

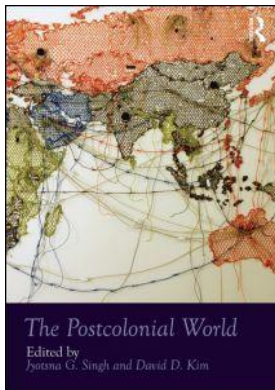
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The Postcolonial World

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Representing Postcolonial Zanzibar in Contested Literary, Cultural, and Political Geographies

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PART IV

POSTCOLONIAL GEOGRAPHIES
AND SPATIAL PRACTICES



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CHAPTER TWELVE

REPRESENTING POSTCOLONIAL
ZANZIBAR IN CONTESTED LITERARY,
CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL
GEOGRAPHIES

Garth Myers

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Republic of Tanzania was embroiled in a long constitutional reform crisis, in which Zanzibar is central. Zanzibar is a semi-autonomous polity within Tanzania, consisting of two main islands, Pemba and Unguja. Zanzibar's relationship to East Africa – politically, culturally and historically – has been a subject of extensive debate for centuries. The islands share a great deal with the Swahili coast, from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique: Zanzibar city Swahili is the language's standard dialect. The Omani Sultanate, which ruled Zanzibar from the 1690s through 1890, established tariffs and control over ports on the entire coast.¹ Oman extended its informal empire inland to Lake Tanganyika in the nineteenth century.² The Sultanate became a British Protectorate in 1890 and was a separate colony from Tanganyika even when the latter shifted from German to British control in 1920, until independence (for Tanganyika in 1961; for Zanzibar in December 1963).

In the postcolonial era, the relationship of Zanzibar and Tanganyika has been fraught with tensions. The two countries established the United Republic of Tanzania on 26 April 1964, just after the January 11 Zanzibar Revolution had created a short-lived People's Republic of Zanzibar.³ The postcolonial era has witnessed many reframings of Zanzibar's relationship to Tanganyika and Swahili relationships to Africa. Similar debates are common across Sub-Saharan Africa since independence. Of the region's more than 50 countries, only two – Ethiopia and Liberia – escaped European colonialism; virtually every country has the potential for struggles over mismatches of national identities and territory. Tensions over borders – geographical and political – national identities, and citizenship have intensified with the waves of democratization and religious extremism since 1990, alongside the vast socioeconomic inequality that has accompanied neoliberal economic policies.⁴ Despite its tiny size, Zanzibar thus exemplifies many of the conflictual tendencies within Africa's cultural geographies in the postcolonial era.

In this chapter, I elucidate several strands of discourse on East Africa's political and cultural geography, centering on the pivotal relationships between Zanzibar and

Tanganyika, and between the Swahili coast and Africa. I concentrate first on three literary voices (novelists Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Abdulrazak Gurnah, and Muhamed Said Abdulla) in the debates on these pivotal relationships.⁵ I look at these three in particular because of their prominence – at different scales, in different ways – in the intellectual articulation of Zanzibar’s geography in relation to East Africa. I argue for adapting a concept discussed in recent literature in postcolonial geography, “planetary indigeneity,”⁶ to articulate a “generous and pluralistic”⁷ understanding of the everyday discourses and life worlds of ordinary Zanzibaris and Swahilis as a route to fully grasping the contested cultural geographies of identity and belonging in the eastern African region. Specifically, I concentrate on the Swahili writings of Muhamed Said Abdulla and the everyday place-naming practices and performances of lived space in Zanzibar to show how Zanzibar is far more than a place for contestation over the revolution, race, or divergent nationalisms. Rather, we see the ways in which the Zanzibar case helps to make tangible this idea of planetary indigeneity, in the ways that *both* Abdulla, as a Swahili novelist, and ordinary Zanzibaris in their everyday lives place value in worldly and inclusive indigenous worldviews. The extraordinarily cosmopolitan character of Zanzibar from at least the nineteenth century onward (and, arguably, from the last two millennia onward) plays an important role, too, in facilitating the possibilities of a planetary form of indigeneity. My argument takes its cues from recent (and not so recent) work on postcolonialism in cultural geography and African studies.⁸

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY, CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIES, INDIGENEITY, AND THE EVERYDAY

Cultural geographers have engaged with postcolonial studies for more than 20 years. Recently, one can sense that “postcolonial perspectives” have “lost some vigor” for geographers, “especially within the context of geography’s fast-changing theoretical predilections.”⁹ A series of essays in 2014 in *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* sought to advance new directions for geographers to reinvigorate postcolonial perspectives. The essays therein take five “speculative pathways” toward understanding geographies of postcolonialism.¹⁰ Among these, the most intriguing for my purposes is that toward “planetary indigeneity,” a (re)valuation of “indigenous ways of being” in light of Gayatri Spivak’s “embrace of indigenous and planetary rhetoric” in postcolonial studies.¹¹ Spivak has argued for conceptualizing the planetary as a “species of alterity” distinct from globalization, which she sees as inseparable from oppressive imperialism.¹² She contends that radical alternative planetary thinking “is perhaps best imagined from the pre-capitalist cultures of the planet.”¹³ And in doing so, she foregrounds their “indigenous ways of being.”¹⁴

Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs note potential “contradictions” and pitfalls in Spivak’s planetary-indigenous turn, such as questions of whether planetary thinking can be balanced with “indigenous aspirations” or specific histories of “indigenous dispossession.”¹⁵ But actually many scholars are arguing for further exploration of this speculative pathway. Robinson had previously advocated “postcolonializing” the discipline of geography, by prioritizing ordinary “understandings generated in other [formerly colonized] places” beyond the West.¹⁶ In African studies, the move toward

“reclaiming the human sciences and humanities through African perspectives”¹⁷ is rooted in various manifestations of planetary indigeneity, whether in postcolonial anthropology¹⁸ or philosophy,¹⁹ or urban studies.²⁰ Building from Lefebvre, Ato Quayson seeks to show in his study of the everyday life of Accra’s Oxford Street that “urban space has an inherently rhythmic quality that can only be ascertained from modulating our perspectives along diverse vectors of interpretation” that incorporate everyday experiences of ordinary people.²¹ Ignasio Jimu highlights the “everydayness” of place-making in the peri-urban fringes of Blantyre, Malawi.²² Understanding everyday African geographies is increasingly deemed crucial to analysis of rural development dynamics, too, even in unexpected contexts like pirate havens in Somalia.²³ The potential is boundless for insights with global implications, which can arise from an interrogation of the quotidian details of indigenous ways of being and place-making in everyday life.

The commonplace, everyday world of contemporary Africa’s changing cultural geographies and intense contestation of identity challenges any easy solutions; the renewed stress on local indigenous knowledge from Africans is a humble, honest response to the daunting array of enduring stereotypes of “Africa-in-the-world.”²⁴ Yet this turn toward planetary indigeneity also brings us back to the foundations of postcolonial cultural studies, in works like Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, which offers warnings of problems which could inhere to planetary indigeneity as a post-colonial, anti-imperial tactic. As he watched the African colonies gain independence, Fanon cautioned that the “unconditional affirmation of African culture” seemed to have “succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture.”²⁵ This process would lead African cultures “up a blind alley” of essentialism; this left the national consciousness of the newly independent states as “an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been.”²⁶ Fanon sought to “combat both imperialism and orthodox nationalism by a counter-narrative of great deconstructive power,” but without falling victim to “nativism used as a private refuge.”²⁷ This struggle against both the empty shell of a false consciousness of constructed elite nationalisms *and* the reactionary tendencies of nativism is powerfully present in postcolonial Zanzibar, such as in the dramatic contrast I discuss below between revolutionary socialist elites’ representation of Zanzibar’s revolution and the reactionary representations produced by those elites’ opponents. Although it is hardly without its own pitfalls, the pathway to the liberation of consciousness may lead through the “possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world” that is built, not from nativism, but from a rooted-yet-worldly sense of place that valorizes everyday indigenous worldviews, within a world of such views.²⁸ Edward Said’s reading of Fanon sought to move beyond simplistic renderings of him as the prince of anti-colonial violence, and to seek ways of redeploing his work for “reconceiving human experience in non-imperialist terms.”²⁹ To Said, “moving beyond nativism” with Fanon entails “thinking of local identity as not exhaustive . . . not being anxious to confine oneself to one’s own sphere, with its ceremonies of belonging, its built-in chauvinism, its limiting sense of security.”³⁰ I begin the exploration of that pathway with three literary takes on Zanzibari and Swahili-coast connective intersections to East Africa’s cultural-political geographies, from Ngũgĩ, Gurnah, and Abdulla, though concentrating most of my attention on Abdulla.

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES OF EAST AFRICA, ZANZIBAR, AND THE SWAHILI WORLD

The first two authors, Ngũgĩ and Gurnah, eloquently illustrate the common polarities of Zanzibar's dis/connection with Tanganyika and East Africa. Ngũgĩ has long been a canonical African voice of postcolonial literary studies, mixing Marxist and African nationalist ideologies in essays and novels, alongside rich geographical description. In his essay, "Matigari and the Dreams of One East Africa," Ngũgĩ poignantly lays out a pan-Africanist cultural geography of the region, recalling a cosmopolitan *Ramadhan* feast in Dar-es-Salaam in 1987. The cosmopolitan friends assembled for the feast then went fishing at midnight in the ocean. Ngũgĩ remembers that evening as a means of celebrating East Africa as "a kaleidoscope of colors, cultures and contours of history."³¹ The ocean journey sets Ngũgĩ "fishing in the waterways of history, waters which had seen the rise and fall of these peculiarly East African cities whose cosmopolitan culture" had been well embodied in that night's gathering. He argues for the oneness of East Africa, seeing the "map of the physical features of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania" as a "sketch of a bust of a human head wearing a slightly flat Muslim cap."³² Much of the essay consists of loving landscape and place descriptions and his dream of a "politically united region as a prelude to the United States of Africa."³³

Although he mentions Zanzibar briefly in this essay, Ngũgĩ does not make any reference to the Zanzibar revolution or the Zanzibar–Tanganyika union. To its chief architect and leader from 1964–1985, Julius Nyerere, that union was the first physical step toward a "United States of Africa." Almost from the beginning, though, the union achieved very little unity. Nyerere even acknowledged that Zanzibar was "a headache for us. . . . If I could tow that island [sic] out into the middle of the Indian Ocean, I'd do it."³⁴ Most recently, this "headache" has rocked efforts for constitutional reform, particularly after a 2008 speech when Tanzania's Prime Minister dismissed Zanzibar's right to join the Organization of Islamic Countries separately from the United Republic because, he said, "Zanzibar is not a country."³⁵

That claim would not surprise the second major voice on the subject of East African unity, Zanzibari novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah. In *Desertion*, Gurnah roams the region's waters of history and geography much like Ngũgĩ does in the "Matigari" essay, beginning in colonial coastal Kenya, ending in the postcolonial police state of Zanzibar. Gurnah, too, imagines a map – this one of all of Africa in the 1950s – with "four predominant colours, red shading to pink for the British-ruled territories, dark green for the French, purple for the Portuguese and brown for the Belgians."³⁶ This map's colonial colors were "a code for a world-view . . . a way of understanding the world . . . a way of dreaming about journeys that could only be pictured in the imagination."³⁷ This geographical worldview's clarity has disappeared in the postcolonial era, according to the novel's narrator, since the "world has become much more confusing. . . . Nothing much is left to the imagination now, when the picture has become the story."³⁸ The picture Gurnah describes in this novel is, as it is in nearly every Gurnah novel, that of the "violence . . . mass slaughter, and . . . terror that had overwhelmed our home": the bloody Zanzibar revolution, its pogroms, and the human consequences for those caught in its midst.³⁹ His previous novel, *Admiring Silence*, captures the tensions of identity and

belonging that surround the revolution and memories of it, all of which, he states as follows:

brought shocking things to the surface. We liked to think of ourselves as a moderate and mild people. Arab African Indian Comorian: we lived alongside each other, quarreled and sometimes intermarried. Civilized, that's what we were. . . . In reality, we were nowhere near *we*, but us in our separate yards, locked in our historical ghettos.⁴⁰

Like many Zanzibaris exiled or imprisoned following the revolution and the union with Tanganyika, Gurnah displays great suspicion for the pan-Africanist vision. Unlike many of those exiled voices, though, Gurnah is also less sanguine toward a re-mapping of Zanzibari and Swahili identities in the postcolonial era that ties the coast to Arabian and Islamic identities.⁴¹

Glassman argues that

the [Zanzibar] revolution has taken its place in historical mythology as either the inevitable outcome of centuries of racial oppression at the hands of Arab 'feudalists' and slaveholders or the culmination of an imperialist campaign to divide and cripple the Zanzibar nation.⁴²

Certainly, the nationalist ideology of the United Republic Africanized the Zanzibar Revolution, as a moment of liberation, almost precisely as Fanon might have predicted.⁴³ Old guard anti-revolutionaries sought to do so as well, for the reverse reasons: to portray the horrors of both revolution and union as the work of "Nyerere the Destroyer" and mainland "Bantus," since true Zanzibaris, as Arab-oriented, peace-loving Muslims, would never have committed such atrocities.⁴⁴ Typical anti-revolutionary discursive tactics are ham-handed by comparison to Gurnah's lyrical writing, but they generally belong in a similar camp, and one that follows Fanon's depressing script perfectly.⁴⁵

In these two contrasting directions, then, we have tendencies toward the false consciousness of nationalism and that of nativism as a private refuge. More complex and hidden voices, which may lead toward the kind of postcolonial planetary indigeneity that Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs suggest as a speculative pathway, are lost in this dualistic typology, though.⁴⁶ Zanzibari novelist Muhamed Said Abdulla is one such voice. Abdulla survived, somehow, the experience of watching from his hiding place as his family was shot to death for their alleged support of the overthrown Sultanate. After enduring this horror, Abdulla still managed to write a series of popular and entertaining novels in Kiswahili that followed his detective alter ego, Bwana Msa, while subtly revealing many nuances of Zanzibari culture. Several novels became staples of Kiswahili language and literature courses in Zanzibar, the mainland, and around the world.

In his only published nonfiction collection of essays, Abdulla edges, gingerly, ever playfully, toward political issues, and produces an entirely different vision of East Africa's geography, and Zanzibar's relation to the mainland of Africa and the world, than that of Ngũgĩ or Gurnah. In his essay, "The Definition of 'Shamba,'" he begins his delineation of the distinction between the "shamba" [countryside] and "mjini"

[in the town] by referencing what he calls a “cold dream” that he had, in which the island of Unguja [Zanzibar] is placed inside the African mainland of Tanganyika. He comes back to the dream several times in the essay: “If we return to our thesis of taking Unguja end to end and putting it inside Tanganyika, it will not take much time before we see Unguja being swallowed whole together with its *shamba*.”⁴⁷

Although this dream reference (and, again, one with a map!) might be read as a reactionary Zanzibari nationalist retort toward the mainland, it is not. It comes within a government-sanctioned publication, in a clever essay that builds directly from the indigenous, everyday Swahili world. First, Abdulla immediately counters his vision of Zanzibar swallowed by Tanganyika as a “cold dream” by saying that for *him* it “brought a breeze that consoled and entertained my soul with a picture that invigorated my thoughts.”⁴⁸ He toys with the Swahili reader throughout the essay, playing off of subtle differences in Swahili word usage between the mainland and the islands. Mainlanders do not (or did not then) use the term *shamba* when referring to their farms. Tanganyikan Swahili has many other words – *viunga*, *konde*, *migunda* – for farms or plantations, but not the overarching term, *shamba*, that Zanzibari Swahili speakers had borrowed long ago (in the 1770s) from the French (*champ*) word for countryside or field. The specific usage began in reference to clove plantations (French planters had brought clove trees from Mauritius), but it gradually spread to encompass everything that was not the town (Figure 12.1). Abdulla’s Zanzibar is thus “divided into only two segments, that’s it: town and *shamba*.”⁴⁹ What would happen



Figure 12.1 The shamba lands of the hills north and east of Zanzibar town in the neighborhood of Mtufaani (By the Apple Tree).
Source and Permission: Author, Garth Myers.

to the *shamba*, hypothetically, in such a huge country like Tanganyika, were it to swallow Zanzibar? Abdulla argues that Tanganyikans didn't know what to make of the *shamba*, and he gives the literal example of how his use of the word was changed in the mainland publication of his first novel because the Tanganyikan editor "didn't know what a *shamba* was."⁵⁰

Always a master of indirection – his alter ego, Bwana Msa, uses a fictitious book called *The Opposite of Things* as his philosophical guide in solving mysteries – Abdulla takes the most basic geography of Zanzibar and cleverly makes a case for its cultural liberation, amidst its emplacement inside Africa. He makes no claims for an Arabist or Islamicist vision of Zanzibar, as he makes fun of what Said called the "built-in chauvinism" and "ceremonies of belonging" of both Zanzibaris and mainlanders. Another essay has Abdulla taking on the revolutionary regime's government-owned Bwawani Hotel, in a similarly backhanded way. This was for many years the only hotel on the islands at all, built on top of the previously vibrant Zanzibar city neighborhood of Funguni, a sand-spit extending from the port-side neighborhood of Malindi, where Abdulla had been born and raised. The essay begins with a hyperbolic run-on sentence praising the hotel, rife with the indirection/misdirection common to everyday discourse among Zanzibaris:

To see those little structures, many of which were so broken down as to stop you dead in your tracks stunned by the mercy of God; to see the woes which surrounded those shacks with importunity and intensity – those scars and cavities that had ripened on that sand-spit [*funguni*] . . . a place that a native of Malindi like me knew and got used to appreciating for this condition of brutality and misfortune; to see that the huts and alleys of Funguni have vanished, and that on top of them stands a massive building, lovely and glittering, is to witness the impossible marvels of the world, like leaving old age and returning to childhood, or like going around in torn clothing, in tatters, every day, and then getting to wear lace and satin.⁵¹

Yet Abdulla goes from this effusive praise to a subtle indictment of the regime, in noting that the old Funguni performed the same role as the Bwawani – receiving visitors from abroad – since Funguni was a neighborhood of immigrants. He defends the character of the old Funguni; it "wasn't a good place to live, and those who lived there did so because they had to – they didn't have any other options."⁵² But they made the best of it with creativity and subterfuge. He ends the essay by noting that the old Funguni welcomed visitors with the refuge of dry land and glittering sand after weeks at sea; the new invited visitors to swim in its pool – and again a Swahili literary double entendre emerges, since a *bwawa* is a swimming pool, but also can mean *swamp*.

In his novels, Abdulla makes Bwana Msa an exceedingly black man, with his underling, Najum, as a mixed-race character; there is no mistaking the subtle ways that he links the islands to the mainland or speaks with pride of place about Zanzibar as a part of the Swahili coast of Africa. He does so while differentiating Zanzibari culture from colonialist portraits of it and from Arab-Islamic visions. In *Mwana wa Yungi Hulewa* [*The Daughter of the Devil is Raised/Usually Drunk*], Abdulla has Bwana Msa differentiating himself from Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle's

fictional British private detective, noting to his loyal sidekick Najum that Msa never works for hire, and that Msa is really a researcher:

the difference between research and espionage is this: that to research is to look with concentration together with attention and listening in order to get to the totality of matters, even so that you are able to say that this was like that for such and such a reason. And spying is to peddle, monger and smear a thing in order to pick at it.⁵³

Even if Abdullah's novels can relate well with the planetary genre of detective fiction, they are also Swahili stories of a Swahili world. In *Kisima cha Giningi* [*Giningi Well*], a parable about the Swahili spirit world of Zanzibar, called Giningi, and the well locals in the story claimed was the portal to it, Abdulla describes another imaginary place in Zanzibar, a tower with a light

that had been lit, without being extinguished, from the ancient days until the recent era when Western education filled the world. . . . And there was a man called Mr. Light – who was a scholar of lights – who made great efforts to research how the light was able to stay eternally lit without going out or without needing oil or kerosene. But his research destroyed things, meaning while he investigated the light went out and it has not agreed to be lit again until today. All of his efforts and those of the others he sent for from Europe to help him didn't do a thing; the light refused, it just refused.⁵⁴

This light, like Abdullah's stories, or the underworld of Giningi, had emerged out of the Swahili indigenous world, not that of European science and education.

That was also an indigenous world that did not belong to the Arabs. In his last and longest novel, *Kosa la Bwana Msa* [*Bwana Msa's Mistake*], Abdulla scripts a conversation between a young Zanzibari woman, Mwanatenga, and an older Zanzibari man, Aziz, during his return visit after years living in the Gulf. Mwanatenga asks Aziz to choose which place is better, Unguja or Dubai. Aziz claims it is Dubai, without hesitation:

Unguja still has tin shacks. The buildings of Dubai are very tall. Your building here doesn't even reach the knees of a building in Dubai. Dubai has buildings that are 13 stories tall. . . . I live high up and look down; you would see people like ants.

Mwanatenga is unimpressed:

Well, if it is like that . . . you go live in your Dubai, leave us our Unguja, we still see it as a whole and we value it, and will not trade it for Dubai even if it has the buildings of America.⁵⁵

Throughout his writings, Abdulla voices a rooted respect for indigenous ways of being in Zanzibar, "as a whole," without falling prey to "nativism as a private refuge," the "blind alley" of either African or Arab nationalist thinking, or the aping of colonialist visions. There is a sense in his writings of the local identity that is "not exhaustive," and an effort to re-think the Zanzibari experience "in non-imperialist terms," as Said

would have it. To wit, it is Aziz's chauvinism about Dubai that Abdulla mocks in *Kosa la Bwana Msa*; Mwanatenga, with whom he clearly sympathizes, appreciates Dubai, and even America, but feels at home in the tin-shack planetary indigeneity of her cosmopolitan Unguja. Of course, much has happened to Zanzibari culture in the three decades since Abdulla's publications that might make it problematic to imagine his writings as the basis of a contemporary Zanzibari version of planetary indigeneity. But the terrain on which he held firm remains the third way of Zanzibari culture, beholden neither to colonialist nor to "blind alley" nationalist visions, and beneath the veneer of contentious politics over Zanzibari sovereignty and the Tanzanian union this way endures in the everyday cultural geographic processes of Zanzibaris.

POLITICAL DISCOURSES OF GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN POSTCOLONIAL ZANZIBAR

The three literary constructions of Zanzibar in relation to East Africa discussed above parallel the dramatically different and vibrantly alive contestation in daily regional geopolitics about Zanzibar. In this segment, I highlight these parallels, arguing for the vital importance of the often-hidden (and Swahili-language) everyday discursive tactics of ordinary, or a majority of, Zanzibari residents for any full understanding of the islands' identity politics, with a particular focus on place-naming practices. I see in these place-naming tactics intersections with a liberatory planetary indigeneity that is rooted in local experience and yet not confined to it, but instead, is strongly engaged with the world evolving all around it. I contend that similar nuances are vital to comprehending such politics across Sub-Saharan Africa in the twenty-first century, with similar possibilities for articulating this sort of planetary indigeneity.

One strong tendency in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Zanzibar has been toward the cultural-political linking of Zanzibar to the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and the Islamic World. The foreign minister of the first independent government before the 1964 revolution, Ali Muhsin al Barwani, exemplified this "Afrabian" discourse of Zanzibar and the Swahili coast in his sprawling memoir, increasing the proportion of Swahili words estimated to originate in Arabic from the standard linguistic estimation of 15–20%, to 45–55%, while claiming that "some put it at more than that."⁵⁶ He decried the transformation of written Swahili from Arabic to the Roman script under British colonialism as having "debased and emasculated Swahili."⁵⁷ He heaped praises upon Arabs for peacefully civilizing the coast, and on the role of Islam in furthering that enlightenment. He argued that from southern Somalia to the Comoro islands the Swahili people are "all mixtures of mixtures, predominantly Bantu and Arab."⁵⁸ But there is no doubt which part Barwani felt was more favored in the "mixtures of mixtures."

In actual practice, the everyday expression of cultural connectivity with the Arabian Peninsula or the province of Shiraz in Iran⁵⁹ has varied over time within postcolonial Zanzibar. Zanzibaris were restricted from acknowledging any Arab ancestry in the aftermath of the revolution given how many Arab-oriented Zanzibaris had been killed, exiled, or imprisoned. Even the label, Shirazi, for indigenous Zanzibaris – as in the name of the revolutionary Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), which ruled Zanzibar from 1964–1977 – faded from favor, virtually disappearing with the 1977 dissolution

of the ASP into the Revolutionary Party (Chama cha Mapinduzi, or CCM) that has ruled both segments of Tanzania since 1977.

With the opening up of Zanzibar's economy and political system in the late 1980s, ties with Arabia subtly came back into the open. This was most notable in the 1980s and 1990s, not in international relations, but in circulating wedding videos, when Zanzibaris in the Gulf, Oman, or the Middle East would send cassettes of their Swahili wedding ceremonies home to family in Zanzibar. Money, household goods and building materials came home from Arabia-based Zanzibaris working as teachers, soccer players, policemen, or engineers in Arabia. What Julia Verne calls the "living translocality" of Swahili people has expanded geographically and extended into new technologies in the twenty-first century, perhaps especially so for Zanzibari Swahili peoples, often inextricable from the "objects" that people trade or send to relatives.⁶⁰ This sort of connectivity is not confined to Oman and the Gulf, or even to the UK or northern Europe, though. Zanzibar's diaspora extends, with its everyday connections, across the Americas and Asia, into Australia, and to other parts of Africa. The African identity of Zanzibari and Swahili peoples has not eroded with the reemergence of claims for Arabness; solidarity with Islamic peoples across Asia, Africa, and Europe has strengthened, but so has, for many Zanzibaris, solidarity with other peoples of Africa. The diasporic reach of indigenous Zanzibar is truly planetary.⁶¹

The everyday discourses reproducing ties between Zanzibar and Africa are more subtle and complex than the tactics of revolutionary political elites. We can see this clearly in post-revolutionary Zanzibar's place-names. Toponymy (the study of place-names) can highlight everyday discursive subtlety as it compares with the decidedly unsubtle African revolutionaries. As Zanzibar city has grown and new neighborhoods have been formed in the postcolonial (revolutionary) era, naming practices delineate both official discourse and hidden cultural geographical dynamics. Official place-names in postcolonial neighborhoods make plain the Zanzibari revolutionary regime's political leanings and its place in the United Republic. Formally semi-planned neighborhoods formed from the 1960s–1980s include Nyerere, Muungano [the Union], Angola [a revolutionary ally], Msumbiji [Mozambique, another revolutionary ally], Urusi [Russia], or Amani [Peace, the name of first revolutionary President Abeid Amani Karume's son, who also served as Zanzibar's President from 2000–2010], alongside Mao Tse Tung Sports Stadium and V.I. Lenin Hospital. By contrast, names deployed informally in everyday discourse suggest much different political and cultural geographies for the new neighborhoods: Baghdad, Gaza Strip, Uholanzi [Holland, a frequently flooded zone], or Daraja Bovu [Broken Bridge] are all in hotly contested lands along the city edge that have developed unlawfully. These are indigenous names, but with obvious planetary resonance.

The more significant toponymic story lies in ordinary Zanzibari neighborhood names. For example, many neighborhood names have a tree in them. The plentiful array of trees represented in the city's indigenous names for neighborhoods surely betray a great significance for trees in the local urban culture as it developed. Mango, Baobab, Jackfruit, Banana, Kapok, Neem, Rambutan, Saman, Tamarind – tree after tree is a part or all of one-quarter of all neighborhood names.

Cosmopolitan and planetary in every sense though it may be, Zanzibar remains overwhelmingly an indigenous city; it predates the colonial period by 200 years as a city; it predates the Omani Sultanate by four centuries as a settlement. In most places,

one looks in vain for Arab or English place-name references. The tiny neighborhood known as Mitiulaya [European Trees] designates a stately *allee* along both sides of the small street at the neighborhood's center; although the trees were planted during the British colonial period, the trees are South American. Besides these "European Trees," there are very rare references in neighborhood names to Omani or Indian landowners – Kijambia [the Omani ceremonial knife] or Kwaalinatoo [Land of Ali Nathoo] – but the long dominance of Swahili communities is very evident in the place-names.

Zanzibar is in a (dry) tropical forest biome, with a full assortment of trees. When we look inside Zanzibari neighborhood tree names a little, though, what we see is the everyday life of working class urban communities, and the *planetary indigeneity* of their trees. Nearly every tree named in a Zanzibar neighborhood is an exotic species, one brought either by the British or by other traders over the centuries. Many of these – palms or mangoes, especially – have grown in such abundance, with many species and sub-species present in the isles for many years, though, that most urbanites would have found these trees upon their arrival even in the eighteenth or nineteenth century CE. Zanzibaris made exotic trees from all over the planet into indigenous trees.

Ten Zanzibari neighborhood names have mango trees in them. Mango trees grow tall and broad, providing extensive shade; they thus become focal points for cultural and economic activity. Mango trees [Mwembe, plural Miembe] that had shade areas for sail-mending (Mwembe-tanga), advice-giving (Mwembe-shauri), coir-rope-making (Mwembe-makumbi), and small-scale sales of groundnuts (Mwembe-njugu), fish (Kiembe-samaki), or sweets (Mwembe-ladu), appear in neighborhood names. Most other trees named in neighborhood toponymy are likewise large shade trees (kapok, baobab, jackfruit), or medium-height shade trees (neem), where people would gather.⁶² This socio-natural co-production also points to something else: the prominence of indigenous cultural-historical narratives in neighborhood naming.

This memorialization of the everyday shines through in many Zanzibari names. There are the occasionally sharp commentaries enmeshed in some names. But there is also a Piece of a Road Ballast [Baraste Kipande], Lucky Coconut Pudding [Bumbwisudi], a Place to be Carried [Chukwani], a Place for Moonshine Liquor [Gongoni], or a place to play Hide and Go Seek [Kajificheni].⁶³ Places of work and community activity are frequently named for the work or activity: Sokomuhogo [Cassava Market], Gulioni [At the Market], Karakana [Workshop], Kama [Milking], Mazizini [At the Cattle Pens], or Fuoni [At the Clothes-washing Place]. Thus the place-names enact the everyday socio-nature of the people, and in ways that are suggestive of local perspectives on nature, politics, and cultural practice. These perspectives suggest the rooted, yet planetary sense of place that Zanzibaris construct on a daily basis, in defiance of or disinterest toward both colonialist and nationalist discourses of cultural geography.

CONCLUSION

The postcolonial world is in flux in the second decade of the twenty-first century. That the "rhythmic qualities of places" now have "diverse vectors of interpretation" almost goes without saying.⁶⁴ It is increasingly challenging to buttress against the enduring postcolonial hangovers of ethnic nationalism, shifting neo-imperialist agendas,

and the rise of religious extremism. Zanzibar is a fine setting for unpacking post-colonial cultural-political struggles over identity, belonging, and space, as it is for an appreciation of the difficult task of reconstructing the postcolonial world in genuinely liberatory ways. Contestation over its national culture and bearing in relation to Tanganyika has similarities with struggles across Africa since independence, whether in geopolitical contests over territory or unending challenges to cultural and political unity in many other countries, at some level. Postcolonial cultural geography has begun to debate the potential of various conceptual pathways for extending the vitality of postcolonial studies. I have examined one of these here, which Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs term “planetary indigeneity.” This is a pathway that is largely in tune with a similar (re)turn to valorizing local knowledge across African studies in the humanities and social sciences.

I have sought to show, using the Zanzibar example, that, deployed carefully, forms of “planetary indigeneity” might help produce cultural work which can combat both imperialist and nationalist blind alleys. This can only happen, though, with the avoidance of what Fanon termed “nativism” as false consciousness, or narrow-minded parochial bigotry. Using Said’s reading of Fanon to open up more “generous and pluralistic”⁶⁵ senses of local knowledge, I examined both works by the late Swahili novelist Muhamed Said Abdulla and everyday place-naming practices of Zanzibaris as potential bases for conceiving of a Zanzibari planetary indigeneity. Similar approaches to elucidating pathways to planetary indigeneity from the everyday performances of lived space or indigenous popular literature, rather than via rhetorical warfare over ethnicity and nationalism, could potentially have utility across Africa, and across the postcolonial world.

ENDNOTES

1. Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire Into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London: James Currey, 1987).
2. Ali Muhsin al-Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar (Memoirs)* (Dubai, UAE: Privately Published, 1997), 126: cites the common nineteenth century phrase, “when one pipes on Zanzibar, they dance at the lakes.”
3. Issa Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism? Lessons of the Tanganyika-Zanzibar Union* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2008), 68.
4. James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
5. Mainly: Ngūgī wa Thiong’o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993); Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Desertion* (New York: Pantheon, 2005); and Muhamed S. Abdulla, “Ufafanuzi wa ‘shamba’” [“The Definition of ‘Shamba’”]. In *Uandishi wa Tanzania, Kitabu cha Kwanza – Insha* [Tanzanian Writing, Book One – Essays], ed. J. Mbonde (Nairobi: East African Literature Board, 1976), 35–42.
6. James Sidaway, Chih Yuan Woon, and Jane Jacobs, “Planetary Postcolonialism.” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35 (2014): 4.
7. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 230.
8. Sidaway et al., “Planetary”; Said, *Culture*; Adebayo Olukoshi and Francis Nyamnjoh, “The Postcolonial Turn: An Introduction.” In *The Post-Colonial Turn: Re-Imagining Anthropology and Africa*, ed. Rene Devisch and Francis Nyamnjoh (Bemenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research Group, 2012), 1–27; Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life*

- and the Itineraries of Transnationalism (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2014); and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press 1968 [Orig. 1961]).
9. Sidaway et al., “Planetary,” 5.
 10. *Ibid.*, 4.
 11. *Ibid.*, 10.
 12. Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 72.
 13. *Ibid.*, 101.
 14. *Ibid.*, 10.
 15. Sidaway et al., “Planetary,” 11.
 16. Jennifer Robinson, “Postcolonializing Geography: Tactics and Pitfalls.” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24 (2003): 280.
 17. Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho, eds., *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives* (Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012).
 18. Olukoshi and Nyamnjuh, “The Postcolonial Turn,” 5.
 19. Munyaradzi Mawere, *Culture, Indigenous Knowledge and Development in Africa: Reviving Interconnections for Sustainable Development* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2014); Munyaradzi Mawere, *Environmental Conservation through Ubuntu and Other Emerging Perspectives* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2014).
 20. Brigit Obrist, “Introduction.” In *Living the City in Africa: Processes of Invention and Intervention*, ed. Brigit Obrist, Veit Arlt, and Elisio Macamo (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), 11.
 21. Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra*, 30. See also: Ingrid Brudvig, *Conviviality in Bellville: An Ethnography of Space, Place, Mobility and Being in Urban South Africa* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research and Publishing, 2014), 9. William Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 334, champions the “unpredictable arts of the everyday.”
 22. Ignasio Jimu, *Peri-Urban Land Transactions: Everyday Practices and Relations in Peri-Urban Blantyre, Malawi* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research and Publishing, 2012), 42.
 23. Brittany Gilmer, *Political Geographies of Piracy: Constructing Threats and Containing Bodies in Somalia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
 24. Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 6–7.
 25. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 213.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. Saïd, *Culture*, 274–275.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. Ngũgĩ, *Moving*, 161.
 32. *Ibid.*
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Cited in Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*, 76.
 35. Garth Myers and Makame Muhajir, “‘Wiped from the Map of the World’? Zanzibar, Critical Geopolitics and Language.” *Geopolitics* 18 (2013): 663–681.
 36. Gurnah, *Desertion*, 148.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Admiring Silence* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 66–67.
 41. Garth Myers, “Narrative Representations of Revolutionary Zanzibar.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2000): 429–448.

42. Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 282.
43. Omar R. Mapuri, *Zanzibar, the 1964 Revolution: Achievements and Prospects* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Tema Publishers, 1996), 1.
44. Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony*.
45. Garth Myers, “Isle of Cloves, Sea of Discourses: Writing About Zanzibar.” *Ecumene* 3 (1996): 408–426.
46. Sidaway, et al., “Planetary.”
47. Abdulla, “Ufafanuzi wa ‘shamba’,” 36; for this and all other quotations: my translation from the Kiswahili.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Muhamed S. Abdulla, “Bwawani Hotel: Utukufu wa Funguni” [“The Bwawani Hotel: The Glory of Funguni”]. In *Uandishi wa Tanzania, Kitabu cha Kwanza – Insha* [Tanzanian Writing, Book One – Essays], ed. J. Mbonde (Nairobi: East African Literature Board, 1976), 77.
52. Ibid.
53. Muhamed S. Abdulla, *Mwana wa Yungi Hulewa* [The Child of the Devil is Raised/Usually Drunk] (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1976), 7; even the title has a double entendre, since “hulewa” can be “is raised” or “is usually drunk.”
54. Muhamed S. Abdulla, *Kisima cha Giningi* [Giningi Well] (Nairobi: Evans Brothers, 1968), 66.
55. Muhamed S. Abdulla, *Kosa la Bwana MSA* [Bwana MSA’s Mistake] (Nairobi: Africana Publishers, 1984), 68.
56. Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony*, 28.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Shiraz is claimed as the ancestral homeland of some Swahili coastal elites, as thoughtfully discussed by Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (London: Hurst, 2010), 163–166.
60. Julia Verne, *Living Translocality: Space, Culture and Economy in Contemporary Swahili Trade* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012).
61. One may hear recordings of Tumbatu island throat-singing of Islamic praise songs, for example, in Zanzibari homes in Seattle, Sweden, or Sendai.
62. Garth Myers, “Naming and Placing the Other: Power and the Urban Landscape in Zanzibar.” In *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming*, ed. L. Berg and J. Vuolteenaho (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 85–100.
63. Ibid.
64. Quayson, *Oxford Street*, 30.
65. Said, *Culture*, 230.

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- . “Bwawani Hotel: Utukufu wa Funguni” [“The Bwawani Hotel: The Glory of Funguni”]. In J. Mbonde, ed. *Uandishi wa Tanzania, kitabu cha kwanza – insha* [Tanzanian writing, book one – essays] Nairobi: East African Literature Board, 1976b, 77–81.

- . *Mwana wa Yungi hulewa [The child of the Devil is raised/usually drunk]*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1976c.
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