonial imagination (2009, 58). Sense making and sentiment were deeply and inextricably conjoined in ways that don’t fit our conventional vision of colonial governance. Yet while numerous scholars have pointed out that European colonial practice often deviated from its professed ideals, few have critically examined the inherent contradictions of the model itself. It is not that European colonial regimes failed to live up to their modernizing and developmentalist

claims or simply applied them imperfectly or partially. The dilemmas of planning in Zanzibar reveal something more far-reaching and profound: the way that Weberian ideals were themselves constituted by contradictions and inconsistencies in imperial practice that translated into a surprisingly irrational and incapable form of administration—laying the groundwork for the failures of urban development in the decades to come.

Failures of Implementation: Circularity and Secrecy in the Pursuit of Planning

In the mid-1940s, on the eve of a major new colonial development and welfare scheme, Chief Secretary Eric A. T. Dutton sought to inscribe the history of urban planning over the first fifty years of colonial rule. At the time he was chair of the Town Planning Board and a vigorous proponent of initiatives to refashion Zanzibar city—in the latest instance, a proposed ten-year plan devoted largely to the “other side” of town, Ng’ambo. The planning review was part of a longer document seeking to justify this ambitious program and obtain a large grant from London to pay for it under the Colonial Welfare and Development Act. Largely echoing the terms established by Portal and Pearce, among many others, the chief secretary took up a familiar colonial refrain, crafting the narrative of British urban engagement in Zanzibar as a story of inexorable improvement.

From modest beginnings, Dutton wrote, the remaking of the city had developed in a linear and progressive fashion, steadily expanding in scope and significance. During the first decades of the twentieth century, he stated, urban betterment in Zanzibar was “mainly confined to the great task of reclaiming large areas” for recreation purposes. This crucial act of ground clearing (which for some reason he credited to a single individual, John Sinclair, the architect’s apprentice and colonial officer most responsible for bringing Indo-Saracenic style to Zanzibar) “provided Zanzibar with admirable playing fields and open spaces at small cost, the filling being mainly composed of town rubbish. This process still continues.” Eventually, the opening up of playing fields paved the way for the inception of planning “proper”:

Little town planning proper, however, was done, with the exception of a small scheme in the Vuga area; and the major problem of improving slum conditions was not seriously tackled until 1923. In that year a visit was paid by Mr. (now Dr.) H. V. Lanchester, a town planning expert of established reputation both in G. Britain and the East, and a report of his investigations was subsequently published which set out the broad outlines upon which, in his view, the development of Zanzibar town might proceed. Shortly before the war, Mr. Bintley, the Government Architect, made recommendations, based on Dr. Lanchester's report, regarding the town planning of the roads of access in the large slum area in Ng'ambo. Further progress was interrupted by the outbreak of war, but in 1943, a topographical folder was prepared incorporating Mr. Bintley's suggestions in a comprehensive plan. In that year also, the Town Planning Board was reorganised, and at once started to work on the problem of town planning as a whole in Zanzibar and Pemba, and particularly in the congested Ng'ambo area.¹

To anyone familiar with Zanzibar's planning history, Dutton's text seems highly selective and idiosyncratic. At one level, the chief secretary seeks to provide evidence of substantial efforts taken over many years to improve the city, lodging these activities within an overarching developmental logic. In the beginning, there was the "great task" of land reclamation, the magical process of transforming trash into turf (at low cost, of course). Once the ground had been cleared, town planning proper could begin with a small-scale scheme in Vuga (Dutton's rather grand designation for irregular attempts to clear huts and brothels out of the area to benefit Europeans). The way was thus prepared for the appearance on the scene of an expert planner, a man of established reputation and experience in the "East," who crafted the broad outlines for future urban development. In this scenario, the growth of urban planning takes narrative shape in the form of a modernizing myth, moving in a straight line from part to whole, simple to complex—the inspired individual giving way to the Government Architect and reorganized Town Board, which "at once" set to work on the problem of planning throughout the isles.

In framing this historical narrative, Dutton strives to create an impression of steady activity and achievement. And yet the text is marked by significant gaps in the record and a strange emptiness. Like the landfill process with which it begins, it attempts to cover a gaping hole with rub-

bish. For instance, this passage appears directly under the heading “Town Improvement. (a) Housing,” yet instead of evidence of actual dwellings improved or constructed, we find only absence: the “achievements” of over fifty years of town improvement largely come down to empty roads and open spaces—the negation of construction. Or, again, the problem of slums, Dutton suggests, was not “seriously tackled” until 1923. And how exactly was this issue “seriously” addressed in that year? Not by the modification or creation of actual buildings, but by the issuance of a report (Lanchester’s urban plan for Zanzibar)—a report, moreover, that was subsequently relegated to a shelf for twenty years before eventually being transformed into yet another document, a “topographical folder.”

What sort of strange modernization narrative is this? Dutton tries in the text to present compelling signs of progress, smoothly attesting to a developmental process whereby “town improvement” evolved over time into the professionalized discourse and scientific practice of “town planning proper.” And yet this shift seems only to have produced the most ambiguous of results, promoting more the enlargement of the archive than actual achievements on the ground. Rather than progressing, urban planning seemed to involve the production of more and more documents; instead of town improvement, we find only bureaucratic involution. And at the center of this story stands the Lanchester plan, whose secret history was far more complicated than Dutton ever cared to suggest. In one sense, Lanchester’s work did mark a certain shift in colonial designs in the city. It represented the latest stage in a process begun nearly a decade earlier, finally fulfilling the directive of the Colonial Office to frame a town plan for Zanzibar. And it offered a totalizing vision for the city, drawing on a more specialized and professional set of idioms. But even as Lanchester’s plan expanded the scale and scope of projected colonial interventions, its impact on the built fabric of the city was negligible at best. Into the 1930s and beyond, the 1923 plan continued to shape administrative policies and debates about the future of the city. But the plan was kept under wraps and remained unfunded, eventually being permanently consigned to a paper existence after years of effort to get it off the drawing board.

Rather than following Dutton’s straight and sure trajectory, planning in Zanzibar took a more circuitous course. Following the twists and turns of the Lanchester plan doesn’t just make for a more compli-

cated tale; it transforms our understanding of the nature of planning and power itself. The landscape of colonial Africa was fairly well littered with flawed or failed schemes for development. It might be tempting to view these as mere mistakes or follies—and yet something more profound was going on. Unrealized plans don't just imply absence or lack. While colonial schemes often fell by the wayside, this doesn't mean they did nothing. True, the ambitious aims of Lanchester's plan were accompanied by repeated failures of implementation. But if the plan was never realized, it managed to preoccupy the colonial regime for decades, and these effects cannot be dismissed as inconsequential. Rather than just errors in judgment or execution, failed plans reveal the hollowness at the heart of colonial rationality itself.

Rethinking colonial power requires a more imaginative anthropological approach—shifting, in a sense, from the plan itself to planning as social process. Plans often operate in the authoritative mode, laying out intentions and ideas for the future, and it is all too easy to read them just as texts, representations, or ideological codes. No doubt, maps and planning statements certainly can provide great insight into state intentions, the orientation of planners, social class, spatial form, and architectural style. And yet these issues represent only one aspect of the problem. Reading spatial texts entails placing them in context—and the formal existence of a plan on the shelf tells us little about the more vital question of its entanglement with a broader world of social practice. In their final incarnation, plans and maps take on a form of appearance that nowhere reflects the processes that brought them into being or their eventual impact on the city. In retrospect, they may seem nothing less than coherent and compelling—every bit the rationalizing and modernizing instruments of urban reform they claim to be. But these spatial designs have a far more complicated relationship with the world they seek to describe and alter than is immediately apparent. Plans, after all, have social lives and are produced in everyday contexts that they mostly manage to erase or exclude. We cannot fully grasp the impact or import of these schemes without analyzing them in ethnographic terms. More than anything else, this entails moving beyond the formal plans themselves to examine the way in which they are lodged within a more far-reaching cultural terrain—debated, engaged, disrupted, implemented, or even simply ignored.

Debate, Digression, Deferral: Transnational Circuits and Temporal Lags

Despite claims of linear progress and inexorable improvement by British officials, the course of urban planning was anything but straight or consistent. Sanitary experts first advocated planning as an essential component of colonial policy just prior to World War I, but it took quite some time before their ideas came any closer to fruition, and even then deliberations and debates continued to far outpace developments on the ground. In the immediate wake of the calls by Simpson and Skelton for comprehensive urban planning, the administration turned somewhat fitfully to evaluate what this might entail. Lacking the technical means or expertise to initiate such a program, officials in Zanzibar chose instead to carry on much as before. Among the many proposals for urban reform, colonial officers only moved initially to take action on a single (and utterly self-serving) item. In predictable fashion, the beginnings of town planning in Zanzibar took shape in the form of a modest program of hut clearance. In 1914 twenty-four huts singled out by Skelton near two houses occupied by English officials were demolished and cleared. Forty-eight more huts near the Health Office were similarly acquired and destroyed. Other than this, little was accomplished. The overview for 1914 concluded with a succinct description of stasis: "No building has been taken in hand, as yet, so that the Medical Officer of Health's Scheme has not been in force."²

At even this early stage, we can glimpse how planning took shape through an intricate discursive process, tied to the bureaucratic production of reviews and reports; as these documents proliferated, becoming increasingly circular and self-referential, their connection to the world they sought to reshape and rationalize became all the more tenuous. Delays in the implementation of plans were directly related to the convoluted logistics and temporality of colonial report making (which became more acute with the outbreak of World War I, but certainly did not end there). When specialist intervention was needed, experts had to be located elsewhere, traveling to local sites to conduct their surveys or inspections. Their findings had to be compiled and transmitted to the Colonial Office as well as reviewed locally, and the spatial distances and disjunctures involved produced inevitable delays.



24. "No building has been taken in hand, as yet." Aerial photograph of Zanzibar city, 1914. Note the intricate and irregular layout of the built environment, as well as its long-established character and density. Zanzibar National Archives.

Simpson's example serves as an excellent case in point. The professor was initially asked to undertake his East African mission in May 1913, but he didn't arrive until the end of the year. He didn't submit his report to the Colonial Office until July 1914, and a copy finally arrived in Zanzibar for review in September. The secretary of state for the colonies instructed the new resident, Pearce, to reply, "at an early date, with your observations on the part of the report which concerns your administration."³ But Pearce did not manage to respond until July 1915, and he was forced to apologize for the prolonged delay. He explained that Simpson's report had been sent to his principal medical officer for review, who "stated he was too busy at the time to deal with the matter"; this officer subsequently resigned, which left the medical office critically understaffed.⁴ Pearce then had to wait for the acting principal medical officer, Dr. Henry Curwen, to settle into his new position and gain his bearings. Curwen had to review all these prior reports, discussing the recommendations in specific detail. After studying the various propos-

als, the doctor compiled his findings and then transmitted these documents once again up the chain of command. Resident Pearce looked over the entire dossier and drafted his own conclusions, responding to the colonial secretary a full two years after the process had begun.

In these prolonged dialogues, one can find ample evidence of the tensions created by disjunctures between local interests and broader imperial concerns, as well as between transnational experts and colonial administrators. In formulating the official response of the Zanzibar administration, Resident Pearce sought to maintain some room for maneuver. He was, after all, in something of a delicate bureaucratic position. All of the studies advocated the need for an ambitious program of urban planning in Zanzibar. Pearce lacked the expertise to challenge Simpson, and he had no desire to undercut his own junior staff. But at the same time he could not afford to endorse many of the initiatives proposed, for they would require the Zanzibar administration to develop complicated and expensive initiatives well beyond local capacities. He wanted to avoid being saddled with unfunded mandates by London, spurning any definite commitments.

Hence Pearce deployed what seemed to be an adroit bureaucratic strategy: he appeared to accept most of the planning proposals while emptying them of substantive force. He went through the various recommendations, intimating that they were already being taken care of or would be in the future “as funds allowed.” He stated, for instance, that Simpson’s proposal to increase the water supply was already “in hand” and claimed that creek reclamation was well under way. War and shortage of staff had hampered swamp drainage, but “improvements, as recommended by Professor Simpson, should be continued next year and provisions will be made.” He agreed that the lunatic asylum and native hospital should certainly be moved when funds became available, and “any area cleared of unsuitable buildings in this locality should be secured for European dwelling houses.” As to hut clearances, he provided no specifics but wrote that “large numbers” had been relocated from the west side of the creek, making new building sites available in Stone Town; this process, he promised, would continue in the coming year.

The tone of Pearce’s memorandum was matter-of-fact and to the point. He reduced Simpson’s recommendations to a list of ten specific initiatives, which he then proceeded to cross off as being carried out

or a matter of common sense. In essence, he endeavored to outflank the sanitary experts by deploying a strategy of inoculation. While he was quite willing to undertake limited initiatives over a period of years that didn't involve burdens on existing staff or resources, he remained decidedly cool to the idea of town planning. With respect to Simpson's call for a comprehensive plan for the "native town" east of the creek, he dismissed the need, saying that "plans of approved houses exist, but wholesale reformation of areas is not feasible." Elsewhere in the memo, he stressed the budgetary risks of planning, warning that the administration's financial position prevented it from embarking on any comprehensive program:

It is necessary to make it clear both as regards Professor Simpson's recommendations and the remarks now submitted of Major Skelton and Dr. Curwen that to give effect to the obviously excellent recommendations is not so simple as it might appear; because in the majority of cases the land involved is private property. This factor in the question of sanitation in Zanzibar was brought into prominence recently when I wished to remove some particularly insanitary native huts which are situated close to certain houses occupied by European officials. The land is private property, and to acquire this small area, and to pay compensation for the huts themselves would have cost, it was estimated, about Rs. 50,000. . . .

Similarly plans for the cutting and broadening of road through the native quarters are often hampered by the land being private property but I have recently taken advantage of a considerable conflagration in the native quarter to broaden and straighten out some of the crooked alleys which formerly existed. The owner of each hut however which required removal had to be compensated, so that unless very large sums of money are available, the wholesale acquisition and clearing of insanitary areas, the draining of swamps, the rebuilding of native areas, the broadening and straightening of existing roads, as recommended by Professor Simpson and the medical authorities, can only be accomplished slowly and in accordance with financial conditions.⁵

Pearce praised the planning recommendations as "obviously excellent," but then proceeded to highlight how difficult it would be to actually put them into practice. By pointing out that the price tag for compensation for removing a few huts in a limited area was around £3,300, he hoped to give the colonial secretary a taste of just how expensive a proposition large-scale urban planning would be. It wasn't just laziness that drove Pearce to defend the status quo: he grasped the outlines of

a dilemma that would confound colonial authorities for years to come. If authorities wanted to rework the urban sphere at will, rationalizing and sanitizing space, this aspiration stood in sharp conflict with other principles they were ideologically bound to uphold, particularly the rule of law and private property rights.

Unless British officials decided to break the very laws that they claimed were the basis of civilized society, planning would require significant levels of compensation to existing owners, as the vast majority of land in urban Zanzibar was privately held. Without a considerable infusion of funds from the metropole, the colonial state could not afford to compensate many private landowners, and its capacity to refashion the urban sphere would remain both modest and incremental. In this manner, Pearce emphasized financial exigencies to the colonial secretary as a means of buying the administration some time and room for maneuver. From his perspective, it was a win-win situation. If London ordered the Zanzibar government to formulate a formal town plan, then his superiors would have to find a way to pay for it. And if no additional funds might be forthcoming, then the administration would be off the hook and could go back to business as usual.

In the end, however, the tactic did not quite produce the expected results. When Pearce claimed that the high costs of planning ruled out the whole exercise from the very start, and that he should simply be allowed to continue with ad hoc improvements as finances and opportunity allowed, he did not anticipate that this economic argument could be neatly reversed and turned against him. And this is precisely what the secretary of state for the colonies did when he responded to Pearce, informing him in no uncertain terms that the fact of tight resources and financial strictures made planning all the more—not less—necessary. Without a plan, after all, how else could the regime economically and scientifically prepare for the future?

What is proposed is that a plan should be prepared of the lines on which it is desirable to work, with a view to carrying out a process of road and street improvement, opening up of congested areas, etc., which would occupy a great many years, and could only be carried out piecemeal and gradually, as opportunity arose. The essential thing is that such a plan, once it has been finally adopted, should be rigidly adhered to; and that, in particular, as the Town develops and it is desired to put up bet-

ter class buildings on sites now occupied by native dwellings, etc. (and to substitute, for instance, masonry for clay and “swish” huts), the plan should be kept steadily in view, and alignments made to conform to it. . . . It is important that there should be a plan to work up to; otherwise the improvements of one period will not fit into those of the next; the Town will remain badly planned and irregularly developed, and a good deal of money will to some extent be wasted.⁶

The colonial secretary was operating here at a level of abstraction that rendered local objections largely irrelevant. Removed from events on the ground, he wholly embraced the rationalizing and modernizing assumptions of town-planning ideology in isolation from the specific facts of the case. Weighing the particular arguments as to why exactly Zanzibar required large-scale urban intervention was beside the point; town planning represented the way of the future, the most scientific means for an enlightened colonial administration to bring about improved urban conditions. The eventual details could be worked out by the technical experts together with local administrators. That was their job, after all.

The critical thing was to have a plan, a carefully conceived and complete model for the future that would guide all urban initiatives in the present. Without this, local authorities would simply be wasting their efforts, pouring money down the drain. Small-scale and localized amelioration was virtually useless according to this perspective, for the programs and policies of one period would not accord with those of the next. Lacking a totalizing and comprehensive vision to work up to, the city would remain congested, crooked, “irregularly developed,” and poorly laid out. Reworking the city might take many years to accomplish, but without a plan in place the regime’s efforts could only be considered fiscally irresponsible, uncoordinated, and inefficient. In this manner, the Colonial Office endorsed a far-reaching project of rationalization that would be marked, as we shall see, by a chaotic irrationality all its own.

“Disappointingly Void of Any Progress or Development”

In the end, Resident Pearce had little choice but to comply with the colonial secretary’s directive, accepting the requirement to initiate planning. Virtually until the end of the colonial period, his successors would

continue to struggle with the consequences of this decision. By any accounting the war years represented the least auspicious moment for a strapped colonial regime to initiate and oversee an ambitious program of socio-spatial intervention. The war effort placed a considerable strain on local personnel and resources, not to mention those of the metropole, and the conflict made it all but impossible to seek advice or expertise from the outside—especially the services of the “qualified” town planner that were required. By the end of 1916, Dr. Curwen was reporting that the secretary’s instructions remained unfulfilled: “It has been impossible to undertake the detailing of a Town Planning Scheme as required by the Colonial Office,” he wrote.

Following the usual bureaucratic practice, however, Curwen masked the absence of any progress by touting a series of reports and studies that allegedly had been produced in *preparation* for an eventual plan: “A useful general survey of the town and its sanitary requirements has been accomplished, a study of the many shipping, anchorage, customs, private, business, and economic interests which must be considered in any such scheme has been constantly maintained, further useful work in acquiring open spaces by demolition of huts has been carried on, and a good scheme for acquiring and improving an area of the town as a European quarter has been evolved.”⁷ Again, he tried to present a picture of departmental vigilance and active engagement by relying on such phrases as “constantly maintained,” but his use of the passive voice and lack of specific details seems rather unconvincing. For instance, was one hut cleared? Twenty-five? A hundred? And just how much open space was actually created? Ten hectares? Forty? He neglected to say. Perhaps this was an oversight, or, more probably, the figures simply did not support the narrative of perpetual progress he was trying to create.

Curwen did make at least one thing clear: there was still no detailed large-scale map of the city, so officials lacked any precise and up-to-date data on the urban totality they were supposed to be continually working to plan and control. Elsewhere in the text it becomes evident that three years of reports and reviews had changed precious little in the space of the city, insofar as Curwen was still complaining about many of the same issues that had provoked Skelton in 1913. While claiming that the “factors requiring consideration in a comprehensive Town Planning Scheme were constantly under discussion,” the doctor continued to lament the

poor state of the central urban bazaars. Characteristically he rejected the possibility of piecemeal reform, describing the situation as “hopeless” and advocating a comprehensive program of razing and rebuilding entire blocks: “The insanitary condition of the great majority of town houses and their hopeless lack of light and ventilation owing to narrowness of dividing lanes form a rather stupendous problem. Little can be achieved by attacking individual houses, although of these it is evident that hotels, Indian lodging houses, Government and Wakf-owned houses must receive first attention, but gradually over a term of years money must annually be set aside for the acquisition of whole blocks of buildings to be razed and rebuilt on approved lines.”

This “stupendous” problem was further complicated by the lack of an adequate and aligned road system: “The only roadway which can be termed a street is that which runs almost completely around the margin of the triangular town site, the mass of houses within this triangle is intersected by narrow irregular lanes of no alignment. These are further narrowed and obstructed by projecting masonry ‘barazas’ and by overhanging iron roofing erected to protect goods exposed for sale on such ‘barazas.’ The surfaces of these lanes are badly broken and in disrepair which hinders sweeping and cleaning.” And with regard to the proposal to carve out a European quarter, he admitted that nothing had been done: “No effort has been made in the past to define or create an European quarter and with very few exceptions [European] residents occupy houses closely surrounded by those of Asiatics and Arabs, the latter with large Swahili households.”⁸

If Curwen described 1916 as “abnormal” for his department, by the end of the war matters were much worse, and he had simply given up any attempt to represent the situation in a positive light. In the annual report of the Medical Division for 1919, we begin to hear the weariness and frustration of a midlevel officer, fed up by prolonged inertia and inactivity: “The year has been disappointedly void of any progress or development. With inadequate staff and the necessity for lending a helping hand to the Public Health Division, it has barely been possible to maintain routine duties.”⁹ The review of the Public Health Division was even more pessimistic in tone: “This belated report may well be reduced to a minimum as there has been a disappointing lack of any progress on development, proper supervision over important details of established routine has



25. A “rather stupendous problem”: with stone structures and narrow streets in the old city, “whole blocks of buildings” must be “razed and rebuilt on approved lines.” Zanzibar National Archives.

been impossible, reforms of increasing urgency and repeatedly pressed have been further postponed indefinitely, and all educational work has been at a standstill.” Next to most of the headings in the text—Water Supply, Drainage, Cesspools, Sewage Disposal, Town Refuse, Dairies, and Markets—a similar refrain appeared over and over again: “There was no improvement.”

Bureaucratic inertia and the status quo eventually began to take a toll. In 1919 Dr. Curwen left the Zanzibar service for good, being invalidated home. It is unclear whether he was truly ill or simply sick of the whole business. But his departure changed little, as we can see from the entry on “Town Planning and Improvement” in the Public Health Division report at the end of the year: “Realizing the inability of the Medical Officer of Health to arouse any interest in the insanitary housing conditions of the majority of the bazaar residents and the futility of his single voiced complaints year in and year out against the immovable inertia of apathy and ignorance of the actual state of affairs, it was suggested that a Town Planning and Improvement Committee should be framed. The proposal was approved and a representative body selected to form the first Committee but nothing further has been designed or achieved.”¹⁰ Here Curwen’s protests against futility produced only more of the same: the formation of yet another committee. The unofficial group did not include anyone with expertise in urban affairs or town planning and met only on a few occasions, leaving no record of any concrete contributions. From the inception of planning discourse in 1913, it took almost a full decade for the colonial administration just to locate a planner and bring him to Zanzibar. And while the arrival of Lanchester marked an important juncture, it did nothing to resolve the difficulties surrounding implementation. Indeed, the content of his proposals and their reception virtually guaranteed these exercises in futility would continue well into the future.

Elements of the Plan: Economizing Dreams and Interlocking Schemes

The scientific promise of planning lay in the field’s alleged capacity to encompass the urban totality, resolving problems in an integrated way while laying a rational blueprint to guide all future development.

Rather than problematic, this comprehensiveness was counted as a kind of saving grace: with an overall plan in place, proponents asserted that different initiatives could be serially implemented as finances allowed. This vision of the economy and efficiency of planning led the Colonial Office to endorse it without worrying about available resources, and planners such as Lanchester certainly embraced expansive notions of the scope and scale of their craft. At the time few seemed to recognize the potential contradiction that loomed between comprehensiveness and economy. Total plans, after all, involved numerous proposals that had to be integrated. But if the schemes were interlocking and interdependent, wouldn't delays and deferrals in one area necessarily postpone many others? Wasn't there the risk that the entire scheme would fall apart, rather than being accomplished on a piecemeal basis?

Comprehensive approaches, in other words, involved an expansion of scale that necessarily introduced new levels of complexity. Resolving an array of urban defects in one fell swoop was deceptively alluring. Treating the totality entailed crafting a complicated series of proposals that intersected in unpredictable ways. On paper, the scheme might seem satisfyingly complete, but interactive designs could quickly come apart at the seams when it came time to actually implement them. Interlocking schemes lay at the heart of Lanchester's plan for Zanzibar. "Every improvement, if soundly conceived," he argued, "tends to put a town in a stronger position strategically, whether such improvements are aimed at advancing the commerce, sanitation, or general convenience and amenity; this being the justification for all schemes of such a character" (1923, 2). Yet Lanchester never dwelled on the interdependence of his proposals or the complexities involved in trying to translate them into practice. And despite his reference to "general convenience and amenity," the concerns of the colonial state largely won out in the plan: most projects were crafted with government needs and a narrow economic calculus in mind.

Given Lanchester's lack of sociocultural engagement (and his dependence on colonial officials for support and information), it is no accident that he gave such short shrift to the social needs of indigenous residents. At the top of his planning list was an extensive program involving harbor reclamation and port construction, a project that decisively shaped many of his other decisions in Stone Town. He wanted to shift the harbor

from the Forodhani seafront (facing the Customs House, fort, and palace complex) to the northeast, building a new port in Malindi. He included plans for a new 1,300-foot wharf, two large warehouses, oil and coal storage, timber, copra, and clove sorting facilities, workshops, post and telegraph services, and the new Customs House, all oriented around a “port square.”

The movement of the port, he asserted, would transfer the city’s “centre of business” to Malindi, Kokoni, and Darajani, requiring new rail and road connections there (1923, 41). As a result of the harbor works, “this area will then become by far the most important section of the Town and therefore possesses great potential value. For reasons of economy and to secure proper sanitary conditions, amenity and convenience, it is highly desirable that its development be organized on definite and well-considered lines.” Investment in new infrastructure would provide cover for clearing out central neighborhoods near the harbor, targeting buildings that Lanchester described as “unsuitable” for future use and areas where “many of the structures are of the lowest type.” Economic redevelopment rather than social needs was the driving force behind the initiative. And because the scheme would require significant state intervention, he called for the project to be centrally controlled, dismissing the idea that local residents should be involved: “Having regard to the character of the majority of the present occupants of the area, it is improbable that any scheme of cooperative development would be feasible and the only appropriate course is to carry out the whole organization as a Government enterprise” (1923, 41).

Denigrating urban dwellers and excluding them from participation was common practice throughout the colonial world and beyond. Of course, planning that required no consultation with residents was all the easier to carry out; centralized control meant much less potential resistance or interference. Top-down methods of planning gave greater sway to officials, experts, and other elites, and indeed it is no accident that large-scale modernist urban designs seemed to flourish best in state-centered or authoritarian contexts. By characterizing urban Zanzibaris as less developed or civilized, Lanchester was voicing a position that colonial officials were already predisposed to endorse. They had no doubt that the administration should exclusively control the pace and direction of planning efforts.

In ways that were quite consonant with the patronizing logic of indirect rule, Lanchester regarded urban Zanzibaris as subjects requiring tutelage rather than as active citizens and political agents in their own right (Mamdani 1996). He asserted that “civic consciousness” in the islands was as yet undeveloped, and “municipal work” existed only “in embryo.” In paternalist fashion, Lanchester endorsed the notion that Zanzibaris could only be granted a greater role in urban affairs when they had “progressed” to a more mature stage of civic development. For the foreseeable future, he argued, “the mode of control best suited to the multifold activities involved in the development of Zanzibar can only be decided by the Government” (1923, 78).

Lanchester’s disregard for local inhabitants carried over to his other schemes. His second priority after the port was to provide for enhanced commodity flows into and out of the city. He stressed “how ill-adapted the town has hitherto been for the requirements of transport,” expressing concern that there was not a single road in the city wider than fifteen feet that accessed the waterfront. The three major routes that fed into the city from the countryside (from Mkokotoni in the north, Chwaka in the east, and Tunguu in the southeast) all converged in Ng’ambo in the “single narrow and inadequate bazaar leading to Darajani bridge.” The fourth—the Fumba road to the south—similarly ended in a constricted lane that petered out eventually in Shangani (1923, 43). These bottlenecks, he asserted, all had to be removed. The plan laid out a system whereby feeder roads from the rural areas would lead into a new grid network of thoroughfares cutting through the neighborhoods of Ng’ambo. Each road crisscrossing Ng’ambo was to be between thirty and fifty feet wide, hooking up with either new or broadened streets encircling Stone Town. The entire perimeter of Stone Town was given over to transport, with a major new “central road” driven into the heart of the city, culminating in a Panopticon-like police post in Sokomuhogo Square.

Following infrastructure and streets, Lanchester emphasized the need for regularity and rationalization, proposing an early form of zoning to disentangle the intermixture of urban functions—precisely the sort of Oriental “confusion” that had provoked Portal thirty years earlier. The distribution of trades in the city was “haphazard,” lacking any “definite grouping.” The promiscuous mingling of economic and residential uses was typical of “eastern towns,” producing irregular traffic

patterns and poor sanitation. Lanchester wanted to rearrange the city into functional zones, following “the more economical western practice of employing areas distinctively for business and residential purposes.” In this way he believed it would be possible to “terminat[e] a confusion that has largely arisen from the gradual growth of the town and the inheritance of conditions from more primitive times” (Lanchester 1923, 44–46). From the perspective of modern planning, “primitive” space was confused and disorganized, undisciplined by efficient calculations of economic utility. To reform this state of affairs, zones of leisure, commerce, and residence had to be separated out and clearly marked. The concentration of enterprises in specific districts would allow for greater efficiency and coordination, facilitating the reconstruction of commercial infrastructure and transport.

In the 1920s, the peninsular triangle of the city—what later became Stone Town—was still the commercial hub of the islands, and Lanchester devoted most of his attention there. Almost all godowns (warehouses), including those for oil, coal, copra, and cloves, were to be removed from the city center and restricted to the new port (or along the road leading out of it). Diverse “noxious trades”—potters, hide dealers, and tanners—were to be relocated on reclaimed land outside the city in a new development called Marahubi Estates. Soap and oil factories, camel oil sheds, dairies, cow sheds, lime kilns, and dhobi houses met a similar fate, being exiled to special zones beyond the city’s border or on its periphery (on reclaimed land in Funguni, for example). But Lanchester made no provision for public transport or housing anywhere near these new commercial sites, giving little thought as to how local workers might manage to reach their newly distant jobs outside the city.

The plan’s emphasis on reconfiguring infrastructure, transport, and commerce perfectly suited both the economic needs and political goals of the colonial administration. Road construction and zoning provided a technical rationale for clearing out areas, removing “insanitary” structures (frequently a code word for huts), and reducing congestion in the city center. Many of his proposals were cleverly integrated, which increased their appeal but also made them far more challenging to implement. Demolition and displacement seemed to work hand in hand, being two sides of the same coin. The central road to Sokomuhogo, for example, was intentionally drawn so that it cut through Mkunazini, “where all the

huts and other insanitary buildings would be cleared and the area laid out on more regular lines.”¹¹ Not far distant, the neighborhood around the central markets was intended to be the target of a related scheme: “A good deal of insanitary property exists in the area immediately to the west of the markets. This property should be acquired and developed for market extension and business premises.” And Vuga would be the site of the proposed European quarter, where building a select group of detached “official residences” would also serve to eradicate native houses of “ill repute”: “Further west there is another insanitary area, partly occupied by native brothels. I suggest linking this up with the markets and the centre of Town by a 25 foot lane which would emerge just east of the Hammam and fronting which sites for a superior class of building could be provided.”¹²

When viewed as a whole, Lanchester’s recommendations constituted an ambitious attempt to clear out Stone Town, transferring entire populations and functions out of built-up areas to new planned neighborhoods in Ng’ambo or beyond. And these initiatives were intricately intertwined. Removals from the western peninsula of the city would allow for decreased densities and increased amenities—a new hotel and park on the seafront, a refurbished *hammam*, or public bath, and a “national museum” in the Old Fort. He also called for a large-scale engineering effort to tame the creek, which would be replaced by a narrow tidal canal and basin, providing reclaimed land on either side for further open space and a new “Indian quarter” in Ng’ambo just across from the central markets. Similarly, Goanese residents were to be removed from the city center and relocated to a “Goanese village” in Ng’ambo (see figure 27). Like Skelton, Simpson, and Curwen before him, Lanchester laid out a complicated and interlocking set of schemes, only hinting at the potential difficulties involved. In his view, overcrowding in Stone Town could not be addressed by clearing out a few structures here and there. Reducing congestion in one section of the city hinged upon providing building sites with approved layouts, infrastructure, and services somewhere else.

Hence the project of cleaning up Stone Town came to depend on clearing out space in Ng’ambo. Lanchester regretted the fact that extensive relocation would have to wait until the colonial administration



27. Lanchester Plan, Map VI, integrated improvement schemes: the proposed port reclamation, new hotel and museum on the seafront, road networks in Ng'ambo and the center city, tidal basin and canal, official residences, Indian quarter, and Goanese village. H. V. Lanchester, *Zanzibar: A Study in Tropical Town Planning* (Cheltenham: Burrow, 1923).

found the resources to once again transform trash into turf, conjuring space out of nothing: “It is the more to be deplored that so much of this will have to await the completion of some of the reclamation schemes,” he lamented (1923, 69). Only by first hemming in the creek—an expensive and complex engineering problem in itself—could the authorities manage to reclaim land, secure proper layouts, and resettle South Asians in new orderly estates. Once completed, these efforts would translate into reduced densities in Stone Town, allowing the authori-

ties to condemn insanitary structures, create open spaces for light and air, construct roads, and impose new structural and health regulations on the buildings that remained. The circle would then be complete, the ground having been cleared for a more rational and regular city.

In this way, Lanchester's various proposals came together to form a plan in which any one element was complexly related to many others. On paper, it seemed to make sense, gesturing toward the organic unity of the urban sphere. In the end, Lanchester claimed that "without undue extravagance," the plan would enhance the merits of the city and "eliminate those defects which militate against a sound civic organization in all the various aspects." He had considered all the "essential factors," and the plan fairly indicated "the lines on which the improvement and development of the town should proceed" (1923, 79). But if the plan ultimately seemed more like radical reconstruction than conservative surgery, the maximum program was exactly what senior colonial officials expected an urban planner to deliver. The colonial secretary ordered a town plan precisely because the new science promised to replace patchwork initiatives with a comprehensive planning mechanism. The idea of master planning was seductive precisely because it promised an efficient total solution, which Chief Secretary R. H. Crofton defined in the following terms: "The *whole* area of any city including the *whole* of the outside suburban regions must be planned and controlled permanently by the civic authorities."¹³ This was a tall order indeed, since it set a goal wildly disproportionate to the limited bureaucratic and fiscal resources possessed by the colonial administration. As the question of implementation came to the fore, this gap between theory and practice would only widen, confronting officials with complexities and conundrums that they themselves had largely worked to create.

"The Scheme, the Whole Scheme, and Nothing but the Scheme": Promoting the Plan

By August 1922, Lanchester's proposals were mostly complete on paper, but the tangled tale of the plan was just beginning. The ideological goals driving the design are significant, yet it is the social life of the plan—the secrecy that surrounded it, the debates and maneuvers it provoked, its various permutations, and lingering influence over the bureaucratic

imagination—that ultimately proved far more important. As a first step, the various schemes had to be reviewed and analyzed by colonial officials on Zanzibar, transmitted to Nairobi, and then discussed with London. Chief Secretary R. H. Crofton took charge of the local review. By this time he was something of an amateur planning enthusiast. Around the end of World War I, Crofton had begun to study town planning legislation elsewhere, following developments in Bombay, Kenya, and Britain. His interest was initially provoked by inquiries he had to conduct concerning the growing problem of urban rents in Zanzibar. The rent restriction decree of 1918 had proved ineffective, and ongoing protests from urban tenants prompted him to look elsewhere for a potential solution. His review of the situation transnationally led him to conclude that rent restriction was a mere “palliative”; urban rents could not be contained without increasing the housing supply, he concluded, and this could best be achieved by formulating a comprehensive plan: “The opinions which are being expressed and the action which is being taken in Europe, . . . in India, and in other parts of the world suggest that the right way to grapple the problem is by a comprehensive housing and town planning scheme.”¹⁴

Crofton’s faith in master planning did not diminish over time. He made the initial overtures to Lanchester in London, served as his primary contact during his visit, and continued to carry on an active correspondence with the architect well into the late 1920s. The chief secretary may have been the logical candidate to review the scheme, but he was hardly an impartial or dispassionate observer. Even so, Crofton’s analysis of Lanchester’s work took nearly a year to complete, culminating in a long report entitled “Secret Memorandum on Town Planning.” He began with an extended discussion of planning methods and laws in diverse contexts, surveying developments in Europe, the United States, the Bombay Presidency, and England. The metropole did not compare favorably with the others; the chief secretary stressed that Britain was no model for Zanzibar to emulate: “The neglect of town planning in England in the past has resulted in a colossal waste of money,” he declared.¹⁵ Crofton continued to strike this note throughout the memo, seeming to turn conventional economic logic on its head. As he framed it, spending nothing on planning was enormously expensive (in the long run), while immediate outlays could be counted as savings rather than costs.

Crofton went over all the main elements of the scheme, interspersing his comments with long quotations taken from Lanchester's proposal sheets. While reiterating many of the arguments the architect had made for the plan, Crofton also covered new ground, particularly concerning the whole question of finance. He estimated that the plan would require a total expenditure of £466,666 (6,700,000 rupees), but downplayed the significance of this large sum. Trying to minimize sticker shock, he argued that the total cost did not seem quite so excessive if one considered the fact that it covered a "large programme of public works" spread over ten years.¹⁶ By way of comparison, he claimed that the public health services would consume about £400,000 over the same period. And he emphasized that most of the expense would be devoted to productive investment in the economy, with a single proposal—the harbor works—taking up almost £300,000 (4,400,000 rupees) of the total.

Even if the costs involved were as economically rational as Crofton intimated, the Zanzibar government would still have to find the money to pay for it somehow—through new sources of revenue, loans, or grants. In discussing funding mechanisms, the chief secretary was blithely optimistic, embracing a speculative economic logic. At the outset, he assured his superiors that town planning would require no large handouts, echoing the Treasury orthodoxy on self-reliance. "Broadly speaking, the Town must pay for its own improvements and the improvements should pay for themselves over a longer or shorter period."¹⁷ Urban planning, he argued, could be made to pay for itself through an array of strategies. He admitted that the state would have to contribute some revenue, but these outlays would be modest and directed to official purposes. Otherwise, he believed that planning could be pursued virtually free of cost.

Officials, he said, could compel residents to pay for improvements themselves, levying a "contribution rate" to fund particular schemes, or they could offset the cost of acquiring property by offering government land in exchange, making schemes revenue-neutral. Even better, he believed the state could turn a profit on planning, asserting that acquisition, development, and leasing would make town improvement not a liability but a potent source of profit: "It is European experience that 100% increase in the value of land is very commonly produced at once and directly by new street and road work done in undeveloped suburbs

and I think it can be assumed with safety that over all the acquisitions proposed that percentage will accrue.”¹⁸

Crofton showed almost limitless faith in the generative capacities of planning. Colonial officials, he suggested, should not be concerned by the prospect of making huge outlays on urban improvements. Instead, they could “safely assume” that any expenditure in the here and now—buying up houses, laying roads, building a new wharf—would readily be recouped later, magically producing a 100 percent profit over time. By this dubious accounting, debits would readily be transformed into assets. Dressed up in sober and calculating language, the speculative logic was faultless, echoing views advocated by other proponents of planning, including those in the Colonial Office. The chief secretary’s beliefs about financing also had clear implications for how planning should be administered. Future profits would not accrue to the government, he asserted, if it did not succeed in tightly controlling and directing planning schemes. To reap the reward, the administration had to be granted full power to capitalize on opportunities, relying on stealth and secrecy to execute its designs. “The main objects to be aimed at in the execution of the Scheme are economy in acquisition of land and economy in carrying out the development works—the Continental principle of ‘very low capital costs,’” he observed. “To achieve the former object it is of great importance that the executive authority should be given full powers and without annual limit of expenditure, to buy up quietly, without notice, ceremony, waste of time, or revelation to ‘speculators’ any land required to carry out the scheme.”¹⁹

If plans leaked out, speculators would quickly snap up the land in question, driving up costs and diverting profits. The state would lose the advantage of inside information, its opportunity to remake the city slipping away to the benefit of private interests. There was, of course, a crucial flaw in the argument that Crofton largely failed to consider. His position was based on the premise that investment in town planning was a means of *generating* lucrative returns rather than a drain on the budget. He argued that to save money the government first had to spend a lot of it; maintaining the economy of “low capital costs” could only be achieved by means of unlimited annual expenditure. Even if we accept this rationale, another problem still remained: any future profits would

remain unrealized just so long as officials lacked the necessary resources to prime the pump and initiate the process. The costs were up-front and very material, while the promised reward was deferred in time, a prospect looming just over the next horizon.

Crofton had little doubt that planning constituted the best means to make improvements possible on a broad scale. As a form of urban administration, he believed it was modern, scientifically rational, efficient, and economizing. He sought to build a strong case for undertaking an extensive planning program, overcoming possible objections. At the end of his secret memorandum, he shifted from issues of economy to emphasize social welfare arguments. Public health and the general welfare were often invoked when colonial officials were trying to obtain funds or justify expenditures, and Crofton was no exception. The reform of housing, the chief secretary remarked, was a critical part of any improvement scheme. He quoted with approval an English authority on public health who warned, "Unless we are prepared to abolish overcrowding, the prime factor in the causation of disease and unhealth, 'mother's welcomes' will not save us, nor will tuberculosis clinics, nor insurance Acts, nor pasteurized milk, nor the medical profession."²⁰ To his mind, planning on garden city lines created cleaner and healthier cities; in its absence, innocent children would only be consigned to underdevelopment or early death. He then warmed to his theme: "It is evident the Government will confer great and lasting benefit on the present and on future generations if they follow Continental precedent and adopt as their policy the scheme, the whole scheme, and nothing but the scheme—far greater benefit, it may be remarked in parenthesis, than is likely to accrue from the money that will be spent on the Public Health Services during the next ten years."²¹

As if this were not enough, Crofton added a political inducement, resorting to a not-so-subtle form of arm-twisting. He highlighted the fact that the secretary of state for the colonies had himself endorsed the need for planning, quoting a long passage from his directive to Resident Pearce in June 1916. The inference was all too clear: the colonial secretary had directed officials in Zanzibar to develop a plan and carry it out, systematically working to achieve their urban designs. There was no choice, Crofton forcefully concluded, but to move ahead:

The Scheme has been prepared by a recognized authority. In general terms it indicates “the lines on which the improvement and development of the Town should proceed in order, without undue extravagance, to enhance its present merits and to eliminate those defects which militate against a sound civic organisation.” . . . A study of the old photograph of the Town in which the English cathedral appears under construction will demonstrate how greatly the face of Zanzibar has since changed. It is still changing. The Scheme substitutes for the present haphazard and costly method of development an intelligent plan which has regard for the health, amenity, and convenience of all.²²

Crofton urged that the Lanchester plan should be passed forthwith, sending his secret memorandum along to Resident John Sinclair. At the time, Sinclair had held the top office in the isles for less than two years. His service in East Africa as a colonial officer, however, stretched back almost three decades, almost all of it spent in Zanzibar. The last of the “old hands,” he had recently decided that the time had come to retire. When he received Crofton’s report, less than a month remained before his departure. The resident had other things to occupy his attention, and he did not bother to comment on the plan in any great detail. Instead, he passed all the paperwork to High Commissioner Robert T. Coryndon in Nairobi, indicating his general support. His sole contribution was to stipulate—without explanation—that the total cost should be summarily reduced to the round figure of £400,000.²³

Coryndon then transmitted the file to London, requesting the approval of the Colonial Office. The plan was presented in a meeting of the Colonial Advisory Medical and Sanitary Committee, eventually receiving its endorsement. The committee considered adding an expensive main drainage system to the list of improvements, but decided in the end that “the native population at any rate” did not merit such investment. In July 1924, the colonial secretary wrote back to Coryndon, indicating that the scheme had been officially accepted in its entirety. In his letter he described the plan as “thoroughly satisfactory, having special regard for the town.” These words came cheap. He had little reason to do anything other than pass the plan, for the decision involved no additional burden or expense on the part of the Colonial Office. The metropole, as he outlined it, would support the scheme and exercise its supervisory powers while assuming no responsibility whatsoever for providing financing.

In essence, the colonial secretary presented local officials with an unfunded mandate, and he made it seem as if it were a gift. In his letter he made a great deal of the fact that he would allow Coryndon the leeway to decide, in light of the financial situation and prevailing local conditions, what priority to place on the various projects and how to pay for the entire initiative. As a start, he suggested that the Zanzibar government should apply for a loan while reserving £10,000 annually in the budget to spend on town improvements.²⁴ He neglected to specify where authorities might turn to secure such a large loan or to ask if they possessed sufficient collateral to back it up. Nor did he bother to consider the critical issue of timing. If additional sources of funding could not be found and the Zanzibar government had to depend on its own resources, the plan would take roughly four decades to implement. But projects drawn up in the early 1920s would be rapidly outpaced by urban developments as the years passed, and the total plan would be irrelevant or outmoded long before it could be brought into being.

On Funding, Frozen Schemes, and the “Fertile Imagination” of Authorities

Even during the brief interim when the Lanchester plan was being evaluated in London, changes occurred on the ground in Zanzibar that significantly altered its shape and status. In January 1924 the new resident, Alfred Claud Hollis, arrived in the islands to find that a number of critical questions awaited his attention. Not the least of these issues was the fact that a major planning initiative was already well under way that had significant implications for his administration and future budgets. The Lanchester plan had received the endorsement of his chief secretary, the approval of his predecessor, and the support of his immediate superior. Moreover, the Colonial Office seemed likely to approve the scheme. At this late stage in the process and newly arrived on the scene, Hollis had little control over the plan's passage. Nevertheless, as he began to familiarize himself with the financial prospects and administrative details of his new position, he grew increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of engaging in large-scale planning. When High Commissioner Coryndon arrived in Zanzibar for his annual inspection in late July 1924, the question of what to do about urban improvements was high on the of-

ficial agenda. Favoring more direct investment in the economy, Hollis wanted to place his priorities elsewhere. He tried his best to shelve the Lanchester scheme, but was only partially successful, as a subsequent letter from Coryndon to Hollis reveals:

The Secretary of State has approved generally of Mr. Lanchester's scheme. During my recent visit to Zanzibar you impressed me with your view that in your opinion the first claim on the resources of the Protectorate was the development of the clove industry and that consequently you were not inclined to favour putting into operation a comprehensive town planning scheme at the present moment. With this view I am in sympathy, but I must observe, however, that now the report has been accepted by the Secretary of State there is no alternative but to proceed to carry it into effect, though there is no reason why undue cost or haste need be involved.²⁵

In formal terms, there was no going back. But the high commissioner provided Hollis with a significant loophole that he could turn to his advantage. In all outward respects, the resident would have to accept the Colonial Office's decision and go along with the plan. But in actual practice he could mostly do as he wished, setting his own budgetary priorities and determining the pace and timing of any measures. The principle of local leeway and constraints on financing left the resident considerable room for maneuver, providing ample opportunity to ignore any proposals, postpone them indefinitely, or undercut them altogether.

Hollis took heed of Coryndon's advice and proceeded accordingly. He formally accepted the plan but then shifted most of the proposals to the back burner. Officials in Nairobi and London approved his decisions, largely because they concurred that the total plan could only be implemented gradually over a considerable time period. Time, they believed, was not of the essence. And in any case, the scope and cost of the scheme made it difficult to argue otherwise—the resources to pay for it simply did not exist. When reviewing the actual budget estimates for Zanzibar for 1925, the secretary of state took a closer look at the overall picture and concurred with Hollis's views:

In view of the financial position it seems unlikely that it will be practicable in the near future to carry out, on any extensive scale, Mr. Lanchester's recommendations with regard to the replanning of the town of Zanzibar; though naturally any alterations of streets and buildings

which may be made should be required to conform to the scheme so as not to prejudice its eventual adoption. . . . I feel that there is much force in the views expressed by Mr. Hollis . . . that schemes for beautifying the town of Zanzibar ought to be regarded as secondary in importance to measures affecting the prosperity of the Protectorate as a whole. . . . I must ask that any proposals for expenditure [on town planning] may be very carefully scrutinized and that approval may only be given for money to be spent when it is clear either that an exceptional opportunity exists of making progress with the scheme, or that the failure of the Government to act would result in some other action being taken which would prejudice the success of the scheme when it is found possible to proceed with it.²⁶

Unsurprisingly, that moment never seemed to arrive. On the drawing board existed the scheme, the whole scheme, and nothing but the scheme—and there it would remain for a very long time to come. In 1946 John Sinclair returned to Zanzibar for a visit, remarking that it was “very interesting to see how far [the Lanchester plan] had been followed during my absence.” Admittedly there was not a whole lot to see. “The only outstanding difference in the appearance of the town,” he wrote, “lay on the sea front where the new quay had been completed and the ugly old Customs godown opposite to the new fort removed.”²⁷ By that time, the plan was mostly dormant and long outdated. The colonial state had done very little over the years to realize the comprehensive scheme, and yet officials still trumpeted their intention to carry out Lanchester’s vision. The plan, it seems, still had a certain utility: even if never implemented, it could still be invoked. Even as late as 1949, a member of the Legislative Council, Mohamed Nasser S. Lemki, rose to ask if “His Highness’ Government would be pleased to state whether they had considered any solution to the housing difficulties in the Stone Town”—which had only grown worse since the 1920s. Chief Secretary Eric Dutton then swiftly rose to assure him that the authorities indeed had such a plan to deal with congestion: “It had always been the policy of Government that when an opportunity occurred a new residential area on the opposite side of the Creek, in accordance with Dr. Lanchester’s plan VI should be opened up.”²⁸ By this time the “policy” was little more than a convenient fiction. It existed in name only, as the colonial state had failed for more than a quarter century to find the “opportunity” to carry it out. Among all of Lanchester’s myriad projects and proposals, only a minor percent-

age ever saw the light of day: the port in Malindi with its transport link (Hollis Road), the reworking of the creek, and a handful of roads in Stone Town and Ng'ambo.²⁹

Rather than a comprehensive plan, what the colonial government actually implemented were a limited number of public works projects. And even here the results were anything but smooth and orderly—amply illustrating the difficulties the authorities faced when trying to carry out their own designs. Take, for example, the long-running issue of the creek. Crofton had regarded Lanchester's creek scheme as a capital idea and continued to discuss the proposal with him long after he had left the islands. It was not until 1928, however, that it was discovered that the architect's original idea for a canal and basin was technically infeasible. Debates about various solutions ensued, and a host of surveys, studies, and committee reviews were ordered—postponing resolution into the 1930s. A modified version was eventually constructed, but the creek remained a “perennial source of trouble.” In 1939 the medical officer of health, Dr. S. W. T. Lee, complained that the “gates and channels were merely treating the symptoms of the disease. What is wanted is a radical cure—filling up the creek by refuse.” The problem was that the creek was already filling, but with waste of a different sort. Colonial officials consistently rejected proposals for a more efficient waste disposal system as unnecessary and expensive, continuing to dump raw sewage into the creek to be flushed out with the tides. As the city grew, however, so too did its waste volume, and this nineteenth-century practice proved increasingly ineffective: the creek in the heart of the city literally stank to high heaven. In 1938, a Miss Gunn of the UMCA mission was moved to complain that the smell from decomposing waste—which included “dead donkeys and cats”—was so foul that residents of the adjacent mission could not sleep at night and suffered from persistent sore throats. The director of medical and sanitary services investigated and found that Miss Gunn was all too correct about the “potency of the smell,” which he described as “literally nauseating if indulged in over too long a period.” Nevertheless, the government continued to do little. It was not until the 1950s that the creek was eventually filled in and reclaimed, most of the land being taken up by a new road.³⁰

Similar delays and difficulties were reflected in the Malindi port project. Gerald Portal had first pushed the idea of port improvements

in the earliest days of the protectorate, claiming that such investment would allow him to transform Zanzibar into another Hong Kong. In 1919 Sinclair was still sounding similar themes, long after Zanzibar had lost its regional monopoly through British inaction and had been supplanted by the rise of the ports of Dar es Salaam and Mombasa. The first definite proposal for the harbor works was actually floated in 1909, with an estimated cost of £100,000. Both this and another scheme were rejected on grounds of expense. In 1914 the Colonial Office accepted a third (and more modest) proposal. It entailed a new jetty and rail extension at a cost of £12,000, but the initiative was abandoned when World War I broke out. The process began all over again in 1919 when two South African advisers were brought in to study the question of port and warehouse facilities. They developed a plan to shift the port to Malindi at a cost of £282,000. The project was subsequently cut back to £253,000 and ultimately received the approval of the Colonial Office.

In 1920 a resident engineer was appointed for the port project and work commenced. But in December construction was suddenly halted when it became clear that the total price tag had been significantly underestimated. After reexamining the issue, officials arrived at a revised estimate of £332,000. In August 1921 this figure was arbitrarily cut by bureaucratic fiat to £293,000 and work started once more. "Unforeseen difficulties" arose, however, and the project was stopped yet again pending Lanchester's arrival in Zanzibar. In his plan, Lanchester largely took over the earlier South African scheme, modifying it to suit his broader vision for the urban sphere. When Chief Secretary Crofton reviewed the port proposal in August 1923, he took the lower 1921 figure as his estimate, claiming the port would cost £293,000. Only four months later, however, this projection was being described as wildly optimistic. The director of public works was told to investigate and soon came up with an "alarming" new set of figures: £428,000 for the new wharf, £196,000 for dredging and the dhow harbor, and £150,000 for two new lighters. When Resident Hollis arrived in 1924, he was disturbed by these estimates and the confusion surrounding the project, and he decided to suspend it. He suspected that the port project would consume huge sums and might still fail if the work was allowed to continue on its present course. So he ordered yet another review, asking the Colonial Office to send out a fresh consulting engineer. This expert, H. G. H. Mitchell,



28. Harbor works: new port construction, late 1920s, in the wake of numerous failed plans, prolonged delays, and cost overruns. The Nasur Nurmohamed Dispensary can be seen behind the tank on the left. Zanzibar National Archives.

arrived at the end of 1924 and formulated a modified scheme that was eventually implemented through the late 1920s. The total cost of the works was £450,000, which “included the money previously expended on the undertaking, most of which was wasted.”³¹

The fiscal priorities and problems of the colonial regime in the mid-1920s essentially emptied the Lanchester plan of any real force. And worse was yet to come as the effects of global economic depression hit hard by the end of the decade. Expenditure on the harbor works came at a significant cost, postponing any realization of the total scheme well off into the indefinite future. To pay for the port, the administration was compelled to auction off a good number of its urban properties, scrambling to generate capital and reduce its deficits.³² The emphasis on sinking funds into large infrastructure projects meant that other initiatives were inevitably delayed or sacrificed, especially those relating to

social needs such as housing or health. As early as 1925 the government's lavish pursuit of a reconstructed port came in for pointed criticism, as articles began to crop up in the local press taking the authorities to task for their wastefulness and disregard for public opinion. The writer of one such piece, Hasanali F. Master, objected to what he called "the fertile imagination" of colonial functionaries, lamenting their tendency to hatch elaborate schemes and then pursue them at great cost:

It is an acknowledged fact that the citizens of Zanzibar have no adequate voice in the management of their own affairs. In the absence of Legislative and Municipal institutions there appears to be no effective control over the ever-increasing Government expenditure, in respect of which, the people themselves are not invited to ventilate their views and to express their opinion. In consequence, very little care is exercised to effect economy in the various items appearing in the Budget, to some of which we have on several occasions drawn the attention of the Authorities. The Authorities seem to have been impressed generally with the erroneous idea they are not responsible to the public for their action, and once their fertile imagination produces a scheme, it must be put into operation at all costs, notwithstanding large expenditure such scheme may involve. And public opinion in respect of such schemes are generally disregarded. How long such retrograde policy will be followed to the detriment of the progress of these Islands, we cannot say. The Government's policy in respect of the Harbour Works, which has now become a matter of history, is an example supporting our statement.³³

Master's hopes were not soon realized: British officials continued to act as if they alone could identify urban priorities and determine the course of "progress" in the islands. For his part, Resident Hollis soon made it clear that he fully intended to stay the course, refusing to be swayed by criticism in the press or grumbling in the streets. In his 1926 address to the recently convened Legislative Council, he stressed the fact that "public" works, designed and overseen by the government to meet its economic imperatives, must still take precedence over any social welfare spending. Outlining his budget plans for the coming year, Hollis invoked the need for continuing restraint and self-sacrifice, stating that many "improvements" would have to wait:

With regard to Public Works Extraordinary, it is of greater importance to the Protectorate as a whole to continue with the construction of

the Harbour Works and to build more roads to tap the clove plantations than to undertake new works, and such items as the agricultural school, a new infectious diseases hospital, additional dispensaries, district schools, cattle-sheds, and quarters for officials, etc., have had to be omitted from the [1927 budget] estimates. . . . To sum up, it is our duty to adapt ourselves in a calm and businesslike manner to present conditions; we must do all that is possible to secure the well-being of our staple industry; we must keep a watchful eye on recurrent expenditure; and we must forgo, let us hope only temporarily, many much needed improvements.³⁴

In this officious manner, Hollis attempted to recast the interests of the colonial state—pumping up the clove economy, which was its predominant source of revenue—as those of the “protectorate as a whole.” His choice of pronouns was especially telling, using “we” and “our” to paint a picture of collective solidarity and common sacrifice. In fact, the burdens of fiscal restraint were never evenly or equitably distributed. Government officers, after all, were not subject to these budgetary strictures, nor did they suffer from the lack of schools, hospitals, and other essential services. If sacrifice was called for, it was entirely a one-way street. The need to economize in no way extended to the administration itself; there were no cutbacks in European staff, reductions in salaries, or cancellation of generous leaves and other perks. Moreover, colonial officials never bore the consequences of their fiscal decisions. The resident admonished his Zanzibari subjects to bear up under the present conditions, enjoining them to adapt to the situation in a “calm and businesslike manner,” precisely because it was they, and they alone, who would be forced to forgo “much needed improvements.”

The Enduring Lure and Liminality of Lanchester

Rather than a temporary response, the colonial administration’s postponement of improvements became habitual. The development of planning in itself required bureaucratic extension and enlargement, leading to higher levels of recurrent expenditure. Administrative growth only exacerbated the deficits created by the pursuit of expensive pet projects, guaranteeing that no money would be available to actually pay for a comprehensive plan once it had been framed. But enduring financial constraints never served to derail planning efforts altogether, and the

critical disconnect between means and ends continued on well into the future. Pursuing a comprehensive scheme necessitated more bureaucratic staff and resources, and so any belt-tightening was rejected as out of the question. Downsizing their designs or strictly economizing was not an option that officials were willing to choose unless forced to do so. If the means to implement a plan couldn't be "found" on Zanzibar itself, then they would have to seek a benefactor elsewhere, hoping for the appearance of a *deus ex machina*. This search for funding went on irregularly, in fits and starts, as the pursuit of planning took on an increasingly disjointed and episodic character.

At particular points in time, the process seemed almost ludicrously unfocused and ungrounded. In 1931 a new round took off when Resident Richard S. D. Rankine decided that it was an opportune moment for the protectorate to apply for a large colonial development loan (just as Eric Dutton would try to do in the following decade). In justifying the application to the colonial secretary, Lord Passfield, Rankine felt it necessary to include some background. His cover letter opened with a little history lesson, reflecting the degree to which the Lanchester plan was already fading from memory. "Town Planning on scientific lines," he informed Passfield, "was first started in Zanzibar in the year 1922 when Mr. Lanchester first visited the Protectorate and after close investigation of the prevailing conditions formulated a scheme." If Lanchester's work was still in limbo, Rankine hoped to revive it by securing a generous infusion of metropolitan capital. After summarizing his wish list of projects, the resident came straight to the point, making his pitch: "It is most desirable, in the interests of public health, that these portions of Mr. Lanchester's proposals should be undertaken, but it is impossible to provide for them at the expense of general revenue. Unless assistance is given from the Colonial Development Loan they must be postponed indefinitely."³⁵

Rankine was typically disingenuous in the way he used public health concerns as a means of obtaining money for infrastructure investment—chiefly road construction and completion of the creek. For a host of development projects he requested the princely sum of £522,343, only a portion of which was intended to support the Lanchester plan. But officials on Zanzibar seemed altogether unfamiliar with the basic criteria and purpose of colonial development loans, and the applica-

tion foundered from the very outset. Many of the projects included in the list did not qualify for consideration under the grant guidelines and were rejected out of hand. After review, the Colonial Development Advisory Committee approved just over one-tenth of the total, asking the Treasury to make available a loan for £59,300. Officials at Treasury, however, refused to do so without first receiving a definite guarantee from the secretary of state that “the Protectorate Government will be able in due course to take over and maintain the services thus inaugurated without exceeding its anticipated revenue.” The colonial secretary felt unable to provide such an assurance given that “the financial record of the Zanzibar Government has been one of successive deficits since 1926.” In the end, metropolitan authorities deigned to provide not even so much as a shilling in support of the protectorate’s application, refusing once more to take any responsibility for implementing the plan. The colonial secretary expressed his “sincere regret” that the loan application met with so little success. He assured the acting resident that he entirely supported the proposed development objectives, finding them both worthy and admirable. Indeed, he wished nothing less than to see them carried out. But unfortunately at this stage, he wrote, he could provide no actual assistance; the matter, alas, was simply beyond his control. What he offered instead was the usual bromide, expressing his hope that local self-reliance should be sufficient to see the measures through: “I trust that . . . it will be found possible by reducing the cost of administration, and perhaps by adjustments in taxation to provide the funds with which, at any rate, the most important of Mr. Rankine’s proposals can be carried into effect.”³⁶

Cutting the expense and extent of the colonial administration was precisely what an editorial in the local newspaper, *Al-Falaq* (The Dawn), had endorsed as a solution a few months previously, echoing earlier criticism about the regime’s lack of economy. “The Government ought to make small its departments,” the piece argued. “Formerly all the departments were occupied in one building but gradually these departments turned into larger size and required six buildings to occupy them including the Beit el Ajaib, a spacious building, which is filled up with offices. Will the Government consider this and curtail the expenditure with which it has without good reason burdened itself relying on the income of cloves. Would the day come when the huge pay which the Europeans

get be decreased—which is larger than any other Government offers.”³⁷ If the Arab press and the colonial secretary were largely in agreement on this one point, the administration took little heed of their advice. Nor was it possible to follow Passfield’s other recommendation, using “adjustments in taxation” to raise capital to put Lanchester’s plan into effect. The impact of global economic depression was by then being fully felt in Zanzibar, with rising unemployment, falling property values, and decreasing incomes and revenues. Indeed, the entire point of the *Al-Falaq* article was to argue that the “present distress” required a reduction in onerous taxes, especially the rates on urban properties, as well as cut-backs in administrative costs. Officials in Zanzibar were quite aware that they could not raise duties or rates at a time of sharp economic decline without provoking a forceful response. As it was, they were struggling to simply hold the line, maintaining levies at their current levels.

In the end, the idea of local self-help went nowhere. Rankine had claimed that it was highly desirable to institute Lanchester’s proposals in the interests of public health. But evidently it was not so desirable that he was willing to sacrifice any of his general revenue to carry them out. When the hopes for a pot of gold from abroad collapsed with the rather dismal failure of the loan application, the planning proposals suddenly seemed neither so urgent and nor so necessary. If the metropole was set on shirking any involvement, officials in Zanzibar were not about to step in and pick up the slack. The easiest course was to return to business as usual, allowing Lanchester’s scheme to quietly recede into the background, languishing in a stack of reports and reviews. But if the plan seemed mostly a dead letter, it managed to survive in a liminal state. Relegated to a bureaucratic purgatory, it continued to consume administrative resources and effort, being periodically resurrected and reviewed. The long march of planning was by no means over.

Almost twenty years had passed since the bureaucratic pursuit of modern planning began. Reports, reviews, and recommendations had been amassed, finally culminating in a comprehensive plan. There it stood on the books, a looming ideal—the material product of the regime’s enduring preoccupation with a certain kind of progress. The spatial designs of the colonial state had advanced quite a distance, yet achievements on the ground were still few and far between. The official goal to impose an ultimate order on the city was as elusive as ever. At the

moment, this inconvenient fact was not readily appreciated; indeed, it went wholly unnoticed. But by the time that some colonial officials were ready to admit that the Lanchester plan was inoperative and outdated, they had already begun to compound the error by insisting on the need for a new and better plan. Doubtless they were unaware of Marx's oft-quoted dictum: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce" (1963 [1852], 15). For colonial authorities, the option of admitting failure, recognizing bureaucratic limitations, and acknowledging that they simply lacked the capacity and capital to control urban space was unpalatable. Rather than seeking to analyze what had gone wrong in the past and adjusting course, it was far easier for them to shelve the 1922 plan and begin all over again, repeating the same mistakes.

The Secret Life of the Plan: Involution, Inaction, Incompleteness

The Lanchester plan was relegated to a subterranean existence, hidden to the extent that few officials subsequently seemed to know what to do with the document—or what it actually contained. The text was in private circulation in England, restricted more by limited interest than anything else. Six hundred official copies had been printed in London in the 1920s, but they were all stamped "strictly confidential" and closely guarded. In Zanzibar, the plan continued to be shrouded in secrecy well into the 1940s, as the administration went to great lengths to hide its intentions from the public. Officials were concerned that if news got out before any plan was legally established, speculators would drive up land prices in the relevant areas, making the eventual acquisition of properties all the more difficult. The regime's concern with concealment verged on the obsessive, lasting well after the report had ceased to have any relevance. For a decade most copies were held in London under wraps, languishing in a warehouse of the Crown Agents. In 1933, trying to clear some space and get rid of outdated materials, the Crown Agents wrote to officials in Zanzibar, asking permission to either release or shred the report. Local officials put off the decision that year, and then again in 1934, and yet again in 1935. What to do with the report seemed to oc-

copy more attention than fulfilling the plan. Finally in September 1936 they instructed the Crown Agents to destroy most copies of Lanchester's work, sending the remainder under cover to Zanzibar.³⁸

If the secrecy surrounding the report kept its contents from public view, it also meant that by the mid-1930s very few officials had any familiarity with its specifics.³⁹ Indeed, the inquiry from the Crown Agents in 1933 raised anew the whole question of just what had been done with Lanchester's proposals, prompting yet another official review. The task of reporting on progress achieved to date was ultimately delegated to Land Officer W. B. Cumming. He dusted off Lanchester's original documents and diligently provided neat summaries of every recommendation, employing exactly the same categories and headings. Each of these was then followed by his assessment of the degree to which the measures had been enacted. His findings on most of the proposals were succinct and to the point: "Not done," "not done for lack of funds," "have not yet materialized," and "no effect given to these recommendations." This litany of inaction was partially ameliorated by more positive signs, as Cumming wrote "done when money is available" or "action taken as occasion arises" under a few items.⁴⁰

The review of Cumming's review was subsequently undertaken by the new chief secretary, Samuel B. B. McElderry, who had assumed the office when Crofton retired in 1933. He had no personal connection with Lanchester or commitment to the plan and wrote about it with a certain dispassion. He seemed unperturbed by the lack of progress, largely because he thought Lanchester's proposals were of questionable value in the first place. As he dryly observed to Resident Rankine, "It is difficult without close study to disentangle the idealistic from the practical elements in these recommendations."⁴¹ Given the low priority he placed on a set of concerns passed down to him by his predecessor, he did not seem inclined to press the matter much further. Indeed, the only result of Cumming's review was to provoke a further round of debate on whether or not to publish the Lanchester plan—an issue that was by now mostly beside the point. And even here the government decided that the best course of action was to do nothing at all: "The question of Action on the Lanchester report was raised at the end of 1933. The L.O. [Land Officer] submitted a précis of the Report, and it was eventually decided that it should not be published. There the matter rested."⁴²

Internal reports, reviews, and committees proliferated while Lanchester's program remained in limbo. An ad hoc group was formed in 1934 to study the question of planning select smaller areas of the city, yet another in a succession of town boards and town planning committees formed and reconstituted during the 1930s. It left no record behind of meetings or demonstrable achievements and soon passed from the scene. One of its members, however, was the recently appointed director of medical and sanitary services, William Leslie Webb, who took the opportunity to instruct his senior medical officer, Dr. S. W. T. Lee (also newly installed), to report back on conditions in the city. In a series of long memos issued in 1935, Lee set forth his analysis of the current state of affairs. His discourse reads in many respects like a reprise of the reports by Major Skelton and Dr. Curwen twenty years earlier. He showed little familiarity with these texts, but insofar as many of the issues noted then had remained unaddressed or had only grown worse in the intervening years, the fact that he was repeating and reinscribing earlier analyses is hardly a surprise.

Dr. Lee's work reflects the degree to which the idea of town planning as a comprehensive solution continued to exercise a powerful allure. As plans remained in limbo, midlevel colonial officers continued to encounter many of the same problems in practice. Those charged with enforcing municipal order—medical and public works staff in particular—were closest to the ground, directly confronting the confusions or contradictions of policy on a regular basis. When the same issues arose time after time, some simply gave up or tried to muddle through as best they could. Others duly noted problems and did little else, waiting for higher authorities to provide explicit instructions and greater direction. A few, however, went further, motivated by a belief in correct procedure and rational improvement, a desire for greater control and administrative efficiency, or an abiding faith in urban order and regularity. Frustrated by their everyday experience, they became convinced that a more definitive and lasting approach was required. Rejecting piecemeal efforts, they pressed the case for a comprehensive urban plan all over again, hoping to use scientific and technical means to resolve a host of urban ills at once. Dr. Lee was very much situated within this latter camp, and he managed to set off a whole new round of town planning debates.

Assessing the State of the City: *Déjà Vu* (All Over Again)

Lee initiated his urban survey with a long memo entitled “RE: Living Conditions in Zanzibar Town,” which provided an overview of the situation and the steps being taken to address the most urgent concerns. He began by breaking the city down into four areas: (1) portions of Stone Town inhabited by Europeans and “better class” Arabs and Indians; (2) the congested Indian bazaar; (3) Funguni spit and the sections east of Darajani Bridge where poorer Arabs, Africans, and Indians resided; and (4) the outskirts of the city occupied mostly by “Swahilis.” Official confusion over boundaries and spatial classifications had continued unabated. The areas that Lee claimed to find were not geographically distinct or circumscribed; like Lanchester before him, he mixed spatial locations with housing types and class and racial markers. He himself found it difficult to maintain consistent categories. About a month later he jettisoned his initial schema, writing instead that the city contained only two districts: “the stone town west of the creek” and “Ngambo.” And when DMSS Webb summarized Lee’s findings for the chief secretary shortly thereafter, he changed this yet again, stating that there were three districts to be dealt with.⁴³

In “Living Conditions,” Lee was relatively less concerned with the first and last areas on his initial list. He thought that the “better class” of houses in Stone Town could be slowly improved through new building regulations and heightened pressure on property owners, while problems on the urban outskirts were as yet rather modest. Much like Lanchester, he was preoccupied with the state of the so-called Indian bazaar in the heart of the city, where eating houses, shops, and manufacturing establishments were interspersed with stone buildings of various sizes, mud huts, and corrugated iron shacks. On his inspection tours of the area, he found ample cause for alarm, invoking a familiar list of sanitary obsessions:

It is apparent from even a cursory survey of this congested area that living conditions are poor, congestion is the rule, and overcrowding occurs. Light and ventilation are often entirely absent from inner rooms and are frequently blocked out from even outside rooms. Kitchens, latrines, and bath rooms are generally situated in one room and it is the rule, almost, for food to be prepared with [*sic*] a few feet of the latrine opening.

Houses are almost all infested with rodents and bed bugs; lice, fleas, and other vermin abound. . . . This being the case it is not clear, except as a matter of pure chance, why Zanzibar Town has not been invaded by any one of a multitude of infectious and contagious diseases.⁴⁴

Conditions were ripe, he alleged, for any number of epidemics to break out at any moment—bubonic plague, typhus, or yellow fever. Moreover, he was certain that tuberculosis was rampant, even though he had no statistics in hand. With regard to Funguni spit and the areas to the east of Darajani Bridge, matters were in his opinion much the same or even worse. “All the defects exist,” Lee noted, “and many more.” The situation in Funguni was most severe, because the area was host to a large influx of population during the annual monsoon. The arriving dhow crews sought lodging wherever they could find it, compelled to cram together in ramshackle quarters on the spit. As many as twenty people, he said, could be found living in a 20×10-foot room during dhow season. Even though the land was government property, municipal services were entirely absent, with no public latrines or washing facilities. As a result, large numbers of transient sailors and traders from the Persian Gulf were forced to use the beach, empty lots, or alleys to relieve themselves, which hardly added to the salubrity of the neighborhood. In Lee’s view, incremental measures were beside the point; without a serious change in policy, no real improvement was possible. He had tried to enforce remedies, he wrote, “but conditions are so bad that I think no substantial progress can be made until a town planning scheme is drawn up and applied.”⁴⁵

Even in the heart of the city, he concluded, sanitary conditions were so “poor” that only “continuous pressure” could improve the situation. “Little has been done in the past and I have found that attempts to apply even the minimum standards meet with considerable opposition.” As an initial step forward, Lee outlined a host of new rules and asked the administration to accept and apply these principles rigorously. He advocated appointing district sanitary inspectors to survey each and every urban area. Where unhealthy conditions were identified, private owners would be called upon to rectify them. New regulations would be set “insisting upon” better drainage, light, air, and a “reasonable standard of cleanliness.” No building would be allowed on unoccupied areas without an approved plan. As circumstances allowed, the regime would move

to acquire properties in congested areas and pull down the buildings to create more open space. Furthermore, no additional “offensive trades” would be allowed in the city, and every effort would be made to shape distinct commercial and residential zones.

Taken together these guidelines constituted the rudiments of a plan. Lee was operating here in familiar territory, reproducing proposals that Lanchester had made thirteen years earlier. Through past neglect or indifference, he believed, conditions in the city had been allowed to fester virtually untreated. At this late stage, he sought to impress on senior officials the gravity of the situation: “In my opinion,” he warned, “even the most vigorous implementation of the above policy will take years to achieve any real results as in the past no definite progressive policy appears to have been followed to prevent the creation of the bad housing conditions which now exist.” He sought to spur the administration into action, urging the necessity of embarking on a new course of planning:

I suggest for consideration, therefore, that possibly the time has come for a town planning scheme to be prepared by an expert for the whole of Zanzibar and for consideration to be given to the provision of a water borne sewage system, storm water drains and the making of roads and foot paths in areas of the town where none now exist. I realize, of course, that the sums involved in the immediate adoption of all the recommendations of a town planner could not be found, even if it were desirable to carry them out; but I submit that it is probable money will be saved if all future development is undertaken in accordance with a predetermined plan.⁴⁶

Lee had little doubt that current policy was utterly flawed; simply continuing on the same course would be absolutely useless. He was convinced of the need for a comprehensive plan, but he realized that higher officials might prefer the status quo, being reluctant to launch into a costly new scheme. In another memo to Webb, he suggested, “It might be advisable for many reasons to have a town planning scheme prepared for the whole of Zanzibar on comprehensive lines to include provision for sewerage, storm water drains, etc. in addition to the layout of houses.” But he recognized that the government might find it difficult to even “contemplate” the development of a complete scheme at the present time. Even so, a plan should be drawn up and “consideration should be given to making provision for some part of the work to be

carried out gradually.” Echoing the earlier logic embraced by Crofton and the Colonial Office, he asserted that neglecting planning now would only end up being more expensive in the long run.⁴⁷ About a month later, Lee tried another tack. If treating the entire city was out of the question, he wrote, then at the very least authorities should focus on creating schemes for select areas, starting with Funguni or Ng’ambo. “No progress or anything but niggling results can be expected from the present system or from any unplanned efforts,” he emphasized again. “A Town Planning scheme for, at least, the congested native (Ngambo) areas is a matter of urgency.”⁴⁸

Plans for a Plan: Native Building Is “Almost Uncontrolled and Uncontrollable”

Of all the arguments presented by Lee, this last seemed initially to carry some weight. His reports served as the basis for a position paper subsequently drawn up by the Joint Building Authority, which consisted of Leslie Webb and the acting head of the department of public works. Writing to the acting chief secretary, they began their overview with a well-honed sense of bureaucratic formality: “We have the honour to request that consideration may now be given to obtaining some control over the future development of Zanzibar Town.” It was as if the question of town planning had never been contemplated before, or the idea of gaining “some” control was a novel development. But by emphasizing the future of the city, the authors indicated that they were most concerned with Ng’ambo, seeking to shift attention away from the older, built-up core and focus on the areas of expansive growth. It was there that they found the greatest cause for concern. “Building in the native town,” they bluntly objected, “is almost uncontrolled and uncontrollable.”⁴⁹ What they meant by the “native town” was by no means self-evident. And why focus at all on future areas of growth in Ng’ambo when Lee had stipulated that conditions on the outskirts were relatively good?

In proposing different tactics, Webb and his colleague were motivated more by utilitarian administrative calculations than material conditions on the ground. In a related memo sent to the chief secretary, Webb openly acknowledged that problems were rife in the older wards. “In the ‘stone’ part of the town housing congestion is prevalent, rooms



29. Shifting efforts away from Stone Town, where planning was deemed “so expensive as to be prohibitive.” Nonetheless, medical officials acknowledged that congestion was “prevalent” and overcrowding “common.” Zanzibar National Archives.

are small and dark, few roads exist and overcrowding in unsuitable premises is common,” he conceded. He then characterized the majority of structures as “slum dwellings of a poor type—possibly not of such a bad variety as prevails in other oriental cities but still so bad that some definite steps appear to be required to improve matters, and a consistent policy is needed which can be followed over a period of years in the expectation that improvement will follow.” So what then did he propose to do? Other than maintaining the status quo, not much else. Problems were most severe in the “stone areas,” but these were also the most difficult and expensive to address. As a result, Webb felt the administration should cut its losses and focus its limited capacities elsewhere. Long established districts were simply too resistant to radical reshaping: “The stone houses are fairly valuable and it is apparent that any drastic action designed to further the better lay out of the areas in which they are situated, and to remedy housing congestion and provide light and air for all dwelling houses, would be so expensive as to be prohibitive.”⁵⁰

If the colonial state lacked the resources to remedy all the ills created through past neglect, Webb was suggesting that it should at least move to prevent them from being reproduced in future areas of growth. Rather than a shift away from master planning to a more practical and small-scale approach, Webb seemed to be advocating a tactical retreat in the

face of the effects of widespread economic depression. But if treating the whole city in one fell swoop presented innumerable difficulties, limiting the scope of planning had not proved much more successful. As the JBA members noted, a series of restricted efforts had been mounted recently in Ng'ambo in an attempt to supply orderly layouts in selected areas. These designs were disconnected and ill coordinated; despite their modest aims, they still came to naught. As an instructive example, they cited the plan for the development of government-controlled *wakf* property at Gulioni that had been approved in 1933. The scheme, they wrote, "has failed to the extent that not a single building on the land today complies with the position that it should occupy on the plan."⁵¹

In this, we can see the essential difficulty. Webb and his colleague in the Joint Building Authority recognized the practical challenges in carrying out a master plan for the entire city. Economic strictures meant limiting the scope and ambition of any scheme. Yet at the same time their faith in the promise of holistic planning was undiminished, insofar as they still believed that greater control and order could only be achieved through a total effort. To resolve this dilemma, the authors elected to try to have it both ways. A master plan was needed, they argued, to coordinate the diversity of initiatives and aims throughout the city. But they believed it could be made feasible by adopting a two-pronged strategy. The primary focus of the scheme would be to ensure that future development in areas such as Ng'ambo would conform to an overarching vision, channeling expansion into orderly and regular layouts. The rest of the city—especially the older, built-up sections—would be left for treatment as the means to do so became available. As they elaborated, "The control of future development and the gradual improvement of areas already developed is the most urgent requirement of the town. We can adduce arguments in support of this contention from every point of view, sanitary, public works, general amenities and economical and we are prepared to do so if required. Unless control is obtained, the position must inevitably get worse as time goes on, and more expensive to rectify." As part of the plan, regulations and rules would have to be framed and applied, slowly clearing out congested "stone areas" and bringing buildings up to code. In other words, they believed that planning could be both comprehensive and limited—achieving the same ends as before, but with a considerable reduction in costs and administrative burdens.

As was typical of these policy debates, the JBA authorities left most of the details unspecified—as if these were minor issues to be worked out as needed later by subordinates or those with specific expertise. Even as they seemed to have little knowledge of the specifics of earlier urban interventions, their approach to planning was wholly familiar. Rather than starting with a clean slate, they remained stuck in the past. The best way forward, they informed the acting chief secretary, was to begin again precisely where planning had previously left off:

There exists the outlines of a town planning scheme in the Lanchester report, and the powers to implement any scheme adopted in the “Town Planning Decree 1925.” The only solution is to use the powers so provided. If this were done consideration would have to be given to the acceptance, modification, or rejection of the Lanchester outline. In this connection it should be remembered that the Lanchester report is some twelve years old, and that since its publication developments have taken place which force some modification of the scheme. Moreover the report did not deal with the whole of the area contained within the township boundaries of today. In any event and under any scheme, the town would have to be “zoned” into areas providing for open spaces, factory sites, permanent and temporary native quarters, commercial areas, markets etc., and to effect this, would be required to be surveyed and ownership and boundary limitations established prior to the preparation of a suitable map.⁵²

One step forward, two steps back: progress, in this case, took the form of an insistent regression. It is quite clear that neither of the authors knew very much about the specific history or content of the Lanchester plan. They seemed to regard its nonfulfillment as resulting from a mere lapse or oversight, unaware that the scheme had been officially adopted and then effectively abandoned a full decade before. The insistence on resurrecting Lanchester’s program was based in equal parts on bureaucratic ignorance and inertia. All they knew was that a plan existed that had been crafted by a recognized authority. Lacking planning credentials or expertise, they hoped to rely on this work, no matter how imperfect, as a suitable “outline” for a new set of proposals. Their position in this regard was more than a little curious, as even they recognized that Lanchester’s study might not be of much use in framing the next steps. Changes in the urban fabric since 1922 inevitably meant that the plan was outmoded, perhaps even wholly obsolete. The city had spread

significantly outward since Lanchester's day, and these areas of new urban growth, which were of paramount concern to Webb, had never been addressed in the prior plan.

Invariably Incomplete: Postponement and the Perpetual Pursuit of Planning

Stealth and secrecy long surrounded the course of planning in Zanzibar. While colonial authorities tried to disguise their intentions and keep plans under wraps, their reticence sometimes had the contrary effect of stoking the rumor mill, stimulating suspicions that something more nefarious was afoot. By the mid-1920s, at least some denizens of the city had become aware that some sort of plan was in the works. An editorial in a local newspaper, the *Samachar*, addressed the rumors that were then circulating through the bazaars and *barazas*, criticizing the administration for proceeding with "certain" pet projects while keeping the public in the dark as to its ultimate designs. The lack of transparency only served to provoke suspicions about the government's priorities, reinforcing speculations of a more conspiratorial nature. "We know that the Government has already started to demolish buildings in a certain locality," the article declared, "and we understand it has in contemplation an expensive plan in connection with the improvement of the Town of Zanzibar, but the public has been kept in darkness as to the details in connection with the scheme." Urban residents failed to comprehend why the government had never issued any public statement about the measures it was intending to take, especially given the housing shortages and intense congestion being experienced in many *mitaa*. In the absence of solid information, it was hard to avoid drawing the most invidious conclusion: "Very little attention" was being paid to the problems of most urban dwellers, the article alleged, while "enormous sums of money" were being spent on street widening and "the erection of palacial [*sic*] buildings on the Vuga Road for the comfort and accommodation of a few Government officials." If the resident would only visit the "narrow and over-crowded streets and [see] for himself what a horrible state these people are compelled to live," then surely he would be moved to "divert his attention to making adequate provisions for improving these localities."⁵³

It was a modest enough proposal, but one that suffered from a certain naïveté: lack of familiarity with urban conditions was hardly the cause of official neglect. The problems of planning were far more profound. A full decade earlier, officials in London had endorsed an ideology of planning that proved all too seductive in the ensuing years. A total plan, the colonial secretary had insisted, was absolutely necessary to address the ills of the city, replacing the inefficient and unscientific practices of the past. A rational and improving administration had to have a comprehensive vision to work up to, acting with foresight to anticipate the future. Practical concerns about implementing any plan were largely immaterial. The critical point was to create the plan first; if it could not be carried out all at once, it would serve as a long-term guide or template, being slowly accomplished as opportunity allowed. With this argument (which was embraced by Lanchester, Crofton, and others following in their wake), the Colonial Office effectively foreclosed some of the most potent critiques of planning in its formative phase. And once Lanchester's scheme was completed, successive administrations found this ideology altogether convenient, taking advantage of the loopholes it provided. It wasn't that the plan had failed, various authorities argued, but rather that it hadn't been fulfilled *as yet*. When pressed, they would point to Lanchester's work as a sign of their reformist intentions, promising they would make good on the scheme just as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

In this sense, one could argue that the Lanchester plan actually "worked," allowing the regime to defer and deflect social demands for improved urban conditions even as it managed to attend to its own priorities. When casting about for external funding, authorities invariably cited better housing and health as their primary motivation, highlighting the "pressing" need to improve the lives of local residents. But when the financing never materialized and officials set out to decide which aspects of the total plan merited immediate attention, social welfare initiatives were inevitably the first to be jettisoned. It is no accident that the only parts of the Lanchester program ever constructed were directly related to the colonial economy—the improvement of transport networks and rehabilitation of the port, both intended to enhance commodity flows. Inherently political decisions concerning which parts of the plan to favor and carry out were never presented as such; the choice to selectively

target investment so as to boost government revenues was portrayed as a natural and necessary first step. Economic “imperatives” demanded sacrifices in the present so that a sufficient foundation could be laid for social initiatives in the future. Of course, that promised day somehow never arrived, as the “opportunity” never “presented itself.”

Even as the Lanchester plan remained inoperative, it continued to have its uses for the administration. Was its “failure” then really a success, shaped by some Machiavellian project of control? This possibility seems dubious on several counts. There is little evidence to support the idea that authorities on Zanzibar were sufficiently canny or unified to carry out such a long-term conspiracy. The disposition of the plan was not shaped by any coordinated intention or intelligence, working behind the scenes to execute a considered strategy. And if the nonrealization of the plan served the interests of the government in certain respects, it also produced unpredictable effects that came back to haunt officials, confronting them with dilemmas of their own making. What colonial authorities and planners mostly failed to grasp was the interwoven and overlapping nature of most urban issues. A single aspect (clearing out congested housing in Stone Town, for instance) could not be started before first making headway on others (surveying Ng’ambo, setting out road lines, laying out plots for new housing). And little progress could be made on any one element without first establishing the legal and bureaucratic framework for the whole—a daunting and ultimately self-defeating task in and of itself, as we shall soon see.

SEVEN

Disorder by Design: Legal Confusion and Bureaucratic Chaos in Colonial Planning

If we look at the landscape of colonial urbanism in the decades leading up to independence, the profusion of planning on a global scale seems altogether striking. Across Asia to Africa and beyond, it would be difficult to find even a single medium-scale or major city that was not the subject of a series of master plans intended to control urban development. In Algiers alone, for instance, Le Corbusier produced no less than seven plans just between 1931 and 1942 (King 1990, 42), and this was by no means exceptional. While planning may not have been quite so prolific in other sites, it was certainly enshrined as a central tool of socio-spatial governance all across the colonial world. But while plans abounded, this did not mean that they were necessarily ever brought to fruition. In Zanzibar, five comprehensive master plans were developed for the city since the 1920s, and few elements of these initiatives ever saw the light of day. The proliferation of plans raises a question: if planning was indeed effective, why did plans have to be incessantly made and remade?

Even as the first urban plan for Zanzibar foundered, a mostly new set of colonial officers concluded in the 1930s that the failure to realize a comprehensive urban design pointed to one thing and one thing alone: the absolute necessity to begin again, launching a new round of attempts to produce an all-embracing plan. Soon enough, with precious little historical memory of what precisely had gone on before, Zanzibar officials embarked on a complicated and tangled process that would culminate over twenty-five years later in yet another expensive and ambitious scheme that was likewise destined—or designed—never to leave

the drawing board. But while the 1922 and 1958 master plans were never translated into material reality, they cannot simply be described as boondoggles, the follies inflicted by a hapless colonialism. As James Ferguson (1994) has argued, “failure” in this context does not imply “doing nothing.” While these plans had few concrete effects on the ground, they spawned an entire bureaucratic and legal milieu that increasingly served as an end unto itself. On the surface, the immense disparity between the bureaucratic resources, time, and energy devoted to city planning and the meager results that followed might seem astounding. Yet on another level there is no surprise at all, for in the colonial milieu, plan making and inertia were not opposed activities; indeed, they directly implied and depended upon each other. As the bureaucratic process became increasingly self-involved, a world unto itself, the endless making of the plan and its eventual lack of implementation went hand in hand. Colonial officials found themselves caught up in the scale of the plans, the complexity of the planning process, and the significant time lag between conception and completion—even as these elements served as extensions of colonial power, endowing it with an arbitrary, unpredictable, and uneven character.

Beyond the plan lies an entire world of social practice and struggle that all too often remains unexplored. The necessity of possessing a plan was invariably stressed, while its production and implementation were treated as incidental. And yet these less obvious processes largely determined the fate of plans or derailed them altogether. In the colonial world, formulating the essential prerequisites for planning consumed an enormous amount of time, resources, and bureaucratic labor; putting them in place took even longer, and as years elapsed, the colonial regime found itself not closer to but farther from achieving its original goals. Temporality intervened in and shaped the process itself, as the plan invariably grew less and less relevant to a city that was in a constant state of flux. Because of its scope, a total design required time to fulfill; but by the time it could be carried out, it was already receding into history. Long before it could be put in play, its time had passed. The prolonged hiatus between conception and completion had very real consequences. In the interim, the fate of the plan itself became the main subject of debate, hedged about with uncertainty. As it was pulled out for review and then reshelved at periodic intervals, questions about its

status, shape, and content roiled the bureaucracy. This eventuality was never foreseen by colonial officials, nor did they ever manage to articulate an adequate response to it.

Intangible Goals: Bureaucratic Fixes and the Search for Legal Order and Control

Urban planning is a discipline ostensibly driven by material concerns: buildings and structures, streets and parks, infrastructure, communications, and transport. But for all the focus on tangible and physical issues, planning was ultimately built on immaterial or intangible foundations: legal definitions, municipal regulations, legislative decrees, and bureaucratic flow charts. To rework the city, one first had to possess a plan, or so the thinking went, and one could not issue a plan without first defining proper authorities, delegating powers, stipulating codes, formulating legislation, and passing decrees. At the time, however, few seemed to realize that legal abstractions and bureaucratic procedures were more than simply technical means to an end. Indeed, the search for solid legal and regulatory foundations became an end in and of itself. Planning devolved into a circular and recursive search for the proper procedures and policies that could guarantee order and control. As the process ground on, it became more ungrounded, and yet the pursuit of abstractions continued; even as plans went nowhere, officials remained convinced that the situation could be turned around only by instituting new rules and stronger regulations, backed by a total scheme.

More bureaucracy, in other words, was prescribed again and again as the remedy for bureaucratic inaction. Colonial officials seemed remarkably uncritical about the system in which they were enmeshed. Urban ills persisted, they believed, due not to structural flaws in planning itself but as a result of the indifference or inaction of past officials. This time around, with a plan in hand, they were convinced that things would be different. In all this, there was precious little awareness that bureaucratic re-engineering itself might introduce additional complications and engender yet more bureaucratic tangles. Whatever issues might have existed in the city at the time, they certainly were never caused by a *lack* of colonial rules or regulations. The issue wasn't that laws didn't exist; it was that they were often incomplete, incoherent,

or unenforceable. Well into the 1950s, colonial authorities continued to show great faith in the power of standards and systems to shape space and social behavior. But they failed to understand the way that their own insistence on proliferating codes and laws repeatedly plunged the regime into a legal and bureaucratic morass that ultimately subverted their planned designs.

Continuing official belief in the power and efficacy of law was especially ironic insofar as the administration itself seemed to find it difficult to uphold its own regulations. By the 1930s, when medical authorities such as Dr. Lee and Webb began once again to raise dire warnings about the sanitary state of the city, they largely laid the blame on past officialdom, asserting that the enforcement of standards had been negligent or nonexistent. In their view, the regime had been altogether lax in the way it enforced its legal codes. It wasn't just that the state was haphazard in prosecuting private owners who violated statutes. The problem went far deeper. In fact, as Lee pointed out, the most egregious offender of the law was the government itself, which violated its own sanitary codes with relative impunity. "The worst properties in Zanzibar are situated on the Funguni spit which is owned by government," he stressed, "and the controllers of the greatest number of properties which, apparently as a result of neglect, are in a poor sanitary state, and which fail to attain minimum standards are the Wakf Commissioners."¹

As this suggests, the colonial state was hardly a cohesive monolith that spoke with one voice. Different branches of the bureaucracy did not necessarily know what others were doing at any one time; policies were incompletely communicated from above or interpreted and applied disparately; there were disputes about authority and battles over turf; and departments simply ignored or dismissed laws issued by others. In May 1933, for instance, sanitary inspectors from the medical department cited the main government markets for numerous violations. In August a second list of infringements was prepared and delivered to the municipal officer. In November 1934, Lee inspected the markets again and found that nothing had been done to correct the problems. He was alarmed by the condition of the slaughterhouse, especially "the fact that crows were able to enter and were fouling the meat with their excreta." The district engineer estimated that repairs would cost a mere £22. This modest sum, however, wasn't formally included in his minor works budget for the

year, so he declared that no action could be taken until 1935. In the end, the repairs weren't carried out until June 1936.

DMSS Webb was incredulous when he was informed about this situation. As he fumed to the chief secretary, "It therefore appears that no measures at all were taken by government for 19 months to stop crows defecating all over the town meat supply, though a sum of only £22 was involved. A private individual would have been expected to abate this nuisance within a week or a closing order would have been obtained from the Court and the premises closed." He also dressed down the municipal officer, curtly observing, "Any attempt to improve town sanitation is doomed to failure so long as government itself is the chief offender and is above the law." He then forwarded this correspondence to the chief secretary, stressing his concern that "the evasion of its own law by government through the agencies of its officials appears to be a serious defect in administration. . . . It is the rule and not the exception for government officials in their official capacity either to ignore sanitary notices, or to delay and protract action by any means within their power, in the hope, which has often been fulfilled in the past, that the Health Authorities will, in despair of ever getting anything done, drop the matter."²

While certain officials were aware of specific bureaucratic and legal lapses, they remained firmly committed to planning as an overall mechanism of spatial order. They continued to believe in the scientific and improving nature of British administration, fully embracing the modernizing premises of colonial planning discourse. Most officers lacked the historical context necessary to grasp why urban planning had fallen by the wayside; they were preoccupied with everyday administrative tasks, often failing to see the larger picture. Hence, even as administrators acknowledged particular flaws, they still advocated the same mechanisms and techniques that had been tried before with little success. And while insisting on the need for better laws and bureaucratic procedures, British officers never seemed to understand how their aspirations for order and control often served to create additional layers of complexity—making the bureaucratic process increasingly tangled and recursive. In the mid-1930s, for example, when the Joint Building Authority insisted once more on the need for a new plan, the group noted that many of the essential prerequisites of planning remained yet to be completed. No plan could

be started, the JBA members concurred, without first coming up with a proper zoning scheme, which in turn would require the preparation of a full-scale urban map. But this map, they insisted, could not be completed without first making an accurate survey of all ownership titles and boundaries. This was an astonishing conclusion—an open admission that the colonial state had failed to establish even the basic rudiments of urban administration. Indeed, even as late as the mid-1930s, colonial authorities still had difficulty identifying and demarcating the lands they said they controlled: “We understand that except for land belonging to five large and six smaller owners, whose titles and boundaries are known and recorded, the rest of the land [in Ng’ambo], which nominally belongs to government, is without title and without known boundaries. It is also in a state of fluidity in that claims to parts of the land are admitted on comparatively slight grounds.”³

Despite these deficiencies, Webb and his colleague in the JBA thought they had no choice but to press ahead with a new plan: “It follows that the first undertaking must be to establish ownership of all town lands and to fix and record boundaries. When this is done, the preliminary survey can be undertaken, a map made, a town plan accepted, the degree made operative, and for the first time some control of town development obtained.” In recommending this course to the chief secretary, they conceded they were advocating a “considerable undertaking,” one they imagined “might take as long as two years.” Their optimism regarding the schedule seems almost stunningly misguided, for they were essentially vowing to accomplish in two years what previous administrations had failed to achieve over more than four decades. But as a predictable first step forward, they asked to be appointed as a committee to prepare a modest temporary scheme, “on broad lines and without detail,” with the aim of controlling “the natural development of the town as it is proceeding today.”⁴ The first goal of this committee would be to reconsider the Lanchester report and make recommendations for approval or alteration. In the interim, the work of surveying the city could move ahead; for the purposes of a map, they suggested that an aerial photographic survey would be best. When all the necessary data became available, the committee’s ad hoc plan could then be replaced by a much more detailed final program.

The recommendations of the Joint Building Authority made their way up the chain of command, and the consensus that eventually emerged was reflected in a minute drawn up for the acting chief secretary by his assistant:

The D.M.S. and Ag. D.P.W. now suggest that the preparation of a town planning scheme for the whole of the native area is a matter of urgency. They are not concerned with the stone-built portion of the town. They propose that all boundaries in the town should be settled, a survey made, a full town planning scheme prepared (whether based on the Lanchester report or not) and the scheme made operative under the Town Planning Decree, 1925. This, however, will take a long time and they consider that something should be done as soon as possible. They accordingly propose that in the meanwhile:—(a) a scheme on broad lines and without detail should be prepared and set out on existing maps so that individual areas could be treated with due regard to the final full scheme (the Lanchester report would be used as a basis). (b) they should be appointed a Committee to prepare the scheme. There can be no doubt that the sooner a town-planning scheme is prepared the better.⁵

The emphasis on timeliness here was by no means reflected in the actual procedures adopted to carry out planning. The Joint Building Authority's proposal was duly approved, and the first meeting of the new Town Planning Committee was held in December 1935, with DMSS Webb, Director of Public Works Harold Peake, and an assistant engineer in attendance. The results were hardly momentous. The first act of the committee was to reiterate that "the early planning of Zanzibar township—preparatory [*sic*] to making a Scheme—was essential." Any postponement, the members agreed, "would be very expensive."⁶ But delay was inevitable: not only did the committee take five months merely to convene their first meeting, but in that session the three members arrived at the conclusion that no planning could be started without an up-to-date and accurate map. So they contented themselves with restating the obvious while urging the government once more to provide an aerial map of the city as soon as possible. This was by no means a simple task. An aerial survey print had been produced as an experiment in 1934. The clarity of the image was satisfactory, and officials hoped that the new technology would make costly and labor-intensive ground surveys redundant. The decision was subsequently reached to order a complete

set, and bids were solicited on the contract. The authorities eventually had to go as far as South Africa to engage a suitable firm, which meant that the photographic survey was inevitably delayed.⁷ In August 1936 the committee was still waiting to see the results, its conduct of business largely at a standstill: “I am not in favor of piecemeal attempts at town planning,” Webb confided to Peake. “I think we should await our map before commencing our activities.”⁸

The aerial photography was carried out in 1936, but that was only the first step in a much longer process. Meanwhile, the work of actual planning continued to be placed on hold. By the end of 1937, the colonial regime still had very little to show for its efforts. Around that time an editorial was published in a local newspaper, *Al-Falaq*, which pointedly criticized administration policies, especially the neglect of urban planning and modernization:

In order to bring Zanzibar on par with other cities in East Africa, Mr. Linchester [*sic*], a town planning expert of great repute, was invited here at an enormous expense about a decade ago. After an exhaustive inquiry Mr. Linchester, we believe, submitted a scheme which if it had been translated into practice Zanzibar would have taken its place amongst the modern cities of the East; but for some inexplicable reasons, besides minor recommendations that were put into force, the whole scheme was shelved, and it may still be rotting in the official musty pigeon-holes! Though Zanzibar is the oldest country in East Africa with a glorious past, . . . [it] is unfortunately being neglected so far as modernisation of the city is concerned, comparing with the towns in our neighboring territories which once formed provinces of this country. . . .

We have often heard it said that Zanzibar has been able to retain its fame because it is at present the only city in the world which owing to its narrow lanes and other characteristics possess [*sic*] the vista of the Arabian Nights legend, and any attempt to modernise it, according to officialdom, will decurtate [*sic*] all its splendour that haloed the ancient cities of Baghdad and Palestine, but the authorities there thought differently and consequently they have been thoroughly modernized to meet the requirements of the rapid progress the present world is making.

Those that talk about leaving the face of Zanzibar unchanged are only birds of passage, but those that have made this country their home think differently, and they cannot help looking with envy at the rapid modernisation of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam that is taking place now, whilst we have not a single road within the town area worth the name.⁹

Resident Rankine had retired a few months earlier, and his replacement, J. Hathron Hall, objected to the tone of the piece and immediately directed the chief secretary to respond in writing. Dictating the content of the letter, Hall instructed his subordinate to challenge the article's claims of official neglect and indifference. The chief secretary was to inform the editor (and thereby the public) that the administration was indeed committed to urban improvements, highlighting the fact that a plan was in the works. Even so, the new resident was compelled to admit that the scheme was not quite ready—but he promised that it was just around the corner: “A suitable town planning scheme for Zanzibar cannot be framed until a satisfactory survey plan of the town has been completed. This is now in course of preparation by the Survey Department: when this plan is complete, D.M.S., with the collaboration of the newly appointed architect, who has considerable town planning experience in Northern Rhodesia and Palestine, will draw up a town planning scheme for publication and application.”¹⁰ The problem was that the survey photographs of 1936 were insufficient for planning purposes in and of themselves; to be of use, they first had to be translated into accurate line drawings and put in map form. This intricate exercise required the concerted effort of the entire survey department and was not completed until 1938. By then, more time had already elapsed than what the JBA said would be needed for the entire scheme—and they hadn't even commenced their work.

The Present State of Planning: “Stagnation and Confusion”

Throughout this period, the administration expended more energy mounting and tinkering with its planning apparatus than advancing a plan. Shifting personnel and a proliferation of overlapping agencies added new levels of confusion and complexity. First, in 1932, local and central “Town Planning Advisory Boards” were ostensibly created, drawing on the staff of various departments as well as the provincial administration. The stated purpose was to oversee township development throughout Zanzibar and Pemba, but the boards never had more than nominal significance. These were distinct from the “Town Board” authorized by decree in 1933, which included unofficial members (one European, two Arabs, two Indians) and was therefore restricted to a

largely ceremonial function. The Joint Building Authority constituted yet another municipal body, and its members (Webb and Peake) were of course appointed to the ad hoc “Town Planning Committee” in late 1935. This expedient only lasted a short time. In August 1936 the committee was reconstituted as the “Town Planning Board,” and the earlier advisory panels disappeared from the scene. At the time, it included the provincial commissioner in addition to the heads of public works and medical services. Nevertheless, after making an inspection tour of the city in January 1938 with the medical officer of health and the director of surveys, Resident Hall decided that the responsibility for urban planning should be placed in the hands of the medical officer of health together with the new government architect, Lionel Bintley. He directed them forthwith to proceed with an “outline plan for Zanzibar . . . so that we can control, without cost to the state, the development of areas which have not yet been built on.”¹¹

The immediate result of this directive was yet another reorganization of the Town Planning Board in March 1938. The group was enlarged, and members were given formal titles (chair, secretary, executive officers, and so forth), but there remained a significant defect: the board had never been legally authorized and lacked any official standing. As the assistant secretary (planning) later observed, “It seems a curious position. The only one who [legally] can ‘town plan’ is the Resident himself. At present the Town Planning Board is merely advisory and the M.O.H. and Architect are therefore Executive Officers of a body which actually has no executive powers.”¹² Despite this glaring drawback, the reconstituted board was instructed in April to commence “a draft planning scheme for that portion of the town of Zanzibar lying east of the creek and known as Ngambo. In regard to road lines, the Board will doubtless adopt, so far as is possible, the Lanchester Road lines which the Medical Officer of Health has been trying to clear during the past three years. The draft scheme outlined above should include an outline plan to control the development of all undeveloped property on the periphery of town.”¹³

Revising the board and shuffling personnel had no direct impact on the issues that had hampered planning since 1935. Indeed, the new body found itself hemmed in precisely by the same obstacles that had derailed earlier attempts. As Webb observed to the chief secretary in

May 1938, “The Board, in my belief, was formed to make a town planning scheme under the Decree. This cannot be done until a map of the town is available. Until then, the Board appears to have no function that it can reasonably exercise.”¹⁴ It was not until 1939 that these convoluted attempts at planning would produce their first “tangible” results. Bintley, the government architect, finally fashioned a scheme for Ng’ambo. It was much more limited than what had been envisaged earlier, as he made no attempt to outline a draft plan for the whole of that section of the city. Instead, he concentrated on issues of transport and traffic flows, trying to establish clear and connected road lines in the east of the city. Much of this work was simply an updated version of the lines drawn on paper by Lanchester years before. In a meeting of the Town Planning Board in July 1939, Bintley presented the scheme of existing and new roads, taking the opportunity to explain his views on town planning more broadly. As the minutes show, “the plan was generally accepted in principle.”¹⁵ Bintley’s work, however, suffered much the same fate as that of his predecessor. Almost two years later, the scheme was still in limbo. In March 1941, the Town Planning Board once again urged the government to legally approve and publish it. Instead, the decision came down that the plan should be kept under wraps and shelved for the duration of the war. The attorney general claimed that Bintley’s outline could not be authenticated as required by law. The senior surveyor stipulated that he was unable to certify it as “sufficiently accurate.”¹⁶ In the end, nothing ever came of the effort.

Meanwhile, bureaucratic problems continued essentially unabated. A new resident, Sir Henry Guy Pilling, was appointed in 1941, and Eric Dutton took over as chief secretary the following year. As Myers (1993, 231–32) makes clear, Dutton was a forceful figure, an “unashamed colonialist” with a military background who sought during his tenure to dominate urban affairs. He had an admitted “love of intrigue,” using his considerable wiles to exercise tight control over his subordinates. A member of his staff, Julian Asquith, reacted with dismay when he first arrived in Zanzibar as an administrative officer. “The Protectorate was closely administered,” he later recalled. “I felt like a cog—not in a machine, but in a very small watch.” As taskmaster and timekeeper, Dutton moved to take over the chairmanship of the Town Planning Board soon after he reached Zanzibar. In preparation for this role, he



30. A cog “in a very small watch”: the Beit el Ajaib, or House of Wonders, heart of colonial bureaucracy. Here, Dutton could serve as taskmaster overseeing colonial governance on three sprawling floors above Jubilee Gardens (1936) and the Indian Ocean. Zanzibar National Archives.

instructed the senior medical officer to brief him on any issues relating to the group that he might need to deal with in the future. The laconic reply he received reflected a rather dismal state of affairs:

The difficulty about the functions of the Board is that it does not function—except over small details which arise from time to time. This is because the Government appears to have no policy as regards town planning—either in the Stone Town or in the Ngambo area—as proved by the fact that the Bintley plan (or any other plan) has never been approved. . . . It appears to me that, unless Government are prepared to spend money either by buying up certain areas on a valuation basis or by compensating owners piecemeal for acquisition of property whenever this is required to conform to a plan; or by provision of alternative sites to those required, no properly considered plan can ever be carried into effect. Tinkering with the matter, as at present, by payment of a few shillings here and there or by seizing every opportunity to condemn an unwanted house, will never be satisfactory.¹⁷

By the latter part of 1943, Dutton had seen enough to convince him of the validity of these views. After barely a year in office, he described the “present condition” of town planning as something “which may fairly be described as one of stagnation and confusion.”¹⁸ By the end of the war, the situation had not improved to any appreciable extent. In 1946, the new resident, Sir Vincent Gonçalves Glenday, sought to familiarize himself with urban issues. Soon after his arrival, he dashed off a note to Dutton, asking the chief secretary to enlighten him on just where matters stood: “Generally speaking (especially after reading Mr. Lanchester’s monograph) I should like to know whether there is a general approved Town Plan ‘on the board’; or whether certain areas only have been selected for Town Planning experiments.” Dutton asked his second assistant secretary to frame the reply, which was anything but encouraging:

1. So far as I can find there is no over-all Zanzibar Town Plan, nor is there the intention to produce one.
2. In regard to the Stone Town, it has been the practice to deal with each separate area as occasion offered, piece by piece, and not to embark on any expensive and drastic replanning. . . .
3. As regards Ng’ambo, no complete plan can be drawn up until the arduous work of a complete survey is complete. The survey of the area east of the creek . . . is progressing and it is the intention I understand to evolve a unified plan of this area without waiting for the whole to be finished.

In response, the resident merely commented, “pl[ease] carry on as at present.”¹⁹

This was, of course, the very year that Dutton authored the glowing review of town planning progress on Zanzibar that opened the preceding chapter. In that overview, he neglected to make any mention of the “stagnation and confusion” he found, preferring instead to present metropolitan authorities with the most favorable account possible—a sanitized and self-serving version of events that misrepresented the current state of affairs. To speak of the sure and steady advance of planning as Dutton did was to indulge in an act of willful fantasy. As we have seen, the process never moved forward without first circling back in upon itself. In repetitive cycles, specific officers, often those newly appointed, would suddenly raise warnings about urgent problems in

the city, predicting dire consequences if nothing were to be done. Site surveys, maps, and assessments would be ordered, with various departments being urged into action. Meetings would be convened and debates held, a host of measures being proposed to correct the situation. As the proposals moved through the bureaucratic process, being postponed for further consideration until more complete data might be available, the urgency that motivated them slowly dissipated, and eventually the entire matter would be shelved, yet another issue to be resolved by the master plan that was always looming just over the horizon. After remaining dormant for a time, concern about urban problems would break out again in another quarter, the old files would be reopened and reviewed, further committees would be convened, and the whole round of debates replayed once more.

This process of reiteration did not end in the mid-1940s. After being interrupted by the war, it took off again and even intensified. The postwar period produced a Labour-sponsored “second colonial occupation” throughout the British Empire, intended to stimulate development and strengthen the bonds between ruled and rulers (Low and Lonsdale 1976, 12). To deflect rising nationalist sympathies and anticolonial movements, the Labour government in London promoted a new imperial ethic, placing greater emphasis on social welfare expenditure, betterment schemes, and “community relations.” It was during this time that Dutton launched the Ten Year Development Plan (1946–55) for Zanzibar, relying on a new mechanism, the Central Development Authority, to keep control squarely in his hands. The program had many aspects, not the least of which was the reconstruction of alleged “slums” in Ng’ambo. While it fell far short of its goals, the scheme did manage to produce some concrete results: a hospital and a couple of schools in Stone Town, a Civic Centre and model “utility houses” in Ng’ambo. Garth Myers has discussed at length the program’s multiple failures, calling it little more than a white elephant. “By the mid-1950s,” he writes, “only the very basic first steps had been completed, and the breadth of the plan to remake Ng’ambo as an English garden suburb had disappeared” (1993, 224).

The Ten Year Development Plan was linked to perhaps an even more spectacular failure that occupied the administration throughout the 1950s: the master plan of 1958, created by Henry Kendall. The 1958 plan went through a torturous administrative process as it was developed.

By the time it was fleshed out, the scheme was far more unfeasible and impractical than its predecessors, and because of financial constraint, it was essentially dead on arrival. Kendall initially recommended fourteen projects in the first five-year segment, costing an estimated £345,000 to implement (the second, third, and fourth five-year phases were to require an additional £538,000). Yet within weeks of its publication, government officials suddenly began to express alarm as to the cost and demand that the Kendall plan be immediately revised “to conform with a very much smaller financial outlay.”²⁰ In the end, the scheme was left largely intact in name, while the burden of funding it was simply shifted to newly created local township authorities, allowing the colonial government to claim credit for the plan while avoiding responsibility for carrying it out. The proposals for immediate implementation were slashed to the order of £50,000 in the first five-year phase, even as the acting chief secretary was acknowledging privately that only £15,000 might be available for actual expenditure.²¹ From £883,000 to £15,000: after expending so much time and effort, the plan was effectively rendered irrelevant. Only the most trivial elements of Kendall’s vision were ever realized. The only aspects of the 1958 scheme that were salvaged tended to be legal codes (such as zoning regulations) that cost nothing to implement and were later routinely ignored. Rather than a constructive design on space, the plan became yet another exercise in ad hoc, often arbitrary prohibition, raising more problems than it resolved.

Entangled in Law: The Force of Fictive Schemes

To understand why plans repeatedly never left the drawing board, we have to leave the drawing board behind. Planning is a cultural process, framed in and through everyday practices. The design and ideological elements of plans are relatively insignificant when compared with the elaborate legal means and bureaucratic maneuverings required to bring them into being. Colonial officials and planners all too often fetishized the plan while ignoring the process of its making. In trying to analyze the significance of what they did, we cannot afford to make the same mistake. In their final form, Lanchester or Kendall’s schemes are little more than the documentary precipitate left behind by an extensive world of administrative struggle and striving that lies submerged in the archi-

val record. Without grasping that milieu in all its political intricacies and protracted involvements, we cannot hope to see how plans could go nowhere while nonetheless having a critical impact. Just because the designs were rarely translated into reality, they cannot be dismissed as fantasies or fictions, for while in one sense they remained the figments of a modernizing colonial imagination, they also produced effects on the ground that were all too real.

Take the Lanchester plan, for example, which was never endowed with a legal existence but nevertheless served to shape the law. Following his 1922 visit, Lanchester recommended a number of changes to existing municipal law in order to facilitate planning. At the time, he believed that slight alterations to the Land Acquisition Decree of 1909 would be enough, outlining some new clauses that would enhance the government's powers. After consulting with the Colonial Office, however, Zanzibar officials were advised to craft an entirely new decree. The attorney general then set about the process of framing legislation, drawing on existing Indian and English precedents—an effort that culminated two years later in the Town Planning Decree of 1925. In preparation for an eventual plan (that never came into being), the government focused its attention on setting its legal house in order, yet the insistence on fleshing out the legal niceties ended up becoming a preoccupation in its own right, ultimately subverting attempts to carry out actual planning. The bill was intended to make the implementation of urban schemes easier, centralizing all powers in the hands of the British resident. Despite this rationalization of authority, the measure proved unworkable and was never even applied.

Before approving the 1925 decree, the colonial secretary's advisers had insisted upon inserting several provisions that officials in Zanzibar found problematic. The final text that emerged was a hybrid, torn between metropolitan norms involving respect for the rights of property owners and the more coercive impulses of colonial overrule. First, the measure stipulated that no scheme could acquire the force of law without first being published; in addition to official notification of the plan's existence, maps with clear boundaries had to be made available to the public. Second, it established that colonial officials had to acquire needed properties and pay adequate compensation before proceeding with any part of the plan. Rather than smoothing the way forward, the law caught

the Zanzibar government in a delicate bind. After working for two years to frame the decree, officials found themselves effectively trapped by the terms it established. According to the statute, the Lanchester scheme had to be published if it was to be made legal. But officials feared that making it public would only serve as a boon to speculators, driving up the land acquisition prices and undermining any possibility of ever carrying it out.

Colonial authorities sought to resolve this difficulty by finding a way around their own law. So long as they lacked funding to implement the plan, they refused to acknowledge its existence. Until the moment the scheme could be imposed as a totality, they intended to keep it under wraps, veiled in secrecy—neatly avoiding activating the law and skirting its requirements for public notification and compensation. At the same time, however, the plan was officially “accepted,” and the administration routinely used it as a framework to guide everyday urban policy. In practical terms it was effectively suspended and yet maintained as an blueprint that would one day be realized. In other words, the scheme was simultaneously immaterial and yet all too tangible in its effects. Despite remaining inoperative and secret, the plan still served to (illegally) shape urban policy into the 1940s, as officials tried to do what they could in the here and now to lay the groundwork for its eventual fulfillment.

THE TOWNS DECREE OF 1929

When Lanchester arrived in the city, the body of urban law consisted of little more than two decrees: one relating to building control, the other to assessments for street lighting and cleaning. By the mid-1920s, the limitations of these measures were becoming increasingly apparent, and the drafting of the Town Planning Decree generated interest in wider legal reform. While the 1925 planning law was never actually used, it spawned a move to overhaul the entire legal framework for the city, culminating in the extensive Towns Decree of 1929. When the 1929 statute was issued, the attorney general justified the measure by stating that the quickening pace of municipal affairs in recent years had “far out-grown” the simple legal provisions for urban governance provided during the last two decades. Officers going about their normal duties fre-

quently experienced the “inconvenience” of not possessing the requisite legal powers they deemed necessary, and there was growing demand for more comprehensive legislation. Hence the bill was intended to supply “a code of municipal law of general application for the government of towns in the protectorate,” covering assessments, streets and buildings, drainage, street cleaning and lighting, water supply, fire protection, and even parks, gardens, and trees.²²

The administration sought to include all issues relating to urban regulation in a single piece of legislation, replacing a patchwork of policies with a coordinated and all-embracing set of powers. But the approach adopted to implement this goal was counterproductive, to say the least, and the new law served in practice to subvert the original intent that motivated it. The 1929 decree granted the resident the power to “declare” any town and apply any or all of its provisions to the area thus designated. For purposes of enforcement, the act then required the resident to designate the “authorities” responsible for carrying out different functions. For political reasons, the resident tried to implement this by appointing separate authorities with distinct responsibilities, rather than creating a cohesive municipal body. For example, in the wake of the decree, the director of public works was given the authority for control and maintenance of streets, drainage, and water supply; the director of electricity in the PWD took over street lighting; the director of medical and sanitary services was placed in charge of street cleaning; the regulation of buildings and permits for alterations fell to the building surveyor; and the head of agriculture assumed responsibility for public gardens and parks.²³ There was a certain logic to these appointments (who better to light the streets, after all, than the director of electricity?), but in practice the system proved unwieldy.

In retrospect, the decision to create three distinct authorities to control, clean, and light the streets was a recipe for administrative disarray. This cumbersome arrangement—an extension of practices followed since the early protectorate—was motivated by political considerations more than anything else, as officials hoped that decentralization would undercut public pressure for municipal representation. If a central urban body did not exist, then there could be no pretext for residents to demand inclusion on it—as members of the Indian National Association had been requesting since the early 1920s. A later attorney general high-

lighted this aspect when he reviewed the law in 1931. Separate officers, he observed, were appointed as authorities “because it was feared that the appointment of a Board as Township Authority, as is the practice in every administration of which I have knowledge, might lead to a demand for a Municipal Authority not exclusively official.” While the proliferation of distinct authorities may have been politically useful, it also created an entirely new set of problems and proved to be a bureaucratic nightmare. First, prospective builders tended to take the approval of any one office as final and to proceed with construction without consulting the other necessary agencies. Second, the processing of applications got bogged down in the circuitous shuffling of papers back and forth between offices for the necessary reviews, stamps, and signatures. After two years, the attorney general concluded that the policy was intrinsically flawed:

The appointment of single authorities for special purposes is found in practice to be extremely difficult of operation for the reason that many matters are not exclusively the business of the Authority who has been appointed to conduct such matters. Examples may be seen in such matters as Drainage, Water supply, and the regulation and alteration of Buildings, which are obviously not entirely matters for an engineer, but for the Health Authorities also. . . . Yet by Notice the Health Authorities have no authority in these matters. This seems to me clear proof that the appointment of a single authority for each purpose was impracticable and unwise.²⁴

While the attorney general may have characterized the policy as “impracticable and unwise,” it was never entirely abandoned. Rather than overhaul their approach, officials chose instead to try to paper over the gaps, incessantly shifting personnel between the various authorities and combining them into new forms. This reshuffling arose in the first instance because issues such as building regulation were not the exclusive concern of the Public Works Department or any other single office. As the attorney general noted, medical officials also had to be involved in the layout and repair of buildings in order to reduce congestion and provide for sanitary flows of light and air. Yet the 1929 decree expressly excluded them from playing any such role, and the public health statutes made no provision for their participation in town planning affairs.

“THIS STATE OF CHAOS”:
THE JOINT BUILDING AUTHORITY

To address these shortcomings, the administration issued a supplemental legal notice in 1932 appointing the director of public works and the director of medical and sanitary services as the Joint Building Authority, with collective responsibility for drainage, water supply, and building control. This consolidation, however, did little to resolve the problem. The Joint Building Authority was reconstituted in 1935 and again in 1938 to little avail. Changing the official “authority” overseeing the work of the 1929 legislation was pointless so long as the available personnel to carry it out remained hopelessly inadequate. Ruling by decree was an ingrained habit of the administration, and officials continued to act as if the mere issuance of laws had an almost talismanic power. In drafting statutes, little consideration was given to the consequences of the increasingly elaborate mechanisms envisioned therein. Questions about the practical difficulties of enforcement—any notion that the ambitious sweep of the law might be thoroughly undermined by the lack of staff and resources supplied to carry it out—rarely arose until well after the legislation was already in place.

From 1929 on, for example, the duties of the Building Authority included “the receipt of applications to build, rebuild or repair, scrutiny of plans, preparation of necessary forms, inspection of the site or building, checking claims with the survey sheet, pegging out sites, and seeing that building or alteration undertaken does not exceed what has been permitted.” By 1938, the government architect had responsibility for Stone Town and the district commissioner for Ng’ambo. But the actual staff dedicated to fulfilling all these tasks amounted to only a single individual, a so-called Asiatic building inspector. He devoted four days a week to Stone Town and two to Ng’ambo but was increasingly unable to keep up with the pace of work. As Webb and Peake noted, even under the “most favorable circumstances,” the inspector could handle no more than 4 applications per day, or 24 per week. Yet in the first fourteen weeks of 1938 alone, the office received no less than 866 applications (71 from Stone Town, 795 from Ng’ambo), an average of almost 62 per week. Processing this total was “far beyond the capacity of one man,”

with the result that nearly two-thirds of applications were going unaddressed each week, leading to a huge backlog of cases. This constituted a problem not so much for local builders as for the regime itself, because the 1929 decree allowed any individual to “proceed with any building he likes if the Building Authority has failed to intimate in writing his disapproval of the building within 30 days of receipt of notice to build.” The result of this was that “unauthorized buildings on unauthorized sites are springing up throughout the town and particularly in the Ngambo area,” bringing the work of the Building Authority, joint or otherwise, to the point of virtual collapse.²⁵

There was yet another factor that significantly hindered the performance of the Joint Building Authority, contributing to what Webb and Peake called “this state of chaos”—the lack of “definitive” building rules. The 1929 Towns Decree had created a building authority but was published with the crucial section on new building rules undrafted.²⁶ These regulations took a full decade to complete, as various drafts and proposals were passed around and debated between administrative offices throughout the 1930s. Ironing out legal inconsistencies consumed the administration’s time and resources, while unregulated building went on, year after year. Just before the Towns (Building) Rules were finally passed in 1939, Dr. Lee once again voiced his frustration to Webb over the long delay, lamenting that since 1934 “I have been hampered at every turn by the absence of these rules.”²⁷ Webb himself had expressed similar objections the previous year when he (together with Peake) complained to the chief secretary about the interminable delays in drafting the building rules: “Those for the Stone Town have just been passed to you in, it is hoped, their final form. Those for the native town, which were drafted over four years ago, have not been seen by us for the last two years.” During this period, Webb and Peake were in charge of the Joint Building Authority, and they highlighted the problems caused by this ongoing disarray: “In the absence of these rules, the Building Authority is powerless to enforce by law certain of its more important decisions, a fact of which a certain section of the building public are becoming increasingly aware. The lack of staff and rules has resulted in what control the Building Authority had, passing out of their hands, and in our opinion, the situation demands immediate action.”²⁸

UNSEEN POWERS: LANCHESTER ROADS AND
THE PHANTOM EXISTENCE OF THE PLAN

Simple inefficiency cannot suffice to explain why “immediate action” in this case was so long deferred. The difficulty over building rules illustrates a much deeper set of legal contradictions that the colonial regime created in the 1920s and then subsequently failed to contain. The 1929 Towns Decree created a Building Authority without passing building regulations. Lacking these codes for years on end, the authority had a legal existence but no capacity to issue or enforce its decisions. Under the Towns Decree, it had the power to deny building permits if structures conflicted with an ill-defined sense of urban “amenities,” but little else. This lack of legal standing, however, never stopped the Building Authority from seeking to control building by applying codes that had never been authorized. Officers continued to evaluate applications, demand alterations, and deny permission to build, relying on nothing less than the Lanchester plan, which had been adopted behind the scenes as a blueprint for setting everyday standards and enforcing codes. There was only one slight drawback to this practice, which took some years for the administration to fully appreciate: it was patently and entirely illegal. The Lanchester scheme had never been declared and published as stipulated by the 1925 Town Planning Decree, so it had no legal basis and could not serve as a framework for everyday urban policy. None of the plan’s proposals were included in the 1929 Towns Decree, and hence the Joint Building Authority had no legal justification to apply them. The plan was caught in limbo, consigned to a phantom existence, and yet it continued to work behind the scenes, impacting ordinary lives in dramatic ways—determining whether they could repair their homes or would be forced to relocate. The plan functioned as a very real fiction.

Let us begin with the whole issue of the so-called Lanchester roads, which lasted into the 1940s, serving as a framework for the government architect, Lionel Bintley, to draw up yet another (mostly unrealized) plan. The intention behind the Lanchester roads was to create a regular grid of streets, especially in Ng’ambo, to facilitate police access and carve out “breathing spaces” in congested areas. These roads existed only on paper as part of the legacy of a plan that was never declared. Despite this,

the Joint Building Authority used the Lanchester roads as a benchmark for reaching decisions on a case-by-case basis well into the late 1930s, hoping to pave the way for the plan's eventual fulfillment. As existing structures deteriorated (something that occurred much more frequently with huts as opposed to stone dwellings), owners had to apply to the Joint Building Authority for permission to repair or rebuild. In cases where such huts stood in the way of these nonexistent Lanchester roads, approval for reconstruction was inevitably and summarily denied—without officials ever citing the real reasons motivating their decisions. This ad hoc procedure served as an inexpensive and effective end run around the 1925 decree, making it possible to clear out huts (and open up road lines) without paying any compensation whatsoever.

Admittedly, translating this backdoor policy into practice was not quite so easy as it might seem. By the mid-1930s, Dr. Lee had come to realize some of the potential difficulties involved. “‘Lanchester Roads’ exist on paper,” he wrote, “yet in practice it is difficult to decide where they run and therefore the proper aligning of huts and the arrangement of new development is almost impossible; furthermore full advantage cannot be taken of the fortuitous collapse, or burning down, of huts to implement the principles laid down by Mr. Lanchester.”²⁹ Lee didn’t object to the illegality of the policy so much as to its ineffectiveness. He wanted to take the straight lines he found on paper and make them a reality, reordering the landscape and “properly” aligning huts. At almost the same moment, though, Webb had arrived at precisely the opposite conclusion. He wrote to the chief secretary, expressing his view that the Joint Building Authority was acting illegally:

Up to date applications to build or re-erect huts situated on ‘Lanchester Roads’ have been refused by the Building Authority under section 37 (1) (a) of the Towns Decree, which does not appear to me correct for the following reasons:—

1. (i) The land on which the Lanchester roads run has not been acquired for the purpose of making roads as required by the Towns Decree section 25 (a). (ii) The streets authority has not prescribed a building line along the Lanchester roads as provided for in section 26 of the Towns Decree.
2. The Lanchester roads are not marked out, and it is a matter of purely arbitrary guesswork by the Building Inspector to determine where they do run.³⁰

While no one disputed his position, it took a further *three years* before the Lanchester road policy was eventually abandoned by the JBA. In the meantime, various officers in the authority continued to decide cases on the basis of their “purely arbitrary guesswork.” In late July 1938, the Town Planning Board, presided over by Resident Hall himself, ultimately agreed that it was indeed “illegal” to prohibit the erection or repair of a hut simply because it stood in the way of a (nonexistent) “Lanchester road.” The members of the Joint Building Authority (by now Dr. Lee and Bintley) chose to interpret this directive after their own fashion, trying to continue on much as before. They took the change to mean not that “all tracks which had been cleared could now be built over,” but rather that the “idea of 50 feet Lanchester lines was to be dropped and 20 feet road lines aimed at.”³¹ The attorney general subsequently found that there was no legal basis for this position. Only after several more months of internal wrangling was the issue eventually settled, as Lanchester roads—even in their 20-foot-wide variant—were laid to rest over the protests of Lee. His position was perfectly clear. “As Medical Officer of Health,” he wrote, “I am interested in any schemes to reduce urban congestion and to get people out of the town into the country.”³²

Other arbitrary guidelines suggested in the Lanchester plan similarly served to guide the ad hoc decisions of the Joint Building Authority: 10-foot sanitary lanes, minimum plot sizes for huts (750 feet), and the idea of zoning, which was used to deny applications for new factories in areas deemed “residential,” despite the continuing highly mixed character of land use. These policies were irregularly and unevenly applied, going in and out of use, as various arms of the colonial administration seemed unaware of what the others were doing. The attorney general was ultimately responsible for legal decisions, but had little direct exposure to everyday urban affairs. He rarely got a chance to see how laws were working in practice, only becoming aware of problems when questions became vexed enough to be referred to him. Moreover, as the scope of legislation expanded and became more complicated, mastery of all the relevant decrees and subsidiary notices—not to mention their interrelations—became a full-time job in itself. The Town Planning Board, by contrast, considered policy only at the broadest level, trying to decide the overall scope and direction of planning. It met intermittently and tended to issue pronouncements rather than delve into the fine print of

specific issues. The Joint Building Authority, together with the various departments, was expected to make things work on the ground, carrying out laws and policies decided elsewhere. But while its members (who changed frequently and did not all interpret the unofficial rules in the same way) were the first to come up against conundrums, they had no means to resolve them, having to wait for instructions from their superiors. In the spaces betwixt and between these diverse boards, bodies, committees, and agents, there was plenty of room for contradictions to take root and thrive. Confusion inevitably led to further debate and delays, as the bureaucracy became preoccupied with trying to untangle its own relations and lines of communication.

A Waste of Time: Unplanned and Ill-defined Efforts

In 1933 the Central Board of Health (yet another in a succession of urban boards and bodies, and one which soon became defunct) decided to set minimum requirements for hut and plot sizes (25×30 and 700×750 square feet, respectively). The precise reasoning behind the decision was never made clear, as no evidence was provided showing that these specific dimensions would improve public health in any way. Nonetheless, the Executive Council endorsed this sanitary folk wisdom and instructed the Building Authority to enforce it. As a result, these standards soon became accepted as a “cardinal principle” in deciding cases. It took a full two years before the attorney general became aware of this ongoing practice, and he immediately voiced his objections to Dr. Lee. He declared there was absolutely no justification for using these sanitary prescriptions “to turn a person out of his house merely because he applies to repair it.” But in Lee’s view, the attorney general’s directive placed the Building Authority in “an almost complete deadlock. On the one hand the policy is to permit no new huts on too small plots and to discourage in every way the continued use of small plots—on the other hand the inference to be drawn from the Attorney General’s ruling is that no application for repairs are to be refused because the hut site is too small, unless government buys the building.”

Lee turned to Webb for clarification on how to proceed. He ventured his opinion that “in a congested area in which no roads have been marked out and no plan adopted in the past as regards siting of huts it

seems a waste of time to stick to the letter of the principle and to acquire huts and turn people off plots in an aimless endeavor to improve general conditions." As he saw it, the source of the problem was "congestion and lack of town planning," and nothing could be done to resolve the situation "until a constructive policy is adopted as complementary to that of destruction." Until a full town planning scheme could be prepared, he recommended dropping the minimum hut and plot requirements, observing that "the present unplanned and ill-defined efforts to improve housing congestion is a waste of time. The environs of a few huts can be improved as a result of inflicting hardship on their neighbors—who are merely unlucky that their properties have got out of repair before the next hut—but the sum of the benefit . . . is very small indeed."³³

Pending deliberations on the eventual fate of town planning, no immediate action was taken on Lee's suggestion. His views were not widely disseminated, and others in the Building Authority continued to deny permits. The following year, however, there were sufficient protests by residents about the policy to prompt Chief Secretary McElderry to ask the resident to direct the Joint Building Authority to allow all repairs to native huts "without question." He asserted that such a reversal would "do much to calm feelings among the native population of the town and remove an important factor making for unrest."³⁴ The matter was taken up by the Executive Council, which passed the following resolution: "The restrictions imposed by the Building Authority with regard to the repairing of native huts in Zanzibar town should be relaxed until such time as proper building regulations and a town planning scheme have been introduced and that in the meantime the activities of the Building Authority should be confined chiefly to the prevention of nuisance. In particular, no action with a view to effecting improvements should be taken in excess of existing legal powers."³⁵

The Joint Building Authority desisted for a time, but shortly thereafter resumed the practice of condemning huts all over again. Its officers asserted that the practice was now legal insofar as they had begun forwarding pro forma requests for compensation to the land officer. They felt it necessary to continue to clear out huts so as to pave the way for an eventual urban plan. If owners were allowed to make repairs and improvements at will, colonial officials feared that the value of premises would rise, and the compensation needed to eventually acquire them

would skyrocket, making urban planning impossible. There was considerable pressure to act in the here and now, but the difficulty was that they could not legally condemn huts without first possessing a town plan and activating the Town Planning Decree. In other words, the Building Authority was still caught in the same legal confusion, arbitrarily imposing its own rules. Nevertheless, the practice continued, leading the assistant secretary (planning) to write to the chief secretary in 1938: "Something must be done about this matter of refusal of permits to build. The position is most unsatisfactory and discontent is fomenting. My own feeling is that the Medical Authorities are exceeding their powers if the refusal to build is based entirely on encroachment on the Lanchester plan which, as you are aware, has not been applied by law."³⁶ The attorney general was called in again to advise at this stage, and he completely concurred. He informed the chief secretary in no uncertain terms that "outright refusal to build in this case could not have been sustained under the provisions of section 66 (b) Cap. 100, and would not have occurred except for the illegitimate [*sic*] purpose of promoting a feature of the projected town planning scheme. . . . The Building Authority of Zanzibar has in the past exceeded its legal powers in the attempt to promote a scheme which has no validity. . . . It should not have required a decision of Executive Council . . . to instruct the Building Authority that its zeal for effecting improvement of the urban amenities should be strictly confined to the promotion of purposes within its jurisdiction."³⁷

At the end of July, the Town Planning Board convened to discuss the grounds on which permission to repair or rebuild a hut could be refused. It was in that meeting that the Lanchester roads were thrown out. Ten-foot sanitary lanes were rejected as requirements in the case of repairs but allowed where new huts were concerned. And the matter of minimum hut and plot sizes was discussed at length but deferred. Finally, in late August, Resident Hall decided that these rules too should be rejected. He sent a minute to the chief secretary with the following instructions: "The Building Authorities have hitherto acted as if the recommendations . . . had the force of law. They should be informed that they have not and cannot be enforced."³⁸ But Dr. Lee continued to express frustration that his hands were being tied. There was no movement forward on an urban planning scheme, and he was being forced to drop the very policies that would make the plan possible. He wrote that he was now allowing

huts to be built or repaired on Lanchester roads, but warned about the consequences to the administration. When a plan eventually came into being, he stressed, acquisition costs for sites along the “roads” would be that much more expensive, and any approvals granted now were bound to be bitterly resented by those who had been denied permits previously. Moreover, he continued, Zanzibaris would begin building just anywhere they pleased:

It is to be remembered, too, that no “building lines” have ever been declared in Zanzibar town, so that there is nothing now to stop people from building right up to all the metalled public streets and all over the tracks which have been developed during the past few years. It becomes necessary therefore to mark out building lines and to declare them. . . . This work [is] a matter of urgency, as the longer this declaration is left the more unnecessary expense will be caused to government. . . . It is necessary to stress here that, as the news gets about that the Building Authority is not refusing applications to build on cleared tracks, applications to build may be expected from every landowner in town as the opportunity for profit is so obvious.³⁹

A few months later, in January 1939, Lee decided that he could no longer tolerate the lack of powers possessed by the Joint Building Authority and tried to get the rules reinstated by other means. “As Joint Building Authority I am experiencing the greatest difficulty in dealing with applications to erect new huts in overcrowded areas,” he reiterated to Webb. “Would it be possible, therefore, for the Honourable Attorney General to draft two rules, applicable to native huts . . . to the effect that: (i) no new native hut may be erected unless the site available is not less than 750 feet. (ii) around all new huts a 10 foot sanitary lane must be left. I think everyone who has discussed the rules is agreed that the above two are necessary and it has, in fact, been the practice for years in the Joint Building Authority to apply these standards under the impression they were legal. Now, we are aware they are not legal and have not been since the revision of the laws in 1934, and, moreover, the public is also aware of the fact.”⁴⁰

Lee’s response to the situation was entirely characteristic. In the pursuit of spatial order and control, he believed JBA policies were utterly necessary. If the old rules had been thrown out on some administrative technicality, he hoped the attorney general could simply rectify the prob-

lem by generating new regulations, tacking them onto existing legislation. Newly supplied with the writ of the law, the JBA could then freely continue as before (without, of course, making any restitution to hut dwellers who had been unjustly evicted in previous years). Throughout the late 1930s and 1940s, the government followed a similar logic, adding to and supplementing existing laws in a fruitless attempt to finally set things right. The administration struggled for a full decade following the Towns Decree of 1929 to frame the Towns (Building) Rules. During that time, what was initially an addendum to the original legislation grew into a complicated set of statutes in its own right. Even in their final form, however, the rules hardly served to lay matters to rest. In relatively short order, a host of refinements and revisions followed: the Town (Native Location) Rules of 1943, the Zanzibar Township Decree of 1944, the Towns (Building) (Amendment) Rules of the same year, and the Towns (Building) Amendment Rules of 1946. But the essential contradiction remained untreated, as fiddling with the building codes could in no way resolve the disjuncture between town planning and management enshrined in colonial law.

Reaping a “Harvest of Chaos Sown by Irregular and Autocratic Methods”

Early in his tenure, Chief Secretary Dutton believed that he had at least managed to isolate the source of the trouble that had long undermined urban planning. As he prepared to assume control of the Town Planning Board, he concluded that the law itself was largely at fault: “It appears to me that all attempts to begin town planning have failed because Government, although they made frequent attempts to grapple with the problem, were each time brought to a halt by the provisions of the Town Planning Decree. Other officers who have read through the numerous files have observed to me how they have been struck by the fact that attempts made to improve the position were subsequently dropped when the difficulties were realized.”⁴¹ New to the post, Dutton believed that he could overcome this stalemate if he could find a way to get around the Town Planning Decree of 1925. Much like his predecessors, he wanted to subvert the requirement to pay compensation for properties that needed to be acquired, paving the way for planning to proceed.

He outlined a strategy based mostly on bluff and implied threats. Colonial authorities, he declared, should move ahead and prepare proposed schemes, which, when approved by the resident, could be treated “as if” they were official documents. It would be announced that all future development must conform to these plans, and administrative instructions would be issued to that effect. The plans would not be “declared” or legally authorized, thus avoiding the necessity of paying compensation. But they would be put on display, as the entire effort hinged on gaining the support of the public, thereby laying the groundwork for voluntary compliance. If prospective builders chose to ignore the scheme they would get reported to the Town Planning Board and the resident, with the possibility of further (unspecified) sanctions. If they continued on with their projects in defiance of the authorities’ wishes, they would be warned that when the scheme was legally in place and the time came around for compensation, their lack of cooperation would be kept in mind. Stymied by the law, Dutton thought the best option was to resort to extralegal tactics: “The alternatives are the immediate operation of an Approved Scheme under Cap. 101 [the Town Planning Decree of 1925], for which we are at present financially unprepared, or a continuation of the present unsatisfactory condition in which officers are left without any means of effecting orderly progress.”

Dutton’s proposal didn’t amount to much of a fresh departure. In seeking new options, he found only the same dead end. The “means of effecting orderly progress” remained well beyond the regime’s grasp. When his suggestion ultimately went nowhere, he shifted his focus to rewriting the 1925 planning decree, which was eventually amended in 1944 to little effect. Almost a decade later, the terms of debate were essentially unchanged, as the latest group of colonial officials were still voicing exactly the same frustrations, their complaints taking on the quality of a broken record. In September 1952, the sanitary superintendent, E. H. Lavers, succinctly described the essence of the difficulty, summing up a long history of futility: “Although a decree to enable the execution of Town Planning Schemes was brought into force on the 1st of June 1925, and later amended by the Town Planning (Amendment) Decree of 1944, there has been no legal assistance rendered to the Building Authority.”

When Lavers started working with the authority, he encountered a whole series of plans that were officially accepted. He was directed to use

these as the basis for making decisions, modifying proposals, condemning premises, and making recommendations for acquisition. Yet all too often his efforts to translate the plans into reality were subsequently overturned or disallowed by other officials. He found himself caught between competing demands, unable to improve the sanitary state of the city without violating the law: "It will be seen from the above quotations that the Building Authority are placed in an invidious position; that they have to endeavor to improve the environmental sanitation of the town but have insufficient legal backing. The legal authority states that the only way is to declare a town planning area, but the Government reply that such action is out of the question at present. Such conflict of opinion adds confusion to the issue at stake."⁴²

The medical officer of health concurred with these views, saying that Lavers's letter captured his own experience precisely: "During the 18 months in which I have performed the duties of Medical Officer of Health Zanzibar, I have in my capacity experienced all the problems and difficulties set out therein. There is no doubt that the Joint Building Authority is at present seriously handicapped by the lack of precise information as to Government intentions in these matters, the absence of plans for given areas, and the doubt as to the legality of such approved plans as have been issued."⁴³ And the senior commissioner was even more withering in his assessment: "It is indeed time the Government reviewed the whole position and made use of the Town Planning Decree whose provisions have been so studiously neglected in years gone by. When I was instructed to take over the administration of the utility houses in the area replanned by the Development Authority, I certainly reaped a harvest of chaos sown by the irregular and autocratic methods of those who had handled the scheme earlier. In planning projects of this kind it is essential to proceed in an orderly manner, in strict conformity with the legislation which is intended to govern such proceedings, even if it takes longer and costs more."⁴⁴

Acting in "strict conformity" with its own laws was an objective that frequently eluded the government, foreclosing repeated attempts to move planning forward in an orderly fashion. Given the pointed nature and persistence of these criticisms, one might reasonably conclude that the administration was finally prompted to take definitive action to resolve the issue. Such was not the case. These complaints were duly

referred to the Town Planning Board in late October 1952, resulting in yet another discussion of the deficiencies caused by the Town Planning Decree of 1925. In that meeting, the chairman did little more than brush the critiques aside, explaining “that the difficult situation in which the Joint Building Authority found itself was well understood, but that it was not possible to take any action to improve matters until a town plan for Zanzibar had been prepared.”⁴⁵

A vicious circle had been established: without a plan in place, legal reform was pointless; but without a proper set of laws, no foundation for planning could be laid in the present. By this time, the paper trail surrounding colonial urban planning had come to be marked by a surreal quality. The recurrent refrain went something like this: town problem *x* must be addressed immediately; but it cannot be addressed before it is studied; such a study would be worthless, however, unless it is linked to a comprehensive town plan; but a town plan cannot be prepared without a new town planning decree; yet a town planning decree cannot be drawn up without overhauling the entire legal framework relating to the city; and this cannot be done without the advice of a qualified town planning expert—and on and on, receding into the far distance. By the end of the line, the original issues had been almost completely forgotten, submerged in a bureaucratic morass.

As Major Dutton’s time in Zanzibar came to a close in the early 1950s, it was more than clear that a complete stalemate had been reached. “In 1952,” the acting financial secretary later reported, lending an absurdist gloss to the situation, “it became apparent that if any further progress was to be made with town planning in Zanzibar town and the three towns of Pemba it would be necessary to get some expert advice from qualified persons.”⁴⁶ The administration initially sought to obtain this assistance on the cheap, asking to borrow the services of Mr. Thornley-Dyer, the town-planning adviser to the Kenya government. Kenyan authorities agreed to the arrangement so long as it did not interfere with the fulfillment of his official duties. Thornley-Dyer and his assistant made several trips to the isles in 1952, but the needs of Zanzibar soon outstripped his limited time and attention. From the outset, he emphasized that his help could only be provisional and temporary, and he informed officials that they would need to hire their own planning expert if they wanted to fashion a plan for the whole of the city. This advice went unheeded,

and authorities on Zanzibar soon began to express irritation at the low priority he was giving to meet their requests. In a special meeting of the Town Planning Board in March 1953, the chairman reaffirmed his belief that “what is needed in Zanzibar is a complete town plan, which is quite a big undertaking.” He complained about the lack of prompt assistance from Thornley-Dyer in Nairobi, proposing that the time had come to find an urban expert closer to home, perhaps in Dar es Salaam. The new adviser could begin at once to make headway on a scheme for Stone Town and Ng’ambo, assuming, of course, that he agreed that the present town planning decree was sufficient for his purposes.⁴⁷

In the following months, however, the administration began to backtrack. The idea of finding a fresh adviser came unraveled, as questions arose anew about the suitability of the 1925 town planning decree. In September, the government resorted once more to calling on Thornley-Dyer, sending him a copy of the legislation and asking for his advice. There was no point, he eventually replied, in hiring a town planning consultant or initiating a plan without first redrafting the planning laws, which were entirely outmoded in light of recent developments in modern town and country planning. Zanzibar officials subsequently accepted the notion that legal reform must come first, and by the end of December they began to review a rough set of proposals drawn up by Thornley-Dyer’s assistant, closely following alterations then under way in Kenya. It soon became evident that these amendments were fairly far-reaching, making revision seem fruitless. The wiser course, it was finally decided in the following year, was to scrap the 1925 decree altogether and start out again from scratch. Accordingly, Chief Secretary R. E. Alford instructed the attorney general to begin drafting an entirely new bill in April 1954. By midyear, copies of the draft were circulating among members of the Town Planning Board for comment, starting off a long and complicated process of review. The bill was not passed until November 1955, and then the real problems—those connected with actually carrying out the law—truly began.

Forging Stupendous Hammers to Crack Small Nuts

The problems created by the Town and Country Planning Decree of 1955 should have been foreseen—and indeed they were, at least in certain

quarters. Prior to its passage, the housing officer, A. P. Cumming-Bruce, voiced sharp objections to the measure. His criticisms were not so much rebutted substantively as ground down and muted within the broader bureaucratic process, which continued on virtually undisturbed. Cumming-Bruce's comments are worth quoting at length, for they provide rich insight into the bureaucratic and legal snares the administration laid for itself, culminating finally in the debacle of the 1958 plan:

Apart from certain minor points, I venture, with much diffidence, to suggest that the new Decree is open to one fundamental general objection: It is so elaborate as to be in practice unworkable in this Protectorate.

I fully recognize that Town Planning is an immensely elaborate matter. It invades private rights in the most ruthless manner and therefore needs strict legal control. Yet we are also forced to look at the proposed control and ask: can this ever be administered so as to enable towns to be planned? I contend that this small government simply has not got the staff capable of running this complicated machine for producing and enforcing plans and that like Abadan in the hands of the Persians it will grind to a standstill.

He then proceeded to outline the flaws of the decree point by point, arguing forcefully that this latest round in legal redefinition was a colossal waste of time and effort. "First," he stated, "are we not trying to forge a stupendous hammer in order to crack four small nuts?"⁴⁸ He thought that the revised legislation might be appropriate for Kenya, Oxford, or Edinburgh, but that the "far simpler problems" presented by Zanzibar city and three small towns on Pemba (Chake Chake, Wete, and Mkoani) called for a more modest response. Second, he lamented the fact that the legislation was wholly "incomprehensible to the great mass of literate citizens." He conceded that laws should not always be crafted with the lay public in mind, but argued that town planning was different: it struck closer to home, so to speak, and could not succeed without winning public support—something that the abstruse language of the decree (and its reliance on a cadre of expert specialists) made all but impossible. Third, he continued, "We have no Town Planning Staff at hand to advise on the daily administration of this decree, nor so far as I know, do we contemplate getting them—surveyors are not town planning experts." He listed the seven departmental officers who in practice would have

to administer the decree, stating that they lacked both the training and staff necessary to fulfill this function. Nor could they expect much help from the Town Planning Board, whose deficiencies had long been apparent: “The Town Planning Board consists mainly of heads of busy departments meeting at monthly intervals for a few hours in an advisory capacity. None of these officers could give more than an occasional hour to work of this nature. They would be subject to the incessant changes of personnel which a small cadre undergoes. The decree could not be ‘run’ on this basis: it would stagnate and frustrate.”

In trying to take over land for an airport, the regime had recently provoked an angry uprising, and Cumming-Bruce minced no words: “The system which could not even acquire land for Kisauni aerodrome without contributing to a major riot should hesitate before it takes new powers expressly intended to be applied to private property in all four townships.” Fourth, he argued that the decree could not be readily decentralized at all and would lead “to a great concentration of intractable paperwork in the Secretariat. For example, the British Resident is expressly charged with at least twenty-three functions, executive and appellate, in the amending legislation alone. . . . Moreover there is no specialist anywhere in the establishment who could handle the subject authoritatively, which makes its treatment at the Secretariat level much harder if not impossible.” Lastly, he charged that the law conflicted with the stated policy of devolution to local authorities, none of which were adequately prepared or funded to oversee its complicated provisions. In light of these objections, Cumming-Bruce respectfully submitted that the law should be drastically revised and simplified, taking into account the “slender official resources” available to administer it, as well as “the nature of the Planning work for which we need to provide.” Alternatively, if his objections did not seem “cogent enough” and the government decided to press ahead, he urged the necessity of paying for and providing a full town planning section (“with a qualified Town Planning Officer, and draftsmen, inspectors and clerks”) to make the law work. But he explicitly warned, “Even with such an expensive apparatus I do not believe the system could operate efficiently under local conditions with the proposed legislation.”⁴⁹

In mid-July 1954 the Town Planning Board met to discuss the draft legislation, being briefed on all the departmental reviews, including

Cumming-Bruce's findings. Several members of the board reportedly found his arguments persuasive, including the acting development secretary. Others either disagreed or were disengaged. A resolution resulted that seemed to broadly endorse the housing officer's views while emptying them of real force. The board agreed that the bill would not be practicable unless provision was made for permanent expert staff to operate it, implying that the government should make provision to meet this responsibility. There was nothing binding to this recommendation, and no one questioned whether the regime actually possessed the means to fulfill it. Approval was granted in such a way as to neatly foreclose debate on the practicalities of implementation, allowing the process to move forward to the next stage unhindered by Cumming-Bruce's objections. The board did suggest that Thornley-Dyer might be invited to recommend ways in which the bill could be simplified. The members ended by changing the title to "Town and Country Planning Decree," arguing that it should be applied throughout the protectorate in both rural and urban areas.⁵⁰

There the matter rested for several months. In September 1954, the acting development secretary admitted that he had made little progress with the legislation, saying that he thought it was better to wait. "If the views of the Town Planning Board are accepted, there is not the same urgency as before about this and it would be better not to rush this legislation and then find it unworkable in practice." He wanted to wait until the new development plan was in place and a town planner had been hired; the regime could then seek his expert advice on all legal questions and move to pass the draft legislation. At present, Thornley-Dyer was too busy, and they could no longer afford to hound him with questions. Besides, borrowing his services on an ad hoc basis was already engendering problems: "At the moment we are trying to adopt the Kenya Town Planning Legislation to Zanzibar, in spite of the fact that the set up in Kenya is very different from here."⁵¹

The financial secretary weighed in soon thereafter with his own views, arguing for a different approach. While he sympathized with many of Cumming-Bruce's arguments, he was of the opinion that the draft law was not really complicated at all. In fact, although he was neither a lawyer nor a planner, he declared that it was far simpler than the existing 1925 decree. Moreover, he wrote, "I am opposed to deferring

this matter as it takes such a long time to get things moving again.” He counseled the chief secretary to push the measure full steam ahead, asking Thornley-Dyer to see whether some modification might be possible or reasonable. He took this position even while undercutting the rationale behind the Town Planning Board’s acceptance, making it clear (as Cumming-Bruce suspected) that there would be no funds for an enlargement of staff: “As far as the Town Planning Section and Staff . . . is concerned, the more I see of our financial commitments during the next few years the less probable does the establishment of such an organization become—unfortunately. The proposal will, of course, be considered in the new five year development plan but I fear that we may have a lot of higher priorities and our resources will be slender by comparison with the scale our first 5-year proposals were drafted.”⁵² After several months had elapsed, the acting development secretary also began to express a greater sense of urgency. His earlier caution was overridden by the sense that matters were getting out of hand: the need for control—any control—meant that he was willing to set aside the substance of his earlier objections: “We are getting nowhere by further delays and there is the somewhat urgent problem of peri-urban development which we cannot at present control except by means of a new Decree or by fairly elaborate amendments to the existing decree.”⁵³

After several months of debating whether to move forward with the legislation or seek further advice, the chief secretary turned once again to Thornley-Dyer, traveling to Nairobi in late January 1955 for a consultation. The town planning adviser airily dismissed most of Cumming-Bruce’s criticisms. Although he wasn’t very familiar with specific conditions in Zanzibar, he rejected the idea that the proposed law was overly elaborate; indeed, he thought it wasn’t expansive enough. As Alford reported the conversation, “Mr. Thornley-Dyer assured me that even Colonial territories working with legislation on this scale were finding it necessary to expand it; he could see no way of producing the results required in Zanzibar with any simpler legislation. He considered that we would need a special planning staff, and the minimum would be a Planning Officer.”⁵⁴

This endorsement was sufficiently compelling to Alford, who decided that enough was enough. A decree was needed, and these debates were producing nothing more than further delays. Indeed, the convo-

luted and disjointed nature of the discussion rendered its substantive content essentially moot: as the process dragged out in round after round of correspondence, detailed arguments increasingly fell by the wayside, overtaken by the perceived need to simply do something—anything. Cumming-Bruce had made his case that there was a gross disproportion between means and ends in the proposed decree. This contention was never contested in real terms. Most agreed that additional staff would be necessary to carry the law out. Whether or not the administration actually possessed the capacity to fund this bureaucratic enlargement receded into the background as the debate became more distended. Attention centered on the more narrow question of numbers, as Cumming-Bruce’s fallback plea for a complete town planning section (at a minimum) was progressively whittled down to a single town planning officer. The views of a qualified town planner carried more weight than those of a mere housing officer, and, besides, Thornley-Dyer’s more optimistic estimate was just what the chief secretary wanted to hear. After his return to Zanzibar, the chief secretary sent the bill to the attorney general with instructions for minor modification, directing that it be handed to the resident for approval as soon as possible.

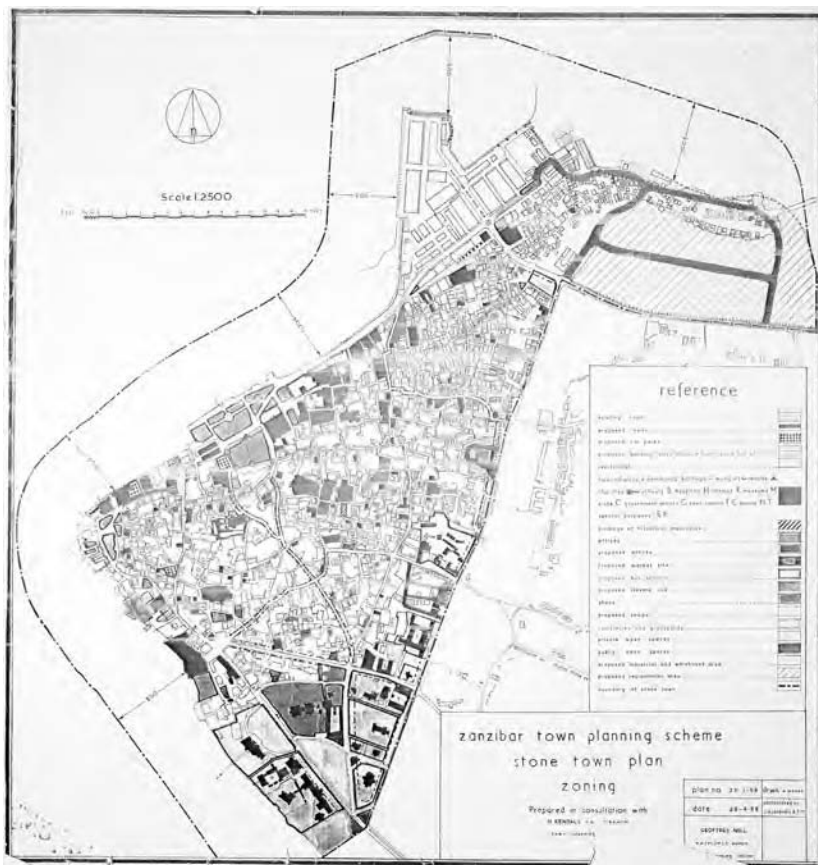
The new planning decree that successive administrations had long sought was finally passed into law at the end of 1955, overriding the objections of the unofficial Zanzibari members of the Legislative Council, who were there to represent indigenous concerns. Indeed, when the bill was still under debate, one of the unofficial members, V. S. Patel, objected to the “dictatorial powers” it bestowed on an unrepresentative body, the Town Planning Board, arguing that the law was causing “apprehension in the minds of the people.” In his view, the measure was utterly unsuited to Zanzibar:

What we want, Sir, are the houses and not the schemes. Schemes look very fine on paper, schemes are very beautiful to read and to digest, but they do not serve the purpose of providing houses which is the very great requirement and need of the present day, not only in the towns but also in the rural areas. The people should be allowed to build the houses according to their resources, economic and otherwise. They should not be asked to enter into complications of the law. Even at present the powers which are in the existing legislation are such as to prevent the ordinary man to put up even a small hut in the town area.⁵⁵

Echoing Cumming-Bruce's views, Patel clearly understood the risks of passing such a complicated decree, and his comments eventually proved quite prescient. Rather than materially improving conditions, providing housing or services, the 1955 decree paved the way for further bureaucratic and legal involution. It was mainly drawn from the British Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, with supplements from Zanzibar, Kenya, Rhodesia, and Nigeria. This meant that a bill designed to shape development throughout Britain, one sophisticated enough to meet the needs and requirements of a metropolis such as London, was suddenly being applied in the vastly different context of Zanzibar. The mechanisms it required for planning were overdetermined and unwieldy, causing problems from the very outset. The decree had been pushed through in the hopes that it would facilitate the control of peri-urban growth. Yet the bill didn't allow for a proactive response so much as facilitate a kind of reactive prohibition. As the acting attorney general pointed out in 1957, "In the first place it should be noted that the Town and Country Planning Decree is not designed primarily to enable the Town Planning Authority to *do* things but to enable it to control the way other people do things. Moreover it cannot . . . control the way any person does anything until that person first applies for permission to develop land within the Authority's area."⁵⁶

In other words, controls could not be enforced under the provisions of the statute unless a host of subsidiary mechanisms were in place and fully operational. First and foremost, township authorities had to be appointed and organized in each of the four urban sites in Zanzibar and Pemba. Their respective jurisdictions had to be precisely mapped and demarcated, which necessitated the declaration of specific "planning areas." A proposed scheme had to be developed, publicized, and reviewed. A final scheme subsequently had to be prepared and published by law—and then and only then could applications for new development be approved or denied. Of course, whether this actually constituted urban "control" was another question entirely. All of these measures consumed an enormous amount of time and resources, while the crucial question—the lack of funds to actually pay for the plan in process—remained entirely unaddressed.

In November 1955, the administration finally managed to locate its own urban planner for a two-year consultancy: Henry Kendall, who



31. Zoning map from Zanzibar Town Planning Scheme, Stone Town Plan, framed by Henry Kendall and Geoffrey Mill, 1958. Town Planning Office, Ministry of Water, Construction, Energy, Lands, and Environment, Zanzibar.

was just then retiring from service in Uganda. Later realizing that an outside consultant was not enough, the government subsequently added a resident town-planning officer on Zanzibar, Geoffrey Mill. By the end of 1956, Kendall had put together the outlines of a proposed scheme for Zanzibar. His ambitions were clear from the start, for his first draft included all of the proposals that were later thrown out as financially preposterous. Indeed, Kendall emphasized at the time that his outline represented just the beginning of something much larger: “I am firmly of the opinion that many ‘detailed schemes’ or ‘sub-division’ or ‘develop-

ment plans' will have to be submitted for approval even after the main scheme has been approved and is in force. In Kampala these plans (call them what you like) ran into many hundreds after a few years, and the main scheme must be sufficiently elastic to give the planning authority power to consider and approve them. It is quite impossible technically to include these detailed schemes in any major or outline scheme. If it could be done the plan would be out-of-date as soon as it was drawn."⁵⁷ Colonial officials could by no means claim that they were kept in the dark concerning Kendall's intentions. At each stage in the process they checked and reviewed his progress, allowing planning to proceed without any regard for the emerging financial implications. The practicalities of implementation never entered into the picture—until, of course, it was already much too late.

In February 1957, the proposed scheme was duly issued in the *Official Gazette*. The plan was then forwarded to the Town Planning Authority (which was barely up and running after being in existence for only two months) for consideration and approval. Meanwhile, the town planning officer seemed unclear as to whether the government had any intention of ever carrying the scheme out. He reiterated all of the major proposals for the chief secretary, ending with the following query, almost as a casual afterthought: "I shall be grateful therefore if you can inform me whether or not government has accepted the above proposals and whether there is any firm intention to implement them." The reply came back that the administration was already in the process of fulfilling one aspect of the plan—providing a road from Kelele Square to the Shangani main street. As to the other six projects on the list, the resident had approved them for *inclusion* in the scheme, "but it is not possible to decide which are to be implemented and in what order without having some idea of the likely cost." At this late stage, Mill was asked to provide some estimates of the expense involved. The near total lack of accounting was no cause for concern, and he was instructed to continue facilitating the process: "In the meantime there is no objection to your informing the Town Planning Authority that the schemes are being examined with a view to deciding where the funds are to be found to implement them in whole or in part and the manner and timing in which they are to be carried out."⁵⁸

In the succeeding months the planning authority went through the laborious process of polishing the plan, fleshing out all the myriad de-

tails of a totalizing and comprehensive design. This bureaucratic work, necessitated by the Town and Country Planning Decree of 1955, moved forward completely divorced from the realities of financing and feasibility. The planning authority consisted of unofficial Zanzibari members, overseen by the town planning officer. In keeping with the policy of bureaucratic devolution, consideration of the plan was cast as a purely local affair, while the colonial government retained the power to make the final decisions about funding. The authorities put off and postponed these decisions, waiting to be presented with the final program. On November 8, 1958, the planning authority submitted the final scheme for Zanzibar to the resident for approval. The plan was by then virtually complete, but so too, unfortunately, were the estimates. On the verge of passage, the deep disjuncture between intention and implementation in the plan could no longer be ignored or sustained. The totalizing sweep of the design, its costs and complications, stood out in black and white, glaringly apparent. As various departments began to review Kendall's work and tabulate the totals involved, officials reacted with shock and consternation, demanding immediate and drastic revisions from their expert consultant. Others were less than surprised by these developments, as critical commentary in the local Zanzibari press showed:

It is well said that Democracy is at a disadvantage in preference to Dictatorship; however, it is equally true beyond reasonable doubt that Democracy reaches the climax of Dictatorship with and by the consent of parliamentarians.

Some two years back, "The Town and Country Planning" Decree was passed under which town planning Officer has been empowered to deposit with British Resident his plans for any town to which the decree was applicable, within two years of the passing of decree. The town planning officer has done so now and it is obligatory on any one who is adversely affected thereby to lodge objections within two months from the date of the depositing of the plans with British Resident.

We understand the town planner has in many instances so planned that several important buildings have been marked for demolition to make open spaces to improve the health and beauty of the Town. As a result, those whose valuable properties are involved have got the shock of their lives. These shocks are not due to feeling that their properties would be acquired by Government without compensation, but because when there is so much scarcity of good building sites, they fear where to go and how? Needless to say these plans could not be put into effect

unless Government has sufficient funds, and it is distressing, therefore, to hear of such plans which would never materialize. The country needs money for social services and money to raise standard of living of its people: how then could it afford to enforce such etopian [*sic*] plans? . . . We appeal to his Excellency to put a stop to such unworkable planning and direct officers concerned to do some concrete work beneficial to country as a whole.⁵⁹

The question was not whether Kendall's plan would ever be implemented, but rather why it had come into being in the first place, taking on such far-fetched proportions. His twenty-year program for Zanzibar was far too expensive ever to be put into practice. Much like the Lanchester plan before it, the scheme was summarily approved and then quietly allowed to languish. In the wake of the design's failure, the bureaucracy was roiled with mutual recriminations, as officials sought to place the blame on Kendall and Mill, and they in turn tried to defend themselves and salvage at least a shred of their work. Little attention was paid, however, to the broader process itself: the way in which the unfolding of a plan in bureaucratic and legal practice generated a series of contradictions that made for its eventual unraveling, again and again. Kendall's vision for the city was not at odds with all that had gone before. Indeed, it was the logical culmination and ultimate expression of years of effort—a failure produced, as it were, almost by design.

CONCLUSION

Reflections on Planning, Colonial Power, and Continuities in the Present

In the late 1950s, shortly after the ambitious Kendall plan had been approved and passed on to newly formed local planning authorities that had no means to pay for or implement it, an unlikely cruise passenger came to the city. The English writer Evelyn Waugh disembarked from his ship and strolled through the streets for a few hours, reviving memories of an earlier trip. In his later travelogue, he wrote that very little had changed in urban Zanzibar since his last visit, except that the fort had been “tidied” and opened to the public. “British administration is pure, effective and benevolent,” he baldly assured his readers, ending with a sharp jab: “No doubt we shall soon read in the papers about ‘Zanzibar Nationalism’ and colonial tyranny.” Of course, anticolonial struggles and nationalist politics, in Zanzibar as elsewhere, had already been in the news for quite some time if Waugh had really cared to look. But he seemed more interested in acerbic commentary rather than serious analysis, and in any case his media attention lay elsewhere:

What I read, in the papers now, at the moment of writing, is this: “One of Zanzibar’s tourist attractions—the old stone town with its narrow streets and houses with intricately carved doors—is to be cleared partially to provide improved living conditions. The inhabitants will be moved to new areas where proper amenities can be provided. Part of the cleared area will be used for the development of warehouse space in the port area to encourage the establishment of new industries essential to the island’s economy. The estimated cost of the scheme, which ensures the balanced progress of housing, communications, commerce, industry, education,

and all community services, is £258,000, but only £58,000 can be allocated because of the lack of funds.”

Waugh then delivered the coup de grace: “The last sentence is comforting” (1960, 68–69). With characteristic sarcasm, he skewers the pieties of postwar bureaucratic modernizers, especially those with pretensions to deliver “proper amenities” or “balanced progress” in the colonies. No friend of social welfare schemes, he celebrates the failure of urban renewal plans, finding comfort in the lack of funding that abruptly undermined the entire initiative. Following Waugh, we might be tempted to see the collapse of the 1958 Kendall scheme as something of a joke—an amusing little tale of official incapacity and incompetence. But the significance of what occurred in Zanzibar was hardly restricted to a mere outpost of empire or relegated to a moment in history long passed. Nor was it ever just simply a laughing matter.

The history of flawed colonial designs might provoke us to express amazement at the colossal folly of it all, asking how officials could possibly have managed to persist in pursuing policies that appear so manifestly ungrounded, dysfunctional, and irrational. This sort of reading only makes sense, however, if we continue to sever planning from the complex cultural and political processes that make it possible in the first place, interpreting static designs and leaving all social detail behind. Without engaging schemes in a more fully ethnographic mode, it becomes impossible to grasp the importance of planning—not to mention the meaning of its incoherence or incompleteness. By reading plans retrospectively and neglecting to correct for distortions introduced by our distanced perspective, we risk falling into a trap set by a false objectivity. As Bourdieu long ago noted, “Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a ‘point of view’ on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone” (1977, 96).

By adopting this perspective, observers fail to recognize the critical difference between the making of a plan and the making sense of it. In retrospect and seen from the outside, the 1922 and 1958 schemes might seem to be striking exemplars of incompetence and misdirection. Yet they did not spring into being all at once, fully formed and available

for the inspection of a sovereign gaze. During the prolonged process of their making, the plans could not be immediately or readily apprehended as total designs laid out on the drawing board. The multiple and dispersed agents responsible for developing an orderly vision for the city rarely commanded any such magisterial vantage point; instead, they were enmeshed in a far more disjunctive and disordered social process, one that largely obscured the central contradictions of colonial rule and downplayed the gap between means and ends. To overlook this basic fact is to fundamentally misconstrue the nature of planning, its relationship to power, and the social production of the city itself.

The remarkable and repeated failures of planning in Zanzibar over the long term cannot be explained just by pointing to particular faults or flaws. In this chaotic terrain where claims of progress were so insistently undermined in practice, something far more profound was at work. Successive administrations in Zanzibar found themselves caught up in contradictions that were constitutive features of colonial power. Without representing colonialism as a force for good, and cloaking themselves in the guise of a higher civilization, the British would have had little justification for their actions. Imperial control would stand revealed as a naked exercise in force, little more than usurpation and expropriation. As a form of legitimation, however, “might makes right” lacks moral weight or persuasive power and is hardly the stuff from which hegemony is made. Whether cynically or not, colonial officials necessarily had to propound and promise to deliver far-reaching improvements or reforms. Insistent claims to modernize and rationalize indigenous worlds—overcoming alleged backwardness or barbarism—were crucial to the administration’s efforts to legitimate its presence and policies in the face of both internal and external pressures: from the metropolitan state, European rivals, disparate elements of its own bureaucracy, and diverse Zanzibaris. In its emergent outlines as a scientific and sanitary practice, comprehensive urban planning perfectly suited the ideological and material requirements of the colonial regime. Indeed, from afar, it seemed like an ideal solution, representing nothing less than a progressive means of bringing the perceived disarray of an “Orientalized” city, with its lack of a clear layout and promiscuous mix of functions, into a more rationalized and productive order.

No imperial regime could afford to simply dismiss these goals or disregard the value of more “scientific” and “enlightened” approaches. It was precisely for these reasons that officials repeatedly turned to planning throughout much of the twentieth century as a cure-all for a shifting list of alleged urban ills, seeking a total design that could be carried out efficiently and economically over time. Yet if they were compelled to embrace planning as a necessary technique of modernizing rule, colonial authorities simultaneously faced a competing imperative that made it extremely difficult to carry out ambitious social experiments or extensive projects of urban redesign: the insistence that imperialism must be rendered profitable and pay for itself, staying within the budget and conforming to the bottom line. Especially in the African context, colonial governments found it difficult to secure the revenues or loans necessary to fund the large state-building projects they desired to pursue, and Zanzibar was no exception. Of course, the imposition of the protectorate itself ironically served to create the very conditions that later administrators struggled to surmount. Diminished economic prospects were a direct result of the European scramble for Africa and the restriction of the sultan’s dominions to a couple of geographically circumscribed islands. The intrusion of British imperialism in the Western Indian Ocean served to disrupt and dismantle a vigorous transnational economy, cutting Zanzibar off from sources of raw materials and hinterland markets, reducing the eventual revenue base to a single source: the monoculture of clove production. It was by no means a propitious start for a system that was supposed to offer the benefits of social and economic transformation, and in retrospect the subsequent collapse of development schemes due to insufficient capital and resources seems unsurprising, almost predictable.

For much of the twentieth century, the sharp divide between social improvement and strict economy never served to subvert the process precisely because planning was presented as the quintessential means of mediating and overcoming this conflict. Planning in its modernist guise loomed as a powerful ideal precisely because it seemed to possess all the hallmarks of a progressive socio-spatial science. It could at once serve to enhance the economy, rationalize and reduce the costs of administration, reform the housing and health of colonial subjects,

beautify the city, and craft a new civic culture. The costs involved were nothing beside the rich future rewards that would be reaped through the magic of rational calculation and foresight. And if the plan eventually seemed too ambitious in scope as it emerged, then this was no reason to turn back. It could always be strategically implemented piece by piece over time, steadily accomplished as means allowed. If these speculative promises eventually proved to be deeply misplaced, we cannot dismiss their original force and seductive power.

A diffuse, ill-coordinated, and undercapitalized regime committed itself to formulating plans without a significant grasp of the full implications involved. The disjunctive nature of the process—its extension in space and time, the specialized and segmented division of labor on which it rested—readily allowed matters to move forward, taking on a peculiar momentum all its own. The complexities involved in formulating a total and comprehensive solution made for gaps in coordination and temporal lags, making it all the more difficult to control planning as it developed. Irrationality or foolishness was hardly the source of this dilemma. Indeed, it was largely through a series of ostensibly rational (albeit disjointed) calculations that plans were fostered in ways that repeatedly guaranteed they would never reach fruition. It was precisely the defining hallmarks of an improving bureaucratic order that hampered and hindered modernization efforts, rather than their absence: an elaborate division of labor, segmented roles and specialized expertise, hierarchical authority, and a profusion of offices and functions.

Only after the completion and approval of schemes did the colonial apparatus ever acknowledge that massive social expenditure was well beyond its means—out of the question “for the moment” at least. When funds to implement the total initiative failed to materialize, and local officials were told they would have to rely on their own resources, they scrambled to dramatically scale back urban designs that had cost so much and taken so long to formulate. Those “pressing” concerns used to justify the need for planning—the health and housing of urban Zanzibaris—were inevitably the first aspects of the schemes to be sacrificed. Vowing to fulfill the plan bit by bit over time (promises that soon proved illusory), colonial officials would plead economic necessity and counsel patience even as they set about funding what they defined as “essential” interests. In the end, the colonial state was willing to bear the costs of planning

only so long as they took the form of capital improvements designed to enhance and improve its own prospects for revenue. The rest would have to wait, as the comprehensive plan was continually postponed, replaced by a far more selective and arbitrary application in practice.

Meaningful Failures

When we look at planning ethnographically, focusing on unfolding processes rather than just the plan, a quite different perspective emerges. Urban schemes always include a set of designs on the city, but they are at the same time much more. Encoded within them are cultural visions and social statements that provide blueprints for urban lives and spaces: the way things ideally *should* be arranged and ordered. Plans inevitably provide readings of the city's past, while laying out a potential charter for an imagined future. While they try to map the coordinates of power and property, schemes also serve as the primary means to intervene in and remake socio-spatial relations. But beyond the domain of intentions, as James Holston (1989) notes, planning also extends to the instruments needed to implement proposals, including the whole array of agencies, offices, codes, practices, and data necessary to formulate a full scheme. And then, of course, we have to account for the entire question of implementation: What happens when plans begin to get engaged or embodied in everyday worlds? What resistances or deviations occur? What gets brought into being and what gets left behind? How do we encompass or account for the full range of social forces and factors that are called into play, as contestations and debates about the city take center stage?

With a more enlarged sense of planning in place, we can begin to grasp some of the ways that urban designs can fail and yet still do quite a lot of "work." While plans themselves were rarely realized in terms of the built environment in Zanzibar, that doesn't imply that they were inactive or insignificant. Indeed, while we tend to think of plans in terms of their functional aims or aspirations—what they seek to achieve—we can't forget their symbolic and rhetorical dimensions (Clarke 1999). Plans lay out a framework for action, but planning also serves to persuade and convince, to foster impressions and images (of competence and care, control and capability) whether or not anything "actually" gets done. Schemes communicate on different levels and are deployed to address

divergent audiences. The fact that plans were almost continually under way (and yet kept under wraps) allowed the colonial state to claim the mantle of innovation and progress, pointing to pending improvements while never having to actually pay for or see them through. Advancing proposals and programs also helped to telegraph a sense of confidence in the capacity of modern bureaucratic techniques and tools to master everyday worlds and remake them. At times these messages were aimed internally, as different departments tried to demonstrate their accomplishments and make claims on bureaucratic resources. But planning processes also allowed Zanzibari officials to highlight a rational and modernizing agenda for the benefit of London, justifying their presence and productivity to higher-ups in the Colonial Office. While emphasizing that they were moving forward to institute a comprehensive plan, they could simultaneously point to budgetary obstacles, trying to garner additional resources, loans, or grants. And lastly, planning also served as a means for the regime to postpone or deflect Zanzibari demands for improved conditions or services, while justifying particular policies and investments.

This strategic maneuvering and discursive work went on even as plans “failed.” These successive waves of efforts to completely refashion the totality of urban Zanzibar might appear infused with fantasy now, but we cannot forget the fact that they had quite material effects on the ground. At the very least, the production of plans meant the elaboration of an extensive administrative apparatus. Plans that never managed to materialize nonetheless worked to generate an entire world of bureaucratic forms, rules, and procedures that were selectively and unevenly applied. From ground rents and hut taxes to building codes and *barazas*, urban Zanzibaris confronted an official milieu where unpredictable decisions, unstated reasons, and unclear findings were the norm. Confusion and lack of clarity made contact with municipal bodies an altogether dicey affair, something best to be avoided as long as possible. In the prolonged interregnum between the creation of a master plan and its final abandonment, the chaos of policy and arbitrariness of the law were periodically subject to internal debate and external challenge, which often further complicated the issues involved. Wealthy property owners—Zanzibaris such as M. H. Tharia Topan or Masoud bin Ali Riyami—had the transnational experience and resources necessary to take

the colonial system on and beat it at its own bureaucratic game. They could hire sophisticated lawyers familiar with Indian precedents and British courts, exploiting contradictions, pointing out lapses or oversights, and making use of the fine print of decrees. Official claims would be met with counterclaims, requests for further study or reviews, arguments about legal standing that were often upheld, and disagreements that took quite some time and energy to sort out in the courts. While their numbers were small, they could raise havoc with official designs, clogging the bureaucracy with extended debates and disputes.

At key moments, state miscalculations provoked a sharp and sustained popular response. These direct confrontations over colonial intrusions ranged from struggles over hut taxes and the ground rent strike in the late 1920s to the general strike of 1948 and the cattle riots of 1951. But beneath the surface, there were also less obvious forms of resistance, where squatters or small traders and workers came up with subtle ways to evade the reach of municipal controls. As we've seen, midlevel officials struggled to articulate and implement a coherent hut policy in Ng'ambo throughout the 1930s. In the absence of a plan to work up to or a defined set of building codes, they relied on informal guidelines and expected the Building Authority to carry them out on a case-by-case basis. This made for a highly irregular process, where different wings of the bureaucracy didn't know or contradicted what others were doing. Property owners at the time had to apply for permission to repair or rebuild their premises. If the huts could be condemned as unsanitary or they were in a "congested" area, permission to rebuild could be refused by the medical officer of health—without acquiring the premises or paying compensation. Rules stipulating sanitary lanes and minimum plot sizes (which had no legal standing at the time) were a way to plan without a plan, paving the way for its future realization without spending a shilling. By the mid-1930s, when the capricious denial of hut rebuilding permits was sparking enough discontent and unrest that the chief secretary became alarmed, residents in Ng'ambo began to find ways to subvert the hut and plot size rules. Due to the small number of building inspectors, certain kinds of applications to reconstruct were received in the authority offices and routinely approved without being passed on to the medical officer of health. Requests to repair a single wall of a hut were included in this category, and by the late 1930s the number of these requests had risen

sharply. Hut dwellers learned to take advantage of loopholes, exploiting the gaps in the system. They patiently applied to repair one wall, waited for a sufficient period and then went on to the next, and the next, until a ruinous hut that would have been denied by the authorities was entirely rebuilt—a completely legal practice that soon became a source of consternation to the Building Authority staff.¹

If urban planning was a profound failure in one sense, it simultaneously served to create and perpetuate a mechanism of bureaucratic domination that endured long after the formal end of colonial rule. A cultural process predicated on systematic approaches, rational goals, and predictability instead produced exactly the opposite: confusion, uncertainty, and irregularity. Over and over again, British officials displayed an astonishing faith in the capacity of the law to rework the most solid realities, the bricks and mortar of the city, and thereby to fashion new kinds of urban subjects, arranged properly in space. Formal codes and regulations were viewed as the means to bring everything into line, imposing a comprehensive framework from above. And yet the authorities were continually frustrated in their attempts to make everyday life conform to the dictates of law. They made little attempt to account for the gulf between the ambitious aims of legislation and the paucity of resources available for implementation and enforcement. Consequently, in practice, decrees were selectively applied or simply ignored, the discipline envisioned in the totality degenerating into the uneven rule of the arbitrary. This very irregularity, the gaps and incoherence that marked the unstable relation between the forms of the law and the unruly domain of social practice, was the means through which a kind of bureaucratic domination was achieved. Even as Zanzibaris challenged or evaded official decisions, they still found themselves caught up in an indifferent bureaucratic morass, trying to make sense of opaque decisions, traipsing back and forth between offices, needing the proper stamps or signatures, subject to approval or inspection, and prey to plans that did not exist.

The capriciousness of this system operated with greatest force against those who were already quite vulnerable or credulous enough to believe in British promises of fair play and benevolent administration. Folded up in archival files, I occasionally found petitions or letters written on behalf of the urban poor hanging on to a precarious exist-

tence at the margins: smallholders, the elderly, or widows with small children. One such entreaty came from a resident of Mwembetanga, in Ng'ambo, whose application to repair his hut had been summarily denied. He made a personal appeal to the resident, throwing himself in effect at the feet of a powerful and distant ruler. "I, your most humble slave," he began, sounding like a loyal subject appealing to the sultan in the last century, asking for mercy or justice. "Your Excellency, we the poor and miserable natives living hand to mount [*sic*] get but rarely such opportunity to become owner of a poor hut to live in not without hard works of many years and by saving at the cost of suffering and even some starvation and avoiding as far as possible even the necessities of life." He could not afford to deconstruct his hut and move elsewhere, pleading for permission to stay at the site and repair his home. His pleas, like so many others, fell on deaf ears; the only response was bureaucratic formality and official indifference. The hut stood in an alleged sanitary lane, and if one individual was allowed to violate the rule, officials argued, then pretty soon all sanitary lanes throughout Zanzibar would be taken over by "illegal" dwellings. Poverty was no excuse for an exception: the rule of law had to be formally upheld, even if, in actual practice, it was in a state of shambles. The application was summarily denied once more, with no explanation or elaboration provided.²

The formal emphasis on correct procedure intersected neatly with failed plans, creating a potent combination. Indeed, one could argue that colonial officials knew all too well just what they were doing—and that the lack of clarity and consistency was precisely the point, creating a more insidious form of dominance. In a somewhat different context, many Iraqis, for instance, came to believe that the chaos and corruption that followed the U.S. invasion in March 2003 were more or less intentional—part of the strategy of occupation rule. As an Iraqi military psychiatrist who worked with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad commented on U.S. mismanagement at the time, "They can't be *that* incompetent. It has to be at least partly deliberate" (quoted in LeVine 2004). Conspiracy theories have an undeniable allure, seeming to hold out the prospect of at least some comfort: no matter how chaotic things get, we can still feel some reassurance that there is someone behind the scenes, pulling the strings and calling the shots. To many who feel subject to the arbitrary effects of power or buffeted by forces beyond

their command, the notion of conspiracies provides the illusion that we really know what is going on—and “they,” of course, really know what they’re doing. Endorsing this vision is simply more palatable than accepting the fact that in certain times and certain places, a conjuncture of forces has created a situation where matters have truly spun out of control.

Lee Clarke has described contingency plans put out by a range of agencies as “fantasy documents,” where experts attempt to display their control over projected future events. Raising doubts about conspiracy theories, he finds that “in fact the message is more disturbing. As cunning as experts sometimes are, the more frightening truth is that they are often unmindful of the *limits* of their knowledge and power. We have more to fear from organizations and experts overextending their reach, propelled by forces endemic to modern society, than from conniving conspiracies” (1999, 2). Planning failures certainly hit urban Zanzibaris harder and more directly, but colonial officials were never exempt from the chaos and confusion they unleashed. Instead of canny conspirators, they seemed anything but farsighted or omnipotent, repeatedly falling into the same traps and finding themselves caught in conundrums of their own making. Just as urban planning often exacerbated the very conditions of disarray it sought to resolve, so too legal measures often gave rise to contradictions and complexities that ultimately undermined a sense of order, throwing the bureaucracy into confusion and weary retrenchment.

If the repeated failure to implement plans was unique to Zanzibar, it would be easy to dismiss what happened there as an isolated case. But similar examples can be found throughout the colonial world and beyond. Over the past century, urban schemes have been routinely formulated and then replaced—relegated to the archives by new and subsequent rounds of planning. In the United States, for example, following the unveiling of the Burnham plan for Chicago, cities large and small moved to embrace planning as a tool of spatial regulation. As Richard Hogan (2003, xx) explains, waves of municipal planning were followed by comprehensive general plans and later comprehensive regional plans. But while planning may have been widely established as a professional practice, few of these schemes ever came to fruition. When we survey a wide range of urban landscapes, he notes, what is “most striking . . .

is the extent to which these plans have failed.” Of course, this insight would come as little surprise to most residents of the largest and fastest growing cities of the global South. By the dawn of the new millennium, the collapse of master planning on a world scale seemed virtually complete; even as states fitfully continued to seek technocratic solutions and external expertise or support, unplanned, unregulated, and informal settlements increasingly sprawled across the urban landscape, especially in the new megacities of the developing world (Davis 2006; Gandy 2006; Verma 2002). With regard to addressing poverty and social deprivation in African cities, “when it comes to the role of urban planning and policies in resolving these problems, the pervading impression is of the failure of governments in most African countries to make any appreciable impact on the situation” (Mabogunje 1990, 121).

From a functionalist perspective on planning, such widespread lapses of bureaucratic rationality and administrative control, repeated time and again across such a vast landscape, can only seem incomprehensible—an insoluble mystery. How could so many plans be so ineffective? How could so many different regimes pursue them at great cost, with such dismal results? Were those in charge either idiots or incompetents? While such responses might seem convenient, they are hardly convincing. Plans, after all, can only be considered “failures” within the narrow framework set up by rationalist thought, that is, because their ostensible or stated objectives were never realized. The operational results of plans, however, only constitute the tip of the iceberg: the most obvious (and least intriguing) endpoint of a much broader entity. In fact, in bureaucratic contexts marked by high degrees of complexity and uncertainty, we can readily see how “failed” plans can serve to stimulate yet *more* planning, not less, setting off a complicated chain of reactions, reviews, and reports. After an interval, the failure to implement initiatives demands further scrutiny or formal study; commissions and committees are formed to assess what went wrong the previous time around; their recommendations find fault and lay out a new agenda for action; the groundwork is prepared for an updated and approved approach, and a new round of planning begins to take shape right where the old one left off. As Weber long ago recognized, the formal rationality of bureaucratic processes can ultimately end up producing quite irrational results (Weber 1968; Ritzer 2001).

Lingering into the Present: Legacies of Flawed Planning

Accounting for failure can prove to be a complicated business. For even as these colonial plans failed to be realized, elements of them lingered on in unexpected ways, continuing to have real impact on the city into the present. Much of the tangled history of colonial planning has been erased from popular memory in Zanzibar and is almost completely absent in official accounts. It is not hard to see how this active forgetting could occur. First and foremost, colonial officials were quite assiduous in promoting their initiatives, and the documentary record they left behind overflows with references to an array of urban reforms and achievements. Many of these texts establish a kind of echo chamber, repeating and reinforcing specious claims advanced by earlier officials. On a surface reading, these accounts seem ostensibly plausible, and one has to read quite widely and deeply in the archives before inconsistencies become apparent. Second, from the very outset, ordinary Zanzibaris were excluded from inside involvement with or knowledge of the colonial planning apparatus, which was tightly controlled and centralized by British authorities and their external “experts.” The details of Zanzibar’s planning history were kept secret by colonial officials, buried behind the bureaucratic scenes and interspersed through hundreds of unrelated files scattered in diverse archives. Reconstructing the social life of plans is an arduous and abstruse process, very much a genealogical form of inquiry: “Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times,” observes Foucault. It requires “a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material” (1998, 369–70). Few have the time or resources to undertake this sort of painstaking inquiry, let alone gain access to the archives for a year or more. Third, and perhaps most important, in the 1960s the revolution intervened to create a profound break in historical consciousness and popular remembrance, reformulating the city (in certain ways), while cutting it off from its past. Longtime residents of the city fled abroad, while new arrivals flooded in from the countryside. History was no longer taught in schools, scholarly access was strictly curtailed, and things of the past were cast aside in the interest of forging new forms of mass culture and urban society.

“The Revolution!” passionately exclaimed a venerable Zanzibari woman who had lived through those days. “We all were overthrown, scattered far apart, each of us alone.”³ She was the daughter of an elite Arab family, who had returned to live in Mji Mkongwe following the uprising, adjusting to radically altered circumstances. In some ways she personalized the revolution, speaking of the dispersal of extended families, old friends, and dramatic alterations to the fabric of everyday social relations and cultural life. As she saw it, the revolution had achieved mostly what it set out to do, utterly overturning and transforming her world. And she was quite right: in so many ways, the revolutionary period ushered in dramatic changes in the space of the city, inscribing new names, reworking monuments, altering land use and ushering in new residents, while fostering new ideals and urban practices. But amidst these ruptures, striking continuities remained that received little notice or remark at the time.

The sultan’s government was swept aside, replaced by the Revolutionary Council, but the Town Planning Office and Building Authority continued on much as before, operating quietly and unobtrusively under new management. Over the *longue durée*, aspects of plans kept cropping up in new guises, resurfacing time and again. Lanchester, for instance, had first raised the modernist ideal of zoning the city by functional uses back in the 1920s, to little avail. But zoning formed the backbone of the later Kendall plan, which was driven by the logic of organizing the city into “neighborhood units.” And postrevolutionary planning took right up where Kendall left off, from the 1968 East German plan to the 1982 Chinese master plan, which broke the city down into five residential zones: Stone Town, villa zone (Mazizini, for “senior officials or high-income families or expatriates”), multi-story apartment building zones (Michenzani, for example), low-density new development zone, and squatter areas. Much of the focus of the scheme, which remains the last master plan covering the entire city, was on the proposed layout of four new communities, each consisting of five to seven neighborhoods (drawn right from the “neighborhood unit” approach favored by Kendall in 1958). And subsequent efforts have continued on in this vein, insofar as a series of conservation plans have singled out Stone Town as a unique historic zone with special conservation policies and a separate authority to administer it (Sheriff 1995).

As Garth Myers remarks, “Many methods, tactics, and strategies associated with colonial planning remained intact during the postcolonial era despite superficial changes in professed ideology” (1995, 1346). Like the Lanchester plan before it, most planning proposals in the 1958 Kendall scheme were already dead in the water long before the revolution took over, but the extensive bureaucratic and legal apparatus created to support it has survived almost untouched, insinuated into the background. After the revolution, most colonial legislation remained on the books, with the designated legal authority simply being changed from “the British resident” to the president of the Revolutionary Government. Throughout the revolutionary period, the only way to issue an approved plan legally was to follow the complicated provisions of the 1955 Town and Country Planning Decree (declaration of a planning area, appointment of a planning authority, formation of a scheme, publication and provisions for public comment, and so forth). And indeed, several decades of urban policy aimed at rehabilitating Stone Town can ultimately be traced back to colonial precedents. The Revolutionary Government used the Town and Country Planning Decree to designate a new authority for the Stone Town, and efforts to impose building controls can be directly traced back to colonial building regulations, including the 1929 Towns Decree. As the conservation plan for Stone Town frankly stated in the mid-1990s, “The laws controlling town planning, building controls, land use, new development, and urban services are largely those introduced by the British administration in the 1920s and later updated in the 1950s” (Aga Khan Trust for Culture 1996, 109).

The continuance of colonial policies, bureaucratic forms, and legal frameworks in the postcolonial period has been accompanied by selective erasure of the actual history of past planning. The British impact and the role played by Lanchester and Kendall have been rewritten to conform with a far more positive and progressive script—ironically, following precisely the sort of terms that Portal, Pearce, or Dutton might have penned themselves. By the late 1970s, colonialism was receding from local memory, and socialist policies and an autocratic and repressive state were increasingly faulted for urban ills, especially deterioration in housing and decline in services. As efforts to rehabilitate the city began to take off, and officials endeavored to search for external aid and expertise in a neoliberal age, British colonialism began to take on more

constructive tones, at least in terms of being credited with shaping the city in its modern guise. “During the early decades of the British Protectorate the Stone Town saw numerous improvements in services and facilities,” the 1982 UN/Habitat plan for Stone Town assures us (LaNier et al. 1983, 1.4). Or as the later Aga Khan master plan confidently stated, in the early years of the protectorate, under Gerald Portal, “improvements to the town were thus carried out through a series of administrative solutions. The initiation of comprehensive physical planning would have to wait until well into the twentieth century” (Aga Khan Trust for Culture 1996, 53), as if “comprehensive physical planning” had ever been a real presence at all. Like earlier colonial reports, few if any examples were provided to substantiate these bald claims.

Reports covering the history of the city routinely went through a succession of plans, treating various intentions and proposals as if the ideology of planning alone was sufficient. Urban initiatives would be listed and discussed at length, giving them weight without any mention of the fact that most remained unimplemented or ineffective. In the process, the legacy of British colonial planning was utterly and thoroughly revised. “In 1928 [*sic*] H. V. Lanchester carried out a survey and made some recommendations for the improvement of urban amenities,” the Habitat report declares. The text then mentions many of his proposals—port development, demolition of housing in Malindi, relocation of the Customs House and warehouses to the new port, new areas for warehouses, and so on, concluding, “Most of these recommendations have been implemented.” More than this, Lanchester, we are told, “was tremendously concerned with health and sanitary improvements,” but somehow his scanty knowledge, colonial racism, and disregard for indigenes were left unmentioned (LaNier 1983, 1.4–1.6). Not, of course, that there was any deep conspiracy here: the authors, just like Lanchester and Kendall before them, were external consultants hired to throw together a master plan on a short time frame, and they didn’t possess extensive knowledge of the city’s history or develop deep contacts with local residents. *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*. Similarly, the later Aga Khan team of planners placed great emphasis on Lanchester’s ideas and approach, as if intentions alone were enough to remake the city. Nowhere do we hear anything about financing difficulties, flawed efforts, or failures of implementation. Indeed, one might think Lanchester was a sensi-

tive conservationist before his time, a figure cast very much in their own image: “Lanchester’s approach to planning was to refrain from wholesale redevelopment, preferring instead corrective improvements to the urban fabric. This approach was followed in the plan for Zanzibar. He carried out a detailed physical survey of the town and recommended a series of improvements” (Aga Khan Trust for Culture 1996, 53).

Similar emphases on the aspirations of planners (rather than their actual achievements or the social lives of plans in everyday terms) dominated discussions of Kendall as well:

A second urban plan was drawn up in 1958 by a team of British planners led by H. Kendall and G. Mill. . . . The plan sought to reduce the density of the population in the Stone Town, at its highest in those years, with planning and building regulations that encouraged people to move to outlying areas. . . . The 1958 scheme contained various proposals to control development in the Stone Town through land use zoning and residential and building density controls. The scheme stressed the importance of reducing certain industrial activities within the historic area. The proposals also included plans for re-developing the market area, which called for the demolition of the Darajani Chawl and the Estella market, as well as reclamation of the Funguni basin and creation of a bus terminal at the junction of Creek and Hollis roads. (Aga Khan Trust for Culture 1996, 55–56)

Reading this, one might never know that the plan was mostly abandoned for lack of funds just as soon as it was approved. Darajani Chawl still stands today; the market was never redeveloped; and the bus terminal remains a sketch on a map (see figure 32). Moreover, one would never realize from this text that the 1958 plan took over two decades to come into being, the product of ongoing bureaucratic confusion and legal chaos. Nor are these idealizing views simply restricted to development experts or planners with a limited knowledge of Zanzibar’s past. Indeed, it permeates official histories and has come to constitute bureaucratic consciousness as well. “Examine Lanchester’s plan,” a senior Zanzibari official told me. “It provides an explanation of history, where people came from, how they influenced things, how they arrived. I recommend this [plan]. You know, it is a very good document. . . . Lanchester combined improvement with development, or redevelopment, because he reclaimed this city.”⁴



32. Darajani Chawl, facing Creek Road, fifty years after the Kendall plan had called for market redevelopment. Photograph by author.

Such views were stunningly misplaced but by no means isolated. When talking with diverse Zanzibaris about problems in the city, all too often they regarded the past through a powerfully nostalgic lens, glossing the colonial period as a time when things worked, the streets were clean, order was enforced, and money held its value (Bissell 2005). The decay and deterioration of the city was attributed to postcolonial incompetence or neglect, the indifference, mismanagement, or corruption of contemporary elites. Many were preoccupied with contemporary political and social hopes, engaged in the ongoing struggle to make a living and make a life. To the vast majority of the population, born in the 1970s and later, colonialism seemed already remote and rather abstract, far removed from their everyday concerns. And as one wanders through the streets of urban Zanzibar now, the signs of failed plans are not immediately apparent. Like the historical landscape of my grandfather's Ohio farm, the presence of the past is either submerged or invisible unless you know where to look. Inaction, incompleteness, and incoherence do not leave an obvious architectural footprint; bureaucratic struggle,

conducted in secrecy and surrounded by silence, leaves only a bewildering paper trail behind. In this sense, it is altogether unsurprising that most residents of the city, officials, NGOs, and expatriates involved in urban reconstruction view the colonial contribution in a surprisingly glowing light.

But the effects of these contemporary developments on the city and the lives of its citizens have been altogether perverse and pernicious. Most strikingly, a misguided modernist faith in planning has been revived and reinforced, as well as a reliance on external technocratic expertise and aid as sources of development—with absolutely predictable and disastrous results. Even as colonial planning and urban policy has been reimagined as effective and well organized, postcolonial planning has unerringly repeated the failures of the colonial past. Since the revolution, there have been four major planning initiatives in quick succession in urban Zanzibar: the 1968 East German plan, the 1982 Chinese master plan, the 1982 UN/Habitat “integrated strategy” for the Stone Town, and the 1992 Aga Khan conservation plan. As comprehensive schemes, they have had limited material impact on the alleged problems they were supposed to resolve, while consuming millions of dollars; enriching consultants; generating reams of reports, maps, studies, and memorandums; perpetuating elite interests; reshuffling agencies and authorities; enlarging the bureaucracy; and spurring repeated efforts to untangle administrative snafus, overlapping jurisdictions, and legal conflicts.

While some Zanzibaris acknowledged recurrent problems with specific plans, few traced them back to their colonial roots. A planning official in the principal urban ministry agreed that postcolonial efforts had gone awry, consuming resources while not producing results. As he noted, there was a surfeit of plans, but little effort to see them through:

Planning should look at what improvements have been recommended in the past, and then implement them—not just prepare more analysis and the drawing of maps. Social work—looking at the problem socially, politically, economically, culturally—is the plan, it is not technical. Base your work on what has already been done: the Chinese come here and offer their plan, then LaNier with his version, and finally Siravo—they all came trying to create something new. I don’t think they even went to the Planning Office to ask the question of affordability, our means to

implement whatever they came up with. Most of these plans come out of the “Development Control” school of thought on planning, seeking to prevent this or that from going forward, and turning planners into policemen—rather than seeing plans as guiding tools.⁵

Like Lanchester, Kendall, and the other plans that went before, the multiyear formulation of the Aga Khan plan was paid for, but then no money remained (or was ever found) to carry it out. As the chief planner leading the effort confessed to me just as he was leaving the islands, “We’re trying to find a mechanism to implement the plan. The plan is approved but pretty soon you realize it’s all in your mind, it’s all on paper. You must move on to the next stage. . . . You don’t want to leave the plan for five years and then come back to it—it will be so far out of date that you would have to start all over again.”⁶ More than fifteen years later, the plan makes for an expensive coffee table volume, but little more—and here we are, ready to start all over again. “Urban planners, municipal authorities, and city officials have looked upon the cityscape as a malleable work in progress amenable to manipulation, tinkering, and improvement. They have visualized the urban landscape through the lens of the classical tropes of modernity, laying particular stress on efficiency, rationality, and functionality,” writes Martin Murray in the context of Johannesburg. In Zanzibar, as in South Africa, this modernizing myth has endured into the postcolonial present, readily surviving the revolution and gaining renewed life at the end of the twentieth century. Given the repeated collapse of plans under colonial and postcolonial regimes, it seems altogether stunning that so few today seem to grasp “the folly of the unending yet futile efforts to superimpose formal order, rational coherence, and spatial stability on the inherently unstable urban landscape” (Murray 2008, 7).

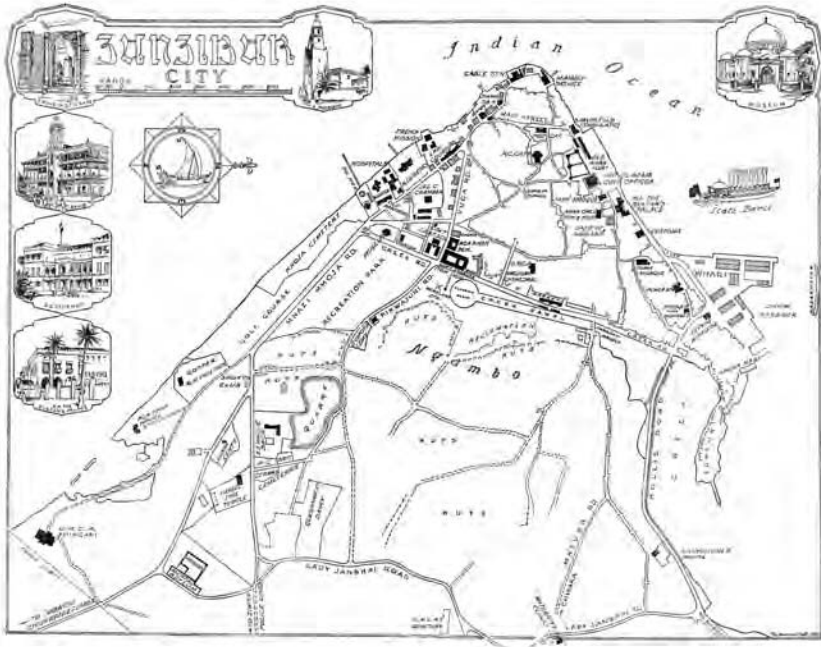
One day I was talking with a Zanzibari friend of a friend in Malindi quarter, a longtime resident of the Chinese-Swahili community who had recently returned from Hong Kong. The electricity was out that day, and we were discussing how various neighborhoods of the city had different problems with access to basic services like water or power. After a while, he just shook his head in disbelief,

How many expats have already come here to make reports?—I can’t count them all. Every time they come, they say they are preparing a “feasibility

study,” they’re preparing a “draft report,” and this and that and the other thing. They stay for a while to conduct their work and as soon as they finish their reports they go on their way, saying that the work has already been completed. But it’s not so. They leave their reports here and take off, saying “we have finished our business,” and nothing more is done. These reports are given to the government, the experts go back to their countries, and these reports then sit in offices only gathering dust. First the water expats arrived to make a “feasibility study,” then the electricity people came, then the drains, and now they’re preparing a “master plan” for the city. Reports are all over the place. But the city remains just the same, just the same—the work is never done.⁷

This pointed critique was aimed at the postcolonial present, and yet the real sources of futility and failure stretched far back into the recesses of the past. The material constructions of colonial rule, fitfully carried out over seven decades, paled in comparison to what British officials promised, promoted, and planned to achieve. It is not just that the colonial authorities somehow failed to deliver or came up short, though that is certainly true. Rather, the colonial state committed itself to a peculiarly modern vision, seeking to use scientific and technical tools to remake the social space of the city in a comprehensive way. But the pursuit of a more rational and efficient order came unstrung almost from the outset, plunging authorities into profound disorders they could not comprehend or contain. The futility of planning never provoked a through reconsideration of the overall aims of imperial rule, its bureaucratic capacities and rationalities, or the resources it could command. Much less did authorities critically reexamine their faith in the value of a modernized city, laid out on totalizing lines according to plan. When schemes never left the drawing board, few realized what had gone wrong or paused to reflect on past mistakes. The plan was maintained “in place” but relegated to the shelf, waiting to be implemented as means allowed. As more and more time elapsed, and the plan slowly faded into the past, changes in personnel and gaps in institutional memory made it possible for the process to start up and take off all over again, ungrounded and incoherent as ever.

The enduring preoccupation of colonial urban policy was to establish and fix the division of the city into two parts, drawing definitive socio-spatial distinctions. Although this dream took on diverse expres-



33. Late colonial map of Zanzibar city, highlighting Orientalist monuments and tourist sites in Stone Town, versus alleged emptiness and “huts” in Ng’ambo, 1952. R. H. Crofton, *Zanzibar Affairs, 1914–1933* (London: Francis Edwards, 1953).

sions over time, Director of Medical and Sanitary Services W. Leslie Webb captured the official ideology quite well in the mid-1930s: “Zanzibar town may be divided into two main areas within each of which living conditions conform, broadly, to two separate standards,” he wrote. “There are the areas lying to the west of the creek in which the Arab type of stone house is in use and the area to the east of the creek, including Funguni, where native type huts are the rule.”⁸ As we’ve seen, the distinction between Stone Town and Ng’ambo (often rendered in other, analogous terms—between “town proper” and “native location,” or “business areas” and “residential” or “hutting” areas) encoded a vision of a racial and class order that was mostly a bureaucratic projection. But over decades, even arbitrary or unclear administrative fiats, decrees, and regulatory codes can begin to shape worlds seemingly in their own image. Colonialism served to craft Stone Town as a more privileged sphere,

and bequeathed separate building codes, plans, and local authorities for Stone Town and Ng'ambo. During the revolution, the values attached to these areas and their demarcations shifted, but the notion of distinct practices and policies separated by area continued on as before. And postcolonial planning has only served to sharpen and intensify the distinctions between the two sides of the city. There are separate local bodies administering the two sides of the city, the Baraza la Mji and the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority (STCDA). Stone Town has been the subject of two conservation plans and numerous donor projects, as well as attracting reams of private investment in upscale hotels, shops, restaurants, and cultural facilities. In neoliberal conditions, Stone Town has been "restored" to a position of prominence as a global tourist destination, based on the re-creation of an "exotic" Orientalist and colonial past. The tourist industry focuses almost exclusively on Stone Town and the beaches, with few tourists ever venturing into Ng'ambo—by far the largest and most important section of the city, where the overwhelming majority of its residents live.

As during the colonial period, planning has been used to advance elite interests, deepening geographic and class inequalities. Western conservationists emphasize the need to rehabilitate Stone Town as an emblem of the cultural heritage of Zanzibaris. But mass tourism and a booming property market have served to drive working-class and poorer Zanzibaris from the heart of their "culture" because they can no longer afford to live anywhere near Stone Town or the inner areas of Ng'ambo. A survey official described the latest conservation plan as a product of external desires, describing it as a waste of time and resources: "There was no need for the master plan—the money should have been used to improve Mwembetanga or Vikokotoni [Ng'ambo *mitaa*]. The Stone Town has been over-planned, and traditional building areas [outside Stone Town] are being neglected. *Wazungu* [Europeans] come and focus immediately on Stone Town, they throw a considerable amount of money at it, where the problems are few. What are the problems faced here? Nothing that can't be done with building regulations."⁹ Like the other plans that came before, the Aga Khan effort singled out Stone Town to the exclusion of Ng'ambo. And just as before, it was approved but never funded. Fifteen years on, there were few results on the ground, with one possible exception: a costly 2009 restoration of a colonial gar-



34. Fifteen years after the passage of the Aga Khan Plan, one of the few projects to actually be implemented: rehabilitation of Forodhani, formerly the Jubilee Gardens. Most of the large structures along the seafront have been rehabilitated to promote a tourist economy, part and parcel of the preservation of Stone Town at the expense of the vast expanse of the city (2009). Photograph by author.

den along the seafront, much of which has been remade as a zone for cultural tourism (see figure 34).

Postcolonial plans, just like their predecessors, have failed even as they work to sow legal confusion, enlarge the bureaucracy, exacerbate inequitable distributions of resources, frustrate popular demands for democracy, and extend a peculiarly modernist mystique: faith in Western development expertise and the power of planning itself. Still in search of the city perfect, plans come and go; consultants get paid well; donors grease the wheels; and the problems of urban residents mostly endure or worsen, as the state searches for solutions abroad that somehow never quite materialize. In a cruel irony, many Zanzibaris now look back to the British and admire their alleged designs, when it was precisely colonialism that laid the uncertain and disorderly foundations of the present. Instead of focusing on the available means at hand or relying on local

resourcefulness and indigenous creativity, residents and officials look for deliverance from experts and donors overseas, pursuing elaborate plans and hoping they will pave the way to a future that somehow never quite arrives.

Zanzibar city and those who dwell within its complicated intersections would be far better served if we (and they) could manage to dispense with these modern dreams of total design. Instead of seeking to impose a technocratic vision of complete order and control, we must shift to engage African cities as they actually exist, embracing and drawing upon those elements that actually make city life worth living: the improvisational, the unknown, the capacity to surprise, and other unpredictable arts of the everyday. Urban Zanzibar is in many ways a chaotic and messy place, filled with rough edges, disruptions, and disorders. For too long, these features have been defined as problems, when they should have been valued as sources of strength and creativity. Zanzibar city is also a space suffused with raw beauty and grace, where urbanites innovate, maneuver, and make do, showing uncommon resourcefulness and ingenuity as they inhabit the city and fashion meaningful worlds in space and time. It is precisely these creative cultural capacities and energies that form the heart of the city, and any planning process that seeks to deny their potential will always end in futility—the elusive search for a pristine order degenerating into little more than an exhausting exercise in self-defeat. It is well past time for Zanzibaris and others to dismantle the colonial legacy of incompetence that has hindered them from realizing their own indigenous and everyday powers of urban design.

NOTES

1. COSMOPOLITAN LIVES, URBANE WORLDS

1. Much of the ensuing account of the city's origins draws on Sheriff 1995 and Gray 1962.

2. Twelve years earlier, in February 1799, another British squadron had stopped over in Zanzibar for two weeks, and one of the officers, Lieutenant Bissell of the *Leopard*, described the settlement in very modest terms, finding it both small and rather desultory. "The town," he wrote, "is composed of some few houses, and the rest are huts of straw mat, which are very neat" (quoted in Gray 1962, 98).

3. Col. Atkins Hamerton to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 2 January 1844, ZNA: AA 12/29, p. 100.

4. *Mwungwana* designated non-slave status, but more generally it had connotations of gentility and cultivation. The precise characteristics marking a well-born citizen of coastal society changed over time and were certainly contested, but they often included such aspects as ties to families that were well established or long-standing, a reputation for Islamic knowledge and piety, certain levels of wealth and property, as well as proper displays of dress and deportment.

5. *Mrima* is a Kiswahili term used by islanders to refer to the opposite mainland; it can be variously translated as "coast," "littoral," or "shore." In nineteenth-century Zanzibar, it referred to the coastal belt (between the sea and the interior) across from the isles, running from around Tanga in the north to Kilwa in the south. The *mrima* coast was that area where the Omani sultanate claimed and exercised its monopoly on trade (Sheriff 1987).

6. This rough parity between the sultan and other Omani patricians eroded as the nineteenth century progressed. As the British forced successive sultans to accept a series of treaties restricting the slave trade, al-Busaidi rulers faced increasing resistance on the part of their subjects, especially the planters and traders who were most directly impacted. Following the 1873 treaty, Sultan Barghash proved particularly adroit in using British backing to give himself a stronger hand both on the mainland and in the islands against internal opposition, altering the balance of power in his favor. But British "support" was a double-edged sword, one aimed ultimately at the heart of the sultanate itself.

7. Among elites, this was a long-established practice. In the 1840s, when resident merchants in Zanzibar estimated the urban population at between 50,000 and 60,000, Browne initially found these claims "greatly exaggerated" given the size of the city. But on second thought, he wrote, "When we reflect that some of the wealthy Arabs have over a thousand

slaves, who are crowded into small huts, and that there are as many houses on one acre of ground as there are in America in six, the estimate does not appear unreasonable" (1846:332).

8. Frederick Cooper's pioneering work on slavery in East Africa (1977, 1980) is an indispensable place to start for an extensive discussion of these issues. Glassman (1995) and Fair (2001) also provide rich insight into the everyday struggles and cultural practice of slavery along the *mrima* coast and in urban Zanzibar.

9. Having slaves to act in one's stead was particularly important to elite Arab women, whose social circulation and access to public space was hedged about by cultural restrictions. Slave women could go places that elite women could not, engage in dealings that were prohibited to their mistresses, convey information and gossip, communicate with intimates or other mistresses, and even participate in dance and ritual.

10. During the early colonial period, it became commonplace to describe Arabs as the "ruling race" or aristocracy of the islands, collapsing race and class. One typical example, which comes from a "précis of information" on the protectorate first issued in the early 1890s and then revised in 1900 by the intelligence division of the War Office: "Besides the few European officials and merchants, there is an upper class of landowners of fairly pure Arab blood, distinguished by their appearance and bearing, and forming the most powerful class in the state. They are fine handsome men, dignified and courteous in manner; they are often superbly dressed, and live in considerable style, while the lower class of Swahili are poor, noisy, and pretentious." For the précis, see ZNA: BA 109/1, p. 102.

11. For detailed and rich accounts of the growth and development of Ng'ambo in the nineteenth century, see Fair 2001 and Myers 1993, both of which I draw upon here.

12. For the "Survey of Zanzibar Town, 1893," see ZNA: AC 16/22.

2. UNCERTAIN STATES

1. Gerald Portal to Lord Salisbury, 19 August 1892, Rhodes House Library (RHL): Mss. Afr. s. 106.

2. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 16 August 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

3. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 2 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

4. Portal to Sir Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer), 14 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

5. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 14 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105. See also his post to H. Percy Anderson of 16 August 1891, where he highlighted alleged threats to European personhood and prestige: "The police are in a shocking state: foreigners and white men are being everywhere knocked about by the niggers & nobody is arrested and punished, and people say that things were not like this before the English protectorate & they say so with great truth."

6. Trained under Lord Cromer in Cairo, Portal was well versed in the more subtle arts of diplomatic manipulation. His correspondence home offers plentiful evidence of his skill as a bureaucratic operator, adroitly maneuvering to seek attention and advantage in the Foreign Office world. As he admitted in a private letter to his wife in 1892, "Things are beginning to work more smoothly. . . I seldom trouble the F.O. with telegrams now, which is a proof that all my arrangements are going on well, but the only effect of which will be, I fear, to cause the F.O. people to forget all about me and Zanzibar. The best way of keeping to the Front is always to be having rows and troubles." Portal to Lady Alice Portal, 25 March 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 113.

7. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 2 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Portal to Sir John Kirk, 13 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

10. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 2 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

11. Like other British agents before him, Portal certainly understood how to use violence and the threat of force to achieve his ends. "Just at present this island is in a transition

state, I am trying to convert an irresponsible Arab despotism into a more or less constitutional Govt. under direct English control," he wrote to Rear Admiral Nicholson in Cape Town, asking for military reinforcements. "This entails administering a few pills to the Sultan and his Arabs which they don't altogether like, and it is useful to have a strong 'argument' in the harbour to which we can point when they get very obstinate and cantankerous" (Portal to Rear Admiral H. F. Nicholson, 1 October 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105). See also his letter to Lady Alice Portal of 8 March 1892, where he relates how he cowed "the Sultan and his Arabs" into compliance by threatening to land British troops on shore and to arrest any noncompliant elites at court and have them forcibly sent into exile (RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 113).

12. Most of these agreements restricted the slave trade, beginning with the Moresby Treaty of 1822, which prohibited the export of slaves from the sultan's ports to any country south of Cape Delgado or east of a line drawn from Diu Head in India (Coupland 1967 [1939]:12). The initial accord did not alter the trade in much of the sultan's dominions and was principally aimed at cutting off the supply to so-called Christian nations, especially the French, who controlled the southern markets in the Indian Ocean. Further agreements followed in 1839, 1845, and 1850, adding geographical restrictions and providing the British with enhanced powers of naval patrol, inspection, and seizure of dhows discovered in violation of the agreements. While the sultan could claim potential losses and threats of social unrest to extract delays or concessions, each agreement progressively narrowed the extent of the sultan's dominions and provided the British with enhanced powers to intervene, which could later be deployed as leverage to extract yet further concessions. Other crucial treaties included the Canning award of 1861, the Frere treaty of 1873, the Delimitation Treaty of 1886, and the Anglo-German agreement of 1890 that established the protectorate itself.

13. Portal to Lord Salisbury, 23 October 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105. As to "robbery" being dead, Portal was dead wrong. Indeed, the worst was yet to come, and the British were directly responsible. In what Randall Pouwels has termed the "shabbiest incident," the Foreign Office "virtually bilked" the sultan out of £200,000 to pay off the shareholders of the Imperial British East Africa Company (1987:165). The sultan had been forced to accept this sum (which he regarded as insultingly low) in 1890 as compensation from Germany for handing over the southern coastal strip on the mainland. As the "payment" was negotiated and arranged by the British, these funds were invested in the metropole. They were subsequently included in the "public treasury" under Portal's reforms, and his successor, Rennell Rodd, sought to get the funds released for economic development in Zanzibar. The Foreign Office decided otherwise, seizing the sultan's money to cover the losses of domestic IBEAC colonial speculators.

14. Lord Salisbury to Portal, 8 March 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 113.
15. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 19 June 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 106.
16. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 3 November 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.
17. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 16 August 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.
18. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 16 August 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.
19. Portal to Lady Alice Portal, 27 February 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 113.
20. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 14 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.
21. Portal to Archdeacon Jones Bateman, 11 June 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108.
22. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 2 November 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.
23. Portal to Lord Salisbury, 3 February 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108.
24. Portal to the Hon. Eric Barrington, 2 September 1891, and to Lord Cromer, 14 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.
25. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 2 November 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.
26. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 19 November 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

27. Portal to R. T. Rhode, Chief Manager, New Oriental Banking Co., London, 30 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105. See also the letters to Messrs Lewis & Peat, Horace Farquhar of the African Banking Corp., F. C. Chappell, L. Thompson, Major Chapman, and L. C. Masfen in Mss. 105, 106, and 108 for other examples of Portal's efforts in commercial promotion.

28. Portal to Lord Salisbury, 23 October 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

29. Portal to Lord Salisbury, 3 February 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108.

30. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 3 February 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108.

31. Portal to Lord Salisbury, 3 November 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

32. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 3 November 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

33. Portal to L. C. Masfen, Esq., 19 May 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108.

34. Portal to Lord Salisbury, 23 October 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

35. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 17 June 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 106.

36. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 9 May 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 106.

37. *Ibid.*

38. See his letter of 8 March 1892 to Lady Alice Portal, where he relates how he responded to Arab petitioners by threatening them with imprisonment and exile. "All the others have grovelled before me and said that they are foolish children and implored me to forgive them and the petition has been publicly torn into shreds. . . . The whole thing was got up by the Palace people who hoped to force or frighten me into reducing the tax on cloves. I have now publicly told them all that I had been contemplating reducing the tax, but since they had tried to force my hand and demand it as a right—I would see them all dead first!" Portal went on to say that he hated "being bluffed or hustled," concluding, "I have thoroughly enjoyed this little episode" (RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 113).

39. Portal to Lord Rosebery, 3 October 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 106.

40. Portal to L. C. Masfen, Esq., 19 May 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Portal to Lord Salisbury, 23 October 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

43. Portal to L. C. Masfen, Esq., 19 May 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108. See also his letter of 3 October 1892 to Lord Rosebery, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 106.

44. See "Correspondence Respecting Slavery in Zanzibar," in Zanzibar Correspondence, 1893–1901, Royal Commonwealth Society Library (RCSL), especially Rodd to Earl of Rosebery, 31 December 1883 (no. 8), and Hardinge to Earl of Kimberley, 26 February 1895 (no. 12) and 13 March 1895 (no. 14).

45. John Houston Sinclair, "Senex Africanus: Reminiscences of Early Days in England, Kenya, Zanzibar, and Tangiers," n.d. [1955], RCSL: Mss. 47, pp. 93, 95. Sinclair at the time was serving as consul under Clarke.

46. See Hollingsworth 1953, 209–11. For administrative changes following 1913, see Zanzibar Protectorate Blue Books, ZNA: BA 10/1–35 (1913–47).

3. COLONIAL CARTOGRAPHIES

1. Portal to Sir John Kirk, 13 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

2. Portal to Sir H. Percy Anderson, 2 November 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

3. Portal to Lt. C. S. Smith, 28 August 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

4. Portal to Capt. W. H. Salmon, 19 September 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

5. Portal to R. H. Boyce, Office of Works, 2 December 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

6. Portal to H. M. Primrose, Office of Works, 12 February 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 108. See also letters to R. H. Boyce Esq. in the Office of Works, 17 August 1891, 2 October 1891, and 2 December 1892, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

7. John Houston Sinclair, a vice consul (later chief secretary and resident) who was apprenticed to an architect in his youth, designed these structures (and more) in the "Indo-Saracenic" style. In an undercapitalized colonial system that emphasized making the most

of the “man on the spot,” Sinclair was able to long indulge his penchant for Orientalist design without much competition, returning to Zanzibar to consult on architectural matters as late as the 1940s.

8. “Report on the Public Health Division for the Year 1917,” p. 1, ZNA: BA 7/41. See also BA 7/1, BA 7/3, BA 7/40, and BA 7/42 for related administrative categories.

9. Director of Public Works to Chief Secretary, 15 November 1936, ZNA: AB 39/178.

10. For material on building rules, see ZNA: AB 39/35; for usage by medical staff, see ZNA: AB 39/207 and AJ 19/10.

11. Regarding area definitions, see ZNA: AB 39/35 and AB 39/180.

12. “Survey of Zanzibar Town, 1893,” ZNA: AC 16/22.

13. Ibid.

14. Commandant of Police to Acting First Minister, 24 August 1910, ZNA: AB 39/309.

15. For documents on street names, see ZNA: AB 39/309, especially minute to Chief Secretary with part III clause 15 of 1929 Towns Decree (draft) of 18 August 1928; Teja Singh, list of street names of 27 July 1950; Teja Singh, memo on “Names of Roads and Streets in Zanzibar Town” of 14 September 1950; note by As (M) to Ad Sec of 3 May 1951 and the reply by Ad Sec to As (M) of 7 May 1951.

16. Cyril Francis, “Legal Report by Attorney General: The Towns Decree, no. 2 of 1929,” 15 March 1929, ZNA: AB 39/182. For more on municipal bodies, see ZNA: AB 39/308 and AB 39/184.

17. Zanzibar Town Council Minutes, 17 December 1909, ZNA: AC 16/13.

18. John Houston Sinclair, “Senex Africanus,” n.d. [1955], RCSL: Mss. 47, p. 94.

19. Zanzibar Town Council Minutes, 11 March 1910, ZNA: AC 16/13.

20. Zanzibar Town Council Minutes, 18 August, 10 September, 1 October 1909, and 8 April 1910, ZNA: AC 16/13.

21. “Notice,” *Official Gazette*, 24 February 1892, p. 3, ZNA: BA 104/1.

22. John Houston Sinclair, “Senex Africanus,” n.d. [1955], RCSL: Mss. 47, p. 75.

23. Portal to Dr. de Souza, Portuguese Acting Consul General, 20 August 1891, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 105.

24. Zanzibar Town Council Minutes, 17 September, 1 October, 4 December, 31 December 1909, and 18 February 1910, ZNA: AC 16/13.

25. First Minister F. R. Barton to Sinclair, 27 March 1911, ZNA: AB 39/268.

26. Barton to Sinclair, 7 November 1913, ZNA: AB 39/268.

27. Resident Pearce to High Commissioner for Zanzibar, Mombasa, 26 April 1915, ZNA: AB 39/268.

28. Director of Agriculture Frank McClellan to Attorney General Percy Shearman-Turner, 9 December 1913, ZNA: AB 39/255A & B.

29. Report by the Crown Lands Committee, 1912, ZNA: AE 4/3.

30. Andrew McClure to Chief Secretary Sinclair, 15 April 1921, ZNA: AB 76/77.

31. “Payment of Ground Rents,” 30 April 1909, ZNA: AB 36/20.

32. Andrade to Clarke, n.d., ZNA: AB 36/12.

33. Sinclair to Director of Agriculture, 6 July 1914, ZNA: AB 36/12.

34. Percy Shearman-Turner to Chief Secretary, 10 October 1917, ZNA: AB 36/12.

35. Acting Secretary, Wakf Commission to Chief Secretary, 18 August 1917, ZNA: AB 36/12.

36. Acting Assistant Chief Secretary Joseph Gilbert, 16 February 1918, ZNA: AB 36/12.

4. DISEASE, ENVIRONMENT, AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING

1. “Public Health Department Report for 1913,” ZNA: BA 7/1, p. 21.

2. This portrait was echoed in numerous other colonial narratives. The first urban plan for Zanzibar, for instance, substantially reiterates Hollingsworth’s views on sanitation under the sultanate. See Lanchester 1923:57.

3. "Public Health Department Report for 1913," ZNA: BA 7/1, p. 24.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Dr. Henry Curwen, "Review of Simpson Report," 21 June 1915, ZNA: AB 2/264.
6. "Public Health Department Report for 1913," ZNA: BA 7/1, p. 25.
7. Such attitudes were both common and enduring among colonial officials. A decade later, the resident played on similar stereotypes to blame Indians for urban difficulties: "The vast majority of Indians necessarily adopt a low standard of living and the crowded conditions under which they exist is one of the serious problems which confront the medical authorities. They, and practically the whole of the Indians, have the most elementary conception of sanitation, yet they reside in the main area of the township." Resident Rankine to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 May 1933, ZNA: AB 39/308. For earlier discourse on the "Indian bazaar quarter" as "hopelessly dirty and smelly," a breeding zone for disease, see Younghusband 1910, 218–19.
8. "Public Health Department Report for 1913," ZNA: BA 7/1, 24–25.
9. *Ibid.*, 25.
10. "Report on Sanitary Matters in the East Africa Protectorate, Uganda, and Zanzibar by Professor W. J. Simpson, C.M.G., M.D., F.R.C.P.," ZNA: AB 2/264, p. 9.
11. *Ibid.*, 9–10.
12. *Ibid.*, 73.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Dr. Henry Curwen, "Review of Simpson Report," 21 June 1915, ZNA: AB 2/264.
15. "Annual Report of the Public Health Department," 1916, ZNA: BA 7/40, pp. 18–19.
16. See Tax Assessment Files, Baraza la Mji (Municipal Council), Zanzibar. The files cover all stone structures in the city, assessing them for the purposes of street lighting rates, and offer a detailed picture of the city at specific junctures in time, especially 1924 and 1958, when reassessments were carried out on virtually every structure.
17. Simpson, "Report on Sanitary Matters," ZNA: AB 2/264, p. 74.

5. DEVELOPMENT AND THE DILEMMAS OF EXPERTISE

1. Dr. Henry Curwen, "Review of Simpson Report," 21 June 1915, ZNA: AB 2/264.
2. It is no accident that the term *town planning* first appeared in a colonial context, used by a British-born architect, John Sulman, in a lecture to the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science in Melbourne (Home 1997:2). The year was 1890, fortuitously coinciding with the formation of the protectorate in Zanzibar.
3. At the end of the text, Lanchester also stated that the conditions of his contract made it impossible to carry out the work as it should have been properly conducted. Nonetheless, he still defended the plan as worthwhile: "While it cannot be claimed that this study of Zanzibar is by any means complete, as it would not have been possible to arrive at conclusive decisions on all points without more prolonged and intimate investigations than the programme of work provided for, it is believed that the essential factors have been considered and a fair indication given as to the lines on which the improvement and development of the town should proceed" (1923:79).
4. "Public Health Department Report for 1913," ZNA: BA 7/1, p. 24.

6. FAILURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. Chief Secretary E. A. T. Dutton, "A Note on the Colonial Development and Welfare Scheme for the Town Improvement (D.571A)," ZNA: AS 1/72, p. 25.
2. "Annual Medical Report for 1914," ZNA: BA 7/3, p. 6.
3. Secretary of State for the Colonies Lewis Harcourt to the British Resident, F. B. Pearce, 7 September 1914, ZNA: AB 2/264.

4. Resident Pearce to Secretary of State for the Colonies A. Bonar Law, 15 July 1915, ZNA: AB 2/264.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Secretary of State for the Colonies to Resident Pearce, 16 June 1916, quoted in Chief Secretary R. H. Crofton, “Secret Memorandum on Town Planning,” 30 August 1923, ZNA: AB 39/203.
7. “Annual Report of the Public Health Department,” 1916, ZNA: BA 7/40, p. 2.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
9. “Annual Report of the Medical Division,” 1919, ZNA: BA 7/42, p. 1.
10. “Annual Report of the Public Health Division,” 1919, ZNA: BA 7/42, pp. 21–23.
11. H. V. Lanchester, “Sokomuhogo Development Scheme,” 22 August 1922, ZNA: AB 39/203.
12. H. V. Lanchester, “Development of Area West of Markets,” 22 August 1922, ZNA: AB 39/203.
13. R. H. Crofton, “Secret Memorandum on Town Planning,” 30 August 1923, ZNA: AB 39/203, p. 1.
14. Assistant Chief Secretary Crofton to Chief Secretary Sinclair, May 1920, ZNA: AB 36/21.
15. Crofton, “Secret Memorandum,” ZNA: AB 39/203, p. 6.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
23. See ZNA AB 39/203. In any case, Sinclair displayed a rather cavalier attitude toward his duties as resident, emphasizing the recreational perks of the post rather than its responsibilities. He stated that the “post of British Resident [in Zanzibar] is probably one of the most attractive of any of the Governorships of the smaller British territories.” The climate was “not unhealthy,” the development work “most interesting,” and the popularity of the sultan, diverse population, and absence of white settlers all made for the absence of “class feeling” and “unseemly” agitations for self-government. All of these factors, in his estimation, left the fortunate holder of the residency with plenty of time to play: “Apart from Polo, described elsewhere, there were ample opportunities for exercise, so important to those living in a tropical climate; and there was a good golf course, there were tennis courts, cricket and football grounds and excellent deep sea fishing. Moreover the Resident, as well as many other officials, was able to get relaxation in making tours of inspection, riding the big white donkeys through the clove and coconut plantations both in Zanzibar and the island of Pemba, which we frequently visited in one of the Government’s steamers, sometimes taking with us the Sultan’s band, a great delight to the natives who had never heard any music beyond that made by their rather monotonous drums and pipes.” John Houston Sinclair, “Senex Africanus,” n.d. [1955], RCSL: Mss.47, p. 114. For portrayals of colonial white social life and etiquette in pre-World War I Zanzibar, see Younghusband 1910 and Powell 1912. After leaving the islands, Sinclair waxed nostalgic over his days of service, including a rather maudlin poem, “The M’nazi Mmoja Road: A Reverie by the Man Who Has Come Home,” in his memoir. Thirty or more years after his retirement, he looked back on Zanzibar in the following terms:

Ah, who can paint that witching land,
Or its subtle charms unfold,
Whose nights are of liquid silver,

Whose days are of molten gold?
 And, e'en should memory falter
 It will need no spur or goad
 To show me the swishing rain-trees
 On the M'nazi Mmoja road.
 "Lucky Dog," you said, "going home,
 With orders and pension won,
 While we are toiling through the rains,
 And wilting beneath the sun."
 Yet I long for your pulsing life,
 And often I envy you,
 You with your neck in the collar
 And still with your work to do.
 The best of our lives is labour,
 The idle man is no more;
 Your barque still stems the tide of life,
 I'm but a hulk on the shore.

24. J. H. Thomas to High Commissioner R. T. Coryndon, 10 July 1924, ZNA: AB 39/203.
25. High Commissioner R. T. Coryndon to Resident Hollis, 12 August 1924, ZNA: AB 39/203.
26. Secretary of State to High Commissioner, Zanzibar, 14 January 1925, ZNA: AB 39/203.
27. John Houston Sinclair, "Senex Africanus," n.d. [1955], RCSL: Mss.47, p. 124.
28. Zanzibar Town Board Planning Minutes of 29 October 1949, ZNA: AB 39/171. Plan VI was one of Lanchester's maps illustrating proposed improvements—see page 236.
29. For more details on implementation, see ZNA: AB 39/203 and AB 39/207, especially the report by the land officer, W. B. Cumming, which reveals how little had been done to carry out Lanchester's proposals as of 1934. Crofton (1953:159) also describes how only quite minor portions of Lanchester's plan ever saw the light of day.
30. The colonial regime's repeated attempts to fix the creek are covered in ZNA: AB 39/231 and AJ 3/36.
31. Hollis, "Autobiography," RCLS: Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 298, vol. 6, pp. 4–5.
32. See ZNA AB 39/40 (entire).
33. "Cooperation with the Public," *Samachar*, 18 January 1925, vol. 22, no. 37, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 1519, p. 1.
34. "Address Delivered by His Honour the British Resident at the Meeting of the Legislative Council Held at Zanzibar on the 15 of November 1926" (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1926), pp. 3–4. Quoted in Hollis, "Autobiography," vol. 6, RHL: Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 298, p. 35A.
35. Resident Rankine to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 March 1931, ZNA: AB 39/203.
36. Secretary of State for the Colonies to Acting British Resident, Zanzibar, 26 September 1931, ZNA: AB 39/203.
37. "The Present Distress," *Al-Falaq*, 17 June 1931, ZNA: AB 39/179.
38. For more details on the history of secrecy behind the Lanchester report, see ZNA: AB 39/203, AB 39/207, and AB 39/166.
39. In 1933 Chief Secretary Crofton, the director of medical and sanitary services, the director and assistant director of public works, the government architect, and the senior surveyor all retired, and their replacements were left in the dark about most planning and urban issues. Indeed, when the new director of public works (Harold Peake) came across a draft set of building regulations that the architect had drawn up before departing, he asked

a simple question: “I wish to be informed of the intentions of Government with regard to the town of Zanzibar. Is there any intention of trying to transform Zanzibar into a modern city with reasonably wide streets or are the narrow streets to be preserved except for a few main thoroughfares?” The chief secretary curtly referred him to map VI in the Lanchester plan, saying that the government’s intentions were perfectly clear therein. See ZNA: AB 39/35.

40. See Land Officer W. B. Cumming, “Town Planning,” 5 February 1934, ZNA: AB 39/207.

41. Chief Secretary McElderry to Resident Rankine, 14 February 1934, ZNA: AB 39/207.

42. Acting Assistant Chief Secretary and Provincial Commissioner G. H. Shelswell-White to Acting Chief Secretary John Penry Jones, 21 June 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207.

43. Lee to Director of Medical and Sanitary Services (DMSS) W. Leslie Webb, “RE: Living Conditions in Zanzibar Town,” 8 April 1935, ZNA: AJ 11/30; Lee to Webb, 25 May 1935, ZNA: AJ 19/10; and Webb to Acting Chief Secretary, 12 June 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207. The three districts that Webb cited were (1) “the stone town lying to the West of the creek,” (2) the “developed native town lying between the creek and the Lady Janbai Road,” and (3) “the developing native town lying to the east of the Lady Janbai Road.”

44. Lee to Webb, “RE: Living Conditions in Zanzibar Town,” 8 April 1935, ZNA: AJ 11/30.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Lee to DMSS Webb, 29 April 1935, ZNA: AJ 19/10.

48. See Lee to DMSS Webb, “Town Planning and the Siting of Huts,” 25 May 1935, no. 500/35 (77), and memo no. 603/35 (77) of the same date, ZNA: AJ 19/10.

49. Joint Building Authority to Acting Chief Secretary John Penry Jones, 12 June 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207.

50. DMSS Webb to Chief Secretary, “Town Planning of Zanzibar,” n.d., ZNA: AJ 19/10.

51. Joint Building Authority to Acting Chief Secretary John Penry Jones, 12 June 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Hasanali F. Master, “Cooperation with the Public,” *Samachar*, 18 January 1925, vol. 22, no. 37, RHL: Mss. Afr. s. 1519.

7. DISORDER BY DESIGN

1. Lee to DMSS Webb, “RE: Living Conditions in Zanzibar Town,” 8 April 1935, ZNA: AJ 11/30.

2. DMSS Webb to Chief Secretary McElderry, 26 October 1936, ZNA: AJ 2/3.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Joint Building Authority to Acting Chief Secretary, John Penry Jones, 12 June 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207.

5. Acting Assistant Chief Secretary/Provincial Commissioner G. H. Shelswell-White to Acting Chief Secretary John Penry Jones, 21 June 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207.

6. “Minutes of the First Meeting of the Town Planning Committee,” 13 December 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207.

7. For more on the aerial survey, see ZNA: AB 40/153 and AB 39/207.

8. Webb to Peake, 10 August 1936, ZNA: AJ 19/10.

9. “Town Planning,” *Al-Falaq*, 13 November 1937, ZNA: AB 39/207.

10. Resident Hall to Chief Secretary, 14 November 1937, ZNA: AB 39/207. When he was instructed to rebut the editor’s allegations of neglect, the chief secretary passed the order down the chain of command to the director of medical services, who, in turn, told his medical officer of health to supply evidence to dispute the charges. In terms of actual results, however, Dr. Lee didn’t have much to report. “It is unfortunate that the Mji Mpya ex-

periment in small scale planning for 1938 has had to be abandoned, but it might be well to tell the Editor that a short length of road will be laid in Ngambo in 1938 . . . but there is no need to say where the road will run as it is uncertain yet in the absence of a plan,” he wrote. Medical Officer of Health Lee to Chief Secretary, 17 November 1937, ZNA: AB 39/207.

11. Quoted in Acting Chief Secretary to Director of Surveys, 9 February 1938, ZNA: AB 39/207. For more on the profusion of boards in the 1930s, see ZNA: AE 5/1, AB 39/184, AB 39/308, and BA 7/6.

12. Assistant Secretary (Planning) to Chief Secretary, 22 September 1938, ZNA: AB 39/207.

13. Acting Chief Secretary to Secretary, Town Planning Board, 2 April 1938, ZNA: AB 39/207.

14. Webb (as Chair of Town Planning Board) to Chief Secretary, 3 May 1938, ZNA: AJ 19/10. Webb was mistaken in his belief that the board was legally empowered by decree to make a town plan. There was no provision in the Town Planning Decree of 1925 for any such body, and all of its operations were in fact ad hoc and unauthorized—in a word, illegal. Confusion about planning law and policy was prevalent throughout this period—a lack of clarity that bore significant consequences, as will become clear below.

15. Town Planning Board meeting minutes, 29 July 1939, ZNA: AB 39/166.

16. Chief Secretary to Secretary, Town Planning Board, 31 July 1941, ZNA: AB 39/207.

17. Senior Medical Officer to Chief Secretary Dutton, 14 January 1943, ZNA: AJ 19/10.

18. Chief Secretary Dutton, “A Note to Town Planning Board,” 30 August 1943, ZNA: DA 1/215.

19. Resident Glenday to Dutton, 13 November 1946; Second Assistant Secretary A. P. Cumming-Bruce to Assistant Secretary, 12 December 1946; and Glenday to Dutton, 17 December 1946, ZNA: AB 39/207.

20. Assistant Chief Secretary (Admin) A. H. Hawker to Town Planning Officer, 11 December 1958, ZNA: AK 19/15.

21. Acting Chief Secretary J. Watson to Chairman, Town Planning Advisory Committee, 21 February 1959, ZNA: AK 19/15.

22. Cyril Francis, “Legal Report by Attorney-General: The Towns Decree, no. 2 of 1929,” 15 March 1929, ZNA: AB 39/182.

23. See Legal Notice of 1 July 1929 signed by Acting Chief Secretary J. Gilbert, ZNA: AB 39/181.

24. A. N. Doorly to Chief Secretary Crofton, 24 December 1931, ZNA: AB 39/181.

25. Joint Building Authority to Chief Secretary, 12 April 1938, ZNA: AB 39/207. See also ZNA: AJ 2/3.

26. The 1929 decree repealed previous legislation, including Building Decrees no. 6 (1918), no. 20 (1922), and no. 10 (1924). The administration subsequently issued a summary ruling that the old building codes remained in force, even though the laws that contained them had been wiped off the books. Adding to the confusion was the fact that provisions relating to building were buried in a number of other statutes. As the director of public works confessed in August 1932, “Under the existing system wherein rules for the construction of Buildings are contained under several other Decrees, it is difficult for the Public and the Building Authority to know exactly their position.” For this memo and more on the building rules in general, see ZNA AB: 39/26.

27. Senior Medical Officer S. W. T. Lee to DMSS Webb, 16 February 1939, ZNA: AB 39/35.

28. Joint Building Authority (DMSS Webb and DPW&E Peake) to Chief Secretary, 12 April 1938, ZNA: AB 39/207. The following month Webb and Peake ceased their involvement with the Joint Building Authority, handing over this thankless task to the medical officer of health and the government architect.

29. Dr. S. W. T. Lee to DMSS Webb, 29 April 1935, ZNA: AJ 19/10.

30. DMSS Webb to Acting Chief Secretary John Penry Jones, 9 May 1935, ZNA: AB 39/207.
31. Joint Building Authority to Chief Secretary, "Town Planning," 11 October 1938, ZNA: AB 39/252.
32. Lee to Provincial Commissioner, 12 August 1939. Raising hut taxes was one way he favored to reduce the number of poorer urbanites, especially those of African descent; another was simply condemning huts. Others in the administration were entirely sympathetic to these ideas, including the provincial commissioner and the director of agriculture, who replied on 16 August, "I cannot see the necessity for the provision of more hut space in Zanzibar town. No new industries are arising which necessitate the employment of additional labour and I consider that every possible difficulty should be put in the way of country people migrating to the town and as far as possible town-dwellers should be urged to return to the country." See ZNA: AJ 19/11.
33. Lee to DMSS Webb, "Town Planning and the Siting of Huts," 25 May 1935, ZNA: AJ 19/10.
34. Chief Secretary McElderry to Resident, 2 April 1936, ZNA: AB 39/252.
35. "Extract of Minutes from Executive Council Meeting," 21 April 1936, ZNA: AB 39/252.
36. Assistant Secretary (Planning) to Chief Secretary, 14 July 1938, ZNA: AB 39/252.
37. Cecil Furness-Smith to Chief Secretary McElderry, 29 July 1938, ZNA: AB 39/252.
38. Quoted in Chief Secretary to Lee and Bintley (i.e., Joint Building Authority), 15 October 1938, ZNA: AB 39/252.
39. Joint Building Authority (Lee and Bintley) to Chief Secretary, "Town Planning," 11 October 1938, ZNA: AB 39/252.
40. Dr. Lee to DMSS Webb, 6 January 1939, ZNA: AB 39/35.
41. Chief Secretary Dutton, "A Note to Town Planning Board," 30 August 1943, ZNA: DA 1/215.
42. E. H. Lavers to Director of Medical Services, 13 September 1952, ZNA: AJ 25/10(b).
43. R. J. K. Tallack to Director of Medical Services, 18 September 1952, ZNA: AJ 25/10(b).
44. Senior Commissioner to Director of Medical Services, 15 October 1952, ZNA: AJ 25/10(b).
45. Zanzibar Town Planning Board Minutes, 28 October 1952, ZNA: AB 39/171.
46. Quoted in "Extract from the Debate on the Second Reading of the Town & Country Planning Bill at Legislative Council Meeting of 25th August 1955," ZNA: DA 1/261.
47. Zanzibar Town Planning Board Minutes, 4 March 1953, ZNA: AB 39/173.
48. Garth Myers has mistakenly suggested in his "Stupendous Hammer" essay (1995) that this quote refers to the reconstruction of Mwembetanga and other projects in Ng'ambo. As a close reading of the archival file makes clear, the Cumming-Bruce quote clearly refers to the proposed draft legislation that later became the Town Planning Decree, describing the bill as a "stupendous hammer" being used to crack "four small nuts"—i.e., the four cities on Unguja and Pemba. See Housing Officer A. P. Cumming-Bruce to Secretary, Town Planning Board, 8 July 1954, ZNA: DA 1/261.
49. Cumming-Bruce to Secretary, Town Planning Board, 8 July 1954, ZNA: DA 1/261.
50. Zanzibar Town Planning Board Minutes, 19 July 1954, ZNA: DA 1/261.
51. Acting Development Secretary to Chief Secretary, 16 September 1954, ZNA: DA 1/261.
52. Financial Secretary to Chief Secretary, 22 September 1954, ZNA: DA 1/261.
53. Acting Development Secretary to Chief Secretary, 16 November 1954, ZNA: DA 1/261.
54. Chief Secretary to Acting Development Secretary, 1 February 1955, ZNA: DA 1/261.
55. "Extract from the Debate on the 2nd Reading of the Town & Country Planning Bill at Legislative Council Meeting of 25th August 1955," ZNA: DA 1/261.
56. N. P. Carrick-Allen to Chief Secretary, 30 January 1957, ZNA: AB 39/226.

57. Kendall to R. P. Read, 8 December 1956, ZNA: AB 39/226.
58. Mill to Chief Secretary, 7 March 1957, and A. E. Forsyth-Thompson for the Chief Secretary to Mill, 4 May 1957, ZNA: AB 39/226.
59. “Town and Country Planning,” *Zanzibar Voice*, 14 December 1958, ZNA: DA 1/261.

CONCLUSION

1. See ZNA: AJ 19/10, AB 39/35, and AB 39/207 for these debates in the 1930s about building rules, the building authority, and hut policy in Ng’ambo.
2. For more on public appeals to the Building Authority, see ZNA: AB 39/1 and AB 39/2.
3. Bibi Hasina binti Mughieri, interview, 10 March 1995. All names used are pseudonyms.
4. Ali Mohamed Suleiman, interview, 30 May 1995.
5. Shaaban Mbarouk, interview, 12 May 1995.
6. Gianluca Rossini, interview, 18 July 1994.
7. Chow Han, interview, 25 June 1995.
8. Director of Medical and Sanitary Services Webb to Chief Secretary McElderry, “Town Planning of Zanzibar,” 12 June 1935, ZNA: AJ 19/10.
9. Amir Ali Hassan, interview, 3 June 1995.

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