

INDIAN OCEAN TRADE AND EMERGING PATHWAYS OF MOBILITY IN NEOLIBERAL ZANZIBAR

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ABSTRACT

Indian Ocean trade historically directed ‘routes’ for merchants and traders to frame their ‘roots’ in Zanzibar. It facilitated access to different forms of social capital for imagining new trajectories of hope and constructing more meaningful futures. However, colonial rule and subsequent policies of the socialist revolutionary government severely restricted the mobility of Zanzibaris and their engagement in Indian Ocean trade, initiating a new era of uncertainty. As free-market policies have revived since the mid-1980s under a renewed framework of neoliberalism, this article examines how Zanzibaris, increasingly finding themselves in conditions of involuntary immobility, are trying to participate today in mercantile activities that brought prosperity in the past in hopes of securing a brighter future. The article explores how the efforts of Zanzibari merchants and traders to engage in transnational Indian Ocean trade provides, for these limited groups of individuals, access to envisioning different pathways of socioeconomic mobility in the neoliberal era. The article contends that engagement in Indian Ocean trade, through support from transnational and diasporic networks, facilitates access to new routes of mobility to situate one’s roots in Zanzibar, while the situation for the majority of Zanzibaris continues to deteriorate under neoliberalism today.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Ocean trade historically provided Zanzibari merchants and traders access to new pathways of socio-economic mobility and strengthened their position as cultural

middlemen within the society.¹ Trans-local trade, linking Zanzibar to littoral societies along the East African coast and beyond, offered new ‘routes’ for formulating ‘roots’ and emerged as an important marker for framing local ideas of belonging.² For those engaged in mercantile activities, Indian Ocean trade facilitated access to various forms of social capital for imagining new trajectories of hope and constructing more meaningful futures shaped in part as a consequence of their own actions.³ Trade brought new immigrants from across the Indian Ocean world⁴ and imprinted Islamic practices into Zanzibar society.⁵ Interaction between these different Zanzibaris shaped the locally contested discourses of *ustaarabu*, ‘civilization,’ and *utamaduni*, ‘culture,’ and fashioned trans-local relations of trust, affinity, and values of Islamic-religious morality.⁶ Merchants and traders exercised these values and preserved various social relationships through redistribution of their wealth, as capital accumulation was considered socially unacceptable.⁷ However, with the arrival of British colonial rule over the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries that transformed the western Indian Ocean into an imperial British lake and subsequent isolationist policies of the socialist revolutionary government in the 1960s, new restrictions limited the participation of Zanzibaris in Indian Ocean trade.⁸

Today, frameworks of neoliberalism introduced after the collapse of socialist policies in the early 1980s increasingly govern the conditions within which Zanzibaris can

¹ John Middleton, “Merchants: An essay in historical ethnography,” *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9, 3 (2003), 509-26; Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African commercial empire into the world economy, 1770-1873* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987).

² James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Julia Pfaff, “A mobile phone: Mobility, materiality, and everyday Swahili trading practices,” *Cultural Geographies* 17, 3 (2010), 341-357; Julia Verne, *Living Translocality: Space, culture and economy in contemporary Swahili trade* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012).

³ Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for jope in a shrinking society* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 15. Thomas Meisenhelder, “Hope: A phenomenological prelude to critical social theory,” *Human Studies*, 5 (1982), 205.

⁴ This includes Arabs from across the Arabian Peninsula (Hadrami, Omani among others), South Asians, Southeast Asians, East Asians, Comorians, other islanders from communities in the western Indian Ocean, and people from the African mainland. While some of these people came to Zanzibar as merchants and traders, others were brought as workers and slaves; the latter groups particularly during the colonial period. See: Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*.

⁵ Over 90 percent of Zanzibaris today are Muslims.

⁶ Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial thought and violence in colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Middleton, “Merchants,” 521.

⁷ Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African consumerism and the genealogies of globalization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

⁸ Edward A. Alpers, “On becoming a British lake: Piracy, slaving, and British imperialism in the Indian Ocean during the first half of the nineteenth century,” in *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*, eds. Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 45-58; Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the age of global empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*.

engage in trade. However, while emphasizing values of individualism, entrepreneurship, and mobility as sources of hope,⁹ neoliberal policies impose new structural limitations that produce disparities in access to resources and power within it, resulting in unequal access and distribution of hope.¹⁰ Individuals compete against each other to acquire capital for facilitating their socio-economic mobility rather than pursue their trajectories of hope in conjunction with the aspirations of others in society. Consequently, individuals unable to excel due to lack of access to different forms of capital for facilitating their mobility remain in a state of ‘involuntary immobility.’¹¹

The emphasis on individualism and personal success introduced by neoliberalism disrupts the principles of generosity and reciprocity that previously marked the orientation of Zanzibar society.¹² Historically, the success of merchants and traders was interconnected with societal hope,¹³ when relations of trust, affinity, quasi-kinship, and religious morality informed pursuits of personal self-interests.¹⁴ Zanzibaris continue to regard participation in trading activities as integral to their identities and sense of belonging.¹⁵ However, new values of individualism advocated by neoliberalism restrict Zanzibaris, particularly impoverished youth, from envisioning such trajectories of hope. Instead, it forces them into a deteriorating state of involuntary immobility, hampering how they relate to each other and can collaborate in shaping a meaningful and inclusive future for the entire society.

Hope, as an analytical framework, suggests different things in different contexts. Western intellectual traditions often embed hope within discourses of faith, salvation, and redemption.¹⁶ Hope situates the embodiment of subjective emotional experiences and serves to frame dispositional activities of the consciousness based on primordial situations

⁹ Hirokazu Miyazaki, “Economy of dreams: Hope in global capitalism and its critiques,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 21, 2 (2006), 151.

¹⁰ Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 17.

¹¹ Jøgen Carling, “Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: Theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28, 1 (2002), 5-42.

¹² William C. Bissell, “City of stone, space of contestation: Urban conservation and the colonial past in Zanzibar” (Unpublished PhD diss.: University of Chicago, 1999).

¹³ Societal hope is based on the idea in which existing social inequalities and limitations are replaced with the potentiality of a more meaningful and inclusive future. See: Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 12-15.

¹⁴ Middleton, “Merchants”.

¹⁵ Akbar Keshodkar, “Who needs China when you have Dubai? The role of networks and the engagement of Zanzibaris in transnational Indian Ocean trade,” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 43, 1-3 (2014), 105-142; Verne, *Living Translocality*.

¹⁶ Vincent Crapanzano, “Reflections on hope as a category of social and psychological analysis,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 18, 1 (2003), 3-32.

of human beings.¹⁷ Hope also can articulate frameworks of incomplete subjective possibilities from objective, future potentialities.¹⁸ In directing these possibilities, hope is ‘the way we construct a meaningful future for ourselves.’¹⁹ This exercise in meaning-making, I contend, is necessarily informed by how individuals formulate their sense of belonging since historical and personal narratives tied to a place establish a new set of possibilities within it.²⁰ While hope offers endless possibilities for the future, one’s present position, informed by their past, directs their capacity to act in pursuit of different trajectories of hope to achieve those possibilities for a better future. In this article, I utilize trajectories of hope to frame different temporal and spatial dimensions of belonging that facilitate mobility by locating previous experiences and make it possible to anticipate probable futures.²¹

Mobility through trade has enabled individuals to secure their livelihood and identify themselves as a ‘proper Zanzibari.’²² However, neoliberalism has now introduced new forms of involuntary immobility. It has diminished hope for future possibilities because people feel there are no alternatives to the neoliberal capitalist system.²³ For many Zanzibaris, these developments have introduced new impediments to improving their current state and envisioning better futures. The incorporation of hope in this article highlights how Zanzibaris frame their aspirations of belonging and mobility through trade by connecting to the past in search of a better future to overcome growing inequities they experience in the present.²⁴ In doing so, I do not suggest that trade is the only pathway of mobility for envisioning better futures in Zanzibar today.²⁵ Rather, as inequities grow and

¹⁷ James R. Averill, “Intellectual emotions,” in *The Emotions: Social, cultural and biological dimensions*, eds. Rom Harre and W. Gerrod Parrott (London: Sage, 1996), 24-37; Meisenhelder, “Hope: A phenomenological prelude,” 195-212.

¹⁸ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

¹⁹ Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 15.

²⁰ Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A philosophical topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Phillip Mar, “Unsettling potentialities: Topographies of hope in transnational migration,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 26, 4 (2005), 361-78.

²² Julia Pfaff, “Finding one’s way through places – A contemporary trade journey of young Zanzibari traders,” in *Cultures of Migration: African perspectives*, eds. Hans Peter Hahn and Georg Klute (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), 85.

²³ Mary Zournazi, *Hope: New philosophies of change* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 162.

²⁴ Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 12.

²⁵ Akbar Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change in Post-Socialist Zanzibar: Struggles for identity, movement, civilization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013); Alataïr Despres, “Stories with strings attached: Transnational intimacy and upward social mobility of the Zanzibar beach boys,” *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 218, 3 (2017), 82-99; Kjersti Larsen, “Translocal experiences and intersecting mobilities: Reflections on motility and actual and imagined movability in contemporary Zanzibar,” in *Translocal Connections across the Indian Ocean*, eds. Francesca Declich (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 227-255. Franziska Fay highlights other pathways of mobility Zanzibaris are pursuing today in search of a better future in: Franziska Fay, “‘Kuishi ughaibuni’: Emplaced absence, the Zanzibar Diaspora Policy, and young men’s experiences of belonging in Zanzibar and Oman,” *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies*, 6, 1 (2022), 10-37.

other avenues remain out of reach, I assess how Zanzibaris continue to view trade as a pathway of mobility to imagine new possibilities for directing different trajectories of hope and envisioning a better future.

The integration of African societies into today's neoliberal world order has resulted in many Africans losing control over their individual and collective lives.²⁶ In Zanzibar, neoliberalism has drastically diminished prospects of individual and societal hope. This article makes this argument by first assessing the degree to which neoliberalism and practices associated with it, primarily through the rise of commodity consumption and the tourism industry, are exacerbating conditions of involuntary immobility increasingly experienced by Zanzibaris. The article then analyzes how, as Zanzibaris are wearied in waiting for a brighter future within this prevailing milieu of neoliberalism,²⁷ those who can access support from either transnational or diasporic networks can once again participate in mercantile practices around the Indian Ocean world. Based on over 15 years of multi-sited, ethnographic fieldwork in Zanzibar and the Arabian Peninsula,²⁸ the article assesses how Zanzibari men who can access these pathways of mobility view their efforts to engage in Indian Ocean trade not only to pursue new routes to overcome their involuntary immobility in the current neoliberal environment but also to reorient their roots in Zanzibar as part of situating their trajectories of hope for the future. The focus on Zanzibari men in this article by no means suggests that Zanzibari women are not involved in similar mercantile activities. Their exclusion here is primarily due to limitations resulting from observing gendered norms in Zanzibar that hindered the researcher's social interaction with local women.²⁹ The growing presence of female traders working as parts of various networks from across Tanzania in wholesale markets in Guangzhou, China,³⁰

²⁶ James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Fay, "'Kuishi ughaibuni,'" 10-37; Ghassan Hage, *Waiting* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009).

²⁸ Several dozen Zanzibaris were interviewed for this project. Ethnographic fieldwork in Zanzibar was conducted over several periods between 1998 and 2018, and in the Arabian Gulf in 2001 and between 2009 and 2014.

²⁹ In observance of gendered norms and values in this patriarchal Muslim society, as well as social expectations placed by respondents on the researcher, who is a South Asian Muslim man, conducting ethnographic research into the public and private lives of Zanzibari women engaged in mercantile practices was not possible. The researcher's interaction with 'strange' women was often discouraged by local respondents with whom he lived and socialized. These respondents emphasized to the researcher that such interaction violated local principles of modesty and respect and reflected negatively on their social position in society. Consequently, interaction with Zanzibari women was often directed by male respondents and in their presence. In this context, regularly interacting with and learning how local women engaged in different social and economic activities remained difficult. See: Akbar Keshodkar, "The politics of localization: Controlling movement in the field," *Anthropology Matters*, 6, 2 (2004); Akbar Keshodkar, "Movement of Asian and Swahili identities: Impact of tourism on constructions of community, ethnicity, and gender relations in Zanzibar Town" (Unpublished PhD. diss.: Oxford University, 2005).

³⁰ T. Tu Huynh, "A 'Wild West' of trade? African women and men and the gendering of globalisation from below in Guangzhou," *Identities: Global studies in culture and power*, 23, 5 (2016), 501-18.

participation of female Zanzibari traders in various parts of southeast Asia, and field observations confirm that Zanzibari women are increasingly participating in Indian Ocean trading activities.³¹ This topic requires further research but remains outside the scope of this article.

EVOLUTION OF INVOLUNTARY IMMOBILITY IN ZANZIBAR

Shifting patterns of migration and trade with littoral societies across the western Indian Ocean and African hinterlands historically served as important fulcrums for articulating local notions of belonging in Zanzibar. Indian Ocean trade contributed to the rise of urban centers along the East African coast, like Zanzibar, where members of various ethnic groups from the coast, across the Indian Ocean as well as inland Africa, came and traded over centuries and integrated Zanzibaris into trans-local, cosmopolitan networks that facilitated their mobility across cultural and political boundaries in pursuit of prosperity in different places.³² The cosmopolitan nature of this interaction fashioned the incorporation of new cultural, social values, such as Islam, and in shaping the development of Swahili culture and the multi-ethnic composition of Zanzibar society.³³

The Omani and British imperial projects, from the late 1700s to the mid-1900s, introduced new controls over these interactions and routes of mobility, while simultaneously contributing to greater socio-economic regional integration.³⁴ More people from mainland Africa and across the Indian Ocean now traversed the Zanzibar landscape to meet the labor demands of the flourishing colonial economy. Under the rule of the Omanis, this period initially transformed Zanzibar into a commercial entrepôt, whose dominance and influence extended far beyond the Indian Ocean world.³⁵ However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the British, as they extended their military control throughout the Indian Ocean world, subjugated Zanzibar, making it a protectorate, and introduced restrictions on the mobility of Zanzibaris by imposing new markers of belonging framed around notions of geographic origins and race.³⁶ The demarcation of

³¹ Julia Verne, "Re-enlivening the Indian Ocean through contemporary trade: East African traders searching for new markets in Jakarta," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 38 (2017), 123-38.

³² Middleton, "Merchants," 509-26; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*; Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, commerce and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

³³ W. Arens, "The WaSwahili: The social history of an ethnic group," *Africa*, 45, 4 (1975), 430.

³⁴ Erik Gilbert, "Coastal East Africa and the western Indian Ocean: Long-distance trade, empire, migration and regional unity, 1750–1970," *The History Teacher*, 36, 1 (2002), 7-36.

³⁵ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*.

³⁶ The British demarcated Zanzibaris either as 'natives,' composed of indigenous islanders and Africans from the continent, and 'non-natives,' those categorized as having origin outside Africa. Non-natives, for the British, were immigrants and

physical and social spaces during the colonial period on the premise of race and ethnicity often restricted access to mobility accessible to different Zanzibaris to improve their local socio-economic-political positions.³⁷

The subsequent turbulent transition to independence from colonial rule and the aftermath of a post-colonial Africanist insurgence in 1964, the Revolution, resulted in the expulsion of the Omanis and genocide of Arab and Asian minorities, further disrupting the mobility of Zanzibaris and their engagement with societies across the Indian Ocean.³⁸ Concurrent efforts of the revolutionary government to integrate Zanzibar into the Tanzanian Union in the 1960s introduced additional controls restricting the mobility of Zanzibaris.³⁹ The authoritarian, revolutionary government advocated self-sufficiency by implementing policies of isolationism, scientific-socialism, and nationalization to maintain control over the population. Travel-bans and restrictions on freedom of movement and interaction with places that previously contributed to shaping trajectories of hope and prosperity initiated a new era of crisis for Zanzibaris.

New modes of inequalities centered around specific notions of race and restrictions on movement during the socialist period further marked the disappearance of a coherent vision of the future. Citizens categorized as racially ‘non-Africans’ were systematically persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, or exiled.⁴⁰ In efforts to create an ‘African’ state, leaders of the revolutionary government established new systems of patronage and clientelism to maintain control and centralize power.⁴¹ Expansion of these patron-client networks over the past 50 years has enabled the ruling authorities to monopolize control over economic resources, the political discourse on the islands, and the production of everything within the state.⁴² As these leaders and their clients increased their wealth and power, state policies exacerbated conditions of involuntary immobility on the majority of Zanzibaris, who experienced greater poverty and uncertainty.

represented members of some diaspora (Arab, Indian, Comorian, etc.) in Zanzibar. See: Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change*, 34-5; Abdul Sheriff, “Race and class in the politics of Zanzibar,” *Afrika Spectrum*, 36, 3 (2001), 301-18.

³⁷ Bissell, “City of Stone;” Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*.

³⁸ Sheriff, “Race and class,” 301-18.

³⁹ Issa G. Shivji, *Pan Africanism or Pragmatism? Lessons of the Tanganyika-Zanzibar Union* (Dar es Salaam: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, 2008).

⁴⁰ G. Thomas Burgess, *Race, Revolution and the Struggle for Human Rights in Zanzibar: The memoirs of Ali Sultan Essa and Seif Sharif Hamad* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 2009); Akbar Keshodkar, “Marriage as the means to preserve ‘Asian-ness’: The post-revolutionary experience of the Asians of Zanzibar,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 45, 20 (2010), 226-40.

⁴¹ Burgess, *Race, Revolution and the Struggle*.

⁴² Kelly M. Askew, “Sung and unsung: Musical reflections on Tanzanian postsocialisms,” *Africa: The journal of the International African Institute*, 76, 1 (2006), 29.

Conditions in Zanzibar changed only after the collapse of the islands' economy due to gross mismanagement of resources and corruption by the early 1980s, when the government was forced to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to stay in power. This agreement mandated abandoning socialist policies in favor of liberalization of the political economy, entailing privatization of the economic sector, ending government subsidies and welfare programs, and introducing multi-party democracy. These policies revived foreign trade and reinstated the freedom of mobility restricted over the previous 20 years. The government touted neoliberalism as the mechanism to offer a renewed sense of hope for its citizens to overcome the socio-economic hardships many endured during the colonial and socialist eras. However, it now serves as the newest disruptive force limiting the capacity of Zanzibaris to pursue new routes of socioeconomic mobility to frame their roots in Zanzibar. Over the past 35 years, large-scale political and economic corruption tied with neoliberal policies has resulted in the continued deterioration of society, with many Zanzibaris now living in far worse socioeconomic conditions than during the socialist era. By the government's own estimates, over 49 percent of Zanzibaris lived in conditions of ultra-poverty in 2010.

Neoliberalism, by mandating restrictive socio-economic policies and promoting the development of elitism and new forms of clientelism for external investors throughout Africa,⁴³ has facilitated growing political corruption and social conflicts and mismanagement and deterioration of Zanzibar's economy.⁴⁴ More Zanzibaris now lack access to sustainable livelihoods, particularly the youth.⁴⁵ With the collapse of basic welfare systems, disregard by the state's institutions of the provision of adequate services for its citizens, and with the majority of people unable to acquire adequate employment or engage in various forms of consumption now prominent in the market economy, conditions of involuntary immobility increasingly experienced by many Zanzibaris create additional challenges for imagining new trajectories of hope. Moreover, forced into levels of dependency instituted by the socialist government's redistribution systems, the majority of Zanzibaris lack the financial resources to compete in the capitalist economy and the human capital needed to access new pathways of mobility in the neoliberal environment. Introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and downsizing of the government bureaucracy resulted in many civil servants losing employment and a

⁴³ Ferguson, *Global Shadows*.

⁴⁴ Kjetil Tronvoll, "Bridging divided identities – or an agency of political domination? Reassessing the future of the Tanzanian Union," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 13 (2006), 223-41.

⁴⁵ Fay, "'Kuishi ughaibuni,'" 10-37; Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change*.

decline in basic public and social services, such as education, healthcare, and welfare. The privatization of the economy further resulted in drastic increases in food prices and consumer goods, continuing devaluation of the local currency,⁴⁶ and a dramatic rise in inflation.⁴⁷ With the continuing deterioration of the public education system, most Zanzibari youth are unable to acquire the necessary skills to compete in the new neoliberal economy.⁴⁸

These developments epitomize the growing involuntary immobility experienced by many Zanzibaris. According to one respondent, Sami, a Swahili Zanzibari in his late 40s, ‘Zanzibaris have become beggars,’ and life and society are collapsing all around. Moving between different jobs, the only form of stable employment he has found is working as a security guard. He works 10 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. However, with rising costs of living, compounded by exploitative salaries and the influx of consumption commodities flooding Zanzibar (largely inaccessible for him), Sami’s monthly salary of USD75 does not adequately support his family. His three teenage children have stopped attending school and taken up menial jobs in the informal sectors of the economy⁴⁹ to help the family survive. Sami contends that his family lived in poverty before, but he never felt a sense of despair. They could turn to relatives and neighbors for

⁴⁶ The Tanzanian currency and per capita income have declined significantly since the liberalization of the economy. In 1986, the official exchange rate was 1 US dollar (USD) = 40 Tanzania Shilling (TZS). By 2020, 1 USD = 2300 TZS (Bank of Tanzania, currency exchange website, www.oanda.com [Accessed: 9 Feb. 2022]). The devaluation of the currency has resulted in the decline in the value on local incomes. In 1988, average earnings in Zanzibar were 2551 TZS per month (USD 64), which equated to USD 768 per year (Zanzibar National Archives, “Employment statistics and earning statistics, 1988-92, Location: BA 92/24). However, per capita income in 2010 was USD 557 (Zanzibar Government, *The Zanzibar Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty: 2010 – 2015* (ZSGRP II - MKUZA II). Commissioned by the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar (October 2010): <http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Tanzania%20UR/Zanzibar/Zanzibar-Mkuza-II-2010-2015.pdf> [Accessed: 10 Jan. 2012]). In 2017, the Zanzibar government instituted a new minimum wage of 300,000 TZS per month (about USD 130). However, 71 percent of all workers continue to earn either the minimum wage or less (UNICEF, “Assessment of the impact of tourism on communities and children in Zanzibar” (June 2018a): <https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org.esa/files/2019-05/UNICEF-Tanzania-2018-Cost-Benefit-Analysis-of-Tourism-in-Zanzibar.pdf> [Accessed: 1 March 2021], 40). The government projects that per capita income will rise to USD 1006 by early 2020s (UNICEF, “Zanzibar 2018 National Budget Brief” (October 2018b): <https://www.unicef.org/tanzania/media/1336/file/UNICEF-Zanzibar-2018-National-Budget-Brief.pdf> [Accessed 1 March 2021], 3).

⁴⁷ Bissell, “City of Stone”, 221; Greg Cameron, “Narratives of democracy and dominance in Zanzibar,” in *Knowledge, Renewal and Religion: Repositioning and changing ideological and material circumstances among the Swahili on the East African Coast*, eds. Kjersti Larsen (Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, 2009), 159.

⁴⁸ Askew, “Sung and Unsung”, 24-5; Burgess, *Race, Revolution and the Struggle*, 328.

⁴⁹ By 1999, the informal sector represented 61 percent of all employment in Zanzibar. See: *United Nations Common Country Assessment for Zanzibar* (Dar es Salaam: Economic Research Bureau, 2001), 24. Data from 2014 suggests that the informal sector of the economy represented 38 percent of all employment in Zanzibar, with 51 percent of it situated in urban areas and 30 percent in rural areas (World Bank, *Zanzibar Poverty Assessment* (October 2017): <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28851/120689-WP-P164456-PUBLIC-11-3-17-25-10-2017-20-15-5-ZanzibarPovertyAssessment.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [Accessed: 1 Mar. 2021], 84).

assistance in the past; these networks, despite being locally situated, offered some degree of support to survive. Today, however, their circumstances are equally bad, if not worse. These basic systems of support have now collapsed. Sami continues working to provide for his family but feels demoralized for having nothing to show for it. He worries immensely about his children and the family's future, fearing that they will end up in a worse situation. In reflecting on his prevailing conditions, with growing limitations on his mobility, prospects for the future remain bleak and uncertain. Sami's condition represents a crisis of lasting disorganization of life resulting in a clear disappearance of a coherent vision of the future grounded in the lack of concrete, real possibilities for orienting such projects.⁵⁰ Given that thousands of Zanzibaris face similar circumstances, their situations are exacerbated by their inability to access different forms of social capital to overcome growing uncertainties of daily life that worsen their state of involuntary immobility.

Living in abject poverty, these Zanzibaris are forced to search for sources of livelihood in the informal sectors of the economy or in tourism, a prominent component of neoliberal efforts to revive Zanzibar's economy. Tourism and related service industries constitute over 45 percent of Zanzibar's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁵¹ Tourism also accounts for 82 percent of all foreign exchange earnings in Zanzibar.⁵² Moreover, neoliberalism has introduced new markers of belonging in Zanzibar through consumption practices of imported and expensive goods, such as mobiles, cars, clothes, etc., and building homes with walled compounds. For the majority of Zanzibaris, engaging in such practices remains inaccessible in the neoliberal era.

Masood, a 25-year-old Arab Zanzibari, works in a small household supplies shop in Zanzibar Stone Town owned by his maternal aunt. Educated in public schools, he dropped out after completing the ninth grade. Bored and not learning much, he claims it was an easy decision to leave school when his aunt offered him the job. Like most other youth I interacted with in Zanzibar, Masood has high aspirations of living a more comfortable life, engaging in different forms of conspicuous consumption now visible throughout Zanzibar. He hopes to acquire his own business someday to earn more money, have 'status,' and live a better life. However, his current salary, about USD100 per month, limits his capacity to engage in different forms of consumption or plan towards owning a business. Masood's family supported his decision to leave school and work because they

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 201. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 206.

⁵¹ UNICEF, "Assessment of the impact," 23-4.

⁵² World Bank, *Zanzibar: A pathway to tourism for all. Integrated strategic action plan* (July 2019):

<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/pt/993701565250577192/pdf/Zanzibar-A-Pathway-to-Tourism-for-All-Integrated-Strategic-Action-Plan.pdf> [Accessed: 1 Mar. 2021], 14.

needed his earnings to survive. His father has been unable to hold on to stable employment and being the only son, the family now expects Masood to contribute to their economic well-being. However, USD100 does not go far at all in helping him pursue his aspirations. He has operated the store on and off for six years but has managed to save nothing; anything left after contributing to growing family expenses is easily used up in trying to buy new clothes and going out with friends. In the several years that I have interacted with Masood, he has expressed increasing pessimism about what the future may hold. Despite having work, he finds life having no clear direction and his situation deteriorating further. Any promise of prosperity seems to become more elusive, resulting in further socio-economic marginalization in society.

Similar circumstances are experienced by those who maintain steady, ‘respectable’ employment in the formal sectors of the economy. Juma, a Swahili Zanzibari in his 40s, is a senior instructor at a state-run school. As a teacher, Juma is well-respected, but he considers his earnings insufficient to support the basic lifestyle he and his family desire to maintain their social position in their community. He contends that his monthly salary of USD 200, along with about USD 100 a month he earns irregularly from teaching Kiswahili to foreigners, is barely enough to adequately support the family, in turn restricting his ability to engage in various forms of consumption practices. This has created new challenges for Juma in interacting with his neighbor, Issa, whom he has known for years. Financial support from relatives living abroad has enabled Issa to acquire a transport business. Living a more ‘comfortable life’ now, Issa regularly consumes imported items, purchased a new car for the family’s use, and built a fence around his home. Consequently, daily social interaction between the two families has declined drastically. Their children no longer play together and Juma’s family is often not invited to social gatherings at Issa’s house.⁵³ Juma laments at how such developments strike at the heart of *ujirani*, ‘neighborliness,’ a cornerstone of maintaining social relations in Zanzibar society.⁵⁴ With new conspicuous consumption patterns increasingly framing social relations, Issa’s new financial dispositions provide him with access to forms of mobility inaccessible to and unattainable by Juma. Given this situation, Juma must wait to realize such a future in more concrete terms. For Zanzibaris facing similar circumstances, such forms of waiting amid growing socio-economic disparity and

⁵³ Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change*, 122-3.

⁵⁴ Garth A. Myers, “Making the socialist city of Zanzibar,” *Geographical Review*, 84, 4 (1999), 451-64.

uncertainty, as Hage suggests, pervades every aspect of social life, further marginalizing their social positions in society and making life more dysfunctional.⁵⁵

Neoliberalism, through foreign investments, was supposed to bring new opportunities and improve the lives of Zanzibaris. However, with the state education system collapsing and government corruption flourishing, Zanzibar has experienced high degrees of deindustrialization. The only industry left, which now dominates the neoliberal environment and accounts for 68 percent of all investments is tourism.⁵⁶ Tourism is also the largest employer in Zanzibar, offering higher salaries than other sectors, but the work is seasonal, unstable with a high turnover rate, and highly competitive, making it often inaccessible.⁵⁷ Routes to individual prosperity in tourism also remain inaccessible for many Zanzibaris because they lack the educational, linguistic, and other skills required for work. The public education system collapsed during the socialist era and remains highly inadequate due to deteriorating government funding in the neoliberal era.⁵⁸ Moreover, competition from migrant laborers arriving from mainland Africa, who are better educated and possess linguistic skills to interact with tourists, often confines Zanzibaris to unskilled, menial, and low-paying positions.⁵⁹

Many Zanzibari respondents view the servile nature of tourism work in hotel environments and around tourists as demeaning and undesirable. Local respondents also associate work in tourism as lacking respectability and dignity on the premise that it requires handling alcohol and interacting with strangers, and it forces them to compromise religious obligations, such as attending mosque regularly. Nonetheless, many Zanzibaris unable to access other opportunities do take up such employment. And those unable to find stable jobs in tourism often end up working in the informal sector of the economy catering to tourists' needs.⁶⁰

Saeed, a Swahili Zanzibari youth living in poverty, considers tourism work equivalent to social death in this traditional Muslim society. Uneducated and unable to

⁵⁵ G. Hage, *Waiting*.

⁵⁶ Zanzibar's agricultural industry, centered around clove production, is controlled by the government. World Bank, *Zanzibar*, 14.

⁵⁷ In 2018, respondents working in hotels indicated that they earned between USD 150 and USD 200 a month. In light of the recent impact of COVID-19 on global tourism resulting in the decline in tourists now visiting Zanzibar, United Nations projects that unemployment in Zanzibar will increase substantially and the islands will 'plunge into a deep economic downturn for the foreseeable future.' See: *United Nations Development Programme Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Tanzania* (April 2020): <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/tanzania/docs/docs2020/undp-tz-SEA-Report%20Rapid-COVID19.pdf> [Accessed: 1 Mar. 2021], 27. See also fn. 46.

⁵⁸ Askew, "Sung and unsung", 15-43.

⁵⁹ Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change*.

⁶⁰ Despres, "Stories with strings attached," 82-99; Keshodkar, "Movement of Asian and Swahili identities."

find other forms of work, Saeed has resorted to working as a part-time independent tour-guide, which requires him to abandon local cultural practices, such as attending mosque during prayer times and refraining from public interacting with tourists, in order to serve their needs. Catering to tourists' demands involves interacting with them in bars, drinking alcohol, and courting female tourists. Working around tourists and through the tips they give him, which remains his primary form of income, Saeed is somewhat able to support his family and consume various commodities now available in Zanzibar. However, for violating local cultural values of *haya* (modesty) and *heshima* (respect) through his public interaction with tourists, Saeed indicates that his social position within the local community has deteriorated and diminished his prospects for marrying a respectable, 'upright' woman in the future.⁶¹ Though the tourism environment offers Saeed a pathway to economic mobility, it also requires him to abandon cultural values he considers meaningful for maintaining his position in society. Saeed wants to leave the tourism environment and eventually engage in trade, emphasizing that those who are involved in trading activities are more socially respected. Similar aspirations are highlighted by almost every respondent working in tourism.

Many respondents categorize work in tourism as lacking *heshima*, but their circumstances limit their ability to abandon such work. They have to weigh this option against their deteriorating socio-economic conditions and lack of access to other pathways of mobility. Othman, a Swahili Zanzibari in his 50s, has worked in tourism for over 15 years. Previously unemployed and unable to find work outside the informal sectors of the economy, his earnings from working in a restaurant catering primarily to tourists now enable him to support his wife and two children. He continuously bemoans that work in tourism is demeaning and claims that his social position and his family's reputation have suffered due to it. However, by having work and being able to support his family, he maintains his dignity. Othman wants to leave employment in tourism and open a business someday but is unable to imagine that future in any concrete terms. His current conditions, limited earnings, and lack of access to other forms of social capital restrict the prospects of moving towards that future.

Similarly, for Saeed, the contrast between working in tourism and searching for more respectable employment is integral to conceptualizing a meaningful future. Tourism offers him more opportunities to make money and engage in the consumption of some commodities. However, he wants to leave such employment to uphold local cultural

⁶¹ Akbar Keshodkar, "The impact of tourism in reconstituting genealogies and kinship relations in Zanzibar," *Encounters*, 1, 1 (2009), 215-43.

values, which he considers important markers of belonging. By deserting what he values from the past to survive today, he views building a future around this work as meaningless. Saeed is desperately trying to save money with hopes of entering some trading activities. He contends that when a person is engaged in trading, they have respect in society, while ‘tourism can get you money, but no respect.’ He hopes that working in tourism will bring him into contact with some local wholesalers, with whom he can subsequently establish trading relations and gain access to other networks. However, with his limited earnings, responsibilities to support the family, and personal desires to engage in various forms of consumption with the little money left over, Saeed, and many others facing similar circumstances, remain unable to overcome their state of involuntary immobility and continue waiting to pursue this trajectory of hope for the future.

For the majority of these Zanzibaris, changes brought forth by neoliberalism, such as the collapse of government social-welfare services and other support systems, lack of access to adequate employment, and growing inflation tied to a devaluing currency have only initiated a new era of suffering.⁶² As unemployment remains a continuing problem, and with youth employment exceeding 25 percent, many Zanzibaris, such as Masood, Sami, Juma, and Saeed, can only categorize their experience under neoliberalism as *maisha magumu*, ‘difficult life.’⁶³ It exacerbates their state of involuntary immobility. Lacking access to capital and other forms of support to cope with these challenges, they are just left waiting. Living under such constraints, they are unable to imagine new pathways of mobility to navigate through the neoliberal environment, where economic capital increasingly dictates the forms of mobility accessible for constructing one’s future.

TRADE AS A PATHWAY OF MOBILITY

While thousands of Zanzibaris continue experiencing more hardships under neoliberalism based on their individual efforts, a small number of locals have managed to embark upon new routes of socio-economic mobility to (re)formulate their roots within this environment. Zanzibaris who can engage in mercantile activities are now able to embark upon new pathways of mobility and pursue different trajectories of hope for constructing more meaningful futures for themselves and their families. Their success, however, is not solely due to their individual effort, but often directed by being able to access forms of social capital that have contributed to prosperity for Zanzibaris in the past. Through

⁶² Bissell, “City of stone”, 221.

⁶³ Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change*, 200; World Bank, *Zanzibar Poverty Assessment*, 78.

financial and logistical support from transnational or diasporic networks based abroad and/or political patronage to establish various trading ventures, these Zanzibaris can engage in mercantile activities with societies around the Indian Ocean. Respondents primarily identified two forms of networks facilitating this mobility. One network is framed within the context of Zanzibaris who can also make claims to having ‘roots’ elsewhere and are categorized as the diaspora in Zanzibar (such as Arab and Asian Zanzibaris). The other is situated within the context of Zanzibaris (Swahili, Arabs, Asians) who have immigrated elsewhere (and are identified as the Zanzibari diaspora there) and support their relatives remaining behind in Zanzibar. No respondents used the term ‘diaspora’ when referring to their networks abroad; they primarily framed these connections in terms of kin or religious networks.⁶⁴ With this support, their participation in trade enables them to shift their goals and vision for the future and empowers them to utilize and re-appropriate the pathways of mobility accessible to them in everyday situations to make their lives more meaningful.⁶⁵

Historically, merchants participating in trading activities across the Indian Ocean were regarded as ‘people of personal substance, reputation, trustworthiness, and ability ... more wealth and higher position,’⁶⁶ Local respondents continue to consider such views of merchants and traders as the standard-bearers of values associated with *ustaarabu* and *utamaduni*. In this social position, they distinguish themselves as upholding *haya* and *heshima*. Swahili culture is seen as integrally shaped by trade, with engagement in trade remaining as an important element of the local cultural identity (roots).⁶⁷ Every respondent enduring greater economic hardships and social marginalization within the neoliberal environment aspires to engage in trade but lacks the capital to pursue that route. While one is not guaranteed prosperity in trade, many respondents assert that trade offers a greater sense of freedom in directing their activities, economic and otherwise, within different communities and thus, serves as an important mechanism for enhancing their position within the local social hierarchy.⁶⁸ Trade is also identified as the pathway to

⁶⁴ Refer to: Iain Walker. and Martin Slama, “The Indian Ocean as a diasporic space: A conceptual introduction,” *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies*, 4, 2 (2021), 76-90; Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, theories and methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), Kim D. Butler, “Defining diaspora, refining a discourse,” *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies*, 10, 2 (2001), 189-219; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008); Robin Cohen and Carolin Fischer (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁶⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Miyazaki, “Economy of dreams,” 160.

⁶⁶ Middleton, “Merchants,” 514.

⁶⁷ Pfaff, “Finding one’s way,” 85; Verne, *Living Translocality*, 11.

⁶⁸ Pfaff, “A mobile phone,” 343.

develop new forms of association with people and places away from Zanzibar, as was often the case in the past.⁶⁹ However, with British rule and subsequent policies of the revolutionary government restricted mercantile activities,⁷⁰ new forms of involuntary immobility created a disjuncture in the ability of Zanzibaris to formulate their identities and trajectories of hope by engaging in trade and through association with other places.

With the arrival of neoliberalism, a new context emerged within which Zanzibaris could engage again in different mercantile activities. However, this route remained accessible to a limited number of Zanzibaris. The continuing devaluation of the Tanzanian shilling required a steady supply of foreign currency, primarily the US dollar, to participate in the market economy.⁷¹ Since the majority of Zanzibaris lived in poverty and lacked access to hard currency,⁷² only those who were able to acquire financial support from relatives abroad (living in better economic conditions) and other transnational social networks⁷³ excelled in this new economic environment.⁷⁴ Many prominent businessmen in Zanzibar today operated as petty traders or had menial employment in the 1980s and were the primary beneficiaries of assistance from such transnational diasporic networks.⁷⁵ These networks provided them the financial capital to access new pathways of mobility for envisioning different futures from and inaccessible to the rest of the population.

For Ali, now a 45-year-old Asian Zanzibari, whose family lived in abject poverty during the socialist era, financial support from relatives in India transformed their socio-economic conditions. Through the money that Ali received from his maternal relatives, he opened a grocery store and now, having engaged in different trading activities for over two decades, has established various business interests across the Indian Ocean and beyond. He has managed to integrate himself into different trade networks in the UAE, India, Southeast Asia, and even as far as Congo and parts of western Africa. His success has enhanced the family's local social status significantly. Their patronage in sponsoring

⁶⁹ Keshodkar, "Who needs China;" Verne, *Living Translocality*.

⁷⁰ The revolutionary regime restricted mercantile activities through bans on import and export of goods from the islands, travel injunctions restricting Zanzibaris from leaving the islands, and banning emigrants that fled Zanzibar after the revolution from returning home (Bissell, "City of Stone", 470).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁷² The socialist government restricted exchange of foreign currencies on the claim that Zanzibaris smuggled local resources and sold them into international markets using foreign currencies, thus undermining the local currency (Askew, "Sung and unsung," 29).

⁷³ Some Asian Zanzibaris have also acquired assistance from transnational *jat*, "caste" religious networks based in South Asia, East Africa, Middle East and the West. See: Keshodkar, "Marriage as the means," 226-40. Similarly, Ibadi religious networks based in Oman provide different forms of assistance to Ibadis living in Zanzibar. See: Kimberly T. Wortmann, "Omani religious networks in contemporary Tanzania and beyond" (Unpublished PhD diss.: Harvard University, 2018).

⁷⁴ Burgess, *Race, Revolution and the Struggle*, 271; Verne, *Living Translocality*.

⁷⁵ Bissell, "City of stone," 271.

various religious events throughout Zanzibar Town has further consolidated their position in society.⁷⁶ Consequently, the capital acquired through the support from kin networks has enabled Ali to create multiple pathways of mobility through which he continues to project different trajectories of hope for the future.

Similarly, for Ahmad, a Swahili Zanzibari presently in his early 30s, managing his paternal uncle's hotel has transformed his social and economic situation. His uncle fled Zanzibar after the revolution and eventually settled down in England. After his first trip back to Zanzibar in the late 1990s, he decided to invest his savings, about USD10,000, in a bed and breakfast hotel in Zanzibar. Living in England and with no desire of relocating back to Zanzibar, he asked Ahmad's father to manage the business. The venture offered promise for both parties, with Ahmad's uncle hoping for lucrative returns on the investment and the family remaining in Zanzibar now able to overcome their dire economic conditions. Over the past twenty years, the value of the business has increased to over a hundred thousand dollars. Ahmad, now having taken control of his retired father's 50 percent stake in the partnership, utilized the profits from the business to open two curio shops catering to tourists' needs and another hotel on the east coast. Through this support from relatives living abroad, Ahmad's father and now Ahmad have embarked upon new pathways of mobility for situating themselves in Zanzibar society.

The pathways of mobility now available to these Zanzibaris through transnational or diasporic networks to reengage in trade also enable them to travel abroad, pursue additional business interests, and strengthen their transnational and trans-local ties.⁷⁷ As they live more prosperous lives in Zanzibar, their mobility further facilitates the acquisition of resources to contemplate migrating elsewhere in the future.⁷⁸ For Jamshed, a 60-year-old third-generation Asian Zanzibari, the resources that he can now access through relatives abroad have helped revive the family's fortunes that were lost after the revolution. His ability to access these resources has come through his wife, who is from India and moved to Zanzibar after their marriage. Her brothers, living in India, provided Jamshed with financial resources after the liberalization of the economy to improve their socio-economic situation. Both families have since pursued several joint business ventures in Zanzibar, mainland Tanzania, Kenya, India, and Indonesia. The wealth Jamshed has been able to accumulate through this support now provides him the flexibility

⁷⁶ Akbar Keshodkar, "Emerging routes for framing Muslim roots in Zanzibar in the era of Tourism," *Journal of Critical African Studies*, 11, 3 (2019), 361-77.

⁷⁷ Pfaff examines the role of trans-local networks throughout mainland Tanzania and Oman for Arab traders from Zanzibar in: Pfaff, "Finding one's way."

⁷⁸ Keshodkar, "Who needs China," 115.

to deposit his wealth abroad, educate his children and grandchildren outside Zanzibar, and consider new alternatives for the future. With deteriorating political and economic conditions that epitomize the growing social decay in neoliberal Zanzibar, the pathways of mobility now accessible to Jamshed enable him to envision new trajectories for the future away from Zanzibar.⁷⁹ He continues to reside in Zanzibar and does not want to leave his ‘homeland’ but is considering relocating elsewhere if local conditions worsen.⁸⁰ The family was unable to leave after the revolution.⁸¹ However, their financial circumstances are quite different now. Jamshed’s outlook highlights how imagining other places vis-à-vis questions of security are integral to directing pathways of mobility in this era of globalization. Similar strategies are executed elsewhere around the Indian Ocean, as exercised by wealthy Hong Kong residents seeking new pathways for migrating to Australia due to doubts about their political future under Chinese rule.⁸² In both cases, only those with access to specific forms of capital can imagine such trajectories of hope for their future.

In framing migration with hope, support from transnational or diasporic networks offers these Zanzibaris pathways to escape dilapidating conditions in Zanzibar, seek a better future elsewhere, and help organize various aspects of their private lives in these other places. Hamza, an Omani Zanzibari in his 50s, sent his children to Dubai under his sister’s care, who has lived there for over 20 years, to pursue new educational opportunities. Despite living in Zanzibar and maintaining business interests there and now in Dubai, he is adamant that his children will not return to Zanzibar. Citing the prevailing deteriorating political and economic environment, Hamza contends that they need to remain outside Zanzibar to pursue more successful, meaningful futures. He remains unsure if he will emigrate in the future, but with his children already living abroad, he has one less reason to remain in Zanzibar.

Similarly, Muhammad, a 40-year-old Swahili Zanzibari with strong ties in the ruling government that helped him acquire various financial resources to engage in trade, sent his sons abroad to study in the care of his cousin in Kenya. Political patronage has aided Muhammad to expand his access to other networks as far as Dubai and Malaysia, where he owns properties and hopes to eventually have his children settle permanently. Muhammad continues living in Zanzibar and has risen in ranks within the local ruling

⁷⁹ Tronvoll, “Bridging divided identities,” 223-41.

⁸⁰ Keshodkar, “Marriage as the means,” 233.

⁸¹ After the 1964 Revolution, it was predominantly wealthier Asians that fled Zanzibar, while those living in poverty or unable to access various social and religious networks were forced to remain behind (Ibid.).

⁸² Mar, “Unsettling potentialities,” 368-9.

political party hierarchy. Though Muhammad's mobility has enabled him to strengthen his roots in this society, he actively contemplates prospects of new routes for his children away from Zanzibar.⁸³ With growing inequities, political corruption, and socio-economic instability that have become the hallmark of neoliberal Zanzibar, individuals that have enhanced their socio-economic conditions through support from various transnational networks can migrate and envision brighter futures elsewhere, while only the destitute remain behind.

In looking elsewhere to pursue new trajectories of hope, the gaze of these Zanzibaris remains oriented primarily towards other places around the Indian Ocean world. Due to challenges experienced by people from across the global south in acquiring visas to travel more freely to Europe and North America and restrictive financial regulations in western countries,⁸⁴ most Zanzibari merchants and traders primarily utilize networks around the Indian Ocean to pursue their commercial activities and acquire goods for markets in Zanzibar, mainland Tanzania and beyond.⁸⁵ These networks across the Indian Ocean play a key role in contributing to the prosperity of not only Zanzibaris but also merchants and traders in other African societies today.⁸⁶ Within the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia, kin and religious networks have often developed over decades, if not centuries, primarily through Indian Ocean trade.⁸⁷ Zanzibari traders, men and women,⁸⁸ acquiring goods from other parts of the Indian Ocean simultaneously utilize and expand trans-local family/religious networks across mainland Africa to serve as intermediaries and brokers to pursue their trading endeavors.⁸⁹ These trading connections

⁸³ Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change*, 118-9.

⁸⁴ Respondents cited western banking regulations and cash restrictions while traveling (US and European nations limit an individual to carry no more than USD 10,000) as further inhibiting factors for pursuing trade activities in western countries (Keshodkar, "Who needs China," 129).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Adams Bodomo, *Africans in China: A sociocultural study and its implications for Africa-China relations* (New York: Cambria Press, 2012); Michaela Pelican, "Urban lifeworlds of Cameroonian migrants in Dubai," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, 43 (2004), 255-309.

⁸⁷ Links with the Arabian Peninsula historically served as important markers for Zanzibaris to distinguish themselves as Muslims and as 'civilized' members of society, concurrently rejecting any association with mainland Africa. See: Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*. More recently, the migration of Swahili people to the Arabian Peninsula after the Revolution has renewed Swahili transnational networks in and beyond the region (Verne, *Living Translocality*). For Zanzibaris from South Asia, caste ties have been instrumental for framing their notions of belonging in Zanzibar society (Keshodkar, "Marriage as the Means"). For Omani Zanzibaris, transnational Ibadi religious networks facilitate their mobility across local social landscapes (Wortmann, "Omani religious networks"). Similar historical and contemporary networks prevail among Zanzibaris who identify themselves as Hadhrami, originating from Yemen, and different Hadhrami communities across the Indian Ocean. See: Iain Walker, "Comorians and Hadramis in the Western Indian Ocean: Diasporic practices in a comparative context," *Social Dynamics*, 38, 3 (2012), 435-53.

⁸⁸ See: J. Verne, "Re-enlivening, 130-3, for a discussion of Zanzibari women engaged in trading activities in other parts of the Indian Ocean.

⁸⁹ Pfaff, "Finding one's way," 64.

serve to revive old routes and further cultivate them through new trans-local links to the diaspora.⁹⁰ Merchants and traders from Zanzibar and across Africa are also increasingly traveling to China in pursuit of various business ventures.⁹¹

Though links with China are quite recent, Zanzibaris now traveling there are increasingly seeking new avenues to expand their mercantile activities or stay there on a more permanent basis. Some Zanzibaris residing in China study at local universities on Chinese government scholarships they acquired through political patronage back home. As students, their legal status to reside and work in China facilitates their engagement in trade activities there, often as intermediaries and translators between Zanzibari and other African traders and Chinese wholesalers.⁹² Sylvie Bredeloup and Adams Bodomo highlight similar practices among West African students living in China and engaging in trade activities there.⁹³

Two Zanzibari respondents who have lived in China for the past four years, pursuing undergraduate degrees in Business Administration there, express no desire to return home. They will only return when the Chinese authorities revoke their residence permits. They hope that since they have lived in China for an extended period, they will qualify for long-term residence.⁹⁴ For them and their families, hope for a better future resides in the prospect of them remaining abroad, establishing new trading ventures there, and sending remittances to family members back in Zanzibar. The remittances, they emphasize, enable their family members in Zanzibar to overcome their involuntary immobility and engage in various consumption practices, maintain food security, pursue

⁹⁰ Verne, *Living Translocality*, 8.

⁹¹ Traders pursuing business activities primarily in China often lack access to networks in the Arabian Peninsula. See: Keshodkar, "Who needs China." Furthermore, initial observations from recent fieldwork in China (2018, 2019) indicate that the number of traders from Zanzibar traveling to China is smaller in scale than traders from other parts of Africa. Up to 400,000 traders from across Africa travel to China annually. See chapters in: Adams Bodomo (ed.), *Africans in China: Guangdong and Beyond* (New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2016).

⁹² Keshodkar, "Who needs China," 118.

⁹³ Sylvie Bredeloup, "West African students turned entrepreneurs in Asian trading posts: A new facet of globalization," *Urban Anthropology*, 43, 1-3 (2014), 17-56; Bodomo (ed.), *Africans in China: Guangdong*. While China's role in, and emigration of Chinese to, Africa receives primary attention in western media and scholarship, the growing presence of Africans trading in China highlights how, through these connections between East Asia and all of Africa, the Indian Ocean remains a vital physical and social space of mobility for people across the global south to pursue new trajectories of hope and construct more meaningful futures in this era of globalization. This point is further validated by the fact that Africa's trade with Asia has grown at a much faster rate than with Europe between 2001 and 2011. See: Tsitsi Effie Mutambara, "Africa-Asia trade versus Africa's trade with the North: Trends and trajectories," *African Review of Economics and Finance*, 14, 2 (2013), 273-99; Howard W. French, *China's Second Continent: How a million migrants are building a new empire in Africa* (New York: Knopf, 2014).

⁹⁴ To what extent new forms of discrimination emerging against Africans in some parts of China amidst the 2019-2020 Covid-19 outbreak introduces new challenges for African traders to pursue this pathway of mobility in the future requires further examination.

private education, and invest in new businesses, thus facilitating the development of new distinctions to formulate their local social identities. These forms of mobility further provide them with a range of different possibilities for developing terms of attachment in Zanzibar and shaping multiple notions of a good life.⁹⁵

The pursuit of various notions of the good life accessible to these Zanzibaris for constructing different trajectories of hope in the neoliberal environment, as all the cases highlight, is facilitated primarily by the movement of foreign capital. This movement of money beyond national borders was heavily restricted during the socialist era. The flow of foreign capital in the form of remittances from relatives abroad provides Zanzibari merchants and traders the foreign currency needed to participate in this economy and access to new forms of mobility amidst the collapse of economic structures and growing involuntary immobility experienced by everyone else in the neoliberal era. For many Zanzibari merchants, their relatives migrated abroad after the revolution and sent remittances to their families that remained behind in Zanzibar, helping them survive when most Zanzibaris continue struggling financially.⁹⁶ Those receiving remittances often utilize these funds to establish small-scale businesses and trading ventures, as well as to engage in emerging consumption practices in the new market economy. Respondents indicate that they have received anywhere from USD100 to a few hundred dollars per month in remittances from relatives living abroad. Since Zanzibaris working as laborers earn far less, the beneficiaries of remittances remain in a far better position to carve out new routes of mobility for negotiating their roots and social status.

For example, Ali and his family received USD3,200 from maternal relatives in India in the late 1980s to cope with their impoverished conditions. He utilized those funds to open a grocery store and then start another business selling tours and curio items, which he also acquired from India. Success from that initial investment and subsequent access to new trade networks in India and Dubai empowered Ali to embark upon other business ventures over the past 20 years. Today, his local businesses include restaurants, hotels, boutiques, and warehouses; and he also owns businesses and homes in South Africa, UAE, Malaysia, and India. As Ali travels across the Indian Ocean searching for new opportunities, these transnational networks remain important in facilitating his mobility and enabling him to construct a more meaningful future. However, the majority of

⁹⁵ Mar, "Unsettling potentialities," 369.

⁹⁶ Mohamed Ahmed Saleh, "'Going with the times': Conflicting Swahili norms and values Today," in *Swahili Modernities: Culture, politics, and identity on the East Coast of Africa*, eds. Patricia Caplan and Farouk Topan (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), 153.

Zanzibaris experiencing conditions of involuntary immobility lack access to such networks and thus, no remittances to help improve their situation.

Referring back to Saeed's dilemma of working in tourism due to a lack of networks outside of Zanzibar, he contends that such circumstances have forced him into employment that lacks cultural respectability. With no access to remittances, tourism work, in his view, remains the only means to acquire money but offers limited prospects of social mobility. He remains convinced that his situation will change when he escapes working in tourism and somehow engages in trading activities. Since he lacks access to external networks and does not earn enough to save the money needed to start a business, he is actively seeking ways to integrate himself into localized networks of other Zanzibari merchants or traders. However, a challenge Saeed continuously encounters is that trading activities in Zanzibar are tightly interwoven within various trans-local kin, or religious or political networks. Accessing such networks becomes more difficult in the neoliberal environment, where new consumption practices further demarcate social boundaries previously non-existent in society. Saeed recognizes that unless and until he can insert himself into networks centered around such patron-client relationships, it will remain impossible for him to escape his current circumstances. He adds that with new boundaries limiting access to people outside similar socio-economic situations like his, it remains difficult developing new relationships with people who could assist him access this specific pathway of mobility.

Another respondent, Omar, a Swahili Zanzibari in his 20s with no access to remittances, has operated as a petty trader selling household items for several years but is similarly unable to earn enough to move beyond the subsistence level. He grieves about not having 'capital' (money) or access to transnational networks to improve his situation. He desires to travel, acquire goods from abroad, and sell them in local markets, rather than to procure them at irregular intervals from other retailers. Omar concedes that he does not know how to change his situation and continually beckons upon God to intervene and improve his life. Through our interaction, he often requested me to introduce him to foreigners I knew in Zanzibar to help him explore new possibilities. However, given the orientation and significance of clientelist networks throughout Africa that are often based around forms of social patronage or patrimonialism, a trader without adequate foreign exchange and access to these networks to maximize their advantages in the transnational

trade activities has limited prospects of excelling in trade.⁹⁷ Lacking the basic resources to engage in such relationships, Omar's hope, shaped by the desire to integrate himself into local trade networks, remains unrealizable. For him and other young Zanzibaris like him, such as Saeed and Masood, hope for a better future resides in continuing to wait for their circumstances to somehow change in this neoliberal economy. Left waiting in this state of involuntary immobility, models of individualism advocated by neoliberalism continue to fail in enabling these young Zanzibaris to secure prospects for a brighter future.⁹⁸

Given that such a very small percentage of Zanzibaris can access new forms of mobility and pursue different trajectories of hope for the future, while most of the population remains in a state of involuntary immobility, the rising gap between the conditions of 'haves' and 'have nots' in neoliberal Zanzibar further dampens prospects of societal hope. With a limited number of Zanzibaris having access to new routes to reformulate their roots in society, the majority experiencing involuntary immobility increasingly find themselves unable to maintain their existing positions. Juma's growing social marginalization vis-à-vis his wealthier neighbor, Issa, who acquired financial support from relatives abroad, is indicative of such a development. Juma emphasizes that socioeconomic inequalities were common during the socialist era, but contends that previously, people from different strata of the society observed civility towards each other. This display of civility, as means for maintaining *ustaarabu*, promoted a sense of social harmony between Zanzibaris of different backgrounds. In contrast, new values of individualism, conspicuous consumption practices, and models of modernity now primarily dictate forms of social interaction between them. For these reasons, Juma concludes that there is no longer a common ground for socially interacting with Issa. Juma's involuntary immobility highlights this new form of social fragmentation in neoliberal Zanzibar where individuals lacking access to external networks remain on the margins, continuing to wait for a coherent vision for situating their trajectories of hope.

Under neoliberalism, only those who have managed to acquire support from various transnational or diasporic networks are increasingly able to visualize new potentialities

⁹⁷ Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris: Transnational traders on the margins of the law* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000); Stephen Ellis, and Janet MacGaffey, "Research on sub-Saharan Africa's unrecorded international trade: Some methodological and conceptual problems," *African Studies Review*, 39, 2 (1996), 37.

⁹⁸ This failure of neoliberalism is not limited to Zanzibar, as youth throughout Africa remain unable to acquire basic forms of respectable employment in their societies and face similar conditions of involuntary immobility and uncertainty for the future. See, for example: Henrik Vigh, "Wayward migration: On imagined futures and technological voids," *Ethnos*, 74, 1 (2009), 91-109; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris*; Fay, "'Kuishi ughaibuni,'" 10-37

for the future. In instances where such support does not exist, some impoverished Zanzibari men are taking new risks to access various clientelist networks to improve their financial conditions and social status.⁹⁹ Indian Ocean trade involves the mobility of people, goods, and money. Within the context of the global capitalist economy regulating international banking rules that place limitations on the movement of money, the unhindered flow of money remains vital for pursuing various business interests. Zanzibari merchants and traders often circumvent banking regulations by utilizing the *hawala* system to transfer money. This process, which involves no physical movement of money, operates around strong transnational religious or social networks based on trust between the parties involved and relies upon middlemen or brokers to transfer funds. It utilizes couriers to physically carry cash or other commodities (gold, art, drugs) through international borders, when large amounts of un-cleared debt remain with one party over long periods.¹⁰⁰ Numerous Zanzibari youth have risked operating as couriers to access and integrate themselves into various networks and used the compensation from such illicit forms of work to escape their involuntary immobility.

Husein, a Swahili Zanzibari now in his early 30s, worked as a courier for several years to escape his dire financial situation. The commissions he earned through this work enabled him to eventually become a successful businessman. He now frequently travels to Dubai and China in pursuit of various business activities. Working as a courier provided him access to local and transnational networks, through which he then positioned himself to initiate new forms of patronage from other impoverished Zanzibaris willing to take similar risks. However, while Husein was successful in this endeavor, several Zanzibari men are presently serving prison sentences in different countries for engaging in this illegal activity.¹⁰¹ Despite the risks, Husein expresses no regrets for pursuing this route. He asserts that he could no longer bear the situation of his family living in abject poverty and eating one meal a day, a condition endured by many Zanzibaris.¹⁰² Consequently, such risks offer impoverished Zanzibari youth like Husein a pathway to pursue different trajectories of hope for the future and reformulate their position in society they consider

⁹⁹ Keshodkar, "Who needs China," 132.

¹⁰⁰ Maryam Razavy, "Hawala: An underground haven for terrorists or social phenomenon?," *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 44 (2005), 279-80.

¹⁰¹ Keshodkar, "Who needs China," 132.

¹⁰² Economic hardships under neoliberalism have forced many Zanzibaris to survive on one meal a day, contributing to malnourishment in over 23 percent of children in Zanzibar. See: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Zanzibar Programme on Food Security, 2006–2010* (2010): Online: <http://www.doc88.com/p-271833842116.html> [Accessed: 20 Aug. 2012]. Even in the tourism sector, a UNICEF study found that 53 percent of workers did not earn a sufficient salary to adequately feed and clothe their children (2018a, 63).

not possible otherwise. As societal hope continues to deteriorate in the neoliberal era, the reinvention of the Indian Ocean as a viable space for engaging in different mercantile activities directed by diasporic and other transnational networks offers the potential to pursue new forms of mobility and with it, the possibilities for these individuals to construct different trajectories of hope and more meaningful futures to situate their positions in Zanzibar society.

CONCLUSION

Prospects of realizing societal hope in Zanzibar continue to diminish drastically in the neoliberal era. Similar to elsewhere across Africa, where the elites and foreign investors primarily benefit,¹⁰³ neoliberalism has exacerbated inequalities and initiated an era of uncertainty that forces many Zanzibaris into a more permanent state of involuntary immobility. Hope is always marked by uncertainties, but access to different forms of capital for mobility based on one's current position, as argued here, offers a variety of possibilities within which trajectories of hope for the future are constructed in more meaningful ways. For many Zanzibaris, particularly the youth, unable to move from their worsening socio-economic situation, their prevailing state is marked not only by what Bourdieu refers to as the disappearance of a coherent vision of the future,¹⁰⁴ but also by the lack of access to resources to overcome existing uncertainties and actively move towards a future shaped by their own actions.¹⁰⁵ They remain waiting and continue enduring more hardships. Waiting is meaningful when the moment for waiting ends. However, with endless waiting, the process becomes dysfunctional.¹⁰⁶ Living within such a dysfunctional social milieu exacerbated by neoliberalism, these Zanzibaris are increasingly struggling to situate themselves within their society and falling deeper into a worsening state of involuntary immobility. Neoliberalism has failed to provide them with meaningful ways that are pertinent to their social positions and experiences for organizing their lives and envisioning more meaningful futures. By instilling new forms of involuntary immobility and inequalities, neoliberalism restricts their agency and capacity to pursue new routes from their existing positions and reformulate their roots in Zanzibar.

¹⁰³ Ferguson, *Global Shadows*

¹⁰⁴ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ Meisenhelder, "Hope: A phenomenological," 205.

¹⁰⁶ Hage, *Waiting*.

Capitalist consumption tied to neoliberal notions of modernity is increasingly shaping ideas of selfhood, identity, and hardships of everyday life.¹⁰⁷ Within such an environment, more Zanzibaris face rising levels of involuntary immobility and experience greater degrees of socio-economic marginalization. Facing these deteriorating circumstances, efforts to engage in Indian Ocean trade, as in the past, offers some Zanzibaris new pathways of mobility for enhancing their socio-economic status and reformulating ideas of belonging in Zanzibar. The primary beneficiaries of this development remain older Zanzibaris and their children who can access diasporic or transnational ties and situate their position in Zanzibar with other places. For everyone else, particularly impoverished youth, the lack of access to such capital restricts how they can imagine new possibilities within the neoliberal environment. Respondents contend that Indian Ocean trade brought prosperity to Zanzibar for centuries. Immersed in this view of the past, whether real or imagined, efforts to revive the centrality of such mercantile activities today underscore how this specific practice associated with the past remains an important site for situating individual prospects of mobility and hope for the future in neoliberal Zanzibar.¹⁰⁸

Mercantilism historically enabled Zanzibaris to pursue new routes to formulate and strengthen their local roots.¹⁰⁹ The introduction of restrictions in mercantile practices during the colonial era and the revolutionary period impacted how Zanzibaris could pursue this pathway of mobility for constructing more meaningful futures. While neoliberalism continues to impose new conditions of involuntary immobility, the small percentage of Zanzibaris able to access capital from transnational diasporic networks can once again engage in different mercantile activities across the Indian Ocean world to pursue different pathways of mobility for situating their trajectories of hope. They are not guaranteed success in trade, but they now enjoy greater control over possibilities to move and pursue different pathways to shape their futures, and simultaneously reformulate their social position and identities in Zanzibar. Though not examined here but certainly an important direction for further research, the growing involvement of women in transnational mercantile activities adds another dimension to the impact of Indian Ocean trade in facilitating different routes for formulating roots in Zanzibar. With prospects of societal hope diminishing and more Zanzibaris forced to wait in a state of involuntary

¹⁰⁷ Jean and John Comaroff, "Millennium capitalism: First thoughts on a second coming," *Public Culture*, 12, 2 (2000), 293-5.

¹⁰⁸ William C. Bissell, "Engaging colonial nostalgia," *Cultural Anthropology*, 20, 2 (2005), 215-48.

¹⁰⁹ Middleton, "Merchants;" Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures*.

immobility under neoliberalism, engagement in trade across the Indian Ocean world facilitates the development of new pathways of mobility and migration patterns, in turn enabling these Zanzibaris to formulate their trajectories of hope, in some cases away from Zanzibar. To what extent this development will revive the state of prosperity Zanzibaris have associated previously with mercantile practices remains unknown. However, as in the past, the Indian Ocean world continues to serve as a space of potential sites and destinations for situating different trajectories of hope otherwise largely inaccessible within the neoliberal environment in Zanzibar today.