Almost all colonial dwellings are hybrids, combining elements from different cultural traditions. This is apparent in many ex-colonies, from Singapore’s shop houses to Louisiana’s Creole style. Colonialism created opportunities for cultural exchange and synthesis as well as oppression. Colonizers displaced indigenous peoples and compelled them to compare and adapt their lifestyles. Whether adaptation produced hybrids depended on circumstances, the attitudes of the colonizing power, and—because no rule is absolute—the attitudes of the colonized. Colonialism created hybrid architecture and urbanism, but their forms and processes have rarely been documented. In particular, as Jay Edwards has observed, “very little attention has been devoted to how the wisdom of local ‘native’ builders was absorbed into expatriate European culture,” and so “found knowledge” has often been interpreted as an “innovative solution.” This paper uses Zanzibar in the later years of British rule, roughly from 1940 to 1960, to explore how innovation drew on two very different building cultures to produce a hybrid form.

Architecture is a significant form of cultural hybridity. Visible and durable, it embodies economic practices as well as cultural values. Vernacular housing has particular significance because it is unavoidably part of everyday life. Studies of housing, then, can ground our understanding of cultural exchange as almost nothing else can. But it is not quite true that, in Amos Rapoport’s words, vernacular architecture “is the world writ small, the ‘ideal’ environment of a people expressed in buildings and settlement.” This is too heavy a burden, as housing is not a mirror of culture but a fragment. Certainly housing offers valuable clues to cultural patterns and change. In late colonial Mauritius, for example, a “Westernization” trend that encompassed dress, religion, language, and endogamy was reflected in a staged transition from mud huts to modern (concrete) houses. But this neat correspondence between house form and culture is not always apparent, especially in colonial settings where one cultural group can impose its values and building practices on another. A barracks or apartment building erected by a public works department says more about its builders than its occupants; but the exact message will depend on its location, rent levels, and occupancy regulations. Hybrid houses are even harder to read, for they articulate varied purposes and unstable cultural accommodations. To comprehend colonial hybridity, we must view dwellings in their context, which has two relevant aspects.

The first important aspect of a house’s context is physical, encompassing design, decorative features, materials, methods, and techniques, what Howard Davis has called “the culture of building.” Paul Oliver has observed that the meaning of “traditional” architecture is contained more in the passing on of specific knowledge and practices than in physical forms; the same applies to hybrids. Then again, design cannot sensibly be discussed apart from the geography of street, neighborhood, and urban environment. In a colonial context, for example, “modern” and “traditional”
houses derive their meanings from the districts in which they were placed or to which they were relegated. A second aspect of a house’s context combines the issues often labeled economic, social, political, and cultural. To speak of a culture of building raises questions about whether it is the same people who commission, design, and build; about their training and how they are organized or managed; and, especially in a colony, about their racialized position. We need to know who builds and for whom. Dwellings, then, are only the beginning of the story. Our interpretation of Zanzibari housing considers power as well as culture, utilizing textual, oral, photographic, and material evidence.

The incidence and meaning of hybrid housing has varied in systematic ways. The attitudes of colonizers and colonized to one another differed between empires and changed over time. Even in one small colony like Zanzibar, a shifting array of views existed, ranging from collaboration and miscegenation to resistance and hostility. Within this variation, however, the late years of British colonialism were unique due to the weakness of colonial power, the strength of resistance, and the possibilities for hybridity. Colonizers strove for control; hybridity hints at its limits and becomes most common—though not necessarily most welcome—when colonial power is weak or in decline. Late colonial eras should see the thousand flowers of hybridity bloom. The evidence for Zanzibar in the 1940s and 1950s is consistent with this hypothesis, indicating the possibilities that emerge when the grip of colonial rule is relaxed or, more accurately, pried open.

In the twentieth century, decolonization coincided with the imperial promotion of “development.” Like its French, Belgian, and Dutch counterparts, the British government pushed for colonial development. Its plans included house building, and by the 1940s, the British Colonial Office was pushing for colonial development. Its plans included house building, and by the 1940s, the British Colonial Office was

**Colonial Zanzibar**

Zanzibar today is a semiautonomous polity of about one million people, the smaller partner with the former Tanganyika on the African mainland in the United Republic of Tanzania. It consists of two main islands, Pemba and Unguja, lying roughly between 40 and 90 kilometers off of the northeast coast of mainland Tanzania in East Africa, between 5 and 6 degrees south of the equator. Zanzibar is a valuable and highly interesting case for the analysis of hybrid housing, in part because so much about its history, society, culture, and environment can be considered hybrid, often in senses that predate British colonialism. The two main islands had several prominent medieval city-states, from the ninth century onward, in the golden age of Swahili civilization that arose from the cultural and economic interchange between a majority of African-mainland origin and small numbers of Arabian, Persian, and South Asian traders and settlers. These island city-states came under Portuguese control for nearly two centuries (in most cases) from the first decade of the 1500s until their 1698 expulsion. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century brought Omani Arab control to the islands and witnessed the formation of a significant city on Unguja’s west central peninsula, built essentially to override a preexisting fishing village and a small Portuguese factory. This became the city of Zanzibar, the seat of an Omani East African sultanate that formally controlled both Unguja and Pemba and informally controlled a commercial and tributary empire stretching from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique along the coast, with dependencies and enclaves as far inland as the African Great Lakes.

This Omani Sultanate of Zanzibar lasted independently for nearly two hundred years until falling under British rule, in 1890, as a protectorate. Omani control coincided with the migration of greater numbers of south Arabian and Gulf Arab settlers to the islands and, after 1810, to the city. Plantation agriculture, centered largely on cloves, production, produced wealth in the early 1800s, fueling a city-building boom that attracted South Asian craftsmen and builders. Indian merchants, farmers, and indentured servants came as well. Labor was supplied by servants and slaves of African-mainland and Zanzibar-island origin, including people from more than twenty-five ethnic groups. The “clove mania,” caravan trading, and other port activities also attracted a diverse array of European residents in the nineteenth century, creating what Francis B. Pearce called the “island metropolis of Eastern Africa.” By the time the British protectorate arrived, the city was ethnically diverse and its architecture hybridized and complex: European, Arabian, Persian, Indian, Swahili-coast, and mainland-African building traditions met and mixed. At the time of the first census of the colonial era, in 1910, the town had 35,362 residents.

To some extent the ethnic, racial, or religious group-
ings of the city settled in distinct areas in the years before colonialism. There was a broad distinction between Stone Town, the peninsular historic core of the city, and Ng’amo, the area that became stereotyped as the native quarter (Figure 1). Stone Town was mostly Indian, Arab, and European, while Ng’amo was mostly African mainlander and Swahili.

The dichotomous appearance of the social geography was enhanced by the tidal inlet that separated the two sides of the city and by the toponymy, as Ng’amo literally means the “other side.”

House types followed suit. Most nineteenth-century Stone Town houses were substantial permanent structures of more than one story, with walls that had a significant thickness of coral stone (Figure 2). Most nineteenth-century Ng’amo houses were temporary or at best semipermanent structures with a ground floor only. Zanzibar’s foremost historian, Abdul Sheriff, cautions us to be wary of accepting the easy dichotomies. He points out that Stone Town had some temporary houses scattered throughout its triangular extent and the port area at its tip had almost exclusively temporary housing. Likewise, Ng’amo had a scattering of stone houses, and its main business strip was entirely stone-built and largely Indian. What is crucial, Sheriff notes, is the degree to which the British colonial protectorate sought to regularize and racialize that dichotomy by eliminating the spots of ambiguity. Stone Town was the “town,” stone-built and non-African, and Ng’amo the “native location,” a place of “huts” for “native” Africans. A segregated and segmented order clearly remained as a policy goal, but it was never fully achieved. Despite the attempts to regularize and racialize the dichotomies—to segregate the city—hybridity and ambiguity crept in, some insidiously and accidentally and some as the result of official policy.

By British standards, housing conditions in Ng’amo were poor, but the colony was not rich and administrators faced little pressure to make improvements. The British often critiqued their own administrators in Zanzibar as having been “faddling and lackadaisical,” or at the very least “imaginative,” in their exercise of authority. Britain had a protectorate over the territory, a version of “indirect rule” whereby the British governed through the Omani sultanate.

In reality, and particularly after 1918, the Omani sultan became a figurehead, deflecting attention from the colonial power structure. The protectorate arrangement insulated the British from pressure, and many officials did little to implement serious—let alone progressive—housing programs for the city’s poor majority.

The British began to impose their own vision of order on Ng’amo in the 1920s. Arguing that it was “no longer possible to continue postponing” improvements on the “other side,” the British Resident, Richard H. Crofton, invited the noted town planner Henry Lanchester to visit Zanzibar on his way back from British India in 1922. His three-week visit resulted in the first comprehensive plan for the town, and despite his focus on planning for Stone Town, his four principal themes influenced plans for Ng’amo in the decade as well. Lanchester had worked with futuristic town planner Patrick Geddes in Madras, and his plan reflected some of Geddes’ influences, particularly in its obsession with air-circulation patterns. Like much of Geddes’ architectural and planning ideas for India and Palestine, the Lanchester Plan’s major specific recommendations were never fully developed. For instance, under the influence of Geddes’ idealized “Outlook Tower” for each city to use in collecting and contemplating its history while practicing surveillance for spatial control, Lanchester proposed a circular tower with windows on all sides for a new police post that was never built. Nonetheless, under the surface, Lanchester’s influences in Zanzibar continued for many years. A “top secret” memorandum from Crofton detailed that “the English principle of betterment and the German principle of redistribution” would guide implementation of housing policy in Ng’amo. Betterment entailed institutionalizing the segregation of Europeans from “natives,” establishing strict building codes, and making general improvements within the protectorate’s means. Redistribution meant “making plots regular” as a “means of civic control.” These twin ideas of betterment and redistribution—in essence improvement and control—remained embedded in colonial housing policy through to Zanzibar’s independence in 1963.

In 1929, Crofton oversaw the writing of comprehensive building regulations that reduced local styles and methods to two categories, stone houses and native huts, enforced in the two main areas of town by two different administrators. In Stone Town, the director of the Public Works Department (PWD) was responsible for enforcing regulations, but in Ng’amo, a “native location,” this task fell to the medical officer of the Health Department. This differentiation expressed the colonial project of distinguishing between, and separating, the colonizer and the other, but it is evident that many of the colonized people in Zanzibar resented and resisted this distinction. Ng’amo residents old enough to remember the colonial era still refer to the Health Department as the “rat office,” with obvious double meaning. Never much enforced, the distinction between colonizer and colonized was always blurred. Apart from Crofton, before the 1940s the only other British administrator to pay attention to housing issues was Stanley W. T. Lee, the medical officer of Health from 1936 through 1939. Lee collaborated with the PWD to fill the tidal inlet between
Stone Town and Ng’amo. After the 1930s, Ng’amo was only the “other side” of a street called Creek Road, no longer the downwind side of a filthy tidal basin. British efforts at town planning and housing improvement ebbed and flowed. During the interwar years, town planning sometimes seemed like merely a hobby for people such as Crofton and Lee, but the mood changed in 1942 with the arrival of Eric Dutton to take over as chief secretary of the protectorate. Although Dutton held to the segregationist agenda of colonialism and did not challenge Crofton’s principles for town planning, he was a crucial agent of hybridization of architectural traditions and the main player in shaping the colonial cityscape. For the previous twenty years, Dutton had served in Uganda during the creation of its Government House, in Nairobi during the writing of its first town plan, and in Northern Rhodesia, where he had overseen the

Figure 1 Zanzibar, showing the location of Stone Town (ethnically mixed), Ng’amo (African), and the new hybrid Holmwood projects

Figure 2 Multistory stone house in the Shangani neighborhood of Stone Town, with thick coral rag wall exposed beneath lime plaster. Photographed 1999

Stone Town and Ng’amo. After the 1930s, Ng’amo was only the “other side” of a street called Creek Road, no longer the downwind side of a filthy tidal basin.
construction of Lusaka as the new capital. For Dutton, “the only real answer” colonialism had for its critics was “concrete and bricks.” In his view, only “the practical task of building in brick and mortar” could make colonized people “believe, from what they see with their own eyes, that we are there to help.” And the only way to “give the natives a square deal” was “to build upon the natives’ own traditions.”

A first step was a thorough rewrite of the building codes as a prelude to a major reconstruction scheme. Under the Towns Decree of August 1943, building regulations were revised and elaborated. They continued to define “native huts” in terms of the use of native materials, notably boriti and fito (poles and lath) with udongo (mud) walling and makuti (thatch), but to these was now added corrugated iron (Figures 3, 4). “Native-type” walls were defined as plaster on a frame of poles and laths, filled with mud or lime mortar. Traditional practices were accommodated in other ways. Floors could be of earth, as long as they were rammed and surfaced with approved material; kitchens were separate.
from the dwelling. Houses built in largely traditional ways, however, were expected to conform to stringent standards of design and layout based on British models. The regulations insisted that: dwellings be rectangular and extensions “preserve the rectangular shape of the building”; plots be rectangular, with houses aligned at right angles to the street; and huts be numbered with discs that remained government property. Minimum heights and room dimensions were also dictated. These were specifications not for a native quarter but, in effect, for a hybrid residential area that would combine British ideals of house design and layout with Zanzibari building practices.

Although he was chief secretary (a post frequently termed “colonial secretary” elsewhere in the empire), Dutton often served as British Resident (Zanzibar had no governor) during his eleven years in the islands, and he always understood local affairs better than the British Residents under whom, technically, he served. After 1945, he wrote the colony’s ten-year development plan. Although in some ways very British, Dutton felt empathy for Africa, declaring that it was “a queer continent. . . . [O]nce it gets in your blood you can never get it out.” This symbolic mixing of blood affected not only Dutton but others on his team, particularly Reginald Wheatley, the PWD’s supervisor of Native Housing (Figure 5). Wheatley served in Zanzibar for twenty-five years and participated actively in town life.

Even more obviously, the architect of the Dutton-era buildings in the city embodied hybrid principles. Ajit Singh Hoogan was a Punjabi architect who spent most of his life in Zanzibar, where his grandchildren still reside (Figure 6). Together with the Zanzibari African and Swahili craftspeople whom they trained and inspired, Dutton’s group attempted to recreate the city in the team’s image. Singh later praised Dutton for having caused them to “radically change the topographical features of the town,” and Dutton replied, “We did alter it a lot, didn’t we?” Singh, Dutton, and Wheatley led the teams that created the striking main city high school (Ewan Smith Madrassa, now called Haile Selassie Secondary School), the first school for African girls, and the civic center for Ng’ambo, all of which had some degree of hybridity to their architectural style (Figure 7). Although its achievements fell short of its goals, the redevelopment plan did create these hybrid buildings, but its hybridity was more notable in the model neighborhood of Holmwood/Hamoud.
Holmwood/Hamoud: A Hybrid Project

Regulations matter only if they are enforced. The regulations of 1929 had little effect, but those of 1943 became a rough template for a government project. As elsewhere in British Africa, the colony came under pressure from the Colonial Office to take action in the housing field. With prospective assistance under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (CDWA) of 1940, and with Dutton in the driver’s seat, Zanzibar was in a position to do so. In October 1943, the administration applied for CDWA support. The “rehousing experiment” outlined in the application was unmistakably the work of Dutton. Noting that Zanzibaris aspired to “quite a high” standard in terms of space and type of hut, it suggested that guidance would only be needed regarding “ventilation, proper spacing and”—using a very British term to describe a particularly British colonial obsession—“latrines.” The result would be “houses of improved and varying designs” based on “experiments . . . using local expedients.”

The idea was to create the sort of neighborhood specified in the revised building regulations. The scheme became ambitious, proposing a staged clearance and redevelopment of Ng’ambo as a whole. The colony secured one hundred thousand pounds of CDWA funds by 1949, but even this was insufficient. Beyond creating new and improved public buildings, including a civic center, girls’ school, native hospital, mental hospital, national stadium, archives, and aerodrome, only a few residential elements were completed. Nicknamed Mji Mpya (New City), a neighborhood for rehousing those displaced to build the civic center took shape in the mid-1940s, and a few roads, footpaths, retaining walls, and staircases appeared in and around the older areas of Ng’ambo. One inner Ng’ambo neighborhood, Mwembetanga, was reconstructed, and one model neighborhood was created in the outskirts.

This outer model neighborhood, Holmwood, is our present concern. Holmwood straddled what was then the town boundary, and the colonial regime had looked to it since the late 1920s as a potential area for developing a model housing estate. The colonial regime acquired much of the land in this area between 1928 and 1936. They made two different attempts to allocate house plots there, finding that they were “unable to attract settlers ejected from other sites in the town because there [was] no water supply” and that “revenue from ground rent [was] being lost on the vacant sites there.” When the regime finally had the funding to provide water and both political and planning motivation to invest in Holmwood, they began with the intention to use the new neighborhood as a way station for families displaced as each neighborhood was rebuilt. Officially named Holmwood in honor of an antislavery activist killed in the nineteenth century, it was translated as “Hamoud,” more understandable in Swahili, by local residents. The first residents of Holmwood were to come from Mwembetanga, the wakf land of Seyyid Hamoud, the Omani sultan’s prime minister at the time of Mwembetanga’s development in the nineteenth century. The area eventually included three neighborhoods known as North,
South, and South Extension (today’s Kidongo Chekundu, Matarumbeta, and Jang’ombe). The first two were built in the redevelopment program, and the third began in 1953. All three were English-style garden suburbs of gridded and curvilinear streets with a village green (Figure 8). They accommodated single-detached homes oriented toward narrow street carriageways. Houses were separated by exactly ten feet, and there was no concession to the irregular appearance and organic manner of development of traditional residential areas. The dwellings, however, were a different matter. They were neither English nor traditionally Zanzibari; rather, they were a carefully crafted hybrid.

The colonial regime classified residential buildings in Zanzibar as belonging to two types. The “stone house” was considered a home with coral stone walls 1-to-3-feet thick, concrete footings, foundations up to plinth, and lintels. Its roof, whether flat or sloped, would have “proper” timber trusses, or at least mangrove poles, embedded in cement-rendered ceilings. By contrast, the “native-type house” was built on a “mesh of sticks”—a frame of mangrove poles lashed together with coir rope—topped by a thatch roof of coconut palm or flattened petrol tins. The first element of hybridity introduced by the Holmwood houses that the government deemed its “improved type” of native house is simply this: the new structures fell into a middle ground between the clearly differentiated types the government worked with and expected to find in the built environment, because they had “proper walls of coral in lime-loam mortar between grooved precast RCC [Reinforced Cast Concrete] poles.”

In concert with his team, Dutton was the moving force behind the hybrid houses. He believed that permanent dwellings of imported materials were too expensive but that temporary homes of traditional construction were unhealthy and a poor investment. Instead, he sought funding for model “semipermanent” houses erected in a fashion that would involve “improvement after improvement on the native design.” The Colonial Office suggested the designs were “unimaginative and soulless” or “unprepossessing and not likely to appeal to the Zanzibaris,” but Dutton insisted that he was firmly committed to a “traditional type of building.” He claimed that it was “preferred by our Health Authorities” and that “the people themselves are wedded to it.” He at least had hoped to vary the sizes or orientations somewhat “so as to reduce as far as possible the drabness of uniformity” and to counter the Colonial Office concerns.

In some colonies, administrators might have encouraged the owner-development of such housing through aided self-help. Dutton’s idea, however, was to use the colonial PWD. He could think in these terms because his staff included people who were able and keen to carry through a project that tapped skills from different building cultures. Wheatley was one of these. Dutton was distrusted by many Africans, particularly PWD employees, because, as one put it, “he was a military man; he always had to have everything in order.” But Wheatley was widely and fondly remembered among older Zanzibaris interviewed in the early 1990s. He was fluent in Swahili, the mother tongue of Ng’ambo’s people, and had trained as a mechanic in the Northern Nigeria administration of Dutton’s mentor Frederick Lugard, the principal architect and theorist of the British African policy of indirect rule. Wheatley came to Zanzibar in 1926 and promptly helped to found a soccer league. He used his position as superintendent to recruit excellent players for the PWD team, giving young men laboring positions so that they could qualify. For many Ng’ambo residents, Wheatley became “the man to trust.”

Dutton brought Wheatley out of retirement to serve as the executive officer and supervisor of Native Housing Construction in the redevelopment. His knowledge of local culture and sensibilities were invaluable, although some administrators viewed him as an unreliable “hypochondriac” who had gone native. The first residents of the model neighborhood, however, referred to “Wheatley houses” in interviews. Most of the building and road construction that Wheatley supervised was undertaken by...
Zanzibaris, whom he trained at a makeshift school for the building arts. Many were veterans of World War II who had seen service on the Burma Road or in North Africa.56 These workers received formal and informal training in both British and local building methods.

Dutton also relied on Singh, a Punjabi Sikh whom Wheatley had hired as a draftsman for the PWD in 1937 not for his soccer skills but for his artistry (he had a degree from the Thakar Singh College of Art in Amritsar).57 Singh’s role, downplayed in official correspondence, was critical. In 1943–44, Dutton suggested to the Colonial Office that his starting point would be a dwelling that had already been adapted from a traditional type in order to “conform to a higher health standard.” A dispatch referred to this as a “Lee-type house,” developed under the sponsorship of the senior medical officer of Health, although it was also known officially as a “Pilling-type” house, after the British Resident.58 In fact, the design and probably much of the impetus came from Singh, whose signature rests on the drawing line below the blank space for “architect” on the original plans. Singh had signed up for correspondence courses in architecture and assumed the post of town architect in 1941. Dutton confirmed Singh’s importance in later correspondence. After Singh had praised him for his “genius in architecture and administration,”59 Dutton replied that they had “designed the buildings together. . . . [W]e were a good team. You must try to remember that a chance to create such as came to Mr. Wheatley, you, and I does not come very often.”60 Even so, Singh was not officially accepted by the British as a social equal, a fact that is signaled by his marginal location at the opening ceremony for the civic center that he designed (Figure 9). Singh was open to the merits of the culture and architecture of his adopted country. He lived and worked side by side with the African residents of the city rather than with Zanzibar’s considerable Indian population. Singh settled in the African section of Ng’ambo and died there in 1986. The home Singh designed for himself there is a remarkable mishmash of European, Indian, and Swahili styles: Singh’s grandson describes it as having a European front, an Indian middle, and an African back (Figure 10).61

Dutton, then, could count on an architect and project supervisor who were willing to experiment and a labor force with necessarily mixed skills to carry the experiment through. The resulting hybridity was striking (Figure 11). In terms of design, the central-hall plan followed the “Swahili” style that...
was well established along the east coast of central Africa, while the separate kitchen expressed British attitudes towards the unhealthiness of indoor smoke. Even the vocabulary was blended. In addition to “bedroom,” “bath,” and “kitchen,” the plan identified a “compound” along with a *baraza,* *ukumbi,* and *choo* (toilet). In one or two cases the use of this terminology may have been gratuitous. On the ground plan, for example, the “compound” looks rather like the vestigial backyard of a British terraced house, though it may have functioned differently. Here the presence of a hall curtain may be significant, offering to maintain the privacy of the rear part of the dwelling—and hence the modesty of the women of the household—on occasions when the man entertained friends in the *ukumbi. Ukumbi* and *baraza* were more significant terms. Much more than a veranda, the *baraza* was used and understood as a meeting place for debate: today the Swahili term for Zanzibar’s House of Representatives is *Baraza la Wawakilishi.* Its inclusion in the PWD plan was a practical and symbolic expression of the British willingness to accommodate local culture.

With CDWA funding and under Singh’s direction, the materials and construction methods of the house also combined cultural traditions. One concern of British experts, in London and in the field, was that indigenous houses were temporary, being built of local materials that needed frequent repairs or replacement. Acknowledging the lobby for permanent houses, the building team experimented with an all-concrete house but quickly abandoned the idea: it was hot and unpopular. Instead, the team made further adaptations to the Lee-type hybrid, which used traditional materials that were “as appropriate to the natural surroundings as they are acceptable to the people who have got to live in them.” The main improvement was to strengthen the structure by replacing unshaped forest wood with reinforced concrete pillars in a concrete foundation (Figure 12). They also experimented with a thin concrete facing to the floor, and the walls had a higher stone content and larger stones than the typical Ng’amo house. The new frame called for novel methods of containing the coral-stone rubble in the walling and for attaching the *fito* lath that was used for the remainder, so local craftsmen were “summoned at various stages” to give their opinion. They made “numerous suggestions” that, apparently, the acting director of Public Works described as “eminently sensible” and that the medical and health authorities later approved.63 These suggestions were incorporated into the first batch of twenty-five nonexperimental houses to be built. Early versions had thatch roofs; later, corrugated iron was substituted.

The colonial PWD went on to build more houses that were based on this design, in the basic “utility houses” of Mwembetanga and the more finished “reception houses” of Holmwood (117 homes in North and South areas) (Figure 13). All told, when Holmwood South Extension was completed in the mid-1950s, more than 300 structures had been put in place in the new model areas, when Ng’amo as a whole contained about 7,000 homes. These new homes,
however, fell far short of the original plans, partly because further funding did not materialize.

The project’s parsimonious character was part of its undoing. For instance, the government attempted to reduce costs by not finishing the wall surfaces of the Mwembetanga utility houses, asking residents themselves to use their own funds to follow the example being set at Holmwood. This approach kept the costs down but raised the ire of the residents. Many who had been displaced protested this and other aspects of the project. One woman summed up the general response of her neighbors in Mwembetanga in the 1940s as follows:

I remember they told us they were going to knock down all of Mwembetanga, all of Ng’ambo, and change the state of things to give everyone good houses. Well, we were happy when we heard that, but we were disappointed later. . . . The utility houses were just udongo [mud] and mawe [stone] with makuti [thatch]. You got a front door and a back door, that’s it. The worst part was that they built no walls for us to have an ua [courtyard].

Figure 12 First hybrid house under construction in Holmwood, 1944

Figure 13 A reception house, Holmwood. Photographed 1992
At the urging of Singh and Wheatley, the Dutton regime did eventually allow, and in some cases supply, courtyard walls.65

Dutton’s hope was that local builders would take the hybrid design as a model and remake the city in increments. He was particularly pleased to note that the program, while following and improving upon indigenous style, created houses that “at 664 square feet are larger than the American homes in housing schemes at Lakewood and Levittown or those of the Ideal Home Exhibition in England recently.”66

To some extent the hybrid design did take root, though one can hardly see the city that resulted as having much in common with Lakewood and Levittown. Local builders began to use concrete pillars, to increase the stone content of the walls, and to widen the uta. Quite a few Ng’ambo residents also erected pillars, though to save money, instead of using corrugated iron, they employed oil drums that they had scrounged and pounded flat.67 Their motives were mixed. Some believed the new methods to be an improvement. Others believed that if they did not adopt them they might be among the first targets of slum clearance or, perversely, that if they were expropriated, they would be able to demand more compensation.68

Local builders also took up this model of house design from the project in building new homes. Ironically, a fair number of residents who refused to move out to Holmwood to live in the reception houses for the reconstruction period eventually built homes along the lines of the model design, just adjacent to rebuilt Mwembetanga.

The wave of hybrid improvement created administrative problems.69 By decree, ground rents and rates (property taxes) for property in Ng’ambo were based on the method of construction, specifically the width of the walls and diameter of the stones. Improvements blurred the line between “hut” and “stone house,” underlining the arbitrary character of the legal distinction. In 1955, the government added a third category to its building regulations that entailed rent and rate increases for many improved dwellings. Predictably enough, this aroused opposition, and in the end, a compromise was reached whereby hybrid houses paid higher rents but not rates. Building a hybrid house created at least as many problems as it solved.

Some of the greatest problems occurred in and around Holmwood itself. Dutton’s critics within the colonial administration complained that Wheatley had created “a private housing estate.”70 Holmwood was supposed to be a temporary “reception” area. When only one neighborhood was actually demolished and many residents refused to move out to Holmwood, the “wilderness” of the suburbs, the government faced the dilemma of what to do with its model homes.71 Their solution was to rent to African civil servants, creating a kind of middle-class garden suburb. The South Extension of the mid-1950s expanded upon this notion, and the 1958 Town Master Plan solidified Holmwood’s identity as a “medium density” (read middle-class) buffer zone between the slums of Ng’ambo and the southern beachfront villas of colonial administrators.72

Holmwood residents considered Wheatley the “landlord” and bombarded him with grievances over higher rates for the “stone” houses or for needed repairs to the units.73 He replied, at the end of his tenure, that he had “always considered the residents to be an ungrateful lot.”74 Yet, the government’s 1953 survey did indeed document 97 of Holmwood’s 136 model homes to have a “defective roof,” 72 of 136 to have “defective plaster” in the walls, and dozens with drainage and toilet problems.75 Many people “failed to pay their rent in the 1950s when the rent was raised, until their houses were sold.”76 Ultimately, representation of the local point of view within the colonial state was left to men like Wheatley who, while they spoke the language and treated their house servants well, could never entirely understand the driving social forces in Ng’ambo’s culture.

Singh is a clearer example for architectural hybridity. He continued to work as a government architect in Zanzibar through 1965, took on some private design contracts in the early 1960s, and served as the senior architect in the Ministry of Works of the government of Malawi from 1966 through 1979. Some of his designs for private developments and in Malawi show the ways that he mixed Western, Indian, and African design elements or materials in subtle buildings that match neatly with their surrounding built environment, such as Zanzibar’s first automobile showroom, Lilongwe’s post office, or the private home in Zanzibar still known as the White Villa (Figures 14, 15). Singh had a great awareness of balancing concerns for climate, local materials, culture, and custom, and he once despaired
Figure 15  Ajit Singh, White Villa, Zanzibar, 1964–65

Figure 16  Hybrid house framed by later high-rise public housing, Mwembetanga, Zanzibar. Photographed 1992
over the East German socialist apartment buildings that now dominate Ng’ambo’s cityscape for “putting a hat on top of my turban” (Figure 16). To the extent that the Holmwood houses were a part of what Singh saw as his “turban,” it is appropriate to consider them a flawed but functional hybrid.

Hybridity in Colonial Architecture

The hybrid qualities of the Singh-designed and PWD-built houses in Holmwood involved everything from design to materials and construction methods. In this regard, the projects exemplified dwellings within the colonial encounter. Many of the best-documented examples of hybrid domestic dwellings emerged in colonial settings. They include forms adapted or appropriated by colonizers (such as the Bengali bungalow and the Indische house of Dutch Java), those that housed colonized peoples (such as the Chinese shop houses of Southeast Asia), and those used by all groups in specific regions. The latter include the Arabisansce style in French North Africa and the Creole forms of Louisiana and the Caribbean islands. How each of these dwellings expressed local building cultures was varied and remains unclear, as their interpreters have emphasized designs and elevations rather than materials and methods. Even so, it is likely that hybridity was the norm in all respects, especially in urban areas where colonizers first came to terms with indigenous practices.

In terms of building materials, some writers have noted the step-by-step process by which imported materials such as concrete and corrugated iron supplanted the local. In India, the British first occupied bungalows of thatch and sun-dried brick, sometimes with mud- or dung-covered floors later replaced by fired brick, tiles, or concrete. Similar transitions occurred in other houses of the colonizers and of the colonized from Batavia (Jakarta) to Botswana. Even where local traditions were largely supplanted by an imported modernity, as in Singapore, hybrids flourished for extended periods. More commonly, complete transition did not occur, so that local materials, concrete blocks, corrugated iron, and found detritus defined new urban vernaculars.

The evolution of hybrid forms and materials went together. Susan Denyer has commented on how, in some regions of Africa, the use of corrugated iron enforced square or rectangular ground plans; conversely, when the kitchen (and smoke from kitchen fires) was removed from the dwelling, thatch became vulnerable to insects, hastening the use of new roofing materials. More importantly, changed designs and materials required new skills. At first, the British occupied bungalows made from local materials because they had to employ builders who possessed only local techniques. Vernacular skills remained a constraint in colonial territories. As late as 1952, the British architect George Atkinson, in his role as housing adviser to the Colonial Office, recommended local materials for that reason. Conversely, to implement designs that required nonlocal materials, colonizers would have to import architects, builders, and some workers with the relevant technical knowledge. The emergence of modern architecture beside the local depended on a juxtaposition of building cultures and workforces. PWDs and expatriate companies built in modern, or specifically British, styles; local artisans continued to practice and hand down their own knowledge. Often these cultures remained distinct after independence. For hybrid housing to emerge, there had to be hybridization of the building industry, as PWDs employed local workers and acquired local skills, or as indigenous builders experimented with new materials and designs. Zanzibar was unusual in the extent to which this process of hybridization occurred and was systematically planned. But if Zanzibar’s experience was atypical, it was also exemplary.

Why, and by whom, were such forms of hybridity accepted? The answers are complex. Administrators most easily accepted hybrid housing as a pragmatic concession. In the early years of colonial settlement only local materials and builders were available, and this remained true in rural areas or when trade was disrupted. Disruptions were ubiquitous during World War II, when colonial administrators worked to locate and utilize local materials. Such efforts shaped housing strategies in Zanzibar and throughout colonial Africa. By 1944 in Nigeria, for example, the director of the colony’s PWD commented that “almost every conceivable type of construction has been tried,” including “all the innumerable hybrid combinations.” The influence of imported practices was greater in the cities but was limited by their greater cost. Hence, although governments often mandated Western materials and standards, such requirements were rarely enforced. When applied, they deflected development into vernacular shantytowns. Even in cities, then, traditional and hybrid housing was tolerated.

Realpolitik also favored the acceptance of hybrids. Local people often resented attempts to impose Western lifestyles, and some administrators used hybrids to buy their acquiescence. During the interwar years, French administrations did this in North Africa, as did the Dutch in Indonesia and, eventually, the British too. In the 1930s, model houses in Northern Rhodesia’s new capital at Lusaka were hybrids designed to secure consent. Such considerations were not dominant in Zanzibar during the 1940s, but local officials could not ignore the unrest that occurred dur-
ing the 1930s on the Rhodesian Copperbelt and on several occasions between 1939 and 1949 in Mombasa, an East African port just to the north. When, after the first phase of Holmwood was completed, the Resident outlined his building plans, he acknowledged that his reasons were in part political, for poor housing is the “breeding ground for social evil and unrest.”

By the 1950s, the merits of a hybrid model were Holmwood’s. For colonizers, a hybrid could communicate a very mixed message. Indigenous builders’ choices were narrowly constrained by the effects of trading patterns and decisions over which they had no control. But, given those limited choices, the majority of these builders made architectural compromises and adaptations. In that sense, they assented wholeheartedly to the creation of hybrid housing in ways that most colonial administrators did not.

Conclusion

The meaning of Holmwood’s hybrid house only emerges when understood in its physical and social context. Its hybridity was circumscribed by the fact that it was an initiative of the colonial government, and its garden-suburb setting showed that its root stock was British, not indigenous. An enlightened PWD produced it, not local builders, and they controlled the process. Indigenous workers were hired and trained, mostly by British staff, and local craftsmen were summoned. Like a project anywhere, it served political ends, but here specifically to maintain the legitimacy of a colonial regime. Some neighborhood residents felt compelled to imitate Holmwood’s style, hoping to avoid dislocation. Others resisted because of the costs that it entailed. The hybridity of the Holmwood estates, then, was colonial in the sense of being political and unequal.

But this story shows that colonial rule was not unbending. Holmwood embodied a compromise already defined in local building regulations, and the motives of those responsible were truly mixed. In addition to realpolitik there was altruism and, indeed, idealism. For example, Arthur-Phillip Cumming-Bruce, the housing officer who replaced Wheatley, argued that “the nurture of good communities is the paramount aim of government.” His model was Holmwood South Extension, which today remains a successful planned area in comparison to the rest of the colonial-era city such as the older sections of Holmwood. Like other colonial initiatives in an era when trade still faced wartime disruptions, Holmwood was a pragmatic attempt to build decent housing using local materials and limited funds. It was a compromise and, for some, a sincere gesture of accommodation to climate and culture. If some Zanzibaris imitated hybridity cynically, others welcomed the greater durability. A real hybrid, the Holmwood house was about improvement as well as political control. Indeed, Cumming-Bruce contended that the improvement of the housing stock was the “indispensable corollary” of good policy. Ironically, later postindependence governments proved eager to replace local building traditions with imported materials and designs (see Figure 16). Experimental hybrids were neglected and often left to decay (Figure 17).
How typical were housing developments in Zanzibar in the 1940s? The particular people and circumstances were unusual. Old hands like Wheatley and Dutton who knew the local setting were common enough, but few PWDs had someone with the progressive views and experience of Singh. Yet, initiatives that mixed pragmatism with ideals and drew on local as well as Western materials seem characteristic of that era. An overview of British thinking by a ranking Colonial Office official in 1953 conceded that local designs and methods might be better than those imported by British experts; the author insisted that houses be judged from the “client’s” point of view. This discourse of accommodation blended with the British acquiescence to decolonization, although both were sometimes contested as they were within the administration of the Protectorate of Zanzibar. Such discourse and policy was less typical of other colonial powers, notably the French. After experimentation in the interwar years, French administrators turned toward the modern International Style after 1945. This was consistent with the intransigent policy of the French state towards the growing movements for political independence. The late colonial era encouraged the development of hybrid urbanism, but there was no guarantee that colonial governments would choose to take that path.

Notes
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1. Janet Abu-Lughod, “Disappearing Dichotomies: First World-Third World; Traditional-Modern,” Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review 3, no.2 (1992), 7–12; and Richard Harris, “Development and Hybridity made Concrete in the Colonies,” Environment and Planning A (forthcoming). We use the term hybridity broadly to include the combination of designs, materials, or stylistic elements from two or more cultural traditions, even where these do not create a distinctive and enduring “creolized” synthesis.


11. “Empire” and “the colonies” can be close synonyms, but the former is a broader term that includes territories whose culture and political economy is shaped by another nation state even in the absence of direct colonial rule.


33. Dutton to Oldham, 11 May 1930, box 5, Joseph Oldham Papers, RHL. 34. Ibid.

35. Dutton to Oldham, 23 March 1931, box 7, Joseph Oldham Papers, RHL.


37. Myers, *Verandahs of Power*.

38. Eric Dutton to Frederick Lugard, 26 Nov. 1942, box 10, Frederick Lugard Papers, RHL.


42. Dutton to Singh, 1 June 1965, Singh Papers.

43. John O’Bryan, “A Report on Rehousing Experiment to be Carried Out at Mwembutanga in the Native Town of Ngambo, which will call for Aid from the Colonial Development Fund,” typescript, 22 Oct. 1943, COR 618/79/14, PRO.

44. Land Officer to Chief Secretary, 19 July 1938, Development of Holmwood shamba, AE 2/437, ZNA (see n. 26).


46. Building Surveyor Marcel Zola to Colonial Office, 14 Aug. 1948, AB 39/11, ZNA.

47. Myers, *Verandahs of Power*.


49. George V. Wild to Secretary of State for the Colonies Stanley, 9 May 1945, COR 618/83/2, PRO; and Wild to M. Robertson, 17 Apr. 1945, COR 618/83/2, PRO.

50. Eric Dutton to George F. Seel, 6 Oct. 1944, COR 618/83/1, PRO.

51. Eric Dutton to John Adie, 8 Jan. 1946, AB 40/46, ZNA.


54. Henry Pilling to Colonial Office, 4 Sept. 1945, COR 618/83/2, PRO; and Henry Hawker to Richard Alford, 8 May 1953, AS 1/26, ZNA.

55. Bi Mgeni Maulid, interview with Garth Myers and Ali Hasan Ali, 16 Jan. 1992, Kidongo Chekundu, Zanzibar; and Abdulla Hallan, interview with Garth Myers and Ali Hasan Ali, 16 Apr. 1992, Zanzibar: “People called the houses they got Wheatley houses because he stood for the whole construction project; he caused them all to be built.”


57. Myers, “Colonial Discourse” (see n. 40).

58. Henry Pilling to Secretary of State for the Colonies Oliver Stanley, 29 Sept. 1944, dispatch 68, COR 618/83/1, PRO.

59. Singh to Dutton, 10 Dec. 1962, Singh Papers (see n. 41).

60. Dutton to Singh, 1 June 1965, Singh Papers.

61. Myers, “Colonial Discourse.”

62. Pilling to Stanley, 29 Sept. 1944, dispatch 68, COR 618/83/1, PRO. 63. Ibid.


65. Reginald Wheatley to Eric Dutton, 3 Aug. 1946, AB 39/22, ZNA (see n. 26): “This is going to be a difficult problem. It is not one of fencing—it is one of privacy. It is in fact psychological from the *purdah* [veil] habit. We shall, I feel sure, have to allow people to put up makuti fences between the walls of main buildings and the outhouses . . . until the people have grown somewhat further out of the *purdah* [seclusion of women] habit.”


67. Myers, “Sticks and Stones,” 263 (see n. 29).
70. Hawker to Alford, 8 May 1953, AS 1/26, ZNA.
72. Myers, “Reconstructing Ng’ambo.”
73. Ibid.
74. Wheatley to Dutton, 1 Dec. 1950, AS 1/21, ZNA.
75. Ibid.
77. Personal communication between Parmukh Singh Hoogan and Garth Myers, 14 July 1997.
84. King, Bungalow, 10.
85. United Kingdom, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, “Visit of the Colonial Liaison Officer to the Far East, and also to Aden and Cyprus, 1952,” typescript, 1952, COR 859/321, PRO (see n. 24).
90. Myers, Verandahs of Power, 60–65 (see n. 32).
91. Pilling to Colonial Office, 4 Sept. 1945, COR 618/83/2, PRO.
92. Edwards, “Architectural Creolisation” (see n. 3).
96. Arthur-Phillip Hovell-Thurlow Cumming-Bruce to Chief Secretary Samuel B. McElderry, 23 Nov. 1955, AB 9/9, ZNA (see n. 26).
97. Cumming-Bruce to McElderry, 8 July 1954, DA 1/261, ZNA.
100. Arthur-Phillip Hovell-Thurlow Cumming-Bruce to Chief Secretary Samuel B. McElderry, 23 Nov. 1955, AB 9/9, ZNA (see n. 26).
101. Pilling to Colonial Office, 4 Sept. 1945, COR 618/83/2, PRO.
102. Edwards, “Architectural Creolisation” (see n. 3).
106. Arthur-Phillip Hovell-Thurlow Cumming-Bruce to Chief Secretary Samuel B. McElderry, 23 Nov. 1955, AB 9/9, ZNA (see n. 26).
107. Cumming-Bruce to McElderry, 8 July 1954, DA 1/261, ZNA.
110. Arthur-Phillip Hovell-Thurlow Cumming-Bruce to Chief Secretary Samuel B. McElderry, 23 Nov. 1955, AB 9/9, ZNA (see n. 26).