

‘Unnatural and Ever Prejudicial’:
Constructions of Race and Colonial Hierarchies by British Observers in 19th Century
Zanzibar

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By

Jeffery Dyer, B.A.

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Introduction

With Great Britain's official declaration of the island as a protectorate in 1890, Zanzibar became one of the principal sites through which the empire commenced their expansion into the territories of East Africa. Zanzibar's central location in the shipping and trade routes around the African continent via the Cape of Good Hope to the Indian Ocean territories and its growing importance in the nineteenth century as a point of entry to East and Central Africa resulted in great interest in the island and attracted a large number of British visitors in the latter half of the century. Thus, even prior to the official adoption of the island as a dependency, a constant stream of British merchants, naval officers, explorers, missionaries and other individuals tied to varying extents to the imperial apparatus found their way to the island and produced an extensive corpus of material relating numerous aspects of the island's environment and inhabitants to an interested audience at home and elsewhere in the empire. These observers encountered a society in which waves of Arab, African and Indian immigrants had produced a complex, multiethnic social and political system with ties to many other parts of the surrounding region. This study will utilize these sources to explore the process through which racial identities were constructed within a British colonial context in the nineteenth century and attempt a brief reproduction of the system of racial

representation employed by British observers in Zanzibar during that time. It will work from the assumption that racial identity is socially constructed from a particular viewpoint and is contextual in various geographical and historical conditions. From this standpoint, we will then be able to outline the racialized framework within which these observers were operating and gain some insight into the effects that it had on policy decisions and the creation of colonial hierarchies of race and political power in the pre-Protectorate period.

One of the defining characteristics of Zanzibar in many contemporary accounts of the nineteenth century was the domination of its political system by a Muscati Arab Sultan from the Al Bu Saidi family and the influence of numerous other Arab immigrant families from the territories that make up present-day Oman. While some Arab and Persian immigration to the island and the nearby coastal territories had taken place for centuries, the large-scale immigration of Arab groups from the Omani territories did not commence until their defeat of Portuguese forces occupying Muscat and Zanzibar in the late seventeenth century. These Arab groups established themselves as a powerful force in the economic life of the Zanzibari territories and, though they maintained ties to their counterparts in the Northern Persian Gulf territories, up to the beginning of the nineteenth century “Zanzibar and Pemba remained divided among several indigenous rulers who acknowledged a distant Umani

sovereignty without any significant loss of local authority.”¹ This situation changed rapidly beginning around 1806 with the ascension to power in Muscat of Sayyid Said, a member of the Al Bu Saidi family whose dynasty was then dominant in the Muscati territories. From his first voyage to Zanzibar in 1829, Said enacted a policy that committed the naval and military power of the Muscati sultanate to the centralization of power in Zanzibar and its surrounding island and coastal territories and subordinated them to the authority of the dynasty that was then based in the distant Persian Gulf city of Muscat.² Said’s close ties to the British authorities based in the Indian territories resulted in increased British interest in the region and his death in 1856, followed by a contentious battle for succession between two of his sons, provided the British with an opportunity to become more directly involved in the internal affairs of the island through a negotiated settlement of its future political system. This settlement, informed by the Coghlin Commission’s report in 1861, was formalized by the decision of Lord

¹ Bennett, Norman. *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar*. London: Methuen & Co., 1978. Pg. 13. This section is also useful for a concise recounting of the previous centuries of Arab involvement in the island.

² Numerous histories of Said’s consolidation of power and the consequences of his actions for the economic life of the island have been produced. For some characteristic examples, see Bennett, Norman. *Arab Versus European: Diplomacy and War in Nineteenth Century East Central Africa*. New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1986 or *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar...*; Coupland, Reginald. *East Africa and its Invaders, from the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*. New York: Russell, 1965; Kumar, Ravinder. *India and the Persian Gulf Region (1858-1907)*. London: Asia Publishing House, 1965.

Canning, Secretary-General of the British Government of India in the same year, which established Zanzibar's independence from the Muscati territories and placed it under the rule of Sayyid Majid, one of Said's sons resident in the city of Zanzibar.³ This decision reconfirmed the rule of the members of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty in Zanzibar, in cooperation with their British advisers, over an Omani Arab aristocracy and a number of African, Indian, European and other inhabitants whose positions on the island were increasingly determined by their utility to the emerging Anglo-Omani power structure and the roles prescribed to them by various British observers. This system remained in place with minor variations throughout the rest of the century and would inform the structure of the island's governance even after it was officially transferred to British sovereignty under the protectorate.

The unique nature of the Arab Sultanate in the African island of Zanzibar and its close relations with the British for more than a century has produced a great deal of interest in the island's history and resulted in numerous studies focusing on the periods before and after Great Britain assumed control of the island's affairs. Some recent

³ This process is carefully detailed in, among others, Kumar, Ravinder. "The Dismemberment of Oman and British Policy Towards the Persian Gulf." *Islamic Culture*. Vol. 36 (1962): 8-19.

studies have taken innovative approaches to exploring the island's colonial past,⁴ though many of the histories of the period of Omani control under Said and his successors rely rather uncritically on colonial documents such as the reports and memos produced by consular officials active in the regional political scene to provide informative, if largely narrative, accounts of the diplomatic interactions of the relevant British and Arab actors. These histories, of which the works of Norman Bennett, Reginald Coupland, or Ravinder Kumar are representative,⁵ provide valuable and substantive accounts of the major actors in the large-scale political events of the nineteenth century and navigate the intricate diplomatic relations between British actors and their counterparts in the Zanzibar dominions. One major drawback of these works, however, is that their almost exclusive utilization of the accounts of British administrative officials and their unquestioned acceptance of the British characterizations of the Arab, African and Indian communities and their roles on the island present the imperial officials as largely uninterested parties whose intervention in the island simply maintains the continuity of a long-established hierarchy of Arab rule

⁴ See Bissell, William. "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia." *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 20:2 (May, 2005): 215-248 for an interesting example of this work.

⁵ See Bennett, Norman. *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar... or Arab Versus European: Diplomacy and War in Nineteenth Century East Central Africa...*; Coupland, Reginald. *East Africa and its Invaders...*; Kumar, Ravinder. "The Dismemberment of Oman and British Policy Towards the Persian Gulf..." or *India and the Persian Gulf Region...*; et.al.

over African and Indian communities. By relying too much on one class of documents and failing to critically engage the role of the British observers in propping up a particular power system that benefited their interests, the authors fail to account for the role that the British observers play in constructing a particular representation of Zanzibari society and formalizing that portrayal through the publication and dissemination of information through the imperial establishment in the region.

By placing the consular sources in the context of their counterparts among geographical expeditions and those involved in the anti-slavery movements, however, we may utilize their differences from each other to locate the role of the British observers and their unique objectives in their travels to Zanzibar in constructing particular representations of Zanzibari society. As a consequence of the primary focus on racial difference during the period of study and the significance with which it was invested in explaining group relations on the island, the characterizations of collectivized racial identities and their relations to the power structure in Zanzibar bring the differences in these sources and the influence of the authors' perspective into sharp focus in a way unmatched by other elements of their works. As a result, the authors' racialization of the populations will constitute the primary means of analyzing the influence of British observers in constructing hierarchies of power in the island in the period prior to their protectorate.

While many of the extant published observations of Zanzibari society in the 19th century were produced by people connected to some degree with the British government, it would be imprudent to characterize them all as government agents or imperial forerunners. The diverse backgrounds and motivations of geographical explorers, merchants, naval officers, anti-slavery activists, or even casual travelers and observers result in varying degrees of focus on some segments of the island's population over others based on their supposed influence over or involvement in the activities deemed most important to the individual. Thus, in the same year the writings of merchants visiting the island may focus on the preponderance of British Indian subjects in the Island's commercial life, governmental representatives may remark on the administrative functions of particular segments of the Arab populations, and anti-slavery activists may denounce the treatment of Black African slaves and the role of the Arab rulers and Indian merchants for their role in the slave trade. Each observer's characterization of the island and the social relations of its population groups is heavily influenced by what they perceive to be their own role in visiting the island and what they deem to be the appropriate role of the people they come into contact with. This observation is essential to analyzing the portrayals of the island's population found in diverse sources due to the fact that there was no singular, unitary conception of racial identity among British observers in Zanzibar in the period under study. The racial

categorization of African, Indian, Arab and other groups and the characteristics associated with them, while remarkably similar, varied somewhat between observers within the Zanzibari context and also differed from similar categories used in other regions at the same time. As a result, this study will not attempt to reconstruct a holistic sense of British definitions of race and power in 19th century Zanzibar, but will rather attempt to isolate each observer's portrayal of the population and their utilization of racial categories as a framework of conceiving identity and an analytical tool in explaining group behavior. These observations will then serve as a means of exploring how race was constructed and utilized by contemporary actors in an imperial framework. The study will focus particularly on the portrayals of Zanzibari society and racial identity and will deal comparatively with the publications of consular representatives and government officials, travelers and geographical expeditions, and naval officers and activists opposing the regional slave trade between the time of the island's subordination to Muscati authority in 1829 and the official proclamation of the British protectorate in 1890. These observations will then be used to explore how the socially-constructed racial categories and characteristics alternately shape and reflect the views of British policy-makers regarding structures of power in Zanzibar in the period prior to the formal/legal colonization of the island.

The Rule of Colonial Difference and Race in Zanzibar

Depictions of non-European populations within a racialized framework and explanations of their difference from and relative position to the often unremarked upon European observer are ubiquitous in many of the publications of the nineteenth century. Whether in the form of scientific publications attempting a systematic classification of the world's populations or fictional narratives portraying the increasingly common interactions with new peoples through colonial expansion, the question of what distinguishes the European or British observer from the rest of the world preoccupied the writings of many people across genres. The manner in which these portrayals of foreign populations were produced, their employment of racial identity as an organizing principle and even the terms used to define racial identity have had a profound influence on what is presumably known about non-European populations and continued to affect their representations in various media.

Constructions of Race and the Rule of Colonial Difference

As may be seen in the relevant sources for Zanzibar and numerous other locales that occupied British attention in this period of exploration and colonial expansion, many observers were preoccupied with the definition and classification of the people with whom they came into contact according to a biological and socio-cultural

definition of their identity. While numerous historical factors in the development of comparative anatomy, ethnology and other contemporary scientific frameworks influenced the form that these racial representations eventually took, several structural factors also shaped the way that the British observers constructed representations of other races and employed them in their political and economic interactions. The effects of the unmarked position of the European observer, the employment of stereotypes and production of complex associations of culture, civilization and race have had major implications for the assumptions inherent in representations of racialized difference and in their utilization in the construction of colonial hierarchies of power.

A key element in the construction of racialized representations of foreign populations is their portrayal in collectivized and essentialized terms, especially through the construction and employment of racial stereotypes. For the purposes of this paper, race will not be considered an innate biological condition that expresses itself through observable physical and social characteristics. It is rather a socially constructed level of identity that links together assumed similarities in physical and behavioral characteristics and links them to an imagined biological pedigree. The presumed scientific basis of these observations creates the potential for a universalized classification of race in which individuals may be interpellated into a larger system of identity in which the range of their abilities and their utility to the colonizing power

may be abstracted from their given racial identity. As a result of the biologically deterministic element of racial theory during this period, physical and behavioral characterizations of racial identity were often described in terms of a relatively fixed group identity, with the individual's utility to the theorist limited to their ability to represent and embody those collective traits. In a discussion of race and colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha has described the stereotype as "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved."⁶ Its dual character as that which is 'already known' and yet dependent on being 'anxiously repeated' suggests an important aspect of the racial stereotype that is revealed in its use and function in many colonial sources. Though some sources that affect a more scientific approach to racial representation, such as the geographical surveys, attempt a systematic explanation of racial identity and difference, many other sources employ race in a way that explains racial difference through that difference itself. Bhabha again notes that in much of the discourse, "race becomes the ineradicable sign of *negative difference* in colonial discourses. For the stereotype impedes the circulation and articulation of the signifier of 'race' as anything other than

⁶ Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg. 95

its *fixity* as racism. We always already know that blacks are licentious, Asiatics duplicitous...”⁷ The stereotype becomes an element of unproven prior knowledge that needs no proof of its veracity for its employment as explanation for racialized difference.

Though oftentimes the referents of racial difference employed by the British were biological and physical in nature, racial differences were defined much more broadly than through strictly physical characteristics. In many cases, social institutions and behavioral characteristics were emphasized as the essential points of difference between the British and other populations and, while not distinctly explained in terms of biological determinism, were intimately linked to the physical differences that provided the primary visual distinctions between populations. Robert Young suggests that the use of culture in the nineteenth century “was often indistinguishable from race: as George Stocking observes, ‘carrying much of the meaning “culture” does today, “race” was a kind of summation of historically accumulated moral differences sustained and slowly modified from generation to generation.’”⁸ The correlation of the physical characteristics of race and the social expressions of ‘historically accumulated moral differences’ is seen often in the employment of stereotypes such as the ‘duplicitous

⁷ Ibid., Pg. 108.

⁸ Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, Race*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Pg. 45.

Asiatic' or the 'licentious Black' cited by Bhabha. Thus, while much attention is paid to the anatomical and phrenological surveys that note the physical variations between the 'white' and the 'other', "in the process of producing race as real and knowable through specific aesthetic and epistemological practices, racialized populations become identified with other types of devalued and degraded knowledge."⁹ And while the effects of this process on the natural sciences are unmistakable, the prominence of the expanding colonial project and the interaction with other populations contributed to a situation in which "theories based on race spread from discipline to discipline and became one of the major organizing axioms of knowledge in general...indeed, it is arguable that race became *the* common principle of academic knowledge in the nineteenth century."¹⁰

Understanding the essential role of the stereotype in the process of racialization and the spread of a racialized worldview becomes even more important in light of Partha Chatterjee's claim that the "premise of [the colonial state's] power was a rule of colonial difference, namely, the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group."¹¹

⁹ Barnett, Clive. "Impure and Worldly Geography: The Africanist Discourse of the Royal Geographical Society 1831-1873." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*. Vol. 23:2 (1998): 239-251. Pg. 243.

¹⁰ Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire...* Pg. 93.

¹¹ Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pg. 10.

Any attempt to justify the establishment of British authority in foreign territories required a differentiation of a distinct British racial identity from that of the subordinated group. By employing stereotypical portrayals of other racialized groups, the British highlight their fitness for rule through the emphasis of other populations' degeneracy and inadequacy, thus simultaneously defining themselves through the boundaries they place around the 'other'. Their unique nature must be immediately evident since "it is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonized the capacities of self-government, independence, Western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power."¹² In this process, the published accounts of the British observer are both influenced by existing racial stereotypes and instrumental in the stereotypes' continuation through their application to new population groups encountered in colonial exploration.

Far from applying a fully conceived and firmly established system of racial classification to well-known and discretely identifiable populations, the British observers may often be seen as struggling to identify and classify the individuals that they encounter, partly based on some prior knowledge of scientized racial ideology and partly based on their observations of the social realities at the time of their travels. Thus, in the absence of an established, universal system of racial classification, the

¹² Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. Pg. 118.

interpellation by British observers of the individuals and populations encountered in their travels into a roughly conceived hierarchy of identity – the racialization of the populations – is vulnerable to all of the effects that contextual influences may have on the observer. Since the focus of these accounts is almost exclusively on the population being represented, the identity of the observer and the influences exerted by their institutional affiliations or objectives are often elided. Barnett notes that “racialization works by constructing certain subject-positions as the unmarked norm, by reference to which representations of difference are constructed.”¹³ While this may hold true in the sense that their accounts do not mark their subject position through explicit acknowledgement of the observer’s position of power, contextual influences may still be seen to exert some influence on their portrayals of other populations through the ranking of one population in relation to another in the context of their utility to the stated objectives of the observer. In this way, though the stereotyped portrayals of collectivized racial groups or the boundaries that define those groups may not change significantly from one observer to the next, the interpretation of their racialized characteristics and the ranking of one group in relation to another can vary depending on other factors like their potential utility to or hindrance of larger political and economic objectives.

¹³ Barnett, Clive. “Impure and Worldly Geography...” Pg. 243.

An Emerging Racial Classification in Pre-Protectorate Zanzibar

If British authority is partly maintained through the ‘rule of colonial difference,’ then the process of racialization and the hierarchization of a society’s constituent groups functions as an essential element in understanding the establishment of structures of British authority prior to the formal establishment of their sovereignty. In this case, Zanzibar provides an especially intriguing example due to the presence of a system of power already somewhat stratified on racial/ethnic lines prior to British conquest. Due to the presence of a decades long Omani Arab domination of the island’s economic and political structure, a population descended from local African groups and previous Arab and Persian immigrants, a significant community of merchants and traders from the Indian subcontinent and numerous other groups with deep ties to the island, the British arrived to find a thriving and complex society of various groups vying for influence in a system somewhat disrupted by the assumption of formal control over the island by Sayyid Said in 1829. Though Said was by no means the first Arab ruler of the island, his more recent arrival from the Persian Gulf territories around Muscat introduced a new element of outside control and strengthened relations with the distant territory in a way unmatched by his predecessors. In light of the fact that they arrived on the island during a period of significant flux, the characterizations of the island by British observers depicting a local society with fixed roles for various social groups and whose

ties to the island are projected into the distant past are especially interesting. Though the sources may differ on the relative position of various groups in relation to each other and on some of the characteristics attributed to them they largely agree in their basic characterization of the island as dominated by, in order of importance, Northern Gulf Arabs, East African Arabs, Banyan (Indian) merchants, half-caste blacks, and other Africans, with the superiority of the British largely unarticulated but nevertheless clearly felt. The following pages will briefly explore these divisions and the various characteristics that typically accompany them.

Arabs

The portrayals of the moral and behavioral characteristics of the Arab population vary more widely between sources than nearly any other population group, though the basic division of the community into those families that immigrated long ago and those more recently arrived remains consistent throughout. The families of Arabs that established themselves on the island in the past are most often described in terms that emphasize, through references to their physical and behavioral characteristics, resemblance to and mixing with the local African inhabitants. Typical of these descriptions is that of Colonel C.P. Rigby, British Resident at Zanzibar, who described a particular family as “vile in the extreme; from long residence here and constant

cohabitation with African slaves.”¹⁴ Richard Burton, with his characteristic attempts at biological classification, contends of the East African Arabs that “whilst the extremities preserve the fineness of Arab blood, the body is weak and effeminate; and the degenerate aspect is accompanied by the no less degraded mind, morals, and manners of the coast-people.”¹⁵ Their supposed shortcomings are often counterposed to the advantages of the pure, unadulterated Arab characteristics of the more recent immigrants from the Gulf. A naval commander in an anti-slavery patrol nicely summarizes the difference between the two when he describes coming across “a great form loomed up in the pitchy black dark, an unmistakable Persian Gulf dhow. *These were the real fighters...* Was there ever such hard luck? In months of cruising never had such a chance come to any of us. *A real proper fight* with a northern dhow, a Persian Gulfer.”¹⁶ In general, however, the Arab inhabitants are treated as a singular unit,

¹⁴ Bailey, R.W. Ed. *Records of Oman 1867-1947*. Buckinghamshire, England: Farnham Common, 1988. Pg. 92.

¹⁵ Burton, Richard Francis. *Zanzibar: City, Island, Coast*. London: Tinsley, 1872. Pg. 375.

¹⁶ Creswell, William, Thompson, P. Ed. *Close to the Wind: The Early Memoirs, 1866-1879, of Admiral Sir William Creswell*. London: Heinemann, 1965. Pg. 175. Emphasis added.

occupying the upper strata of life on the island and characterized by their martial prowess and their ability to maintain order.¹⁷

Africans (Negroes)

The African communities in British accounts of Zanzibar are paradoxically the subjects of the most complex and the most reductivist portrayals of any population group on the island. Several of the sources devote significant attention to distinguishing between various groups within the larger designation of African, which are generally divided into Somalis, Swahilis and the general category of ‘Negroes’.¹⁸ The distinctions are considered to be very important, especially in relation to enforcement of the ban on the slave trade, given the view that some, such as the Somalis, are “considered Hoor or free, in contradistinction to Negroes or Abyssinians, who came under the denomination of Abud, or bondsmen.”¹⁹ However, despite the care which is taken to distinguish between various populations in abstract terms, the portrayals of

¹⁷ There are some variations in this portrayal that will be more fully explored in later sections.

¹⁸ For examples of these distinctions see Frere, Henry Bartle Edmond. “A Few Remarks on Zanzibar and the East Coast of Africa.” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*. 17 (1872-73): 343-54. Pg. 353; Kemball, Arnold Burrowes. “Paper Relative to the Measures Adopted by the British Government, 1820-1844, for effecting the suppression of the slave trade in the Persian Gulf...”. *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*. No. 24 (1856): 635-87. Pgs. 642-3; Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pgs. 111, 407-421.

¹⁹ Kemball, Arnold. “Paper Relative to...” Pg. 643.

African individuals or groups on the island of Zanzibar inevitably refer simply to ‘Negroes’ or even simply ‘dark faces’, with no further distinction being deemed necessary.²⁰ This is even more noticeable in light of the fact that no mention is made of Somalis or other groups in reference to any actual experiences with them in visits to the island. This may be due to a similar situation as that described by Kemball in relation to raids on suspected slave dhows in which “as a large portion of the crew of native boats is frequently composed of Negroes, it must of course be extremely difficult if not impossible, for any examining officer to ascertain whether the Africans on board are bona fide seamen, or brought for sale.”²¹ Portrayals of the African populations are further limited by constant resort to such phrases as “Like all negroes they will wear...”²² or “like all places in which negroes congregate...”²³ which essentialize the population in a way that requires no further elaboration by the author and which are,

²⁰ Though it would be impractical to list all of the examples, see Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pg. 33 or Bellville, Alfred. “A Trip Round the South End of Zanzibar Island.” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*. 20 (1875-76): 69-74. Pg. 73 for some representative samples.

²¹ Kemball, Arnold. “Paper Relative to...” Pg. 651. By pointing this out I do not mean to suggest that there are no differentiations in the African populations of the island or the coastal areas, only that when faced with an individual in front of them, many of the observers seem unable or unwilling to employ the systems of classification that they take such pride in creating in the abstract.

²² Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pg. 111.

²³ Holman, James, R.N. *Travels in Madras, Ceylon, Mauritius, Cormoro Islands, Zanzibar, Calcutta, Etc. Etc.* London: Routledge, 1840. Pg. 47.

needless to say, typically less than flattering for those being described. However, in a manner similar to that of the Arab populations some key variations in depictions of their behavioral characteristics and governing abilities arise in particular sources that will be more fully explored in subsequent sections.

Banyans (Indians)

The third most prominent segment of the population of Zanzibar included in the British accounts is what they describe as the ‘Banyan,’ or British subject from the Indian sub-continent, whose relative importance in the social and political life of the island is much less in comparison to the Arab and African inhabitants. They are described almost exclusively in their role as traders and merchants, who are considered “right meek by the side of the Arab’s fierceness...with placid, satisfied countenances, and plump, sleek, rounded forms, suggesting the idea of happy, well-to-do cows.”²⁴ Several sources also suggest a scorn for their domination of the island’s trade, describing them in contemptible tones as “the local Jew”²⁵ or as “the mortgagee [of the island]...beside whom Shylock were as an alms-giving angel of light.”²⁶ Their

²⁴ Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pg. 105. Given the focus in numerous accounts on their Hinduism, the latter imagery may also be considered a somewhat subtle allusion to their religious difference from the other inhabitants.

²⁵ Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pg. 105.

²⁶ Gordon, Stuart D. “Zanzibar Slave: His Condition and Progress.” *Belgravia: A London Magazine*. 95 (1895): 125-34. Pg. 130.

presence on the island is portrayed as well established in the distant past, with at least one observer even employing that oft-used colonial cliché that their community was “established *from time immemorial* upon the Zanzibar coast.”²⁷ Their presence in the consular and geographical accounts of the island ranges from non-existent to ancillary, however they occupy an unexpected and unappealing role in the portrayals of several of the documents related to the slave trade that will be more fully explored in that section.

By employing the stereotyped representations of various racialized groups to classify the various populations that they encountered at Zanzibar, the observers were beginning the process of interpellating those inhabitants in a classification of racial difference that signified not only the separation between them and the British observers, but also the separation that existed between the various groups. The categories employed and the moral connotations of those categories are far from universal in the various sources, especially in cases where the observers are dealing with particular individuals such as the Sultan. However, their utilization of these categories and reductive suggestions of their effects on behavior and character is quite common in relation to general populations of Arabs, Africans and others and, through repetition of

²⁷ Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pg. 39. This phrase is a particular favorite since, as the British really only arrived on the island within the last few decades, ‘from time immemorial’ does not technically connote any great length.

their basic tenets, exerts some influence on how the observer and the reader interprets the basic character of various groups and the complex relations between them. Thus, as we will see in the following sections, repeated affirmations or rejections of the fitness of Arabs to exercise authority or of Africans to provide for themselves both explain and reinforce the power relations being supported by the colonial power, despite some variations in the characteristics attributed to each.

Consular Officials and the Construction of Colonial Hierarchies

In order to assess the construction of British authority in Zanzibar prior to its formal claims of the island as a protectorate, it is necessary to explore how the apportionment of power between different population groups coincided with newly established racial categories and hierarchies. Given the established interests on the island of Northern Gulf Arab tribes like the ruling Al Bu Saidi family, Arab and African traders on the mainland, commercial and imperial representatives from Europe and America, and the extensive economic involvement of British Indian subjects, British sovereignty in Zanzibar was hardly a *fait accompli* even as late as the mid-19th century. Their eventual primacy in Zanzibar's political and economic affairs resulted from decades of treaties and strategic engagements in which the British succeeded in constructing a hierarchy of power in the territory with themselves and their closest allies at the apex. Though no single actor or policy may be cited as primarily responsible in this endeavor, several policies and reactions to particular events may be cited as pivotal in the evolution of British authority in the island. Through their relations with Sayyid Said during his rule of Muscat and Zanzibar, their handling of the dispute over succession in the two territories, and negotiations over the status of other populations on the island, the British administrators in India, Muscat and Zanzibar revealed the

racialized nature of their assumptions on the legitimate authority of various groups in the governance of the island and their proper positions in the developing colonial hierarchy. By exploring the evolution of Anglo-Muscati relations in Muscat and Zanzibar, establishing the circumstances of the construction of Al Bu Saidi dominance in an ‘independent’ Zanzibar, and determining the effect of this arrangement on official British interaction with the other populations of the island, we can trace how the racial paradigm of British administrators in the Indian Ocean, as expressed by their representations in the consular memoranda and reports, was reproduced in the governmental structure that they helped create in Zanzibar.

Gulf Affairs and Muscati Authority in Zanzibar

While the period in which Sayyid Said and the authorities in Muscat exercised direct political control of Zanzibar and the coastal territories was fairly short-lived, it established the basis for relations between the Muscati Arab rulers of the Al Bu Saidi family and their British patrons through the rest of the period of British control. Said’s first voyage to Zanzibar and the coastal East African territories did not take place until December of 1829, more than two decades after he assumed control of the Sultanate of Muscat and began a close strategic relationship with the British representatives in India and the Persian Gulf. The advantages for the British created by this relationship in the Gulf constituted one of the primary and fundamental factors that shaped their policy

regarding Said's involvement in East Africa and their decisions on the political status of the two territories and their rulers following his death.

British support for Said's entry into Zanzibar and East Africa in 1829 rested largely on his importance to them in maintaining their affairs in the Persian Gulf. The relationship that developed between the two parties between 1807 and 1829 was not entirely consistent in terms of direct British support for the ruler and should not be overstated. At one point in 1811, as Said was threatened by an invasion of the Wahhabi rulers to the West, the British authorities denied support to the ruler based on the claim that the previously signed "treaty of 1798 [between the British and Said's predecessor] did not impose 'any obligation on either of the contracting parties to co-operate in the wars of the other.'"²⁸ However, despite this and several other incidents denying any formal responsibility for the Muscati ruler's defense, British support was continuously provided in recognition of Said's role in containing the encroachment of parties in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula and opposing tribes in the Trucial Coast viewed by the British as pirates that interfered with their maritime trade.²⁹ Thus, as a result of Muscat's strategic position and Said's cooperation with the British in several efforts to suppress piracy and contain rival forces, Said acted as sort of a 'cap' on the Persian

²⁸ Kumar, Ravinder. "The Dismemberment of Oman ... Pg. 9.

²⁹ For an interesting alternative view see Qasimi, Sultan ibn Muhammad. *The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf*. London: Croom Helm, 1986.

Gulf, restricting access to the waters of the Gulf and the Indian Ocean by powers that were less favorable to British trade interests.

British recognition of Said's vital role in their trade policy in the Gulf and Indian Ocean may be seen not only in their close cooperation with the ruler in his domestic affairs, but also in several actions taken to ease his entry into East African affairs in the late 1820's. Since hereditary claims in East Africa by the Al Bu Saidi dynasty also included several coastal territories largely controlled by the Omani Mazrui tribes, the fledgling British protectorate over Mombassa established in 1824 would have constituted an impediment to Muscati expansion in the area.³⁰ However, British commitment to the Sultan and their desire to keep him happy was exhibited when the rival protectorate was "withdrawn in [1826] at the instance of the Government of India, who were unwilling to thwart the projects of their ally."³¹ Actions such as these taken by the British on behalf of Said enabled him to consolidate his hold over Zanzibar, Pemba and other islands and territories on the coast and eventually to build a large and economically successful companion to his established territorial holdings in Muscat.

³⁰ See Coupland, Sir Reginald. *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*. London: T. Butterworth Ltd., 1933. Pgs. 198-99, for an interesting connection between this protectorate and the burgeoning efforts to halt the Sultan's involvement in the East African slave trade. This will also be explored in further detail below.

³¹ Lorimer, J.G. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*. Farnborough, England: Gregg International Publishers, Ltd., 1970. Vol. 1 Pt. 1A. Pg. 451.

However, these changes proved troublesome for the British when the shift in the Sultan's focus to Zanzibari affairs resulted in the assumption of greater responsibilities for the British administrators in India in supporting his continued rule in Muscat.

Due to the increase of Muscat involvement in Zanzibar and the relative distance between the island and Muscat, "more than two-thirds of his time, after 1829, was spent by Saiyid Said either on board ship or in his African possessions."³² His absence from the Muscati territories resulted in frequent attempts by rival tribes and other regional actors to seize control of the strategically important territory, forcing the British government in India to prevent his "power in Maskat from being extinguished or seriously crippled by remonstrances addressed to his enemies and by naval demonstrations."³³ The necessity for the British to repeatedly intervene on behalf of the Sultan to maintain his power in the Muscati holdings expressly conflicted with their official policy to not involve themselves in the Arab rivalries on land,³⁴ and expended resources in a manner that the British felt would not be necessary if the Sultan would "remain at home in future and protect his hereditary dominions."³⁵ Several other

³² Lorimer, J.G. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf...* Pg. 452.

³³ Saldanha, J.A. *The Persian Gulf Precipis*. Gerrards Cross : Archive, 1986. Vol. II, Pg. 171.

³⁴ See Saldanha, J.A. *The Persian Gulf Precipis*. Vol. II. Pg. 171 among others for an explanation of this position.

³⁵ Lorimer, J.G. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf...* Pg. 453.

instances in which it was deemed necessary by the British to intercede with the Sultan in Zanzibar and request his return to Muscat³⁶ led by the time of his death in 1856 to a general regard for the East African possessions as an unnecessary distraction for the Sultan from his responsibilities in the Persian Gulf. The evolution of Muscati authority in the two territories and British views on the Sultan's responsibilities to them in each resulted in a dramatic shift in their approach to the two territories that was expressed in their mediation between two of his sons following his death in 1856.

The Coughlin Commission and the Separation of Zanzibar

During his tenure as Sultan of the Muscati and East African dominions, Said, in his automatic supersession of the authority of the governors that he installed in each territory during his absences, personally embodied the political unity of Muscat and Zanzibar in a way unparalleled before or after his period of rule. Thus, as a result of his death and conflicting accounts of his wishes regarding the succession of his sons, Majid and Thuwaynee, as sovereigns of the territories now treated as separate entities, the British Governor General of India, Lord Canning, sent a commission of inquiry under Brigadier William Coghlan, then Political Resident at Aden, to investigate and arbitrate the matter. The findings of the commission regarding the relationship between Muscat

³⁶ See Lorimer, J.G. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*... Pg. 455, "...letters also were written by the British authorities to Saiyid Sa'id at Zanzibar to urge his immediate return."

and Zanzibar, the nature of each territory's sovereignty and the policies that were enacted as a result reflect British assumptions regarding the ability of Zanzibar's various populations to govern and had a fundamental impact on the political organization of the territory during that period.

While the commission was formed under the pretense of determining "what are the exact rights of the one [claimant] in relation to the other by religious law, family customs, specific instrument, or force of circumstances," its findings and the decision of the government hewed more closely to its secondary objective of finding "what is right and what is expedient, and whether the parties can be induced partially to concede the one for the purpose of permanently securing the other."³⁷ The major point of disagreement that existed between the two sons of Sayyid Said was not, from the British point of view, whether Majid had been legitimately installed as governor of Zanzibar and Thuwaynee as governor of Muscat, but whether, as historical precedent suggested, the former was subordinate to the latter and whether it was necessary to provide monetary compensation as an acknowledgement of that subordination. The conclusion reached by the commission on this question is interesting both for what it explicitly said about the ability of each of the sons to govern the territories and for the racial implications of unstated British assumptions on the right and ability of the Northern

³⁷ Bailey, R.W. Ed. *Records of Oman...* Pg. 106.

Arab governors to continue ruling the island. In their conclusion that “Syed Majid’s claims to the sovereignty of Zanzibar and its African dependencies are superior to any which can be adduced in favor of Syed Thoweynee” and that “it would be superfluous to add anything to these considerations in favor of the independent sovereignty of Zanzibar,”³⁸ the commission, and by extension the British government in India, rejected the notion of seeking a ‘new Said,’ rather accepting the separation of the two territories under different rulers and working out the monetary terms under which they would now be related. Left largely unstated in the Coghlan report, though remarked upon by a contemporary observer, was that “the stability of Masqat and Zanzibar would be ensured by such a step. Besides, a Zanzibar rid of Arabian encumbrances would play an important role in the future of British policy in East Africa.”³⁹ The report cites indications that, as Thuwaynee was preparing a military expedition to subordinate his brother in Zanzibar, another relation was preparing an attack on the holdings in Muscat, leading the British to fear that “in grasping at the shadow of sovereignty in Zanzibar,

³⁸ Ibid. Pg. 115. Interestingly, the commission’s report also suggests, without a hint of irony, the inevitability of the separation of the two territories since “the connection which existed between Oman and a country so far remote as East Africa was always an unnatural one and ever prejudicial to the interests of both countries.”

³⁹ Kumar, Ravinder. “The Dismemberment of Oman...” Pg. 17. The text cited is Kumar’s paraphrasing of a memoranda from a British Political Agent.

Syed Thoweynee would have lost the substance in Muscat.”⁴⁰ Through the arbitration of the commission, the British government in India succeeded in ensuring the political and financial stability of two of its most strategic assets in the Indian Ocean and tilted both towards greater dependency on British mediation in their affairs.⁴¹ This aspect of the British decision to separate the territories, while not the only motivation, must still be taken into account as an aspect of how the territories fit into a broader British strategy for prominence in the territories bordering the Indian Ocean and for the effect that it had on the ability of the British administrators to consolidate their authority in the two territories in the following decades.

The decision of the Coghlin Commission and the Canning Award to place Sayyid Majid in power in Muscat and Sayyid Thuwaynee in Zanzibar was also significant in its unstated decision that one or the other of the Omani Arab members of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty was the only proper choice to be the new ruler. Especially in the case of Zanzibar, the existence of many wealthy members of other Arab tribes from the area of Oman and a well-established African population with rulers subordinated to

⁴⁰ Bailey, R.W. Ed. *Records of Oman...* Pg. 114

⁴¹ An interesting incident reaffirms the expediency of this policy for the British as, in 1880, the Sultans of Muscat and Zanzibar exchange correspondence exploring the possibility of reuniting the two territories and are informed that it would be opposed by the British since it would contradict the decision of Lord Canning in 1861 to separate them. See Bailey, R.W. Ed. *Records of Oman...* Pgs. 174-78 for relevant documents.

Sultan Said provided other choices for the British administrators charged with determining the future government of the island. In the commission's report a great deal of attention is paid to established precedent in the political tradition of the Muscati Sultans and the question is addressed at the very least with the pretension of working within an established system of succession. However, the status of the Muscati Sultans in Zanzibar and the East African territories underwent a fundamental shift under Sultan Said and the conditions of the dispute between his sons was one that was unparalleled in the historical examples available to the members of the commission.⁴² Additionally, there is little doubt that, had political expediency suggested another ruler to be preferable to the two options from Said's bloodline, the British commitment to Muscati precedent would have shifted with their political requirements. Thus, we are left with the question of why British interests in Zanzibar would best be served by Sayyid Majid, the son of the previous, newly established ruler, whose authority was questioned by several local tribes as well as his younger brother, Barghash.⁴³

⁴² For the source that most prominently shaped the views of the commission in this regard see, Ibn Ruzayq, Hamid ibn Muhammad. *History of the Imams and Sayyids of Oman, 661-1856*. Translated from the original Arabic, and ed., with notes, appendices, and an introduction, continuing the history down to 1870, by George Percy Badger. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1871.

⁴³ See Bailey, R.W. Ed. *Records of Oman...* Pgs. 91-2, among others, for some examples of opposition to Majid's rule.

Though the primary explanation for the favor granted to Majid is most likely the presumed legitimacy of his succession to his father and the ease with which his transition to power could be effected over that of establishing a new and untested dynasty on the island, some other motivations may be drawn from the characterizations of the British observers regarding the racial characteristics of the Northern Arab tribes over other Arabs and Africans in the same territories. In reference to another of the Omani family groups established in Zanzibar and the coastal territories, the ‘El Harth,’ British representative Colonel C.P. Rigby describes them as “the oldest Arab settlers on the island, and appear to have always had an idea of some day obtaining the sovereignty of it.”⁴⁴ Though it seems their established residency could be seen as an advantage in their ties to the community, Rigby goes on to characterize the group as “vile in the extreme; from long residence here and constant cohabitation with African slaves, they retain nothing of the Arab character, but its sensual vices. This tribe furnishes most of the slave-merchants and slave-brokers, who are cruel, sensual wretches, dead to every feeling of humanity.”⁴⁵ His focus on this group is informative for the distinctions that Captain Rigby draws between the newly arrived Arab settlers and the established residents, and for the terms in which he draws the distinctions. Their behavior is

⁴⁴ Ibid. Pg. 92.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Pg. 92.

singled out as cause for their reprobation, however the behavior is linked to their ‘constant cohabitation’ with the local African populations, who themselves are characterized only by slavery. Their moral degradation, and hence lack of fitness to rule, is not only alleged through their biological links with slavery, but also with their actual participation in the practice as slave traders and merchants, a trope that will surface many more times in the extensive literature devoted strictly to dealing with the status of slavery in East Africa.

The connections drawn by Rigby between the ability to govern and the racialized characterizations of the East African and Persian Gulf residents are echoed by another British resident, Colonel Lewis Pelly, in a way that goes on to link them to the consequences of the decision to end the political unity of the two territories. He noted his reservations on the settlement in a memo from 1861 that stated:

“I sometimes anticipate, now that the supply of the northern blood is cut off by the separation of Muscat from Zanzibar, that the Arabs of the latter place will soften and effeminate to the tone of society usually found in rich, low enervating situations, where little exertion is essential to a dreamy existence, and where climate offers many incitements to sensuality and idleness.”⁴⁶

Pelly’s explicit linking of the behavior of the Arab governors to their ‘supply of the northern blood’ draws the most distinct correlation between biological racial identity and behavioral characteristics of any of the previous consular documents. The

⁴⁶ Bailey, R.W. Ed. *Records of Oman...* Pg. 142.

combination of this distinctly racial approach and the attention paid to the effects of climate on behavior and society is even more characteristic of another class of sources, the geographical expeditions, whose links to those of the consular corps are numerous and yet whose approach to involvement in local affairs, as will be seen below, is far more ethnographic and explicitly racialized than their counterparts in the colonial establishment.

The Royal Geographical Society and a Scientific Construction of Race

The expansion of interest during the nineteenth century in geographical surveys of unexplored regions of Africa and Asia contributed to an explosion of published material relaying observations on the physical and social makeup of foreign lands to an eager audience in Europe. The establishment of the Royal Geographical Society of London in 1830 and its official sponsorship by the British monarchy is a key expression of this interest and was responsible for many volumes of travelers' observations both through its official journal and the numerous other publications produced by the explorers that the society sponsored.⁴⁷ While these publications differed in style, substance and focus from the consular documents reviewed above, the involvement of numerous members of the colonial establishment in the geographical surveys and close ties between their efforts and those of the governments in London and India produced some remarkable similarities between the portrayals of local populations within the official reports and those of the society. Additionally, the scientific pretensions of the members of the society and the emphasis on ethnological analyses of the human

⁴⁷ See Barnett, Clive. "Impure and Worldly Geography..." or Home, R.W. "The Royal Society and the Empire: The Colonial and Commonwealth Fellowship, Part 1 1731-1847." *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*. Vol. 56:3 (Sept., 2002): 307-332 for a description of the society's beginnings and the increased interest in a scientific exploration of foreign territories.

populations of the territories, under the influence of the contemporary views of the natural sciences on racial characteristics and social behavior, characterized the observations made by these travelers of particular populations and social relations at a given point in time as a means of determining their place within a scientific classification of human populations and affected their ranking in a general hierarchy of humanity. By comparing the publications of members of the Royal Geographical Society on Zanzibar and studying them in relation to the society's views on ethnological approaches to studying human populations, we will be able to identify the contextual influences that shaped their depictions of Zanzibar's populations and analyze their effects on the definition and hierarchization of the various groups within the geographical literature.

The Royal Geographical Society and Ethnological Racial Classification

The foundation of the Royal Geographical Society of London in 1830 was both a reflection of and an impetus for continued production of geographical knowledge of the world outside of Europe. In pursuit of the “twin aims of its founders: the encouragement of scientific expeditions and the dissemination of geographical knowledge,”⁴⁸ the founding members of the society sponsored expeditions into new areas of Africa and Asia that were achieving greater notoriety and importance in the

⁴⁸ Barnett, Clive. “Impure and Worldly Geography...” Pg. 241.

British context due to the increased involvement of the British in the Indian subcontinent. Though committed from its founding document to “conferring just and distinct notions of the physical and political relations of our globe,”⁴⁹ the utility of such knowledge to the colonial efforts in these territories did not go unnoticed. The society was perceived as a body capable of not only “evaluating the haphazard travelers information then deluging Britain from the periphery,” but also “of gathering accurate intelligence on potential markets and sources of raw materials by means of scientific expeditions orchestrated as patriotic adventures.”⁵⁰ Given the confluence of interests between the society and imperial interests at this time, and the proportion of members of the Royal Army and Navy and East India Company officers counted among its members, “logic dictated [the society’s] extension into the colonial empires, where the marshalling of empirical information helped rationalize the administration of alien territories.”⁵¹ These overlaps in membership and objectives resulted in a strong correlation between the representations of the territories and the points of focus within the geographical literature and the official government reports.

⁴⁹ Royal Geographical Society. “Prospectus of the Royal Geographical Society.”

Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London. Vol. 1 (1831): vii-xii. Pg. vii.

⁵⁰ Stafford, Robert A. “Geological Survey, Mineral Discoveries and British Expansion, 1835-71.” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*. Vol. 12 (1984): 5-32. Pg. 13.

⁵¹ Stafford, Robert A. “Geological Survey...” Pg. 23.

The focus of the society on mineralogical and hydrological surveys, among other types of studies, contributed greatly to the expansion of knowledge of new territories and their potential utility to the imperial administration. However, the populations of people residing in these territories also constituted an essential area of inquiry to any potential involvement in them and became an important aspect of the society's publications. The founding objectives of the society included a commitment to explore "[t]he establishment of new divisions of the Earth's surface...more especially as regards those divisions which are founded on physical and geological characters, on climate, *and on distinctions of the human race, or of language.*"⁵² The framing of their objectives in this manner is significant both for its inclusion of human populations in its areas of inquiry and for the way that it situates them as an aspect of the local geography, alongside its geology and climate. This approach suggests not only an assumption that the peoples could be understood with a relative degree of scientific accuracy, given proper scrutiny, but also that the potential existed to control and utilize them as another resource of the occupied land. The descriptions of local populations in these sources, alternately described as ethnographies or ethnologies, "include descriptions of racialized cultural difference; accounts of the customs, manners and the spatial practices of non-

⁵² Royal Geographical Society. "Prospectus..." Pg. xi. Emphasis added.

European societies; and representations of geographical landscapes.”⁵³ In a section of ‘Hints to Travellers,’ the society’s journal provides a set of questions in its ‘Ethnography’ section that reads like a questionnaire of their potential for colonial exploitation. Alongside suggestions of learning the local languages and customs stand admonishments to “Note the number of natives seen from day to day, distinguishing the sex, and children,...Do they give proof of capacity for civilization?...May the natives be trusted as guides?...What presents please them best?...Are they disposed to receive instruction?...Can the traveller point out the most probable mode of civilizing and benefiting the natives?”⁵⁴ The focus of these suggestions on largely social and customary behavior and their subsumption within the section of ethnology/ethnography elucidate the association made within much of the literature and within common discourse of the nineteenth century between a biological racial identity and a series of manners and customs that are assumed to correspond to that identity. This presumed correlation and its ability to be properly scrutinized and classified within the scientific

⁵³ Barnett, Clive. “Impure and Worldly Geography...” Pg. 243. See Raper, Henry and Robert FitzRoy. “Hints to Travellers.” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*. Vol. 24 (1854): 328-358. Pg. 356, and Burton, Richard. *Zanziabar...* Pg. 368 for examples using both ‘ethnography’ and ‘ethnology’.

⁵⁴ Raper, Henry et.al. “Hints to Travellers.” Pgs. 356-7. Another interesting suggestion of the use of gender relations for control is found in questions the same page such as “Is plurality of wives common? Are women without husbands frequent?” or “How do they treat their wives?”

literature is reflected in many of the published accounts of Zanzibar in the society's journal and especially in the full-length treatise on the island by one of the society's most prolific members, Sir Richard Burton.

Africans and Arabs in the Writings of the RGS and Richard Burton

While India and the surrounding territories constituted an important area of exploration for the nascent geographical society, “first, and perhaps most obviously, the RGS established its scientific credibility and prominence on the public stage through its close association with the exploration of the African continent.”⁵⁵ The great diversity of ecologies, flora, fauna, and especially the profusion of local customs among the numerous population groups proved to be an attractive area of enquiry for aspiring geographers and explorers. The prominent works of Richard Burton, David Livingstone, or Henry Stanley were accompanied by innumerable smaller publications in the society's journals elucidating every aspect of the continent and attempting to reduce it to an exhaustive collection of its most minute details. These efforts are especially intriguing in their treatments of the population groups in Zanzibar given their efforts to explore and elucidate the complex social relations between Arab and African populations on the island in a way that both reflects and reaffirms the justifications of established British relations with the groups.

⁵⁵ Barnett, Clive. “Impure and Worldly Geography...” Pg. 241.

Just as the descriptions in the consular documents reinforce a social and political order in Zanzibar in which the Northern Arab rulers maintain firm control over the earlier Arab immigrants, Indian merchants, African servants and slaves, and other minority population groups, the geographical surveys of the island tend to maintain similar separations of the population and an identical hierarchy of power through their descriptions of social relations and the attendant biological and behavioral characteristics that engender them. Though individuals in the descriptions may differ in the way that they are characterized, the populations are often collectivized according to standard stereotypical typologies in which “patriarchs with long grey beards, unclean white robes, and sabers in hand, held courts of justice, and distributed rough-and-ready law to peaceful Banyans, noisy negroes, and groups of fierce Arabs.”⁵⁶ Particularly important in this characterization and in any consideration of the literature and its correspondence with policy-making decisions is the opposition created between the Black African populations and the Arab populations, and the tendency to subordinate the former to the latter. While this formulation of Zanzibari society is certainly influenced by existing social relations at the time of the British arrival, the reinforcement of this particular hierarchy through repetition, its naturalization via the language of the ethnological studies, and its ossification in the British discourse through

⁵⁶ Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pg. 89.

continuous publication of its utility to the British administration had a profound effect on British interaction with the populations in the pre-protectorate period.

One of the most consistently stereotyped depictions of the island's populations is that of the Black African inhabitants, often simply collectivized under the term 'Negroes.' More than any other human population on the island, the Africans are commonly mentioned in the same manner and section as the natural animal and plant life of the island, assumed to be both indigenous to the island's ecology and governed by the same natural laws and pressures. This association is perfectly captured in Burton's eroticized and anthropomorphized description of the island itself, which begins as a 'tropical man' and ends as a 'girl negress.' Evoking numerous stereotypes of life in the tropical regions even before his boat entered the harbor, Burton writes of traveling a sea that "lay basking, lazy as the tropical man, under a blaze of sunshine" with "hardly energy enough to dandle us, or to cream with snowy foam."⁵⁷ The flower that he spied on the coastline "had opened its pink eyes to the light of day, but was languidly closing them, as though gazing upon the face of heaven were too much of exertion."⁵⁸ However, even these allusions are outdone by his description of the island itself, which "seemed over-indolent, and unwilling to rise; it showed no trace of

⁵⁷ Ibid. Pg. 28.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Pg. 28.

mountain or crag, but was all voluptuous with gentle swellings with the rounded contours of the girl-negress, and the brown-red tintage of its warm skin showed through its gauzy attire of green.”⁵⁹ These allusions to the most basic stereotypes of life in the warmer climates to portray their people as indulgent, lazy, and in need of guidance from the European powers subtly reinforce in the reader’s mind the general character of Zanzibar’s inhabitants, without having even encountered them yet.

The inclusion of these African populations in surveys of the natural life of the regions is informative both in that they are the only group referred to in this way and in what their inclusion suggests about the observers’ opinions of their humanity. A particularly telling example may be found in Burton’s chapter titled “Geographical and Physiological,” in which he sandwiches a description of the Black African populations of the island and coastline between descriptions of the types of rocks to be found in the region and the animals that inhabit the coastlines and forests of East Africa. By describing the “negroes and negroids” of the region as “an undeveloped and not to be developed race – in this point agreeing with the fauna and flora around them,”⁶⁰ he associates them with the other natural resources of the land to be judged based on their potential for exploitation by the occupying power. Even more egregious is their

⁵⁹ Ibid. Pg. 29.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Pg. 121.

inclusion in the statement that “few, if any, domestic animals are aborigines of the island, and of those imported none thrive save Bozal negroes and asses.”⁶¹ No longer simply implied by proximity, this passage explicitly labels the ‘Bozal negroes’ as domestic animals to be imported and utilized as resources. The exclusive characterization of the black populations of the island as part of the natural ecology, though possibly partly traceable to the essentialist view of Africa as their native home and not that of the Arab or Indian populations, also serves to lower them to the bottom ranking of human civilization in the British accounts and precludes the populations from consideration for roles in the leadership or administration of the territory.

Though their presence in the ecological surveys is unmistakable, the African populations are also present in the explorers’ descriptions of the social makeup of the island in a way that continues their relatively dehumanized conglomeration and their subordination to the Arabs. Though the African populations are occasionally differentiated into several groups,⁶² the differences attributed to each are minor and often enumerated only in the abstract without influencing the tendency to describe

⁶¹ Ibid. Pg. 211. Elsewhere, Burton offers by way of definition that “the Bozals, or freshly-trapped chattels, are far more original and interesting.” Pg. 112.

⁶² See Frere, Henry. “A Few Remarks on Zanzibar...” Pg. 353 or Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pgs. 407-468. Burton’s decision to title the chapter “Ethnology of Zanzibar: The Wasawahili and the Slave Races” is especially interesting given his contemporaries’ efforts at putting an end to the slave trade on the island.

groups of people that the explorers personally observe according to their most basic stereotype. Oftentimes, the African populations melt into the background of the surveys, surfacing only when they are considered to have become a nuisance to the explorers or fail in their assigned tasks of facilitating their travel. When Alfred Bellville describes a house as “at present uninhabited, except by some negroes”⁶³ he makes visible their almost complete irrelevance to the objectives of the visiting Briton and to the social life that he sees on the island. A far more common refrain in the accounts is the suggestion of the African’s lack of civilization evidenced by their inability to properly communicate or maintain basic hygiene. Upon Burton’s arrival on the island he encountered another ship whose “few dark faces on board bawled out information unintelligible to our pilot, and showed no colors, as is customary when a foreign cruiser enters the port,” a development the crew attributed to “the fact of their being blacks – ‘careless Ethiopians.’”⁶⁴ These encounters, invariably accompanied by descriptions of the people ‘bawling’ or ‘barking’ instead of speaking, contribute to the de-individualized and animalized portrayal of the Africans of the island, who are more

⁶³ Bellville, Alfred. “A Trip Round the South End of Zanzibar Island.” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*. 20 (1875-76): 69-74. Pg. 73.

⁶⁴ Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar*... Pg. 33.

often characterized by their number or occupation than personal attributes.⁶⁵ In many cases, the populations are only important to the travelers to the extent that they may be of assistance and, as in the instance of a group encountered by Bartle Frere, their unimportance was characterized by their “being, like most of the negroes illiterate, they could give no connected information regarding the route they had taken.”⁶⁶ In other cases, their presence is noted through descriptions of the uncleanliness of the city and its supposed connection to their behavior. Burton’s account of Zanzibar city starts with the observation that “the shore is a cess-pool, and the younger blacks of both sexes disport themselves in an absence of costume which would startle even Margate,”⁶⁷ leading into a description of the streets as containing “frequent green and black puddles, like those of the filthy Ghetto, or Jews’ quarter, of Damascus, [which] argue a preponderance of black population.”⁶⁸ Though they are more common, the claims of unhygienic practices among the African population don’t stop with their presumed effect on the surrounding environment, but sometimes even extend to claims of basic

⁶⁵ Both phenomena may be seen in Holman, James. *Travels in Madras...* Pg. 47, in his description of the Zanzibari marketplace, “where, like all places in which negroes congregate, the noise is intolerable, as they not only hold their conversations in a high and discordant key, but holloed out the merits of their various articles.”

⁶⁶ Frere, Henry. “A Few Remarks on Zanzibar...” Pg. 349.

⁶⁷ Burton, Richard. *Zanzibar...* Pg. 80. His description does not openly suggest that the group is responsible, but links the pollution of the city to his suggestion of their moral pollution through simple proximity of the two claims.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Pg. 83.

biological differences. Burton includes a note in his chapter on the ethnology of the African populations that suggests he felt “compelled by its high racial significance” to comment on “the odour [sic] of the Wasawahili, like that of the negro...which faintly reminded me of the ammoniacal smell exhaled by low-caste Hindus.”⁶⁹ His claim connects two of the divisions of the African populations with that of the lower orders of people in the Indian territories via a common marker of unpleasant lack of hygiene that may be of ‘high racial significance,’ thus reinforcing not only their basic biological differences, but also connecting those differences to the relegation of each of the populations to the lowest orders of their respective societies.

The use of racialized social characteristics as a marker of the populations’ level of civilization is also highly visible in the many comparisons made by the writers between the African and Arab populations on the island. While not depicted nearly as often as the depredations of the African populations, the characterizations of Arabs as leaders whose biological capabilities set them above and apart from the other groups on the island abound in the literature. Their capability for fair leadership is even extended to their ownership of dogs, in which they “are kind masters, great contrasts to the brutally cruel negro, whose approximation to the lower animals causes him to tyrannize

⁶⁹ Ibid. Pg. 409.

over them.”⁷⁰ The characterization is not universally applied to the Arabs of the island, rather conforming to an internal hierarchy with the Sultan at its head and followed by other Northern Arabs and the local East African Arabs at the bottom, and all of whom are naturally subordinated to the British.⁷¹ The Sultan’s power is deemed to be a necessary check on some of the unruly elements in the Arab society, with the “royal magistracy, the only form of rule to which the primitive and undisciplinable Eastern Arab will submit.”⁷² The East African Arab is often differentiated from their Northern compatriots and, just as the effects of climate were feared in some of the consular accounts, so too do the geographical accounts suggest that “the grandsons of purest Arabs who have settled in Africa, though there has been no mixture of blood, already show important physical modification worked by the ‘mixture of air,’...Whilst the extremities preserve the fineness of Arab blood, the body is weak and effeminate; and the degenerate aspect is accompanied by the no less degraded mind, morals and manners of the coast-people.”⁷³ And yet despite this suggestion of primitiveness and

⁷⁰ Ibid. Pg. 215.

⁷¹ Always ready with an anecdote, Burton describes a time when “The late Sayyid [Said] once attempted English sailors, who behave well as long as they did what they please, especially in the minor matters of ‘baccy and grog; but when the dark-faced skipper began loud speaking and tall threats, they incontinently thrashed him upon his own quarter-deck, and were perforce ‘dismissed the service.’” Ibid. Pg. 77.

⁷² Ibid. Pg. 261.

⁷³ Ibid. Pg. 375.

lack of discipline, the collective “Arab holds, and, according to old Moslem travelers, has long held in these regions the position of an Osmanli in Arabia; he is a ‘superior person.’”⁷⁴ His superior position is considered both a testament to and a result of his biological superiority, contrasted sharply with that of the Africans, who “might make his coast a mine of wealth, but he will not work till hunger compels him, and his pure insouciance has allowed his valuable commerce to be wrested from him by Europeans, Hindus, and Arabs.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid. Pg. 374. A position not limited to the males of the population, with Burton also noting that “the half-caste Zanzibar girl enviously eyes the Arab woman” for her hair, makeup, clothing and other signs of wealth and beauty. Pg. 114.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Pg. 418.

Chapter 5: The Slave Trade and Shifting Racial Perspectives

Perhaps only second in its importance during the nineteenth century to the expansion of British influence in the territories bordering the Indian Ocean stand the efforts of British governmental officials, naval officers and missionaries to end the slave trade originating in the territories of East Africa and spreading throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the Sub-Continent. The active participation in the trade of individuals from nearly every territory in the region meant that preoccupation with the slave trade linked British interests in Coastal East Africa, its neighboring islands, the Persian Gulf territories and the holdings in India in a way unmatched by any other issue at the time. Interestingly, the accounts of Zanzibar produced by government officials, naval officers and missionaries involved in efforts to combat the slave trade are characterized by a slightly different representation of the Arab and African populations than the previous sources in relation to the propensity for leadership and self-government of the two population groups, as well as a remarkably different portrayal of the Indian population of the island. Through a brief analysis of British-Zanzibari relations regarding regional British policy on the slave trade and an examination of the changes that may be found in the racialization of Zanzibar's population in the accounts of the slave trade, some

conclusions may be drawn on the effect of contextual influences on the construction of racial categories by British observers.

The Royal Navy and the British Anti-Slavery Movement in Zanzibar

Following the British government's decisions to outlaw British participation in the slave trade in 1811 and the institution of slavery in general in 1838, the preoccupation of the British government with suppressing the trade by other powers in the Indian Ocean and worldwide resulted in efforts to conclude treaties agreeing to halt the trade and to utilize British naval power to enforce the terms of the treaties. The numerous agreements with European and regional powers and the complex relations that these efforts produced are widely documented and would be impractical to recount in the scope of this paper. However, a brief outline of Anglo-Zanzibari treaty engagements and the efforts of various segments of the British population to document and intercede in Zanzibari involvement in the slave trade may provide some useful context in which to view the accounts to follow.

The British government in India is said to have begun pressuring Sultan Said to conclude an agreement limiting his involvement in the East African slave trade as early as 1812, though the first agreement signed between the two was not completed until 1822 when the Moresby Treaty committed the Sultan to refrain from participating in

“all external traffic in slaves’ and in particular the sale of slaves to any Christians.”⁷⁶

As a result of continued traffic in slaves from the island to the British and other territories in the north, the Hammerton Treaty was concluded in 1845, which agreed to end altogether the transport of slaves via the water routes to any power – Arab, Indian or European – by the Sultan or his subjects. However, enforcement of the treaty again proved difficult for the British and the transport of slaves between the territories continued unbroken.⁷⁷ The continuance of the trade in spite of these agreements led the British government in India to increase the engagement of the Royal Navy in the waters from the Mozambique Channel up through the Persian Gulf during the 1860’s and 1870’s in an attempt to enforce the terms of the treaties and stem the flow of slaves to their territories in the north.

While the treaties negotiated with the Zanzibari sultans provided the British with some legal and moral authority for their claims to stop the slave trade, the actual enforcement of the treaties’ pretensions was left to naval patrols operating between the Mozambique Channel and the Indian and Persian Gulf port cities that constituted the main passage of the Indian Ocean slave trade. According to one soldier’s account from

⁷⁶ Coupland, Sir Reginald. *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*. London: T. Butterworth Ltd., 1933. Pg. 198. The treaty is also inaccurately described as having been signed in 1882 in Nwulia, Moses D.E. “The Role of Missionaries in the Emancipation of Slaves in Zanzibar.” *The Journal of Negro History*. Vol. 60:2 (April, 1975): 268-287. Pg. 270.

⁷⁷ Coupland, Reginald. *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*. Pg. 204.

around 1870, this engagement was one of the few areas in which British sailors could take effective action to further their own careers during a time of relative calm in British engagements.

“Those old enough to have served in the Navy in the seventies will remember what a deadly slow time it was for everybody, particularly so for an ambitious young man in a hurry. There was no *active* service going on anywhere...The only work the Navy was engaged in that offered any chances of advancement for special services was here, the East Coast (Africa, of course, understood) in the suppression of the slave trade.”⁷⁸

As a result, many sailors were drawn into an engagement in which their objective of ending the slave trade portrayed the Arab inhabitants as the primary hindrance in realizing their goals and the African inhabitants as the hapless victims of Arab greed and aggression. Their efforts were accompanied, and in some cases hindered,⁷⁹ by an influx of missionary societies seeking to end the slave trade whose perception of the relationship between the Arab and African inhabitants fell along largely the same lines.

⁷⁸ Creswell, William, Thompson, P. Ed. *Close to the Wind: The Early Memoirs, 1866-1879, of Admiral Sir William Creswell*. London: Heinemann, 1965. Pg. 143. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ See Nwulia, Moses. “The Role of Missionaries...” Pgs. 276-7 for an account of missionaries needing to be rescued by the British forces following the violent reaction of local groups to the missionaries’ forced emancipation of their slaves.

Shifting Hierarchies in the Arab Slave Trade

The published accounts of each of these actors reveals a portrayal of the inhabitants of Zanzibar that, while maintaining the basic division of the racial groups and many of the same characteristics as their counterparts in the consular and geographical documents, differ in several key ways regarding their portrayals of the effects of the slave trade on the Arab, African and Indian populations. The general perception of the Arab population's involvement in the trade is exemplified in Christopher Lloyd's contention that "every Arab in Africa was implicated in some way or other in the ramifications of this traffic, from the Sultan (whose customs revenue in 1870 was twice that enjoyed by Seyyid Said) to the leaders of remote caravans in the interior."⁸⁰ Out of apparent frustration with their lack of success in halting the trade, these British observers portrayed the Arab population as primarily responsible for the continued traffic and continuously referenced the supposedly ancient origins of the trade itself as a way of limiting their responsibility.⁸¹ While one observer suggests that

⁸⁰ Lloyd, Christopher. *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Longmans Green, 1949. Pg. 249. The Sultan that he is referring to at this time is Sultan Barghash.

⁸¹ Though as one author points out, the continuance of the trade may not entirely be attributed to the Arab traders since "the slave trade, like the trade in any other commodity, involved demand and supply," which just as often implicated British subjects in the region. Nwulia, Moses. "The Role of Missionaries..." Pg. 269.

the trade in slaves from Africa dates back to “the days of Solomon,”⁸² another suggests that it is hardly even objectionable to its people since “Africa and slavery have probably been so closely and intimately associated from the beginning of time that it has been regarded by all African peoples as a natural condition of life.”⁸³

The responsibility assigned to the Arab populations in continuing the trade resulted in a shift away from an emphasis on their abilities to maintain authority over the other populations of the island and toward a portrayal of the dual corruption of the Arab and African character created by the institution of slavery. A romanticized past in which “the island of Zanzibar possessed a peasantry” that “laboured mostly in their own fields” and “used to be seen on the quays working as porters” gave way to a moral stagnation of the population where “to be seen working has become synonymous with being degraded.”⁸⁴ A novelized portrayal of a slave auction in Zanzibar captures the

⁸² Cameron, Verney Lovette. “Slavery in its Relation to Trade in Tropical Africa.” *Journal of the Society of Arts*. 37 (1888-89): 299-309. Pg. 304.

⁸³ Cresswell, William. *Close to the Wind...* Pg. 144.

⁸⁴ Malcolm, W.E. *England’s East African Policy: Articles on the Relations of England to the Sultan of Zanzibar*. London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1875. Pg. 8. Another source suggests that the “moral degradation of both slave and master is the worst feature of actual slavery under Arab owners.” See Fraser, Captain H.A., Rev. Bishop Tozer, James Christie, M.D. *The East African Slave Trade and the Measures Proposed for its Extinction*. London: Pall Mall, 1871. Pg. 5. The similarity in the rhetoric employed by the observers and in the tropes of dual degradation between these sources and those dealing with English slave owners in other areas is significant and warrants further analysis.

stock images of the participants in its description of “handsome negro men and good-looking girls put up for public sale, their mouths rudely opened and their teeth examined by cool, calculating Arabs, just as if they had been domestic cattle.”⁸⁵ While the generally indignant tone is unmistakable, the passage is noteworthy not only for its continued description of the Africans in purely physical terms, but also for its negative portrayal of the Arab characters and the morally corrupting influence of the slave trade. Similarly, the reverent descriptions of the Sultan in the consular and geographical sources are contrasted sharply with the conclusion of one sailor active in the oceans around Zanzibar that “never was a man so falsely represented or so little understood as this petty Prince. In England we hear of his munificence, his power...whereas he is merely upheld in his shadow of authority by the countenance of the English.”⁸⁶ This equivocation in the typical portrayal of Arab authority in the island, though not universal, represents an important shift in the perceived role of the Arabs on the island and constitutes an intriguing example of how portrayals of racial identity may shift as a result of changing political contexts.

⁸⁵ Ballantyne, R.M. *Black Ivory: A Tale of Adventure Among the Slavers of East Africa*. London: James Nisbet & Co., 1878. Pg. 72.

⁸⁶ Barnard, Frederick L. *Three Years' Cruize in the Mozambique Channel for the Suppression of the Slave Trade*. London: Richard Bentley, 1848. Pg. 74.

An even more remarkable change in these accounts involves the portrayal of the Indian populations of the island. Far from their relative absence from the consular sources or their portrayal in the geographical sources as simple traders and merchants on the periphery of the social and political life of the island, the anti-slavery activists portray the Indian populations as the secret perpetrators of the slave trade and one of the primary reasons for the failure of their efforts. A pamphlet on England's policy in East African contends that the Indian population has "silently taken possession of almost the entire trade on the East Coast of Africa" and "had made their influence felt, and in no case more successfully than in blinding people to the fact of their participation in the slave trade."⁸⁷ Especially in light of the previously noted portrayal of them as 'the local Jew',⁸⁸ this description of 'silently taking possession' and 'blinding' people to their power suggests the influence of stock anti-Semitic tropes similar to those common in Europe in this period. Their participation in the traffic of slaves is projected as the primary reason for the failure of efforts to suppress it, partly as result of their influence as British subjects, with one source going as far as to suggest that "if the natives of India who were connected with the slave trade (and they were the dregs of Indian

⁸⁷ Malcom, W.E. *England's East Africa Policy...* Pg. 30.

⁸⁸ See footnotes 25 & 26.

society) ceased to have anything to do with it, slavery would soon come to an end.”⁸⁹

Their trajectory from incidental bystander to prime obstruction of the realization of British policy goals is perhaps the most dramatic change of any seen in these sources so far.

In contrast to the erosion of stature experienced by the Arab and Indian populations of the island, the African populations are represented as both victimized by the slave trade and, in a remarkable departure from the other sources, capable of self-rule and social advancement. The populations were still characterized as “poor simple creatures,”⁹⁰ with the observers lamenting that “the wretched blacks under the hard hands of their Arab masters, who were barely one step higher than their victims in the scale of civilization, suffered the hardest of lives.”⁹¹ However, a new development that presents an important departure from previous depictions is the suggestion that the population is redeemable and capable of civilization and self-rule. One sailor contends that with the end of slavery “the condition of Darky will be considerably improved, as

⁸⁹ Frere, Henry. “A Few Remarks on Zanzibar...” Pg. 353. Also, Malcom, W.E. *England's East Africa Policy...* Pg. 31 suggests, in reference to the Indian populations, that “our own authorities were more or less indignant when it was said that on the coast they not only held slaves, but as a body, were as deeply engaged in the trade as the Arabs and the natives of Africa themselves.”

⁹⁰ Cresswell, William. *Close to the Wind...* Pg. 176.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* Pg. 185. This quote is also important for its direct employment of a racial hierarchy, and for the fact that the Arabs are still placed on top.

he may eventually return to his own country with a sum of money and a trade, and perhaps this may be one of the best means of commencing civilization in Africa – without which the slave trade never can be put down, with all England’s sacrifice of life and treasure.”⁹² Thus, freedom for the African populations is linked to their own personal improvement, as well as the general civilization of the African continent and the end of the slave trade in a perfect confluence of many of the British objectives in the region. Other examples of freed slaves are cited as proof of the success of this formula, since “settlements, consisting of runaway negroes, already exist, and have at times, with some success, resisted the efforts of the Sultan’s soldiers to subjugate them, *showing that the negroes are capable of organization*, and would succeed if protected.”⁹³ Though the thought that the freed Africans are simply capable of organization seems like a limited victory, even this admission is a serious departure from their description as part of the natural ecology or simply as animals intended for labor that was found in the other sources.

The difference in the portrayals of Arab authority in the documents preoccupied with the slave trade is dramatic and, given their proximity in time to the official

⁹² Barnard, Frederick L. *Three Years’ Cruize...* Pg. 79.

⁹³ Malcom, W.E. *England’s East Africa Policy...* Pg. 51. Emphasis added.

extension of the protectorate, may have important consequences for the change in British policy regarding their direct involvement in the territories. Similarly, the new portrayals of the African populations as capable of organization and open to civilization provide the necessary justification for further British involvement in the East African interior, where Sultanic authority decreases rapidly. Despite these changes, some continuity in the portrayals of the population groups between each of the three categories of sources should be noted. While the relative distance between the Arab and African populations decreased in the sources on the slave trade, the general distinctions between the two groups and the superiority of the Arab populations on the island of Zanzibar was still maintained. This is especially significant given the continuity in the Omani Arab Sultanate even following the establishment of the British protectorate. Additionally, though it was acknowledged that there was a possibility that independent African settlements could be established, oftentimes it was maintained that it would not “have a beneficial effect to establish liberated Africans on the Island of Zanzibar. The settlement should be on the mainland, where their status and how they attained to it would soon be known.”⁹⁴ This policy would effectively maintain the superior position of Great Britain’s Arab allies in the island while also producing new allies in the mainland who would stand as a testament to the British role in their

⁹⁴ Malcolm, W.E. *England’s East Africa Policy*... Pg. 56.

freedom and advancement and constitute an effective launching point for further encroachment into the interior.

Conclusion

By broadening the types of sources consulted in constructing a history of the British in Zanzibar and focusing attention more closely on those that produced them rather than the publications' utility as sources of information on the lives of the colonized, we may begin to produce a more complete picture of the process through which colonial rule was established. Despite framing their studies as accounts of the natural state of affairs in the territories under scrutiny and attempting to project their observations back into an imagined line of historical continuity, many of the observers had limited experience in the places that they were visiting and little ability to accurately chronicle shifting social dynamics prior to their arrivals. Thus their observations of the societies, based on their experiences in a particular geographical and chronological context and abstracted to represent the essential nature of the society, tell us more about the nature of colonial discourse and the views of the observers themselves than they do of the societies being represented. This is especially true of the representations of racial identity and its effects on behavior, as seen in the publications of British observers in Zanzibar. Their characterizations of the island's inhabitants were influenced both by contemporary theories of racial identity and a racialized worldview popular in British discourse in the nineteenth century, and by experiences

interacting with the local populations in the context of their own political and institutional objectives. The interaction of these various influences resulted in a process that classified local populations according to their conformity to largely pre-conceived racial identities and interpreted existing relations between groups according to this framework.

As previously noted, the division of the populations into racial groups was largely the same in the different classes of sources, though the behavioral characteristics and their positive or negative portrayals relative to other groups sometimes varied, most noticeably in relation to their connections with the slave trade. In the case of the consular corps and geographical societies, despite obvious differences in the format and framing of the publications, their portrayals of the physical and behavioral characteristics of the racial groups on Zanzibar are remarkably similar. The two groups also maintained in common a commitment to a political order in which particular segments of the Arab population with whom they were allied retained their dominance over the rest of the island's populations. These similarities would not appear to be quite so significant if not for the stark contrast that appeared between them and the accounts of naval and colonial officials affiliated with the anti-slavery movement. The sources on the slave trade feature an inversion of the hierarchy found elsewhere. They are instead characterized by a greater emphasis on the corruption and degradation of the

Arab and Indian populations due to their involvement in the slave trade and a unique emphasis on the leadership ability of the African populations.

The changes in the discourse found in this situation, in which the objectives and outlook of the groups opposed to the slave trade appear to have produced a different racialized portrayal of the Zanzibari populations, are significant for several reasons. First, the appearance of heterogeneity in the racialization of local populations by the British observers may raise some questions regarding Edward Said's claims to an "internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient."⁹⁵ Though some consistency in Western representations of populations in Asia and Africa are certainly identifiable on a large scale within the discourse of the nineteenth century, the differences between these sources on Zanzibar suggest that a narrower focus within particular geographical and chronological contexts and greater emphasis on internally comparative approaches to studying Western discourse may prove fruitful in identifying points of variation in their representations.

Secondly, greater attention to the location of the different sources within the chronological period of their production and publication suggests a possible link between changes in the representations of the sources and shifts in British policy

⁹⁵ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. Pg. 5.

towards the island's government. Though the three categories of sources do not fit neatly into particular time periods in terms of their production, a larger proportion of the documents related to the slave trade were produced during the period closer to the establishment of the protectorate than that of the consular or geographical sources that were consulted for this paper. The increased involvement of the Royal Navy from the 1870's and the arrival of missionary societies and other groups opposed to the slave trade in subsequent decades placed the issue of Arab and Indian involvement in the continuation of the East African slave trade, and the British government's failure to bring it to a halt, in a more prominent position in analyses of British involvement in the region. Though there is no clear evidence here to suggest that these matters directly shaped British policy in any particular direction, the altered terms of their racialized portrayals of the various groups could very well have provided British policy-makers in the region with useful justifications for a policy of more direct involvement in the island and the coastal territories.

Each of the above points may have important consequences for the study of how racial categories are produced and employed within colonial discourse. Regional or individual variations in the colonial discourse on race must be highlighted given the discourse's dual nature during this formative period of British Empire in Asia and Africa as both a series of local experiences by particular individuals and, through the

publication and dissemination of their reports, as an emerging system of standardized colonial knowledge of non-European peoples. This network of distribution of knowledge produced in a colonial setting creates a situation in which, while individual experiences and objectives may shape the construction of racial categories by observers in a local context, their reproduction within publications that are then distributed to administrators and explorers in other areas may shape their outlook and the production of racialized portrayals in other areas. A dialectic relationship is then created in which racial categories and representations are both shaped by regional political realities and objectives, and alternately exert an influence on the perceptions of local conditions by various explorers and policy-makers. Each of these elements and their effects on particular observers must be taken into account in order to more accurately determine how systems of racial representation were brought into being in the early colonial period and how these representations affected the structures of power that developed at the same time.

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