

TAIFA

Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania



James R. Brennan

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Introduction

The title of this book asks the reader to learn one Swahili word from the outset. *Taifa* (pronounced tə-ēfā) is today translated as “nation,” but seventy years ago, “race” would have been an equally accurate translation. I have titled this book *TAIFA* not only because this is a historical study of nation and race in a city and country where Swahili is the first language, but also because this is a study of the language of identity. Terms of identity like *taifa* often resist simple translation to contemporary English equivalents; moreover, the meanings of the terms themselves change over time. I employ categories such as “nation” and “race” as modes of thought rather than as elements of social structure; they are best understood by paying attention to the changing meaning of words and the deeper linguistic and cultural grammars in which the words are embedded.

This is also a study of colonial rule, which is what made English the country’s second language. The imposition of European colonial rule on what is today mainland Tanzania—first by Germans (1890–1916) and then by the British (1916–1961)—shaped in formative ways the social, economic, and intellectual lives of those who inhabited its capital city of Dar es Salaam. Colonial rulers oversaw urban segregation; they reserved for themselves the best housing and services; they instituted inferior and racially segregated systems of education and government employment for Indians and Africans; and they did much more that will be examined in the pages to come. Yet the impact of colonial rule did not fully reinvent the language with which people identified one another. Rather, this book demonstrates that categories of belonging like nation, race, and ethnicity (or “tribe”) were shaped as much by the limitations and contradictions of colonial rule and by local cultural understandings of hierarchy and difference as they were by the imposition of new colonial categories. In this work we will embark on a tour of identity categories as they were created by the colonial and postcolonial state, as well as by those states’

subjects and citizens, over the period of British rule and the early years of postcolonial rule in what became the independent nation-state of Tanganyika (1961–1964) and shortly after, Tanzania (1964–present).¹

The identity of “African” is not one that can be taken for granted. *TAIFA* tells the story of how one particular African racial identity formed and came to provide the guiding assumptions of nationalism in Tanzania. Such stories cannot be told only from the towering perspectives of colonial rulers, who imposed racial modes of thought and hierarchical social structures, or those of Pan-Africanist elites, who offered a racial ideology of liberation that deliberately ignored cultural diversity. Local thinkers in Dar es Salaam made sense of both colonial categories and Pan-Africanist arguments, but did so through the lens of local Swahili categories of thought. Swahili has since been appropriated as a main language of postcolonial Pan-Africanism, most notably in a North American context, by providing the vocabulary for African American names and festivals such as Kwanzaa. It is an ironic appropriation—Swahili had become a national language across Tanganyika through the nineteenth-century slave and ivory trading, and then through its application as the chosen language of German colonial administration. But this appropriation has also been vindicated; Swahili shapes Tanzania’s polity, and few other African countries can boast a more durable and successful national identity or a postcolonial history that has been comparatively untroubled by ethnic strife. This is not a survey of the many and varied reasons often given for Tanzania’s relative political tranquillity, except only to explore what is in plain sight—that Tanzania marks perhaps the continent’s most successful example of an African racial political identity.

Every group has its constitutive “Other.” For most Africans in colonial and early postcolonial Dar es Salaam, that “Other” was neither the town’s tiny European community, which figured so prominently in Africa’s settler colonies, nor its similarly small Arab population, which figured so prominently in neighboring Zanzibar. Rather, it was the town’s Indian community, who outnumbered Europeans and Arabs combined by nearly four to one, and who constituted roughly one quarter of colonial Dar es Salaam’s population. The existence of East African Indians became globally known in the late 1960s and early 1970s when they emigrated out of the region’s increasingly inhospitable countries, most notoriously Idi Amin’s Uganda, to countries in the West, particularly Great Britain, where this instance of the empire “striking back” provoked a wave of anti-immigrant populism that opened a new chapter in British history. Most of these Indians had originated earlier—in some cases far earlier—from northwest India in the area bounded roughly by Bombay and Karachi, but had developed deep roots in East Africa, with some families dating back well over a century. Although the Indian presence in East

Africa had predated European colonialism, many more immigrated during the years of colonial rule, primarily drawn to communities with prospering commercial networks, but some came also to take up artisanal and clerical positions. Examined closely, East African “Indians” splinter into a dizzying array of regional, religious, and caste-based communities. If considered as a microcosm, East African Indians appear to be a privileged community that, by and large, had profited from their participation in systems of colonial rule. Wealthy and endogamous, Indians appeared to many Africans as a privileged insular merchant minority who generally refused to participate in a new post-colonial nation. Thus, figures like Idi Amin and many others could speak reliable applause lines by railing against the exploitative presence of Indian foreigners, whose wealth was widely perceived as coming at the expense of African farmers and consumers.

This is a study of racial and national thought, but also one that does not seek to divine the “origins” of such thought in East Africa; rather, it examines the specific processes by which historical actors come to identify and politicize humanity’s alleged divisions. Race cannot be assumed to be a universal mode of thought, but its ubiquity, as Jonathon Glassman argues, is perhaps born of “a universal propensity to categorize.”² Understanding the contingent and historically unique ways in which this “propensity to categorize” is realized is one of the central tasks of this book, which proposes to chart the growth and intensification of racial and national thought in the context of colonial and postcolonial urbanization. Prevailing terms of identity such as “African,” “Indian,” “Zaramo,” et cetera, thus bear the burden of being interrogated and historicized while also having to perform important descriptive work. I have tried to historicize these terms throughout, even in my employment of them as objective categories, and emphasize the subjective and processual nature of identity formation where appropriate. But the amount of descriptive work is simply far too great to avoid regular usage of “African” and “Indian” in this study of identity. Thus we begin and end with frequent descriptions of historical actors as Indians and Africans, but in the minds of these actors, both terms varied considerably in their meaning, utility, and intensity across the intervening decades.

HOUSING A NATION

Let us begin at the end of this book’s story. On April 22, 1971, residents of Dar es Salaam heard over the radio that Tanzania’s National Assembly had passed a law nationalizing all buildings worth more than 100,000 shillings (£5,000) and not solely occupied by their owners. Handled with utmost secrecy before its parliamentary introduction, the law was the boldest move yet in Tanzania’s socialist makeover of its cities. Dar es Salaam’s Indian community, who

owned nearly all of the buildings in question, waited nervously to hear which specific properties were affected. The next day brought a massive political parade. Such parades had become routine events since independence in 1961, but this one was different. Several thousand Africans joined in a celebratory march, which grew loud and unruly as it traversed the predominantly Indian neighborhood that was most heavily affected by the new law. President Julius Nyerere triumphantly proclaimed to celebrants that the goal of the law was “to prevent the emergence of a class of people who live and thrive by exploiting others.”³ The following Saturday at midnight, Indians leaving the city’s late cinema shows scrambled to buy fresh copies of the *Sunday News*, which carried the first listings of nationalized buildings. Hundreds learned that night that the government had taken over their properties, and so began planning their departures from Tanzania.⁴ Fiction captures the moment’s emotions. Hassan Uncle, an Indian character in Moyez G. Vassanji’s novel *The Gunny Sack*, reports the devastating news to his sister:

“Did you hear? Washed out, I said. We are washed out—”

“Washed out what, brother?”

“Aré, in which world do you all live? Haven’t you heard? Our buildings, our property, our houses, all gone. Saafi! Clean! Nationalised. Mali ya uma. Property of the masses. He’s betrayed us, this stick-wielder [Julius Nyerere].”⁵

More than any other African leader of his time, this “stick-wielder” had elevated the principle of nondiscrimination to a philosophy of governance. Seven years earlier, an abortive army mutiny had unleashed riots that destroyed several Indian shops in Dar es Salaam. President Nyerere had toured the wreckage shortly after, apologized to shop owners, and promised them security. After Tanzania’s banks were nationalized in 1967, he allegedly promised Habib Punja, Dar es Salaam’s wealthiest property investor, that his buildings would be secure. As late as February 1971, Nyerere had joined the Aga Khan, leader of the region’s largest and wealthiest Indian community, for the ceremonial opening of the Investment Promotion Services (IPS) skyscraper. All such buildings became “property of the masses” two months later.⁶

Was this betrayal or fulfillment? *Ujamaa*, postcolonial Tanzania’s policy of “African socialism,” had promised to remove exploitation, and Nyerere had identified “landlordism” as a principal source of exploitation and class conflict—a practice carried out with alacrity by all groups, but most visibly in the dense clusters of multistory buildings owned by Indians. For many *ujamaa* supporters, however, removing exploitation meant removing the enemies of African socialism, enemies whose qualities blurred economic and racial

characteristics. In the months following passage of the Building Acquisition Act of 1971, more than 96 percent of the properties nationalized were revealed to be owned by Indians, who had invested heavily in housing in part to prove their commitment to living in independent Tanzania.⁷ These investments were now taken away by a government hostile toward both capitalist development and the widely perceived failure of Indians to integrate with Africans. For many, nationalization removed the heavy inheritance of racial inequality symbolized by Uhindini (Swahili for “Indian area”), Dar es Salaam’s prosperous Indian neighborhood that consisted of expensive, multistoried buildings situated apart from the nearest African neighborhood. H. M. Makaranga, a member of Tanzania’s Parliament, reflected on how his walks through Uhindini would now be different:

I think this bill will make legislators known today when they walk in this city of Dar es Salaam, and citizens will see that we truly rule ourselves, because every day when I left Parliament I passed these buildings, it seemed to me as if I was not actually leaving this Parliament. Because when those people saw me they were sitting up high in their buildings and asking, “Where are they coming from? Legislators, no way! They run the country? How!” From today they know that we have the real power to tear out the horns of the elephant and rhinoceros.⁸

Africans would no longer have to endure such postcolonial humiliation. By 1973, upward to half of Tanzania’s Indian population had left the country. Of those who remained, the wealthy hedged their African futures by obtaining multiple passports; the poor simply adjusted to new conditions.⁹ The rapidity of the Indian exodus only confirmed to most Africans what was then widely felt to be self-evident: that Indians never “belonged” to the new Tanzanian nation. Their houses had not been their homes.

This is a historical study of the connection between “houses,” the urban site of economic investment and social life, and “homes,” the intellectual site of racial thought and debates over national belonging. In exploring this connection, this book brings together two modes of analysis that rarely speak to one another. The first is that of colonial urban social history. Driven principally by materialist concerns, this approach typically focuses on the policies of the colonial state and African responses to them, as well as on the history of class development and social movements that occur within colonial cities.¹⁰ The second mode of analysis is that of intellectual and cultural history, which for non-Western, ex-colonial sites like East Africa has been loosely termed “postcolonial studies.” Driven principally by concerns about discourse

and representation, this approach typically focuses on colonial, anticolonial, and nationalist political discourses, primarily by integrating the study of elite philosophy with that of more popular discourse, and interpreting subsequent communication and miscommunication between elites and masses. The most intellectually fruitful example of this approach has been the work of the “Subaltern Studies” school, whose examinations of nonelite agency and discourse in colonial India pioneered efforts to disrupt master narratives of anticolonial nationalism in the postcolonial world.¹¹ But before this study is situated within these two wider literatures—urban history and the study of nationalist and racial discourse—it will first be situated within the geographical and diasporic context of this book’s primary “Other,” East African Indians and the wider Indian Ocean world that they represent.

A CITY ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

Except for a brief examination of African soldiers in wartime South Asia, our spatial focus is the city and surrounding area of Dar es Salaam, which lies both on the African continent and along the Indian Ocean littoral. As a bustling site of peoples, goods, and ideas, Dar es Salaam housed multiple political discourses that were regional, extraterritorial, and supraterritorial in their ambition. One prominent discourse concerned “Greater India,” an idea elaborated by Indian patriots in East Africa and other diasporic locales during the half century before India’s independence in 1947. Extending across a far-flung South Asian diaspora, the primary aim of Greater India was to secure a set of national rights within an imperial context. The idea flourished where anti-British grievances ran sharpest; it was particularly pronounced along the Indian Ocean littoral. Neither a derivative discourse of European nationalism nor a modular replication of a proto-nation-state’s “imagined community,” Greater India was instead an argument formed out of diasporic grievances in dialogue with a constant stream of news from home, carried over imperial and commercial networks that tied London, Bombay, Delhi, and the diaspora together. Such networks formed, Sana Aiyar argues in her study of Kenya, a “united political realm” into which Indian diaspora figures inserted themselves and political intermediaries between local East African concerns, the global imperial project of Britain, and anticolonial nationalism then ascendant in India. Subsequent anticolonial discourse enabled East African Indians to create paths for inclusion in both colonial governance and African national movements.¹² Yet “Greater India” enthusiasts were not only apostles of anticolonialism but also importers and imposers of a tutelary nationalism to East Africa, in which the much-vaunted cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean world revealed its hierarchical underpinnings.

The Indian Ocean of the British Empire was a capacious arena of political debate, pregnant with multiple and contradictory forms of diasporic politics.

Such “polyphony” had potential to cohere around anti-imperial targets. In *A Hundred Horizons*, Sugata Bose stresses the virtues of cosmopolitan and universalist anticolonialism forged by “expatriate patriots” of the Indian Ocean unconcerned with “false binaries” of the secular and the religious. The anticolonialism of South Asians in the Indian Ocean, Bose argues, was “nourished by many regional patriotisms, competing versions of Indian nationalism, and extraterritorial affinities of religiously informed universalisms.” Across this sprawling littoral, Indians sought “creative accommodation of differences” rather than pursuit of any singular type of anticolonialism.¹³ It takes determined listening, however, to discern only the anticolonial tendencies from this oceanic political cacophony. Bose’s portrait celebrates the patriotic vigor of South Asia’s Indian Ocean diasporas while silently passing over their subimperial roles and aspirations. Much of Britain’s Indian Ocean littoral, as Thomas R. Metcalf has demonstrated, owed its colonial administrative machinery, labor, and capital to British India.¹⁴

Another theme plainly audible across Britain’s Indian Ocean after 1920 was the rivalry between “Indian” and “Muslim” political parties. The spirit of India’s Pan-Islamic *khilafat* campaign and salt tax protests manifested themselves in East Africa, where they were similarly both secular and religious. But it would be an equally false binary to disentangle the religious from the secular as embodied in the imperial loyalism and bitter communal struggles that also flourished among East African Indians, who breathlessly exercised colonial privilege and anticolonial activism in tandem. In the eyes of many Africans in Dar es Salaam, the institutions of what Jon Soske terms “diasporic endogamy,” which include marriage, religion, domestic space, dress, and even music and food, become “signifiers of social hierarchy and racial exclusion.”¹⁵ Blithe celebrations of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism tend to obscure these deeper currents of racial resentment upon which African nationalist thought and practice would be built.

The task here is not to trace Indian diasporic networks in their movements across great distances, but rather in their social, economic, and political investments within one revealing corner, to show how what was once termed “plural society” forms, hardens, and dissipates. The descriptive sociology pioneered by J. S. Furnivall posited plural societies as one “with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit.”¹⁶ Lacking the organic unity of common values, such a society, Furnivall argued, could be held together only through exercise of political force by its dominant section; by extension, only nationalism could reconstruct the connectedness lost with colonial rule and global economic integration. While offering little in way of either analysis or prescription, Furnivall’s vision of pluralist social fracture reflects a sensibility that actors in Dar es Salaam’s colonial public

would readily acknowledge. Within this public, “different sections” had different and well-defined roles.

Indians famously became colonial East Africa’s most important “middlemen” minority. Like European Jewry and the Chinese of Southeast Asia, they were the penetrating “strangers” of Simmelian sociological literature, middlemen who enjoyed freedom from expected reciprocal obligation, thus well-positioned to create money-based market relations but also reviled for their unassimilability, and therefore vulnerable to scapegoating. Neither alien nor citizen, the archetypal stranger was an economically aggressive actor who served to mediate between society and state.¹⁷ For Africans, Indians were the shopkeepers on the other side of the counter who bought low and sold high, extracting African wealth between the margins. While such typologies have comparative utility, they cannot account for how Indians formed a *politically* aggressive diaspora, whose ultimate frailty was a product of both local and imperial histories. Such typologies also risk conflating popular imaginaries with sociological categories, as when Van den Berghe characterizes East African Indians as a middlemen minority that “shared little more in common than a broad geographical origin and membership in a despised, powerless, vulnerable, defenseless group of pariah capitalists.”¹⁸ Most important, comparative typologies lose sight of how immigrant communities historically shape the very categories of identity that they inhabit, and how these communities act as a mirror via which “host” populations define themselves.

Indians in Dar es Salaam, similar to their cousins in Durban, were both “insiders and outsiders,” accorded privileges denied to Africans but also disenfranchised in relation to Europeans. Yet in contrast to South Africa, Indians in East Africa wielded significantly more political influence and economic power—power that originated from access to capital and its husbanding within profitable mercantile circuits. Moreover, Indians in Tanganyika had access to land, particularly urban land, which offered not only secure returns on investment but also collateral for credit, upon which all mercantile circuits relied. Enthusiastic Indian investment in urban property would form the basis not only for regional merchant networks but also for local political influence over the shape and direction of Dar es Salaam’s urbanization.

CREATING URBAN SPACE

Histories of colonial African cities are most frequently cast in broad terms of material conflict between colonial states and their unruly African subjects. While isolated urban enclaves have a long history across Africa, one particularly significant dimension of the twentieth-century colonial town, as Bill Freund argues, was the way in which it began “to dissolve older relations of production in the countryside.”¹⁹ The most rigorous analytical framework cast

in such terms is the subtle Marxist argument offered by Frederick Cooper in his studies of colonial Mombasa. Political conflict over space and mobility are revealed to be part of a deeper economic struggle over the control of labor. Cooper highlights the wide-ranging significance of African *straddling* of different modes of production—working part of the time as wage laborers and part of the time as peasant or subsistence farmers—which largely obstructed the full-scale proletarianization desired by colonial officials and capital investors alike. Late-colonial efforts to overcome straddling and finally achieve a permanent African urban workforce through labor stabilization policies created new forms of urban and national politics that would prove inordinately influential in Africa’s decolonization. The analytical key was to investigate the actual relations of production, or what Marx termed the “hidden abode of production.”²⁰ In this framework, colonial urbanization is one semiproletarianized end of a larger spatial conflict over class formation.

This book is not primarily a study of class formation and labor extraction, but it does examine these themes from the two main perspectives that it takes on colonial urbanization—the analysis of local cash-generating strategies that include but are not limited to labor, and the analysis of the changing regulatory commitments of the colonial state. Besides wages and the profits of petty commerce, there were two other major cash-generating strategies that urban residents relied upon—for creditors, rents; for debtors, consumer credit. Struggles over property indeed form a central motor of urban history, but my point of departure is Ricardian rather than Marxist. The most diffuse and accessible strategy of capital accumulation in cities was the accumulation of rents. Dar es Salaam’s high rents for rooms and houses were not only indicators of urban immiseration for those on the economic margins, though they were certainly that, but also powerful evidence of successful strategies of capital accumulation by landlords of varying means and all colors. Urban newcomers suffered to pay because overall they derived comparative advantages from living in cities. Expensive rents emerge not only as a function of scarcity, but also from the consequent spillover or “externality” of human capital that in turn binds cities and their willing renters together.²¹ The work of landlords who set out to capture these expensive rents did considerably more to determine the physical shape of colonial and particularly postcolonial urban growth than did colonial urban planners.

A subtheme of this study is the gradual rise and partial dismemberment of an urban *rentier* class of landlords in Dar es Salaam.²² As the term is used here, *rentier* refers not only to those who passively derive their main incomes from returns on property, but also to those who actively *seek and collect economic rent*. Conventionally defined, economic rent is not simply payment for use (i.e., rent), but rather the *surplus of income over opportunity cost*.²³

The *rentier's* capture is the excess value beyond what is minimally needed to elicit the sale of a given object. Inelastic by nature, land cannot respond to price changes that accompany population growth in the way that elastic factors of labor and capital can. Land works instead, in David Ricardo's words, for whatever is given to it by competition. A surplus above perfectly competitive market conditions is a regular and obvious phenomenon enjoyed by landowners throughout history—a history that may largely turn on the story of changing *rentier* fortunes.²⁴ In cities, growing scarcity of urban land generates rising incomes and power for *rentiers*. Commodification of urban space occurred in Dar es Salaam through shifting and competing institutions of petty and diffuse landlords, developers, farmers, and squatters. While the colonial state treated rising rents as a problem best handled by rent controls and other forms of regulation, the postcolonial state shook off lingering ambivalence and confronted landlordism directly, initially with a gradual euthanasia of land *rentiers* through rising taxes and changing land laws, and finally through a dramatic expropriation of private property that overwhelmingly targeted Indian “exploiters” in April 1971.

Although *rentiers* were key urban economic actors, urban identities were formed not primarily from landlord-renter relationships but rather through participation in wider urban economic circuits. The most concentrated site of such circuits was the *duka* (store), where food, clothing, and credit changed hands across shop counters, typically dividing African producers and consumers from Indian traders. Urban Africans on marginal wages survived on credit—primarily the consumer credit of pawnshops and store advances. Sharply diverging approaches to the meaning and use of wealth characterized this commercial nexus on the East African coast. Explicating the relationship between desire and wealth, Jeremy Prestholdt has demonstrated that for nineteenth-century Mombasans, the “proper social use of wealth was to consume it, not to store it up for future use.” A Mombasan aphorism philosophized that “the property of the miser is eaten by worms.”²⁵ Powerful regional caricatures portray Indians as tightfisted and self-denying, forgoing present satisfaction for future-oriented accumulation. Africans, by contrast, understood wealth as a means to the social end of mobilizing supporters and clients—or, as they were caricatured by Indians, living lives only in the here and now without reckoning for future investments. Such caricatures, while carrying grains of truth, also serve to obscure the history of successful African urban businessmen, as well as the extravagant use of wealth within Indian households and communities. This sort of social caricature is a major theme of this study; it plays an important constituent role in forming urban identities. But caricature is a process, not a timeless given. Racial caricature grew in tandem not only with the economic interactions for which it was a shorthand but also with a

more fundamental rethinking of territorial origins, descent, and belonging, the core elements of identity in this Indian Ocean city. Credit, more than any other element of daily life, entwined strategies of urban survival with processes of racial caricature.

The other major perspective on urbanization that this study takes up has to do with the colonial state itself. There was a peculiar ambivalence at the heart of British interwar policy. In a materialist sense, this ambivalence was owing to what John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman termed the “contradictions of accumulation and control”²⁶ (i.e., the contradiction between the need to extract labor and the need to be seen to act on behalf of the social order as a whole). The latter primarily took the form of the paternalist protection of Africans, which was enshrined in the League of Nations mandate that granted Tanganyika to Britain. The British arrived after Dar es Salaam had already experienced thirty-odd years of racial segregation, and they proceeded to retain most of the urban policies of their German predecessor. For two decades, officials drifted between two poles of thought—that Tanganyika’s “non-native” Indian and European population be encouraged to invest and gentrify urban space, and that Tanganyika’s “native” African population be protected from the encroachment of “non-natives,” with the former pole generally winning out in practice. The very language of this debate provided the major categories of identity—“native” and “non-native”—that the British colonial state formally imposed upon its Tanganyikan subjects.

The threat of war in 1939 ended this ambivalence and placed colonial urban policy on an entirely new footing. Unlike rural areas, which were heavily targeted for accumulation, urban areas posed an immediate threat to political security, and as such became primary sites to impose control, even at the expense of accumulation. The wartime urban colonial state was a regulatory state that extended basic minimum guarantees of food and clothing in return for visible full employment. Urban space grew within this regulatory texture of price and mobility controls, with several far-reaching effects, including providing the foundations for what development economists term “urban bias”—the unfair pricing of goods and services that flow between rural and urban areas.²⁷ What becomes clear in these processes is that African cities like Dar es Salaam increasingly became primary sites of consumption. Local politics thus became increasingly concerned with how scarce commodities were regulated by the state, as well as how the state should best manage hitherto opaque commercial distribution networks. The colonial state’s particular answer to this crisis in Dar es Salaam was similar to what it had chosen to do elsewhere in East Africa—to distribute resources according to community “needs,” which had the effect of putting distribution and consumption on a thoroughly racial basis.

In colonial historiographies the state occupies center stage as principal manufacturer of identity categories, although the limitations of this approach have been increasingly appreciated. Recent literature has begun to stress that the state itself was both less ambitious and more confused about entrenching categories of identity. The goal of what Ann Laura Stoler terms “taxonomic states” was to create not detailed sociological knowledge but rather “sorting codes” that were easy to think through and useful to master, and whose fullness of implementation fell well short of Foucauldian expectations. Subsequent racial taxonomies were “not the unilateral inventions of colonial and metropolitan states,” but rather mutually constituted through conflict and intimacy.²⁸ Colonial-era identities in East Africa were partly products of legal-administrative strategies and expediencies of colonial states, although their classificatory powers were mainly suggestive outlines. Early literature on the subject has stressed the rigidification of identity that accompanied colonial rule and colonial thinking. Justin Willis shows how identity in Mombasa was once “intensely negotiable” and defined “by attachments, the nature of obligations and claims,” but that, in the subsequent imposition of colonial ideas, ethnicity had lost “much of its negotiability.”²⁹ In the work of Willis, as well as Laura Fair’s study of colonial Zanzibar, colonial subject participation in identity building usually consists of the straightforward and rational pursuit of legal improvement and social status that imparted new meanings to old categories. The startling numerical rise in self-identifying “Arabs” and “Shirazi” in colonial Zanzibar between 1924 and 1931 reveals a growing stigma attached to the category of Swahili. Distancing oneself from the category of Swahili was an assertion of “independence and transcendence” and, crucially, rising landownership on Zanzibar’s neighboring island of Pemba.³⁰ This process became even more straightforward during the Second World War, when one could secure access to scarce cloth and rice, as well as avoid forced labor, by successfully claiming Arab or Shirazi identity. Pursuit of superior ration cards led the population of Zanzibar’s “superior” races to grow suspiciously large.³¹ However, whatever the ultimate cause for this sharp rise in claims to Shirazi identity happened to be, as Jonathon Glassman has argued, “in the minds of its participants it involved more than rationing cards.”³² This study takes up Glassman’s insight by examining the trajectories of racial thought, as well as examining the ambivalences of the colonial state.

Colonial identity categorization was not a unilateral process of realizing state hegemony; it was always relational. Indeed, as we shall see, for Tanganyika the categories of “native” and “non-native” were not only poor guides to urban development, they were also categories that were neither sharply defined nor sharply applied by colonial officials. Nor were these categories eagerly appropriated by colonial subjects. Instead, the process of identity

formation had multiple if unequal participants, who expressed a variety of material, intellectual, and psychological motivations—the pursuit of legal improvement, social status, intellectual rearticulation of community, and visceral resentment were all at work, if not in concert. The pursuit of identities necessarily required the manufacture or appropriation of useful vocabularies. The English-language category of “African” is a product of that continent’s enslaved diaspora in the Americas.³³ Coexisting with its synonymous referents “negro” and “black,” “African,” however, was appropriated by Africa-descended authors and activists in the late eighteenth century. According to James Sidbury, it was these actors who transformed “African” from a term “so laden with connotations of primitivism and savagery into a source of pride,”³⁴ before its fading from nationalist discourse by the 1820s. “African,” in Swahili *mwafrika*, had existed as a term of identity throughout the twentieth century but became the touchstone claim of origin, descent, and belonging in Tanganyika only during the 1940s. The term’s political success owed much to the local, regional, and postwar international context, but it also reflected a new language for an old need. Robin Fox has speculated that the human need to reckon descent and claim ancestries may originate from the psychological security “derived from a sureness about one’s ancestry,” for such knowledge “rids us of anonymity.”³⁵ This book traces specific efforts to “rid anonymity” within a relatively short period, from the 1920s to 1970s in Tanzania, by focusing on processes that formed categories of race, nation, and ethnicity. All of these categories can be understood theoretically as metaphors of descent; and all could be expressed in colonial East Africa with the Swahili word *taifa*.

National categorical thought need not be “modular” (i.e., portable and universally adaptable from country to country), let alone a modular import. In Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, nationalism begins with Europe’s post-Enlightenment disenchantment, in which print capitalism replaces church authority to produce an exportable and modular nationalism that forms nation-states out of shared horizontal imaginations seeking territorial states.³⁶ In their wide-ranging critique of Anderson’s model, John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan explain that there is “both less and more to the nation-state and its genealogy” than Anderson suggests. “Communities” were not simply imagined, but fundamental political institutions that were legally and bureaucratically routinized within colonial states.³⁷ In British colonial Africa, “community” transformations were institutional phenomena. Put roughly, unrepresented “natives” in colonial Africa before the Second World War became poorly represented “Africans” who resented other better-represented races during the 1940s; better-represented “Africans” of the 1950s became citizens of sovereign nation-states in the 1960s. What *was* modular, symmetrical, and homogeneous about nationalism in Africa was not its specific contents but instead the symmetrical

and singular world system of postwar UN sovereignty that welcomed the accession of colonial territories to nominally equal independent nation-states.³⁸ Out of shared disgust with the violent wartime elisions of nationalism and race, postwar metropolitan elites created a new international order that separated nation from race. But throughout the late colonized world, in sharp contrast, aspiring citizens expected their nations to value the shared descent that formed communities of visceral nationalist attachment.

Nationalisms precede nations, and require articulation by nationalist intellectuals who presume the world to be constructed of natural units of nations. Strictly speaking, few such intellectuals imagine themselves to be “creating” nations; they rather see themselves doing the simpler work of identifying what is already immanent in a “natural” grouping of peoples. Guiding assumptions about national fealty in Tanganyika involved race, which is an inherently exclusive rubric. There was a widespread conviction among academics as well as some political actors, including Julius Nyerere, during the first decades of Africa’s independence, that nationalism was inclusive and based on shared civic values that could be realized in the future, within a secular and sovereign nation-state. This vision was partially secured in Tanzania’s legal code, most notably its nonracial citizenship laws, yet its appeal was thin, and wilted in the face of “popular” nationalists who were less troubled by confections of nation and race.

Although much of this book studies the subjective side of identity formation, it also must account for objective social structures that become racialized in practice. The analytical value of the term “identity,” as Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker have observed, is often compromised by its tendencies to conflate categories of analysis and categories of practice.³⁹ Therefore, it is important to distinguish terms of analysis from terms of practice at the outset. This book analyzes nation, race, and ethnicity alike as modes of thought in which “groups” are subjectively presumed to be authentic cultural wholes that define themselves by metaphors of shared descent.⁴⁰ By showing how both political language and political will of Tanzanian actors changed over time, this book demonstrates the connection between intellectual engagement with identity and the urban socioeconomic context, through which these actors defined national belonging and exclusion. Although this book is not primarily a study of women and gender, women figure prominently in the male African political imagination as the vulnerable barriers through which other “nations” and “races” undermine the African *taifa*. Indeed, what emerges as the most enduringly hegemonic aspect of racial and national thought in Tanzania is the reckoning of descent along patrilineal lines. Yet the messy material realities of urban life, in which women increasingly exercise autonomy within the colonial and postcolonial economies through informal and unregulated

activities such as beer-brewing, trading, and prostitution, make poignant the enormous gaps between that world that African nationalist intellectuals would like to have had and the world that they had.

A NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The language of identity in Dar es Salaam survives mostly in the voluminous documentary sources that this book examines. Covering the period from roughly 1916 to 1976, these sources reflect the biased perspective of their authors, who were overwhelmingly educated men—be they European, Indian, or African—who produced documents to be read either by or within formal institutions of government, voluntary associations, and newspapers. I also conducted a large number of formal interviews and less-formal conversations, which included conversations with Indians, Africans, and one particularly helpful former colonial official, the late Randal Sadleir. These oral interlocutors provided me with valuable social and economic perspectives on urban history, but discussions with them about the language of identity were both nonabstract and “postcolonial,” by which I mean that my interlocutors showed little interest in discussing categories of identity themselves (race, nation, etc.), and that their use of identity categories usually matched the postcolonial sensibilities that are mapped out in this book’s final chapter rather than recalling colonial-era usages that survive in print.

There were, however, important exceptions; in particular, the oral discourse of firstcomers and outsiders discussed at length in this book’s second chapter. Through my research assistants, Hamisi Msumi and Mohamed Kibanda, I conducted a series of interviews with elderly African men and a few women—as few of the latter agreed to be interviewed—in the neighborhoods of Kariakoo, Gerezani, and Buguruni, framed around questions of race relations between Indians and Africans and more-general economic issues. This is where I first learned that many Shomvi and Zaramo, Dar es Salaam’s “original” African inhabitants, remain deeply embittered about their displacement from positions of wealth and authority in the city and continue to use the discourse of firstcomers and outsiders to convey their complaints. They and others alerted me to the significance of this vital language of identity that structured large parts of urban African social life during the colonial period, which I would have otherwise missed—its presence in written sources is often oblique and lacking in consistent terminology. This is also where I first learned of the deep resentment and occasional misogyny that some men displayed in reference to successful and independent women in Dar es Salaam, which correlates with what survives in documents, in particular letters published in newspapers.

This is primarily a work of documentary history, in which institutions and educated men loom large. The most important of these institutions was the colonial

and postcolonial state, which plays a central role by shaping and administering policies—and in adjudicating disputes—relevant to identity. The historian must not only reconstruct legal and administrative histories but also trace conceptual genealogies of identity in order to discern points at which the state is creating, shaping, or simply receiving ideas about who its subjects are. This book attempts to meet this challenge through a systematic reading of colonial-era documents that pays careful attention to shifts in language employed by both the state and its subjects. The state's unrivaled capacity to generate and preserve documents, at least during the colonial period, exaggerates its importance to local life. This also makes for an ironic challenge, as one of my arguments is that previous historians have attributed too much significance to the state—colonial and postcolonial alike—in generating categories of identity. Yet at certain junctures the interventions of the state *were* critical, and this is reflected in the chapter structure, which acknowledges that the Second World War and independence were both watershed moments in Tanzania's social and intellectual history.

This book also traces the contours and trajectories of print debates as they appeared in newspapers, educational primers, poetry, and literature in order to recover a history of African political thought. Dar es Salaam's press richly chronicles and debates urban developments for a preponderantly urban readership. The most important newspapers were owned either by the government (*Mambo Leo*), European-owned corporations (*Tanganyika Standard*), private individuals (*Tanganyika Opinion*, *Kwetu*, *Ngurumo*), or the ruling party (*Uhuru*, *Nationalist*).⁴¹ Both short- and long-term intellectual debates emerge through an exhaustive reading of these sources, which rarely challenged political authority but gave surprisingly generous latitude to social criticism. In the last two chapters, I delineate a forum of political debate that lies somewhere between the structural determinism of discourse and the detached elite agency of African intellectual history, a midway realm termed a "public." Karin Barber has defined *public* as "an audience whose members are not known to the speaker/composer of the text, and not necessarily present, but still addressed simultaneously, and imagined as a collectivity." This shift to print, among other media technologies, marks a fundamental change in the relationship between author/speaker and recipient. This requires a new form of address to meet the challenge of anonymity, while also striving to form what Barber terms "a real, single, co-present collectivity."⁴² Ridding oneself of this anonymity was a central if unstated task for authors of the country's print public. One answer to this challenge was the employment of wider descent-based categories of identity like *taifa*, as well as the use of racial caricatures and class-based personifications like *kabwela* and *naizi* (chapter 5).

Tanganyika's print public had numerous limitations. The African population literate in Roman-script Swahili or English, the language of the major print

media examined in this study, was limited and mostly male in colonial Dar es Salaam—in 1956, 42 percent of men and 12 percent of women were literate in Roman-script Swahili—although overall literacy rates had surpassed 60 percent by the 1960s.⁴³ Yet this print public always had a significant oral component. Tanganyikan writers wrote to be heard. Reading was often a social event, in which the reach of the press extended to the nonliterate through the practice of reading aloud. Much of what was published in Swahili independent newspapers, and the poetry that was published in all Swahili newspapers, followed spoken rather than standardized written conventions.⁴⁴ Tanganyikan writers also wrote to be seen. The sense of honor that was attached to the acquisition and public demonstration of literacy noticeably shaped how male African writers—in particular those associated with the military—represented themselves, colonial society, and elements of that society that they felt were dishonoring them—namely women and non-African men. Although honor is not taken up as a central category of analysis, it nonetheless features in key moments when racial and nationalist convictions harden. John Iliffe argues that honor, minimally defined as the right to respect, was a powerful ideological motivation in Africa’s twentieth-century history.⁴⁵ The language of Tanganyika’s print public supports this claim, as it is saturated with references to honor (*heshima*) and shame (*aibu*). As an “ideological motivation,” honor does not lend itself to systematic thought like that of race and nation, but its thick presence does reveal the versatility of Tanzanian documentary sources to convey the rich combinations of thought, posture, and sentiment at work in the minds of its authors.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

We begin with an analysis of urbanization under colonial law and administration in the 1920s and 1930s. This was not the beginning of imperial rule in Dar es Salaam, which was founded in the 1860s as an imperial outpost of Zanzibar, and later served as the capital of German East Africa from 1890 until its evacuation in 1916. Chapter 1 instead begins by examining how British officials adopted much of the German administration’s segregationist spatial urban planning, yet departed from German practices by raising the legal status of Indians from “native” to “non-native.” The distinction between “native” and “non-native,” premised on the postwar paternalist principle to protect “native” Africans from “non-native” predations, became the critical fulcrum through which urban policies were pursued, to self-contradicting ends. The enormous wealth generated and invested by the town’s Indian community over this period dramatically improved conditions in the “Asian” or “Commercial Quarters,” but also drove poorer Indians to seek cheaper housing in the (theoretically) segregated “Native Quarters” ostensibly reserved for Dar es Salaam’s African population. Resulting ripples of gentrification challenged

the very purpose and logic of policies ostensibly designed to protect “native” interests, and gave unintended meanings to the categories of native and non-native.

Chapter 2 examines the social and political lives of Africans and Indians in Dar es Salaam during the interwar period. Despite abiding divisions along “communal” lines based on religion and caste, Indian nationalists based in Dar es Salaam during the 1920s often united in criticism of British policy to direct effective protests against the colonial state. Yet the growing salience of Hindu-Muslim division in India disrupted East African anticolonial unity in the 1930s. This also coincided with the increasing communalization of commercial networks to better adapt to global depression that had reduced territorial trade and tightened commercial regulations. Indian political activism also stimulated new forms of African political activism. Racial self-identification as “African” was growing but enjoyed no political monopoly. It instead competed with an older dynamic in which Dar es Salaam’s “indigenous” inhabitants would claim firstcomer status and ancestral rights to all aspects of urban life vis-à-vis more recent, and frequently more successful, African immigrants. Associational life in Dar es Salaam straddled not only this moiety-like dynamic that pitted self-proclaimed “owners of the town,” or *wenye mji*, against more recent immigrants, or *watu wa kuja*, but also the aspirations of new actors and groups that identified along racial rather than firstcomer lines. “Race relations” between Indians and Africans were largely commercial relations, and the urban economy became the prism through which both groups would understand, misunderstand, and caricature each other.

Chapter 3 analyzes the radical demographic, economic, and administrative changes that the Second World War brought to Dar es Salaam. Facing massive growth in urban population and inflation, the colonial state exercised unprecedented control over Dar es Salaam’s urban economy. Their intrusions, which guaranteed a low but reliable level of subsistence to town residents, in effect created “urban entitlement” in a time of territorial scarcity. To put urban entitlement on a sustainable basis, the colonial government restricted urban space to those it deemed productive and fully employed, while targeting the unemployed through heavy-handed rural repatriation campaigns. The major issues of urban politics were the distribution and consumption of food, clothing, and housing. To contain inflation, the colonial state took over distribution of these goods for which it used a racialized rubric, which effectively organized urban life along racial lines as never before. Black markets thrived, and Africans identified and vilified Indians as unscrupulous profiteers. Labor disputes were increasingly organized around racial resentments, and labor leaders insisted on the duty of non-Africans to pay Africans a living wage. From these tensions developed a race-based popular politics among Africans

in Dar es Salaam. The creation of urban entitlement—macroeconomically speaking, the rural subsidization of urban life—had the political effect of entrenching racial divisions.

The term *taifa* comes under examination in chapter 4, which is an intellectual history of racial and nationalist writers, mostly based in Dar es Salaam, who made sense of these wide-ranging urban and territorial changes by articulating the idea of nation and race during the 1940s and 1950s. “Civilization” provided the principal theme upon which ideas of racial difference were cast. African writers embraced the “uplift” provided by plainly paternalistic notions of civilization, but also discerned that civilization bestowed racial self-identification and a duty to maintain racial integrity. Racial advancement depended on racial purity, whose greatest transgressors were the numerous “mixed-race” offspring of “immoral” African women and non-African men. The Second World War had a decisive effect on those African men who served in South Asia and Burma; these men returned with memories scarred not only by racial inequalities but with newly gained knowledge of comparative Indian poverty. The African racial identity paradigm flourished under political leadership of the African Association, which by 1954 had become the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). TANU embraced and pursued ideas of racial purity and virtue contained within the concept of civilization and its more secular successor, development, although its leader, Julius Nyerere, tempered racial logic by his pragmatic participation in “multiracial” politics, as well as by his personal conviction to pursue nonracial politics when possible. TANU also mobilized mass support by adopting local idioms of exploitation to explain the demoralizing persistence of non-African economic successes and African economic failures. So complete was TANU’s monopoly over racial discourse, and its monopoly of racial thought over most Tanganyikans, that formal and informal political opposition to TANU failed to effectively contest Nyerere’s ideal of a nonracial, patrilineal-based national citizenship for Tanganyika.

Chapter 5 examines the development of an urban socialist ideology that combined local ideas of exploitation and its eradication with international socialist concepts and colonial ideas of development. The discursive categories of *ujamaa* targeted non-Africans, Indians in particular, as unwilling participants in the project of nation-building. Long-standing mistrust, combined with long-standing discursive conflation of nation and race, helped nationalists to identify the “Indian” as the most fitting example of the new nation’s purge category, “exploiter.” This culminated in the expropriation of mostly Indian-owned buildings in 1971, which inspired a massive Indian exodus that fulfilled the doomsayers’ prophecy that Indians never intended to join the new African nation. Despite these racial transformations of urban policy, much of the colonial inheritance endured, in particular systematic removals of under- and unemployed Africans.

Racialized purge categories offered little to aspiring urban residents who lived in constant fear of being removed from Dar es Salaam to labor in *ujamaa* villages. Instead, a new language was born that transcended the official rhetoric of party and state, crafted by urban residents who sought to carve out discursive space to critique the totalizing conceits of the postcolonial state.

A final note on term usage: the language of identity categories is the principal focus of this book, and thus much thought has been given to descriptive group terms that require frequent and consistent usage. I use the term “Indian” throughout to refer to people of South Asian descent for two reasons. First, “Indian” was the main term of reference and self-reference throughout most of the period covered in this study. Second, the alternative terms, “South Asian” and “Asian,” are far too artificial and inexact, respectively, to bear constant repetition. “South Asian” is the preferred postpartition term of academics, but it is a term that is simply not used, either then or now, in East Africa. “South Asian” can be relied upon not to offend, but it lacks any and all emotive or intellectual force that is sometimes contextually conveyed—with both joy and discomfort—by the term “Indian” and its Swahili equivalent, *Mhindi*. The term “Asian” and its archaic variant “Asiatic” were frequently used to describe people from South Asia, but these were also shifting legal and political terms that sometimes, but not always, joined Arabs and Indians together, and sometimes Chinese as well. Although “Asian” became considerably more popular as a term of reference and self-reference after 1950, which is reflected in its usage in this book, any systematic usage of this term throughout would require frequent and tedious qualification. That said, “South Asian” and “Asian” are used in those instances when they are the better terms and require little or no elaboration. More problematic are the terms “native” and “non-native,” which were not only the principal legal categories used until the 1940s, but also terms frequently used for popular identification and self-identification. When I employ the terms “native” and “non-native” in the chapters below, I attempt to ameliorate the condescending connotations they inevitably carry by sometimes using scare quotes (“native” and “non-native”) to indicate their historically specific and, on occasion, ironic usage. I do not do this consistently, however, as systematic usage of scare quotes becomes burdensome and tedious for the reader and writer alike. Understand that the absence of scare quotes in no way condones the degrading connotations associated with the term “native,” any more than my un-scare-quoted usage of the acrid epithet *mshenzi* (savage) condones the degradation of mainland Africans by “civilized” coastal chauvinists.