

# Sin, Slave Status, and the “City”: Zanzibar, 1865–c. 1930

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**Abstract:** The Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) missionaries equated urbanity with moral contagion, to which those with slave status were especially vulnerable. To the former slaves who came into contact with the mission, the growing commercial center of Zanzibar, and the coastal cultures it was associated with, were not only enticing, but also crucial to social and economic mobility. The mission’s ex-slaves rarely enjoyed a special advantage though their connection to missionaries. Even for the missionaries’ most treasured dependents, the advantages were ambiguous. However, the mission did facilitate the making of strong cohorts and ease the transition to town living.

**Résumé:** L’organisation Mission des Universités en Afrique Centrale (MUAC) a assimilé l’urbanité à la corruption morale, condition à laquelle les personnes ayant un statut d’esclave étaient particulièrement vulnérables. Pour les anciens esclaves, cependant, le centre commercial grandissant de Zanzibar et des cultures côtières auxquelles ils étaient associés était non seulement séduisant, mais également essentiels à la mobilité sociale et économique. Les anciens esclaves vivant dans les missions ne jouissant pas cependant d’un avantage particulier de par leur lien avec les missionnaires. Même pour les dépendants les plus importants des missionnaires, les avantages étaient ambigus. Toutefois, la mission a facilité la création de groupes solides et facilité la transition vers la vie en ville.

**Keywords:** Urban history; ex-slaves; Christian missions; slavery; social history; Zanzibar

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## Introduction

On Christmas Eve in 1901, Frank Weston, a missionary in Zanzibar who would later become the Bishop of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), conducted an interview at Kiungani Boys' School in Zanzibar with one of his students. The young man was a former slave who had been studying at the school for eighteen months and was planning to be a teacher. He was reputedly progressing and flourishing in his studies, and Weston, who was supervising him in his spiritual preparations, was therefore horrified to hear his student admit that he had "fallen again" to "the sin of Sodom." Weston immediately coordinated a manhunt for the other guilty party and subjected both boys to harsh punishment, which he described as follows:

There was I until 11.30pm trying to get this second boy to confess, and then both to repent. . . . The repentance of the first boy was beautiful. He told me all I asked without a lie, accepted a flogging which hurt him very much, and prayed with me afterwards for a long time. The tears that he shed when we spoke and prayed were more than he shed over his own whipping, which was severe. That was a compensation. (Weston 1901)

Weston despaired for his students, lamenting how he felt the need to monitor their sexual conduct so closely. The significance of this anecdote to this article is not in the existence of homosexuality in mission schools, but in the way Weston explains its existence. He was convinced that homosexual tendencies were the result of the combined influence of city life and slavery. Weston claimed that "It is not a mainland sin, it belongs to this sink of sin—Zanzibar. And my particular boys are nearly all the city type" (1901).<sup>1</sup> Missionaries distrusted and condemned the ex-slaves' tendency to be drawn into Zanzibar town and blamed city life for the moral contagion they witnessed, consisting largely of carnal sins and alcohol abuse, but also the more nebulous sin of "arrogance." The notion that all that was urban was detrimental to Christian respectability must have been difficult to accept for the UMCA's former slaves, given that the "city" was the setting in which social mobility was most likely to take place. This anecdote neatly encapsulates the struggles that all Christian converts were likely to face in navigating between vastly different missionary and non-missionary values.

These struggles were especially weighty for the ex-slave contingent of the UMCA. The mission's involvement with ex-slaves in Zanzibar began in 1865 when the sultan gave Bishop William George Tozer (UMCA bishop 1863–72) a gift of five slave children, whom Tozer promptly proclaimed "free," though they remained under his patronage (Steere 1881a; Frewer 1908). Over the next three decades British navy patrols concentrated their efforts on policing the slave trade. Most of the slaves from these raids were taken to the British consulate in Zanzibar, where they were then distributed among mission, government, and the sultan's ex-slave settlements.

In addition to this influx of confiscated former slaves, mistreated slaves occasionally sought self-emancipation and increasingly looked to the mission when they sought to escape despotic masters. However, the missionaries were highly cautious about ransoming runaway slaves, not wanting to be implicated in debates about legal ownership.<sup>2</sup> In this way, the UMCA's ex-slave settlement contrasted starkly with the settlements of the CMS in Rabai and the Holy Ghost in Bagamoyo, which controversially welcomed runaway slaves (Strayer 1978; Kollman 2005).

There is a wealth of literature detailing the variety that characterized such processes, in this region and elsewhere, as well as the difference between being free of slave labor and being "free." The literature demonstrates that there were myriad different categories of slaves, all associated with different processes of socialization.<sup>3</sup> The categories of "slave" and "ex-slave" were, as a result, very fluid, but for the sake of simplicity I will refer to those in contact with the mission as "ex-slaves" because they were legally free. The official legal freedom of the former slaves, however, had a limited impact upon their social standing; it took ingenuity, good fortune, and—most of all—time to move on from one's slave status. In the Zanzibar context this is exemplified by the Swahili term *wazalia*, meaning "born here," which denoted superior social status.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, claims to indigeneity and first-comer status were of fundamental importance to the upwardly mobile (ex)-slave.

As Weston's anecdote suggests, the missionaries' initial optimism about emancipating slaves, or rescuing and advancing slaves and simultaneously converting them, was short lived. Missionaries believed that slaves and former slaves were "bad material" for conversion—that they were predisposed to immoral behavior and that this immorality was contagious (Liebst 2014). They also assumed that academic education was wasted on most of them (Maples 1899). They therefore relegated ex-slaves to the rural "industrial schools," which operated much like "infirmaries" (Steere 1881c). Thus, the term "industrial student" became a euphemism for slave or slave-like status—that is, the social stigma of being a slave, even when the individual in question was not a slave according to legal definitions.<sup>5</sup>

By 1901, the year of the anecdote, the legal practice of slavery was coming to an end. But because slave status persisted long after the legal practice of slavery ended, it was increasingly difficult to define.<sup>6</sup> As late as 1931 the British Colonial Administrator, Harold Ingrams, reported that "many of the ex-slaves still live on their former owners' plantations and refer to themselves as slaves, and are often proud of their title" (2007 [1931]:35–36). This article looks at the time frame of roughly 1865 to the 1930s. It draws on oral history research that focuses on the lives of the parents of elderly Anglicans in Zanzibar, all of whom were descended from the mission's ex-slaves. Although it was difficult to date the parental generation precisely, the time frame upon which the interviewees could comment went back to the 1920s.

The enormous body of literature exploring how slaves went about negotiating their social status in various contexts informs the historical approach

of this article. A thread that runs through historical and anthropological texts is that the dependence that slavery engendered was not usually the worst thing about the state of being a slave. In fact, dependence on a patron was usually a necessary facet of the strategies exploited by slaves to better their situations and eventually attain their freedom. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff's emblematic thesis (1977) argues that, at times, slaves in Africa saw total autonomy as impractical. Social belonging in their new societies was the most important goal, and autonomy did not necessarily help a slave achieve this. Similar observations were made in the nineteenth century. For instance, in 1873 a British observer in Zanzibar made the point that enslavement could potentially reap greater rewards than emancipation due to the security afforded by the patron–client dynamic (Colomb 1873).

Recently, however, scholars such as Benedetta Rossi (2009) have been at pains to emphasize that the possible benefits of enslavement did not mean that slaves were complacent or unambitious, as colonial accounts might suggest. Moreover, slaves did not indiscriminately accept various forms of social belonging, as Jonathon Glassman's research on Zanzibar demonstrates. He argues that people with slave status could be particular about the kind of social position they sought and they would define, or negotiate, the terms of their inclusion, even when complete freedom (*uhuru*) was not a realistic state. Instead, different types of dependence, or "bonds," could be sought to redefine the relationship between master and slave, although these choices were usually independent of the social values of the master class (Glassman 1995).<sup>7</sup> This article aims to build on Glassman's careful mapping of the various paths slaves took in search of a better life.

Particularly since the wave of the nationalist Africanist literature of the 1950s and 1960s, scholars have recognized that the capacity of missionaries as individuals and missions as institutions to emancipate slaves was limited. For instance, in 1965 Roland Oliver discussed missionary involvement with ex-slave settlements as a well-meaning but ultimately misguided policy that unintentionally stimulated the slave trade. In a 2013 article David Maxwell found that, in practice, the missionaries' aim to emancipate slaves—which necessarily required a boost in their social status—sat uncomfortably with their objective to instill humility in parishioners. Thus many ex-slaves looked to independent churches or "traditional" leadership to attain respectability, a development that contributed to the decline of mission Christianity. Paul Kollman (2005) put forward a similar argument in regard to the Holy Ghost mission, although he also sought to defend the missionaries' commitment to the ex-slave settlement, which came under critique by observers in the 1970s and 1990s.

What all these accounts have in common is the observation that for the ex-slave population it could be, at worst, socially detrimental, and, at best, unhelpful, to associate with missions—and similar findings emerged from the research for this article on the UMCA's ex-slaves in Zanzibar.<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Prestholdt, commenting on the involvement of Bishop Tozer (in addition

to British officials, such as John Kirk) with ex-slaves, touched on this point when he stated that the mission provided very limited scope for ex-slaves' desire to "define their own place in the social order, to represent their own political and social interests" (2008:135). This certainly explains why the life trajectories of UMCA ex-slaves often appear indistinguishable from those who had no mission affiliation.

Still, questions about the actual relationships, successful and unsuccessful, between ex-slaves and missionaries—as well as the absence of these relationships—remain unanswered. More important, there is also a lack of clarity about how networks among ex-slaves operated. Thus this article examines some of the ways in which slave status was negotiated horizontally as well as vertically in terms of social hierarchies, focusing on two trajectories taken by UMCA ex-slaves, which were not mutually exclusive. The first trajectory was the most common: to move to the town and find new patrons, which usually meant abandoning Christian practices and mission allegiance. The second trajectory was oriented toward gaining an academic education and mission employment as a teacher or priest. Particularly by the 1920s these individuals were highly respected for their educational achievements, but their social status was also sealed in terms of their connections to their enslaved ancestors and their ex-slave antecedents. Indeed, even today being Christian in Zanzibar labels you, by default, as an ex-slave.

### **Ex-slave Status and the Contagion of Urban Life**

In order to understand these complex social arrangements, it is helpful to understand the way in which the mission was situated geographically and how proximity to the town was associated with sin and slave status. As the opening anecdote suggests, the temptation to sin had a certain geography in the mind of the missionary, two spatial binary oppositions consisting of island versus mainland or urban versus rural. Slave status was inextricably woven into this spatial mapping, largely because former slaves flocked to Zanzibar's urban center, or rather, its edge, at Ng'ambo—literally, "the other side" of the tidal inlet that bordered the prosperous town. Ng'ambo had long been an important residential area, although its distinctive geography disappeared when Zanzibar became a British protectorate and the British filled in the inlet with waste. In the account of a French explorer and navy captain's mid-century visits to the region, it was observed that slaves made up the majority of the population (Guillain & Bayot 1856), and UMCA missionaries made similar observations in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>9</sup> From this point Ng'ambo exerted a gravitational pull for various socially marginal people, including the mission's ex-slaves, and came to be known in the first decades of the twentieth century as a quickly growing "working class quarter" (Fair 2001). And while missionaries had particular conceptions about the social significance of space, African Christians, especially those of ex-slave stock, did not share the same ideas about respectability and honor (see Kollman 2005; Iliffe 2005; McMahan 2013; Maxwell 2013).

For most Africans, the Swahili geography of “civilization” and negative associations with the mainland as *washenzi*, meaning “barbarians” or “primitive” (Bissell 2011), were much more salient, and the town was seen as the way out of slave status.

The fraught exchanges between missionaries and ex-slaves demonstrate that, at least for missionaries, the “taint” of slavery lingered long after a slave’s legal emancipation and residence at the mission. The missionaries’ prejudice toward urban ex-slaves was not, at least on the surface, connected to a prejudice against manual labor; in this way, it could be argued, they were at variance with Zanzibar’s patrician class. Nor was this “taint” the perception of an indelible mark of slavery on the individual. Missionaries considered ex-slaves particularly poorly equipped to deal with the “temptations” of city life because of the lack of community self-regulation that kinship and “tribal” belonging had afforded (Anderson-Morshead 1909). For example, Weston observed in 1899 that whereas “tribal custom inspires a fine for fornication and for adultery[,] . . . in Zanzibar such customs are not observed much. Tribes are nowhere.” Missionaries also believed that the mixing of ethnicities in urban environments had negative repercussions. For instance, Cyril C. Frewer, a UMCA missionary, argued that Zanzibar presented Christians with “numberless sin-traps” because it contained “the dregs of all nations” (1905:85).

Conforming to Muslim or non-Christian cultures was part of, but not entirely, the “sin.” The sin the missionaries were referring to was predominantly sexual. Thus, in 1916 missionaries blamed the influence of the city for the extramarital affairs of Samuel Chiponde and Cecil Majaliwa, both ordained ministers, who were also ex-slaves (Smith 1925; Mackay 1925; Wilson 1936). In 1880 the missionary Edward Steere wrote to a British admiral to correct his impression, during a visit to Zanzibar, that since there were no prostitutes in sight, as in London, prostitution did not exist. “Mohammedanism deliberately sanctions a much worse state of things,” Steere wrote. “The streets are empty of prostitutes because the homes are full of them and there is no scandal because there is no shame” (Steere to Admiral, 1880). For Steere, the problem with Islam was partly that it thrived in the urban and ethnically mixed social context of Zanzibar in which the people, most of whom were relative newcomers, were estranged from their origins. Of course, it is also possible that African Christians appeared to sin more often in Zanzibar than in the UMCA’s mainland stations because of the intensity of social surveillance that is so characteristic—then and now—of Zanzibar’s social scene.

Missionaries and colonial agents shared an interest in keeping certain categories of Africans out of town, though they followed a different rationale. Colonial officials packaged the policies to restrict entrance into the town as efforts to reduce disease, though their outlook and actions were undoubtedly shaped by social and racial prejudice. Ng’ambo, with its enormous population, was legally defined as a “native location” not only for its population, but also its appearance. While missionaries sought to limit the

urban influences on their converts, British colonial agents were simultaneously endeavoring to minimize Africans' access to the town proper, which was visually, and later legally, defined by its stone buildings (giving it the name of "Stone Town"). In the 1920s colonial law prohibited "huts" from being built in the "town," apparently as part of the effort to reduce the spread of disease. "Native huts" were erected, for example, in the Mkunazini area at the edge of the town proper, but they were increasingly few in number.<sup>10</sup>

Thus both missionaries and colonial administrators shared the concern that "contagion" should be limited, yet they defined it differently and had differing opinions about its source and the best strategies for managing it. Colonial quarantine policies, bolstered by building regulations, made it nearly impossible for Africans, whether they were Christian or Muslim, to live in the "town" (see Bissell 2011; Fair 2001). These restrictions became less significant over time, however, as Ng'ambo's population grew. By 1931 it held around twenty-two thousand people, amounting to a quarter of the whole island's population, and these numbers alone inevitably made it part of the social life of the town. Missionaries, for their part, tried to curb the moral contagion of urban life by establishing a mission station in Ng'ambo, although their efforts continually failed. This was partly because parents suspected missionaries of being slave dealers and did not trust them with their children, although the missionaries' difficulties in Ng'ambo continued long after it was clear that they were not slave dealers (or cannibals) (Steere 1865; *Central Africa* 1883; Lister 1894). Indeed, the record shows that they lost more Christian converts there than they won (Allen 1886).

The mission had a more lasting hold at some other locations, such as the Mkunazini mission station at the edge of the town proper, which contained a boarding house for apprentices, a hospital, a cathedral, and a "home" for widows, divorcees, and ex-prostitutes. It also included a compact residential area housing a small Christian population, which missionaries referred to as a quarter, or, rather whimsically, as the "cathedral close." The inhabitants tended to be skilled workers, such as boat builders, "door-boys," cooks, and printers, who were more often than not married to "Mbwani girls."<sup>11</sup>

"Mbwani girls" were ex-slave girls who were educated and housed at the Mbwani mission station, approximately four and a half miles from the town. The Mbwani girls' school, established in 1877, was adjacent to a *shamba* (farm), which was established in the 1870s as an ex-slave settlement, but it was socially almost entirely separate from it. As testament to the uneven way social status was spread in the mission communities, the "Mbwani girls" looked upon the *shamba* people as lower status, referring to them simply as "slaves."<sup>12</sup> Initially, the school housed and educated female ex-slave children and adolescents, and, increasingly, the children of these ex-slaves. Only a handful of local parents who were unconnected to the mission were willing to send their children to this school because they feared the missionaries would steal or harm them (Steere 1881b).

Despite a resolution in the UMCA synod of 1884 to refuse to accept any more adult ex-slaves from the British Consulate, the shamba only came to an end when the mission sold the land in several stages in the 1920s, slowly disengaging from the elderly and infirm “stragglers” who remained (Anderson-Morshead 1897; Diocese of Zanzibar 1923). The settlement had a plantation of approximately one hundred and thirty acres with a fluctuating population of about five hundred ex-slaves, who were employed as day laborers (*vibarua* in Swahili) (Hodgson 1880; Rowley 1881). They received daily wages and were expected to work for the mission, although they were granted a grace period immediately after their arrival and emancipation as many initially suffered very poor health. During this period they were technically free to leave, but they were strongly discouraged from doing so. Those who left the shamba without informing the missionaries were referred to as “runaways.” These ex-slaves were expected to attend church services and to be self-sufficient and self-supporting in return for their use of the land (Kirk 1871; Steere 1875).

Though it is not the intention here to determine the “genuine” spread of Christianity in this area, it is clear that the shamba could not be accurately described as a Christian settlement, at least in the early period. From 1878 to 1881 only seventy individuals were baptized, whereas roughly one hundred new ex-slaves were taken in each year (Steere 1881a). The missionaries were publicly embarrassed by the goings-on in the shamba. Though relatively far from the town, it was the site of drinking, debauchery, and transactional sex. The missionary John P. Farler (1885) wrote, “I fear the whole state of morality of Mbwani is at a fearfully low ebb” after he banished the wife of Peter Sudi for “going out to men’s houses outside the shamba every night.” Missionaries enforced discipline, making use of a “parish prison” when it was considered necessary (Farler 1885; UMCA 1903). The Europeans of the town also had a very low opinion of the shamba people, forbidding their servants from visiting it for fear that they, too, would be morally contaminated (Allen 1884). They construed the sinful behavior in the shamba as a consequence of the residents’ proximity to the town and their misguided attempt to participate in urban life. This shows that, as far as the missionaries saw it, a person did not have to live in the city in order to be a victim of its sinfulness, such was the potency of urban moral contagion.

Kiungani Boys’ School, established in 1866, was situated about two miles from the town; in Swahili, the word “kiungani” means “near the town, in the suburbs.”<sup>13</sup> The idea was that the students would be close enough to the town to become accustomed to it and learn how to resist its temptations, but far enough to be free of it on an everyday basis. Much like the students at the girls’ school, Kiungani students were, initially, ex-slaves, but missionaries struggled to gain freeborn students from Zanzibar. However, unlike at the girls’ school, the children of ex-slaves were much less likely over time to send their own male children to this school because its admissions policies favored children who had no slave (or ex-slave) status. From the time of



Bishop Steere's episcopate (1872–1883), the school was intended to be filled with "free" or "voluntary" children from mainland stations, and Bishop Tozer's system of adopting and training freed slaves remained in place until the episcopate of Charles Smythie (1884–94) (Steere 1872a, 1872b, 1873). Missionaries preferred "voluntary" students from the mainland because of their assumption that youths who were making a sacrifice to attend the school (i.e., leaving their family) would be better behaved than the ex-slaves who had nothing to lose and, equally, no better option than to stay in the mission (Deerr 1892; Steere 1878; Farler 1884). Of course, as Justin Willis (1993) explains, the missionaries' assumption that all mainland children were "free" reflected deep misunderstandings in the first place as most, at least initially, were in a complex state of pawnship when they arrived at the mission.<sup>14</sup> Another perceived problem was that the school contained students from too many backgrounds: apprentices, "the young men about town sort," "boys fresh from slave dhows," "boys" from Mbweni shamba, and finally, "boys" from mainland schools (Dale 1894).

From 1903 onward, as a result of the growing influence of the town on mission life, the UMCA attempted to purge its ex-slave dependents from the Zanzibar mission stations. Thus, many were outposted to the "dumping ground" of the rural island of Pemba (Foxley 1904; Frewer 1905; Weston 1906). The ex-slaves selected for this exodus were the ones the missionaries identified as being most troublesome: the adults of the shamba, the apprentices from Mkunazini, and the industrial students from both Mbweni and Kiungani schools (Key 1898, 1899; Robinson 2013). In theory, but certainly not in practice, only the academic students, male and female, remained in Zanzibar, often isolated from their own family members who had been relocated to Pemba. Missionaries also encouraged ex-slaves to journey to Pemba for a few months at a time during clove harvesting season, without making it a permanent move (Frewer 1907; 1908). Again, this highlights how the missionaries' intention of keeping the mixing of people to a minimum in order to manage the influence of urban life was largely thwarted. In other words, the missionaries eventually came to see rural life as a treatment, but not a cure, for the ex-slaves' estrangement from their roots.

### "Wajoli" and the Town

Thus, despite the missionaries' strategies to limit the moral contagion that resulted, in their view, from proximity of ex-slaves to the town and their disconnectedness from mainland "roots," most mission ex-slaves moved to, or hoped to move to, Ng'ambo. These ex-slaves referred to themselves as "wajoli," or "fellow servants" (Steere 1894; Frewer 1907; Eastman 1994).<sup>15</sup> According to my interviews with Zanzibari Anglicans, all of whom had slave ancestry, any ex-slave who had the necessary means, whether Christian or not, moved to Ng'ambo. Mbweni was considered too rural and devoid of economic opportunity, especially when the missionaries left in the 1920s (Peter Sudi, interview, Mbweni, Sept. 9, 2014).<sup>16</sup> But even before then, the

dependence offered by the missionaries was considered of limited value. The ex-slaves received fair wages as day laborers, but this type of work was (paradoxically) of lower status than even slave labor because it was devoid of ongoing commitment and mutual obligations between laborer and employer (Green 2014).

Ex-slaves who were at all interested in returning to the mainland often did so by joining caravans as porters or ship workers, since travel itself could offer opportunities for an individual to gain respectability, partly through being anonymous and transient (Speke 1864) and partly through the opportunity to carry items to trade for profit. Ex-slaves who chose to hire themselves out as porters would sometimes refuse to work for non-Europeans because, as one missionary put it, “a man of ours loses caste if he serves under anyone else” (Steere 1878). Similarly, another missionary noted that porters working for Europeans accepted a wage of four Maria Theresa Thalers per month instead of the usual five, because Europeans had a reputation for fair treatment and regular pay (Allen 1877).

John Mhina, a mainland Christian and historian, expressed a sentiment that was echoed by many other respondents. He argued that the shamba ex-slaves lacked a livelihood, or “*njia ya kuishi*,” literally meaning “way of living,” unless they relied on Arabs (interview, Magila, Oct. 15, 2014). He reasoned that this is why the missionaries tried to offer the ex-slaves livelihoods, although many ex-slaves turned to Arab patrons in any case, apparently rejecting the dependence that missionaries offered at the shamba in favor of dependence on patrons in the town. Indeed, as Bishop Steere (1873) observed, the boys and young men who came to the mission were capable and independent: “It must be remembered that the boys are better able to teach us agriculture than we to teach them, they could any of them get a living at that at once, don’t imagine that any of them are as helpless as English boys of eighteen or so without a trade.”

In Zanzibar the employment opportunities offered by the trades and services were much more lucrative than the agricultural work and manual labor on the mission shamba. The missionaries, nevertheless, taught trades selectively, not to all ex-slaves. Missionaries widely advocated the learning of agricultural skills, which prompted some resistance on the part of the “industrial students.” As a missionary named Cyril Frewer lamented in a 1905 letter,

The young African in these parts cordially dislikes taking hold of a hoe. It is to the mind of the rising generation the tool of the slave, the quite ignorant, and the aged and this is just as much the case with the heathen boys who live anywhere near a town, as with our Christian boys from Zanzibar schools who can read and write.

Another factor pushing young men to the town was the shortage of potential brides on the shamba. Female missionaries guarded their female students’ “virtue” very carefully, and only allowed “Mbwani girls” to marry Zanzibar

Christians who had a trade or profession, such as teachers or priests. Educated mainland suitors were considered the cream of the crop. Needless to say, the fact that missionaries were reluctant to marry their favorite female converts to male agricultural laborers further undermined their promotion of agriculture among ex-slaves (Thackeray 1897; Anonymous 1904; Weston 1909).

Shamba people, like other ex-slaves associated with the mission, suffered a very poor reputation in the majority Muslim Zanzibar town, partly because the mission did not prepare them adequately for cultural assimilation (Frewer 1905). For instance, staying on the shamba made it harder to learn Swahili, and their poor command of the language was an enormous disadvantage (Woodward 1891; Durham Kaleza, interview, Kwa Alinato, Sept. 10, 2014; Stockreiter 2015). Among other problems, it drew attention to the fact that they had recently come from the rural mainland. In his 1876 account, a British physician named James Christie remarked that "the town negroes look down upon their country cousins with a good deal of contempt, and consider themselves a superior class" (1876:316). The shamba ex-slaves suffered from other disadvantages as well. Their affiliation with the mission itself signaled that they were "fresher" ex-slaves than those living in the town, who had established roots on the island (Glassman 1995; Steere 1885; Abrahams 1981). The reputation of mission ex-slaves was also compromised by the association between the mission and the Nyamwezi, a subgroup of several "tribes" who had an especially poor reputation.<sup>17</sup> Later in the 1920s the shamba ex-slaves also came to have an unfortunate reputation as bad workers, bad Christians, and bad citizens among Zanzibar's townspeople.

Thus while urban life provided opportunities to overcome slave status, this was not a simple process. Missionaries tried to broker this process on their own terms with their ex-slave apprenticing scheme. The mission sponsored some selected ex-slave young men to become apprentices in the town, on the condition that they sleep at the mission at Mbwani and live under its moral codes. This scheme failed, largely because the apprentice-masters treated them like slaves and did very little to train them. As a consequence, they were unable to compete with the artisans of the town and continued to seek employment through other routes (Allen 1884).

In 1890 the principal of Kiungani Boys' School, Percy L. Jones-Bateman, produced a "census" of his school leavers. He recorded that 140 out of 272 had left Kiungani and continued to live as Christians. Only thirty-one had formally given up Christianity—although, Jones-Bateman hastened to add, they had at least refused Islam. Since he based this conclusion on information he received from African Christians who kept in contact with these individuals, it might not have been absolutely accurate. But it is still noteworthy that these former slaves and ex-Christians maintained their connections to African Christians. According to a report in the UMCA publication *Central Africa* entitled "What Becomes of Your Mission Boys When They Leave You?", even the "backsliders" who moved to Ng'ambo would bid farewell to

their “old Christian schoolfellows” (Jones-Bateman 1890)—suggesting not only that these personal networks were maintained, but also that connections to Christians may have been more valuable than connections to missionaries themselves.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, mission ex-slaves who moved to Ng’ambo often settled in groups, and Christians tended to reside in clusters for protection. Though living in Ng’ambo was desirable, it was not easy for a Christian to do so. Living in a group was considered safer than living among a Muslim majority, and there were also particular landlords and patrons who were considered more tolerant toward Christians. This explains the Christian contingent in Kwa Alinato, which remains today and is named after Ali Nathoo, a leading landlord in this region who is still remembered for his generosity toward the poor and tolerance of Christians.<sup>19</sup>

Many Zanzibar Anglicans who were interviewed claimed that Christians melted into the town, with some even saying that in those days Muslims and Christians were visually indistinguishable. Sylvester Tayari (interview, Ng’ambo, Sept. 16, 2014) commented that “sometimes it was hard to say who was a Christian and who was a Muslim.”<sup>20</sup> One of the reasons, according to a number of interviewees, was that everyone dressed alike; in everyday life women wore the *buibui* shawl and men wore *kofia* caps, although they could not wear these garments in church.<sup>21</sup> Respondents differed in their opinion as to why Christians decided to wear the same things as Muslims. Tayari believed it was simply out of habit, while Teresa Mwakanjuki believed they wanted to please Muslims (interview, Sept. 16, 2014).

Nevertheless, Christian practices could make people strikingly conspicuous, particularly on Sundays when Christians were not supposed to drink, dance, or work, and when they could not wear Arab garments to church.<sup>22</sup> Missionaries endeavored to make their Christian presence felt in the town by orchestrating processions and public reading groups, in the style of the Muslims who read the Koran in public, but these efforts never really caught on—not because the Muslim population of the town believed them to be particularly antagonistic but because of the reluctance of ex-slaves to reveal their association with the mission (Steere 1873; Lister 1894; Farler 1895). In fact, it was not uncommon for some of the mission’s highest achieving pupils to run away from the mission on account of being taunted by townspeople (*African Tidings* 1888).

Thus, Zanzibar Christians were in a very difficult situation. Outward demonstration of their Anglican faith signaled their slave (or ex-slave) status. Muslims also criticized Christianity for being a “prayerless religion,” on account of prayers being conducted relatively privately and quietly, and less frequently than the Muslim calls to prayer (Allen 1900). Muslims would refuse to eat with Christians, and women would refuse to marry them (*Central Africa* 1899). It is possible that missionaries’ accounts sensationalized their victimization on the grounds of religious membership, but it is clear that ex-slaves from the mission underwent a great struggle in their attempts to integrate into town life.

## Kiungani Graduates

As opposed to the general group of shamba ex-slaves, the small elite group of ex-slaves who received an academic education from the Kiungani school and remained in mission employment as teachers or priests—such as the student referred to at the beginning of the article—came to be referred by the missionaries as “wenyeji” (literally “natives”) or “watumwa waliye-kombolewa” (“released slaves”). Tellingly, however, they were not called “waungwana” (gentlemen or freemen)—suggesting that even as the missionaries groomed a small number of ex-slaves to form part of the Anglican elite, they simultaneously discriminated against them by continuing to refer to their slave origins (Maples 1899; John Mhina, interview, Magila, Oct. 15, 2014). In fact, the “wenyeji” were in a position of bitter irony because they also did not enjoy the benefits one might expect to reap from being a “native.”

Missionaries, in fact, increasingly emphasized the essential distinction between “freeborn” and ex-slave, frequently complaining that the latter were bad “material.” For instance, the missionary Herbert Geldart argued that the schoolboys on the mainland were much better mannered than “Kiungani boys” because “they have never been demoralized as slaves” (Geldart 1885). Unsurprisingly, the ex-slave pupils struggled to come to terms with their lack of kin and belonging compared to the students from the mainland: “These lads here seem to realise bitterly how isolated they are in the world,” wrote the missionary Godfrey Dale in 1895, “how the family tie exists for all but them, how all the other boys have a home and country and position of their own but they nothing of the kind.” Frank Weston expressed similar concerns in 1916:

Zanzibar Christians are a very small, isolated body. They are shut off from the town population by the Cross, from fellow Christians—European and Goanese—by colour, and from us by social customs and education, or the want of it. They are ex-slaves and have no shame, such as mainland heathen feel at certain things. They depended on masters and early missionaries; and they do not easily acquire the independence that our present methods and growth require of them. Many of them accepted Baptism because they lived with us and owed us their daily bread. (Quoted in Smith 1926)

Other missionaries observed that Kiungani was very “cliquey” as groups separated according to tribe and freeborn/slave status. Missionaries facilitated the creation of cliques along tribal lines, even building separate playhouses for boys from Nyasa and Bondei (UMCA 1903).

Several interviewees corroborated the existence of these tensions. John Mhina, the mainland Christian quoted earlier, contended that the ex-slaves and their descendants were not considered to be truly “free.” His father had told him that at Kiungani mainland students enjoyed greater respectability

than those born in Zanzibar (interview, Magila, Oct. 15, 2014). The moral stigma surrounding Zanzibar Christians and their supposed lack of “roots” remains today. For example, an anonymous individual I interviewed in 2014 criticized the retired Bishop John Ramadhani, a descendent of ex-slaves, for his controversial policies on almsgiving, attributing it to a lack of connection with the mainland and overdependence on Europeans.

Mainlanders did not completely undervalue coastal and urban connections, and Zanzibar was clearly influential, as suggested by the proverb “When you play the flute in Zanzibar, all Africa, as far as the lakes, dances” (Ingrams 2007:346). But they tended to believe that mainland students could benefit the most from a brief sojourn in Zanzibar and then should return to their homes, bringing back tales of the great town. Missionaries worried that sending their students to Zanzibar could risk exposing them to moral contagion. They complained that mainland students who had been educated in Kiungani were “stuck up” when they returned (Dale 1894; Farler 1896) and had been robbed of their carefully nurtured humility. “Swagger,” to them, was the embodiment of this sin (Heanley 1898; Ward 1903; Weston 1903,1909).

But a major concern, as we have seen, had to do with moral conduct. The missionary Godfrey Dale insisted in 1894 that “it is my deliberate conviction that boys sent to Kiungani more often than not come back morally deteriorated” and “utterly degenerated.” According to his report, the same concerns of the missionaries were shared by students; one student who had gone to Kiungani complained that “Boys mock at religion altogether and . . . the whole place is insolent. . . . All round the place hover women of doubtful character and drink is got at by the boys at the Mbweni Shamba.” Newala students (from southern mainland Tanzania) similarly claimed, according to Dale, that, “When we left home, we loved our Lord Jesus Christ but now we are always being tempted to do wrong.”

These students (who were not named) were of course closely associated with the missionaries, and Dale was circumspect enough to wonder if they were exaggerating how bad things had become in Kiungani in order to confirm the missionaries’ moral concerns. But to some extent, the ex-slave students shared these concerns about the town’s influence. The accounts collected by Arthur C. Madan, a UMCA missionary, from the ex-slave boys at Kiungani demonstrate that they, too, believed that Zanzibar lacked the communalism of their mainland origins. For instance, a “Makua Boy” noted that the people from his homeland “do not eat as people do in Zanzibar, everyone at his own house.” Instead, he explained, “in every village there is a great tree, and by it a place for holding meetings. Each family goes out and takes its meals together” (1887:55). A Zaramo “boy” likewise observed that people in Zanzibar were much less ready to help their neighbors if they found them to be in difficulty (Madan 1887). Similarly, a Nyassa “boy” said he was eager to return to his homeland because the people there “are not hard-hearted, like the people of Zanzibar, who resemble Pharaoh” (*Central Africa* 1883). Evidently, Madan took some artistic license when

editing these testimonies, but they do suggest that ex-slaves did not feel at home in the town.

Thus the educated ex-slaves' connection to urban life was of limited value in terms of contributing to their social status among their mainland peers and colleagues. Yet the estrangement was somewhat reciprocal. The missionaries liked the idea of returning the ex-slaves to their homelands as missionary teachers or priests, and one of the tests the trainee teachers and priests had to undergo was to live for a period of time in remote areas on the mainland, selected vaguely according to their origins. Yet these moves were seldom permanent, as these priests and teachers struggled to cope with the "heathen" of the mainland (Majaliwa 1895; Abdallah 1894). Mbweni-educated women who married mainland Christians were more likely to remain, probably due to a relative lack of autonomy, but also possibly because slave status had different implications for women than for men. But generally, return to one's homeland was not really an option for an ex-slave. Several interviewees suggested—in a rather anguished fashion—that searching for your family was futile because you would only find them to be *washenzi* (primitive), and the difference between you and your long-lost kin would be too great to overcome. Thus, the great majority were content to become Zanzibaris (interviews with Sylvester Tayari, Ng'ambo, Sept. 16, 2014; Margaret Victoria Juma Sudi, Ng'ambo, Sept. 12, 2014; Francis Wakati, Mkunazini, Sept. 12, 2014).

The missionaries struggled with the fact that although they declared town influences as a moral threat to their converts, a central tenet of the UMCA was that integration was an essential strategy for furthering Christianity. Shutting their converts off from the opportunities the town offered would have been problematic because they believed that "genuine" conversion was impossible for individuals who simply had no other choice but to be mission dependents. This, disconcertingly for the missionaries, resembled slave–master relationships. Missionaries worried, in other words, that ex-slaves, even those who had risen to the ranks of the ministry, were only outwardly following Christianity because they saw the missionaries as their masters, not because they had genuinely converted.

The overwhelming majority of the elderly Anglicans I encountered in my Zanzibar research had ex-slave elders whom the mission had trained to be teachers or priests. Very few of them had mainland connections, and unlike most Zanzibaris, who normally deny any connection to slavery, they were willing to discuss their slave ancestry relatively openly. Of course, concealment of their slave ancestry would have been very difficult; Christians have Christian names, and as a rule, all Christians in Zanzibar are descended from slaves. It is also possible that they were willing to discuss their slave ancestry as a way of justifying their hostility to certain aspects of the societies that surround them, such as what they perceive as growing Islamic extremism. But yet another possibility is that while the missionaries may well have played a role in isolating educated Zanzibari Christians, they also played a part in making slave status easier to talk about. It is clear, though, that this group,

descendents of the very first ex-slave Christians, the UMCA's early poster children and mission loyalists, is to some extent still struggling to belong.

## Conclusion

This article has confirmed many of the findings that provide the basis for the study of postslavery societies and the role of Christian missionaries in the ending of slavery and brokering of new respectability. First, the town was undoubtedly a popular arena in which slave status could be modified, particularly for men (Fair 2001; Bissell 2011). Second, as Glassman (1995) and Rossi (2009) have shown and theorized, numerous trajectories and possibilities were open to ex-slaves. These were unpredictable and often undesirable, but ex-slaves made their own choices, with their own values and worldviews in mind. Zanzibar Christians and others who were affiliated with the mission followed a number of paths, none of which was aimed exclusively toward self-differentiation or conformity. Some distanced themselves from the townspeople and attached themselves to the missionaries, who they believed to be their benevolent patrons. Another option was to move to the town and conform to Muslim, non-Christian cultures. Third, missionaries were not necessarily helpful to ex-slaves in search of a better life (Kollman 2005; Maxwell 2013; McMahan 2013). Very often, they simply modified the already existing social stratification that was shaped by slave status. Other times, their impact was simply ephemeral.

This article argues that it was the mission, rather than the missionaries, that provided valuable tools for networking and socialization for both Christian and non-Christian ex-slaves. The fact that they retained ties to fellow mission ex-slaves, regardless of their religious affiliation and sometimes even in preference to sustaining their allegiance to missionaries, is very striking. The educated ex-slave Christians had various advantages and challenges. On the one hand, they benefited from their early investment in Western schooling. On the other hand, the stigma attached to them by missionaries and mainland African Christians affected their respectability in the Christian community. They were marked as more susceptible to sin, because of their estrangement from their "roots." Yet they also had to modify their behavior in the setting of the Muslim town, toward which they gravitated.

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## Notes

- Ingrams (2007) suggests that homosexuality was uncommon in Zanzibar.
- Some examples of cases such as these can be found in Committee on the East African Slave Trade (1870); Steere (1878); Farler (1887, 1895); *African Tidings* (1893b, 1895, 1913); Foxley (1902a, 1902b); Pennell (n.d.).
- See Miers and Kopytoff (1977); Rossi (2009); Lovejoy (2011); Bissell (2011); McMahon (2013).
- See Steere (1871); Colomb (1873); Nwulia (1975); Cooper (1977); Fair (2001); Bissell (2011); Glassman (2011).
- This term, as a euphemism for someone with slave status, resembles the use of the term "Swahili," which came relatively late, in the 1920s and 1930s; see Fair (2001).
- This was also the case on the mainland. See, e.g., Becker (2015).
- For mainland comparisons, see Becker (2001) on southeast Tanzania and Nimtz (1980) on Bagamoyo. These authors both show how Sufi orders facilitated the integration of former slaves into Muslim communities.
- Brenner (2001) provides an additional example of this view in his study of West Africa.
- See, e.g., Hodgson (1871); Woodward (1883); Allen (1886).
- It was not illegal to build in stone in Ng'ambo, but rent laws passed in the late 1920s made it financially prohibitive (Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009; Lanchester 1923; Fair 2001). Bissell (2011) offers a messier depiction than the colonial impression of this stark divide between the town proper and Ng'ambo.
- By 1881 there were about one hundred Christians living in the town according to Steere (1881a); see also Cameron (1896).
- It was said that these educated freed slaves would procure a slave once they married (Capel 1877).
- The word was derived from "kiunga," meaning "suburb." See Steere (1894).
- A person was "pawned" by a debtor who was unable to repay a debt or needed time in which to repay a debt. The lender took the pawned person as collateral, but if the debtor never repaid the loan, the pawned person belonged (as a slave) to the lender. Sometimes the lender would then sell the pawn (to recoup the money lost) or would give the pawn away as a gift.
- Unfortunately, this section is only partially informed by the informants' reports, although the reasons behind this are in themselves rather informative. My interviews were almost exclusively with Anglicans, who were born of the elite minority of the mission community. Not for want of trying, I was unable to find non-Christian interlocutors of the right age range. Most of the mission's

ex-slave converts did not remain Christians in the twentieth century. Aside from the small number of mission teachers, priests, and their families, the Mbweni shamba's population consisted of elderly or disabled ex-slaves who had run out of options. These older converts were, more often than not, childless, and so hardly contributed to the making of a younger generation of Christians. See Sharpe (1898, 1900); Steere (1878).

16. The social status of these areas has to some extent become reversed in recent decades, particularly since the Karume family established their estate there on mission land. This is somewhat reflected in the fact that the most well-to-do interlocutors I interviewed resided in comfortable homes in the Mbweni district. See also *Conger* (2011).
17. In a letter (Juma 1887) from a freed slave, the missionary editor points out his attempts to conceal his Nyamwezi origin. For more on the Nyamwezi, see Steere (1885), Abrahams (1981), and Ingrams (2007), who accounted for their poor reputation with the fact that by the 1920s many Zanzibar Christians seem to have been Nyamwezi.
18. Other evidence suggests that Jones-Bateman's survey may have been overly optimistic. Indeed, Sir Arthur Henry Hardinge, Colonial Head for the British East Africa Protectorate, claimed that after leaving the mission school, the only ex-slaves who remained Christians were those who had positions in government service and administration (*Central Africa* 1899).
19. Some of my interviews took place in Kwa Alinato. It is worth noting that one of the Anglican interlocutors, John Selemani, mentioned he had run in the election to become a council representative. He was unsuccessful, and he believed this was due to his religion. However, he added that Kwa Alinato was generally less hostile toward Christians than other areas (interview, Sept. 14, 2014). For a brief history of Ali Nathoo, who arrived in Zanzibar in 1886, see Fazal (n.d.).
20. In Swahili: "wakristo na waislamu kwa hiyo kuwatofautisha saa nyingine inakuwa vigumu" (my translation).
21. Buibui is piece of black cloth worn as a shawl, usually by Muslim women. Kofia, meaning "hat" in Swahili, refers specifically to a brimless cylindrical cap with a flat crown worn by men in East Africa, especially Swahili-speaking cultures. John Ramadhani, a retired Anglican bishop, suggested that at one point it was controversial for mission teachers and employees to wear kanzu at all, but that it was mostly mainland missionaries, rather than Zanzibar Christians, who objected to its Arabic connotations (interview, Mkunazini, Sept. 8, 2014; see also Mangenya 1984).
22. Failing to partake in drinking would have suggested a lack of generosity on mainland Tanzania. This is represented in the Swahili word for "to pay tribute"—*kushikana*—which literally means "to hold each other" (Peterson 2012; Farler 1877).