Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa

Examining the process of abolition on the island of Pemba off the East African coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this book demonstrates the links between emancipation and the redefinition of honor among all classes of people on the island. By examining the social vulnerability of ex-slaves and the former slave-owning elite caused by the Abolition Decree of 1897, this study argues that moments of resistance on Pemba reflected an effort to mitigate vulnerability rather than resist the hegemonic power of elites or the colonial state. As the meanings of the Swahili word *heshima* shifted from honor to respectability, individuals' reputations came under scrutiny, and the Islamic *kadhi* and colonial courts became an integral location for interrogating reputations in the community. This study illustrates the ways in which former slaves used piety, reputation, gossip, education, kinship, and witchcraft to negotiate the gap between emancipation and local notions of belonging.

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From Honor to Respectability

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To my grandmothers,
Cecilia Mullin McMahon and Katharine McConnell Rock,
one taught me to listen to stories, and
one taught me to write them down.

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Preface

When I first began conducting research on Pemba Island for my dissertation, I was focused on the question of why Pembans responded to the revolution of 1964 so differently from people on Unguja (Zanzibar) Island. When the "anti-Arab" revolution came to the Zanzibar Islands in 1964, violence broke out on Unguja but not on Pemba. This is an old story, and a number of scholars have sought to understand the political and social dynamics of the revolution.[1] Why did it happen the way it happened? But most often scholarship focused on Zanzibar Town because that was where the revolution began. Eventually, after months, the revolution

[1] B. D. Bowles, "The Struggle for Independence, 1946–1963," in *Zanzibar under Colonial Rule*, edited by Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991); Gary Burgess, "Youth and the Revolution: Mobility and Discipline in Zanzibar, 1950–1980" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2002); Thomas Burgess, *Race, Revolution, and the Struggle for Human Rights in Zanzibar* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Anthony Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981); Jonathon Glassman, "Slower Than a Massacre: The Multiple Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial Africa," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004), pp. 720–54; Jonathon Glassman, "Sorting Out the Tribes: The Creation of Racial Identities in Colonial Zanzibar's Newspaper Wars," *Journal of African History* 41, no. 3 (2000), pp. 395–428; Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Michael Lofchie, *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965); Omar Mapuri, *Zanzibar, the 1964 Revolution: Achievements and Prospects* (Dar es Salaam: TEMA Publishers, 1996); Esmond Bradley Martin, *Zanzibar: Tradition and Revolution* (London: Hamilton, 1978); Catharine M. Newbury, "Colonialism, Ethnicity, and Rural Political Protest: Rwanda and Zanzibar in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 15, no. 3 (1983), pp. 253–80; Donald Petterson, *Revolution in Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2002); Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson. *Zanzibar under Colonial Rule* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991).

snaked out across the water to Pemba Island, the second largest island in the archipelago and home to one-third of the population of the islands. The question that haunted me, as I witnessed Pembans responding to electoral conflict in 2000 (in the run-up to the 2001 elections), was why were Pembans generally so antirevolution? Pembans had a similar historical trajectory as Unguja Island, according to most scholars. Both had developed clove plantations under the auspices of Omani Arab colonization and extensively used slave labor to maintain and profit from the cloves. Both islands were colonized by the British in 1890 undergoing similar, albeit less in the case of Pemba, transformations in infrastructure such as roads, schools, courts, public health, and social welfare. My dissertation focused on the later colonial period and sought to examine how social welfare affected responses to the revolution, but I did not feel I found a satisfactory answer there. So I probed further, following the sources to the beginning of the British Protectorate and the abolition of slavery. When I followed the sources, I did not find answers in the ways I expected. I did not draw direct links between the abolition of slavery, identity formation, and the revolution. However, what I did find in looking at the sources was much bigger. Instead of seeing a case of identity formation for one particular group, I found an example of the ways in which local definitions and ideas about honor and power were transformed by the expansion of the colonial state. This transformation was not particular to Pemba Island; rather, it mirrored patterns seen across the continent.

Officials on both the islands of Unguja and Pemba handled emancipation in a similar manner, with almost equal numbers of slaves on each island seeking their emancipation from their owners between 1897 and 1909. By all accounts, at least half of Pemba's population was ex-slaves by the early twentieth century. It would make sense, then, that Pembans of slave ancestry would join in the revolution that overthrew the Arab Sultan and the administration, which was essentially put in place by the exiting British colonizers. But they did not. Since I first visited Pemba in 2000, I have been trying to understand how the history of slavery on Pemba affected the local responses to the revolution. Not so much "where did all the slaves go" in the words of Patricia Romero, but rather what were the relationships between the various populations of Pemba that allowed them to see themselves as part of the larger idea of Zanzibari identity while at the same time positioning themselves as Pemban first?[2]

[2] Patricia Romero, "'Where Have All the Slaves Gone?' Emancipation and Post-Emancipation in Lamu, Kenya," *Journal of African History* 27, no. 3 (1986), pp. 497–512.

The answers to the question of ex-slave identity and the passivity of Pembans at the time of the revolution have most often been framed in terms of either class or racial/ethnic issues. The arguments about class are persuasive; they argue that the disparity of wealth as found in Zanzibar Town did not exist between Arabs and Africans living on Pemba.[3] Certainly, social stratification on Pemba was limited in comparison with urban coastal populations, and many Africans actually had more wealth than Arabs during the colonial period. Additionally, scholars argued that Arabs had actively lived among and intermarried with the African populations – including ex-slaves – on Pemba in ways that did not happen on Unguja Island. The maps of ethnic enclaves made by F. B. Wilson in 1939 show that Arabs on Unguja lived almost entirely in Zanzibar Town or in small groups along the main trunk roads on the island, whereas on Pemba Arabs could be found living within a mile of most parts of the island.[4] The argument followed that people of "African" descent on Pemba did not rebel against the "Arabs" because they were related to them and saw them as neighbors and family rather than as blood-sucking former slave owners. This was certainly the image that people of Arab descent on Pemba encouraged and continued to proclaim even in 2002.[5] Contrarily, other scholars point to the census data from 1924, 1931, and 1948 that show a gradual shift in how the African population on Pemba redefined its ethnicities (and identities) to claim an indigenous identity that excluded it from having an "enslaved past."[6] Therefore, if people joined the revolution, they were displaying to all their neighbors that they had slave ancestors and were not really "local." But the problem with both of these arguments is that they suggest that African-descended Pembans were all dupes to the hegemonic Arab overlords. What about the slaves who demanded their freedom from the government by 1909? Were they and their descendants really so willing to yet again accept the domination of people descended from slave owners?

I wanted to understand how and why people on Pemba had developed an identity of "Pemban-ness." Yet the sources suggest that until the 1930s, few people on Pemba framed their existence in nationalistic terms

[3] Bowles, 1991; Ferguson and Sheriff, 1991.
[4] F. B. Wilson, *Report of the Commission Appointed to Investigate Rural Education in the Zanzibar Protectorate* (Zanzibar: Government Printer, 1939).
[5] Mzee Suliman, Konde, Pemba, October 29, 2002.
[6] Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001); Helle Goldman, "A Comparative Study of Swahili in Two Rural Communities in Pemba, Zanzibar, Tanzania" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1996).

of "Pemban-ness." I had assumed by looking at the processes of emancipation that I would find the relationships between the various populations of Pemba that allowed them to see themselves as part of a larger notion of Pemban identity. Instead, what I found in the records was the trail of how colonialism reshaped power and honor within a postabolition society in Africa. The patterns on Pemba were not unique to the island but rather can be found across the continent. As colonizing powers took over the ability to control populations and remove the capacity of slave owners, patriarchs, and local leaders to "enforce a right to respect," a radical shift occurred across Africa.[7] I found, similarly to John Iliffe, that colonialism created a breakdown in honor culture, but the case from Pemba demonstrates fundamentally different processes than suggested by Iliffe. Iliffe's work focuses on the honor of "heroes and householders," people I describe as being able to control others. Yet he argues that "respectability was the chief means by which Europeans tried to domesticate African notions of honour, replacing their emphasis on rank and prowess with stress on virtue and duty."[8] On Pemba, respectability was not a matter of adopting (or even adapting) European virtues or duties because most of the population was Muslim and did not desire to be like Europeans. Rather, respectability was the socially vulnerable position that almost all subjects in a colonial society encountered when confronted with their inability to assert power over other people. Iliffe suggested that the idea of respectability never caught on in Ethiopia because of competition with the aristocratic elite, but after seeing the dynamics on Pemba, I would argue that respectability never replaced honor because Ethiopia was never colonized.[9] The Ethiopian elite never lost their ability to "enforce their right to respect," as other Africans did in the colonial era; thus they never became socially vulnerable in the ways found on Pemba Island and elsewhere in Africa.

In the end, this book focuses on understanding the power vacuum created by colonial policies such as abolition and direct control over the local court systems, which helps to explain the ways in which political parties in the 1950s sought to grasp power from one another in the face of the impending colonial departure. The colonial officials held the ultimate power in the islands. Certainly Africans responded to this power, and I argue within this book that the practice of *uchawi* ("witchcraft")

[7] John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 4.
[8] Iliffe, p. 246.
[9] Iliffe, pp. 258–9.

was a form of local agency. Nonetheless, since the end of colonialism was on the horizon, local groups and individuals jockeyed for the ability to demand a "right to respect" from others – knowing that colonial officials would no longer be the ultimate source of power through the courts and their policing of behavior. Thus, while I do not directly discuss the events of the revolution of 1964 in this book, the footprints of the early colonial period run across the later history in the islands.

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Glossary

NOTE ON THE GLOSSARY

Many of the definitions of words here are the definitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A number of definitions of words have changed in meaning since that time period.

Aibn: Shame
Askari: A policeman
Assaba: A male paternal relative such as an uncle, nephew, or cousin
Baraka: Blessings
Baraza: The benches outside of homes where men sit and gossip
Bei kataa: A fictional or conditional sale of land, often used to avoid the Islamic rule against usury
Buibui: A black covering for the head and body of women
Chuo (pl. *vyuo*): Islamic school
Dalal: A broker who sells or appraises land
Dawa: Medicine; can refer to both Western medicine and local practices such as *uchawi* or spirit possession
Dhikiri: A Sufi practice, often involving particular methods of breathing, moving, or drumming that helps practitioners get closer to God
Dhow: Large sailing boats commonly found in the Indian Ocean
Dukizi: Someone who eavesdrops on other people
Edda: The three-month period of waiting until a divorced Muslim woman can remarry
Fitna or *fitina:* Slander of a person, trouble, scandal, or intrigue

Fundi (pl. *mafundi*): A craftsman or artisan (originally referred to enslaved craftsmen); also a term used for a spirit possession leader or someone knowledgeable about *uchawi*
Hadim: A servant; commonly used by ex-slaves to denote a connection with their former owners' family or clan
Hadim wa Sirkar: Servant of the government, a slave emancipated by the colonial government
Hamali (pl. *hamali*): Porter on a dock (originally referred to enslaved porters)
Heshima: Honor, dignity, position, rank, respect, reverence, modesty and courtesy, respectability
Hunu abadu: You have no manners.
Jambia: Curved sword, often worn by men from Oman
Jinn (pl. *majini*): Spirits that can be Islamic or environmental and can be both beneficial and harmful
Kadhi (pl. *makadhi*): Judge who presides in an Islamic court
Kanga: Brightly colored clothes worn by women
Kaniki: Indigo-dyed clothes worn by men and women; often signified slave status
Kanzu: A long, shirtlike dress worn by free men
Khalifa: A leader of a Sufi religious sect
Kibarua (pl. *vibarua*): A day laborer (originally referred to enslaved day laborers)
Kijakazi (pl. *vijakazi*): A girl slave
Kikoy (pl. *vikoy*): A cloth worn as an undergarment by men
Kitwana (pl. *vitwana*): A boy slave
Kofia: A hat worn by Muslim men
Komba: A galagos, a small nocturnal animal often called a bushbaby
Kuamba: To slander
Kuheshima: A verb used to mean "to honor" someone in the nineteenth century
Kuizara: To publish things about a person to create scandal
Kunenana: To talk against one another
Kupapuriana: To pick apart one another's reputations
Kupuzika: To gossip among women
Kustahi: A verb used to mean "to respect" someone in the nineteenth century
Liwali: A governor (pl. *maliwali*, however scholars usually simply use *liwali* for both singular and plural)
Mahari: Dower

Mateka: War booty; refers to a slave brought from the interior who is "uncivilized"
Maula: Commonly used by ex-slaves to denote a connection with their former owners' family or clan
Maulidi: Celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad
Mbao: A board game
Mchawi (pl. *wachawi*): A practitioner of witchcraft, magic, or the occult
Mdunsi (pl. *wadunsi*): A person who gossips
Mganga (pl. *waganga*): The general term used for anyone who used specialized occult knowledge to help others, in either harmful or helpful practices
Mgeni (pl. *wageni*): A guest, a stranger
Mhuru (pl. *wahuru*): A free person, no longer enslaved; generally used by missionaries but not enslaved people
Mjakazi (pl. *wajakazi*): Adult female slave
Mjinga (pl. *wajinga*): A person enslaved after birth
Mkulima (pl. *wakulima*): Farm laborers
Mshenzi (pl. *washenzi*): A barbarian, someone from the interior regions of the mainland of Africa
Mtumishi (pl. *watumishi*): Servant
Mtumwa (pl. *watumwa*): Slave
Mtumwa mtumwaji: An enslaved agent
Mtumwa wa mtumwa: A slave of a slave
Mtumwa wa nyumba: A domestic slave
Mtumwa wa shamba: A farm slave
Mtumwa wa shauri: An enslaved councilor to an owner
Mtwana (pl. *watwana*): Adult male slave
Mwalimu (pl. *wali mu*): A Quranic teacher
Mwungwana (pl. *waungwana*): Nineteenth-century Swahili coastal elite
Mzalia (pl. *wazalia*): A person born into slavery
Nasab: Blood kinship
Ngoma: A dance
Ngoma ya harusi: Wedding dance
Ngoma ya kirumbizi: Stick-fighting dance performed by men
Ngoma ya msondo: Initiation ceremony
Ngoma ya pepo: Spirit possession ceremony
Nisba: Clan name
Njoli (pl. *njoli*): A term used to greet a slave of equal status among enslaved people

Nusu-bin-nusu: Dividing a land in half between the landowner and the person who does the planting work on the land
Pepo: Spirits; generally spirits that possess people
Sabab: Kinship through marriage
Shamba (pl. *mashamba*): Farm, land, plantation
Sheha (pl. *masheha*): A village-level government official
Sheria: Islamic law
Shikamoo: This means "I grasp your feet" and is now used as a greeting of respect by juniors to their elders. Originally a greeting by enslaved to freeborn people
Shule: Colonial government schools
Sifa: Reputation
Sifa mbaya: A bad reputation
Suria (pl. *masuria*): A concubine
Tarika (pl. *tarika*): A Sufi group; *tarika* literally means the "way" or "path," but it is essentially referencing a particular Sufi religious group and its practices.
Uchawi: Witchcraft, magic or the occult
Unyago: A form of female initiation
Upelelezi: Gossip
Ustaarabu: Civility and respectability based on the late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideals of Arabs
Utaapa: Upon your oath
Uungwana: Civility and respectability based on the pre-nineteenth-century elite ideals
Wakf: Charitable endowments dedicated to the support of local communities by providing for mosques, Quranic schools, and the care of the elderly and the poor
Wakil: A representative in the courts, similar to a lawyer
Wala: Kinship through patronage; claimed by slave owners to their slaves
Wari: Members of spirit possession groups
Watu wazee: Community elders
Zamani sana: Olden times

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