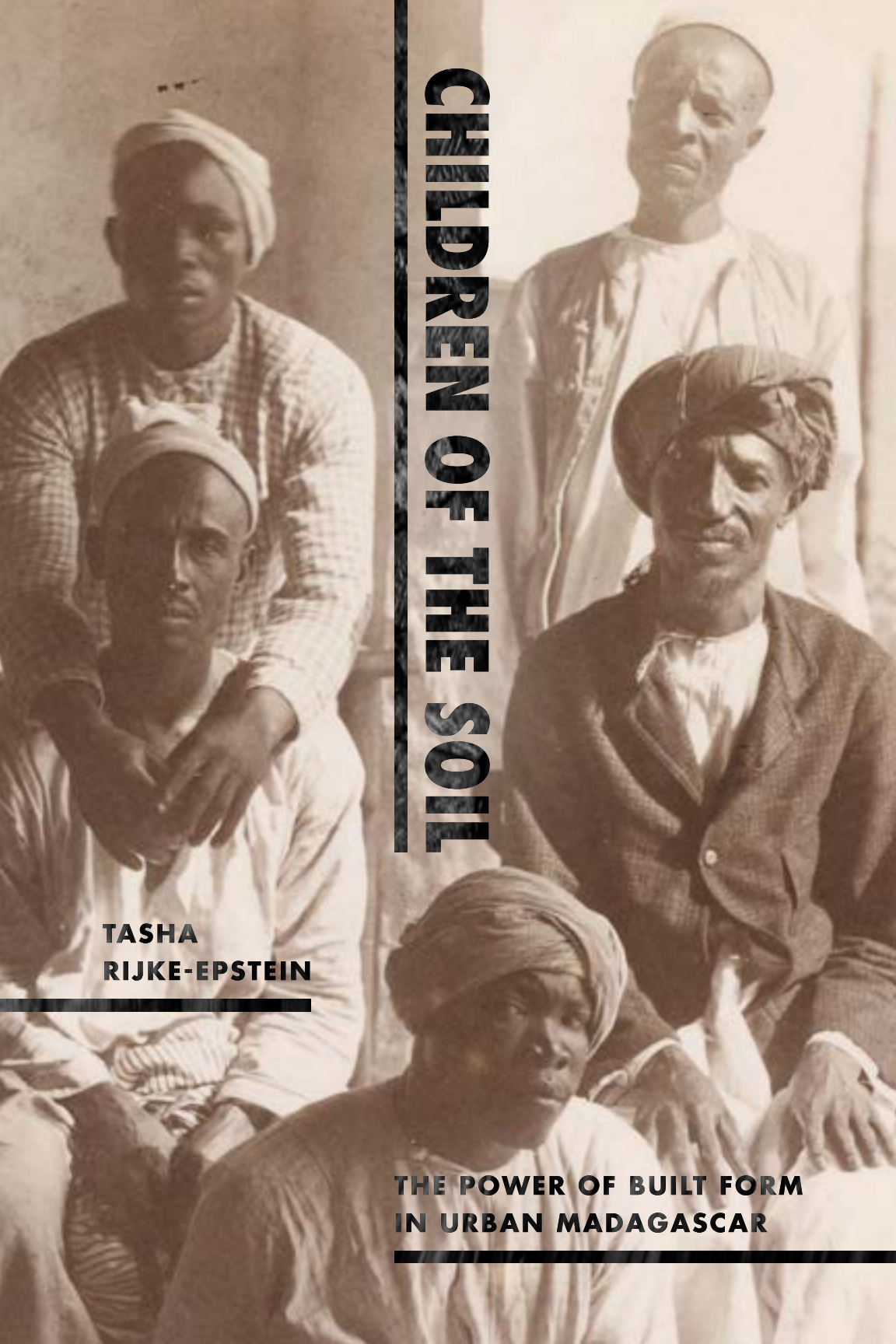

CHILDREN OF THE SOIL

TASHA RIJKE-EPSTEIN

THE POWER OF BUILT FORM IN URBAN MADAGASCAR

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Children of the Soil

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For David, for everything and more

And in cherished memory of Pier Larson and Mama Agnes
Ireo izay tsy nisalasala nonoro lalana ahy

For much of Madagascar's history, toponyms have been key vectors through which competing, successive groups framed their relationships to land, articulated conceptions of authority, and laid claims to territory. During French colonial times (1896–1960), administrators Frenchified urban toponyms, changing Antananarivo to Tananarive, Toamasina to Tamatave, and so on. Following the socialist revolution under President Didier Ratsiraka, the Malagasy national government renamed most of the island's urban centers as part of a broader project of Malgachization designed to efface the French colonial and linguistic influence. For all cities other than Mahajanga, I use the colonial names when referring to the period of 1896–1960 and the current place names for all other times.

Mahajanga is the exception to this. Throughout this book, I have chosen to use the contemporary name Mahajanga. The city's name, like other toponyms and key terms differentiating social groups, has been highly sensitive to political-economic transformations in the settlement's long polylinguistic history. In chapter 1, I explain the particular origin stories that are tied to each of the city's early, distinctive toponyms (Moudzangayeh, Moudzangaie, Mouzangaye, Mazangaya). These competing founding narratives and associated toponyms reflect the contested claims over how, and especially *by whom*, the city was established. In their nineteenth-century written correspondence, Merina administrators referred to the city as "Mojanga." At the dawn of French colonial rule in 1896, officials condensed the multiple iterations of the city's name into "Majunga," which postindependence officials subsequently changed to "Mahajanga" in an effort to return urban toponyms to their precolonial appellations after 1960.

I retain Mahajanga not to disavow that other Malagasy toponyms have their own contested histories but for purposes of clarity and to avoid privileging one particular version of the city's name and founding narrative over another.

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their worries, and their inspiring, heartfelt desires to explore new terrains. Our neighbors in Amborovy-Petite Plage brought conviviality and friendship, bestowing on us what we will never be able to fully reciprocate. I thank especially Rasoa, Berna, and Mama and Papa Saondra and their whole family for early morning *mokari*, raw *tantely*, long talks at the seaside, and so many celebrations. Mama and Papa Pauline, Mama and Papa Tatamo, and Rafotsy and her mother brought fullness and care to our lives. I thank Mama Elio and Mama Toky for patiently teaching me Malagasy, for nurturing our home and family, and for their tireless labor and support, which enabled the fruition of the research for this book.

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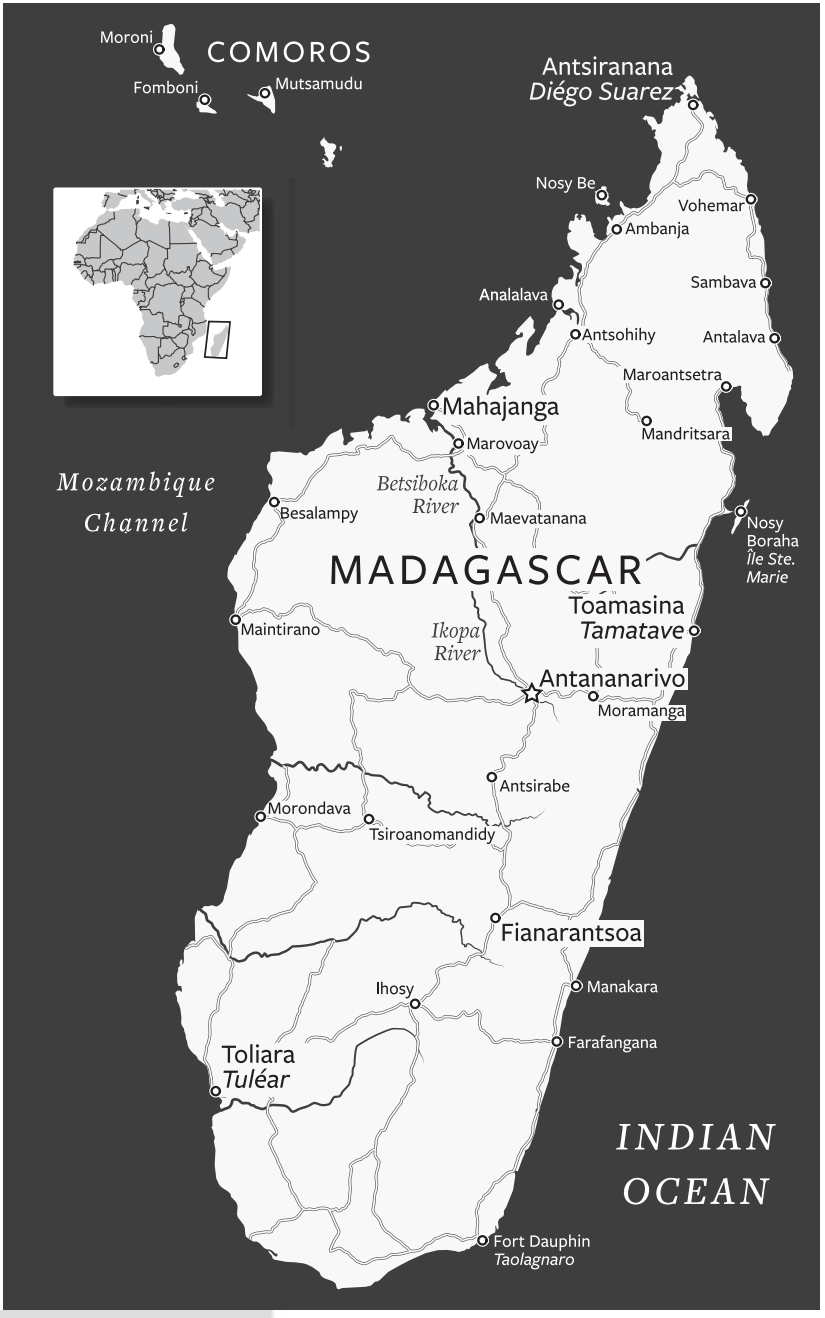
To all, I say:

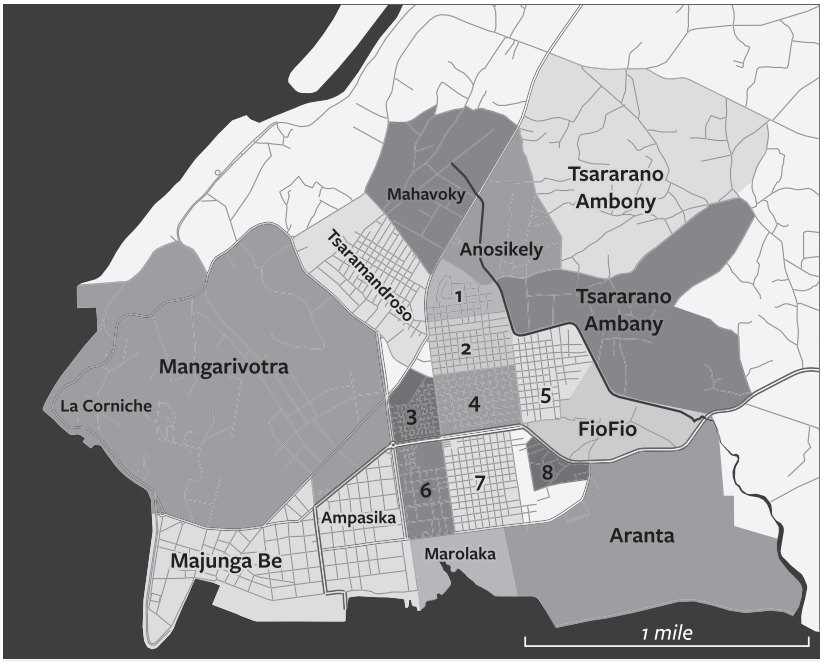
Ity kely, fa ny foko mameno azy.

What I offer is small, but it is given with a full heart.



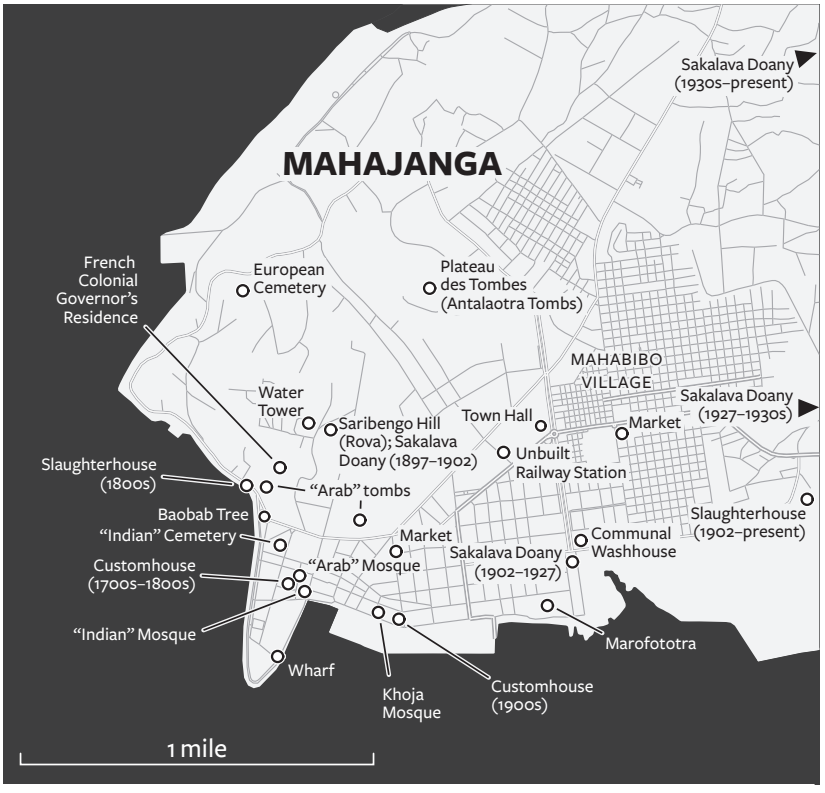
MAP FM.1 Madagascar and Comoros. Map by Tim Stallmann.

MAP FM.2 Mahajanga. Map by Tim Stallmann.



1. Ambalavato
2. Mahabibokely
3. Manga
4. Morafeno
5. Ambalavola
6. Ambovoalanana
7. Abattoir
8. Manjarisoa

MAP FM.3 Neighborhoods of Mahajanga. Map by Tim Stallmann.



MAP FM.4 Mahajanga (Majunga) during French Colonial Rule, 1896–1960. Map by Tim Stallmann.

FIGURE FM.1
Mahajanga [Majunga Ville] 1934.
Courtesy of Foiben-Taosarintanin'I Madagasikara.

FIGURE FM.2 Mahajanga (Majunga Marofototra), 1934. Courtesy of Foiben-Taosarintanin'I Madagasikara.

FIGURE FM.3
Mahajanga (Majunga), 1942.
Courtesy of American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

Introduction

Material Histories

On a heat-saturated late September morning in 2012, the local neighborhood women's association (*fikambanana*) gathered to cook for a funerary ritual event honoring a deceased elderly neighbor in Mahajanga, a port city of some 300,000 people on the northwestern coast of Madagascar. Over cast-iron cauldrons steaming with *vary* (rice) and *girigitzi* (beef with coconut and tomato sauce), women of various ages traded stories and relayed jokes. Mama Nasra, one of the major leaders of the fikambanana, began to emphatically tell a story.[1] All eyes of the women nestled on the cool, concrete veranda, turned to her. "Listen closely," Mama Jaki whispered in my ear, "she's saying something important." When I finally caught the winding narrative, I gathered that Mama Nasra was describing a recent encounter with a newcomer in town. The migrant had questioned whether Mama Nasra was "really" Malagasy. Noticing her head and shoulder covering (*kisaly*) and flowing cloth wrap (*salovana*), the man had asked whether she was not in fact from the nearby Comoros, an island archipelago with a predominantly Muslim population. Muslims are a religious minority within Madagascar, but historically not so within Mahajanga, where they have comprised a significant portion of the town's population for centuries. Mama Nasra scoffed at the newcomer's ignorance and adamantly refuted his wrongheaded intimation that she might not be authentically Malagasy. "I told him," she passionately exclaimed, "my grandparents got this land, and they built their house of wood, and my parents rebuilt the house of corrugated steel! Ô! And now we've rebuilt the house of stone (*vato*)! You

see this house, this stone house? This is proof that we've been here longer than you can imagine! We're children of the soil (*zanatany*)!"[2]

In the weeks and months to come, I would repeatedly hear similar stories. It became clear that Mama Nasra's account exemplified how people's senses of belonging to the city were intertwined with their spatial worlds. Although assertions to belonging have historically hinged on naturalized claims to land, the way Mama Nasra described the *texture* and *material substance* of her home was striking. By signaling the increased durability of her house, Mama Nasra indexed her family's investment in the city and their vested intentions to remain there, but she also forcefully affirmed their status as "children of the soil." What, I began to wonder, was the broader context of the city in which the accrued hardness of her home carried weight, and what kind of political import and imaginaries did durability offer? What did it mean to be a "child of the soil," and how did this category of belonging emerge and become linked to the material substance of her home? And how had the political, symbolic, and emotive valence of urban forms and building materials shifted from the foundation of the city and through its turbulent history under Merina conquest, French colonial occupation, and the postcolonial era? I came to gradually understand that for Mama Nasra and many others, one's home was a material artifact of their family's enduring continuity amid the convulsions of history and an evidentiary link among entangled lives, things, and places—past and present. Like other built forms, homes stood as archival sources, unfurled over a moral topography animated by the living and the dead, and ever mediated by asymmetrical political forces, ecological habitats, and tentatively held anticipations of the future.

Children of the Soil probes the significance of the material world in historical struggles to constitute power—over land, over people, and to define conceptions of belonging—in the Indian Ocean port town of Mahajanga, from its founding in the mid-eighteenth century through the cusp of independence in 1960. Drawing on archival and ethnographic research, this book explores how buildings in Mahajanga have served as politically charged inscriptions through which competing groups sought to rewrite the past, manage the indeterminacies of the present, and establish new conditions of possibility for aspired futures. As a history of city-making, this book chronicles how successive groups—Sakalava royal monarchs, highland Merina conquerors, Indian merchants, Comorian seafarers, and French colonizers—entwined ideas about power over people with specific building materials and designs, as they built their presence into the landscape. I argue that,

in so doing, they transformed political debates about the relative value of lives, shifted the ethics of communal life, and determined the viability of social collectivities into dynamic building processes. At the same time, these negotiations and accruing architectural forms were indelibly informed by the more-than-human world—an uncertain domain of spirits, ancestral presences, trees, vital fluids, stubborn stones—in which they arose. In the chapters to come, I offer biographies of key human-constructed sites to illuminate how different groups labored and deliberated with one another and with the nonhuman realm through material assemblages, during shifting conditions associated with the expansion of global racial capitalism and imperial encroachment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[3]

Taking the lives of built spaces—in addition to written words, texts, images, and interviews—as its entry point, this book traces labor and materials to understand how agency operates through the deliberate and accidental efforts of people enmeshed in disparate political systems, with widely varying access to capital, ecological bounty, and otherworldly forces. Buildings occupy a mediating space between agency and structuring forces. As scholars have shown, buildings are both the outcome of overlapping human actions and ecological bequeathment and forces themselves that bear upon the possibilities of social interaction.[4] Built forms are ongoing processes through which people reflect broader sociopolitical hierarchies and relations, yet they also embody politics through distinctive material properties and arrangements that order socialities, channel mobilities, and enable collective imaginaries.[5] Yet it is through human action that buildings become meaningful and powerful things able to reorient historical trajectories. As a city of migrants, Mahajanga offers a vantage point from which to address more broadly how overlapping, densely clustered groups navigate the affordances and responsibilities of the city in their attempts to enmesh themselves in its social fabric. While the details are specific to Mahajanga, the challenges residents faced to negotiate their political possibilities, and the material strategies they employed, are characteristic of many African cities.

Recent scholarship has expanded the bounds of the archive, drawing on progressively more diverse sources, including images, archaeological remains, court records, novels, and song, to evince the experiential textures of everyday life and discernable agential acts of those who have left few, if any, written records. Over the past several decades, historians have developed increasingly nuanced methods for recuperating buried voices by combing through the documentary archive, churning it over, and reading suspiciously "against the grain" for counter-histories.[6] Yet African building

dreams and urban designs have largely floated beneath the scholar's gaze. Historians and anthropologists of contemporary Africa have yet to fully explore built forms as lasting evidentiary sources, as epigraphs crafted by families and individuals who left few other written records, yet who inscribed buildings with memories, knowledge, and aspiration. Buildings are epistemic repositories that enfold historical narratives and unscripted imaginaries; as with any historical sources, our access to them is always mediated by layered histories of power.

Historians have often overlooked material forms, perhaps owing to their sheer omnipresence, which defies easy interpretation and challenges our confidence in fully grasping the capaciousness of history. Post-structuralist influences led scholars of Africa in particular to privilege interpretation of language, symbol, and ritual over material forms, and discursive notions of identity over embodied, technical expressive projects.[7] This need not be the case. Given the paucity of records for many communities across the African continent, the constraints of colonially composed archives, and the evermore apparent need for decolonizing historical practice, I am convinced that buildings can and ought to be taken as evidentiary sources that reveal the experiences and aspirations of those who left few written traces.[8] Built sites exceed the written record; as archaeologist Lynn Meskell puts it, they are "material witnesses" that transcend generations and "instantiate the past in the present in a way that no textual account can fully achieve."[9] At the same time, Michel-Rolph Trouillot astutely reminds us that, like other forms of historical evidence, the material heft of buildings "hides secrets so deep that no revelation may fully dissipate their silences."[10] *Children of the Soil* contends that buildings—secrets and all—exhort us to explore the silenced and forgotten pasts that have been etched, sedimented, and compressed within and through them.

Attending to the histories embedded in materiality and ephemerality, commemoration and silence, also requires attending to the shifting role of the more-than-human world, which, no less than its earthly counterpart, has shaped the contours, temporalities, and designs of architectural forms across the city's history. Foundational to understanding power in many African contexts is the distributed nature of authority, in which ancestral spirits have not only been fundamental to political sovereignties but have also been capable of exerting force on sociopolitical and material conditions of life. Substantial scholarship in African studies has shown how topographies are laden with ancestral presences, spirits of the dead, and land- and water-dwelling spirits that impose themselves and wield power

over human actors in authoritative, prohibitive, and concrete ways.[11] In Madagascar's historical context, active cohabitation between the living and the dead has palpably informed everyday life, and the living must continuously negotiate spirits and ancestral presences as they are entangled in the material world.[12] Spirits and ancestral presences are important figures in this material history, whether in determining appropriate conditions for building construction, forcibly "taking" living persons out of angry offence, or demanding offerings to rejoin a kin-based community. The particular tempos, demands, and contours of relations between the living and the dead are locally situated, but this general orientation has stretched across the diverse conceptual frameworks and broad expanses of time on the island.

Accordingly, *Children of the Soil* eschews the relatively discrete periods that organize most studies of early, colonial, or postcolonial building, casting its view across the broader expanse of time. Anchored in a two-century span, this book decenters colonial textuality and orality as the primary loci of historical knowledge production by foregrounding the forms people built, the materials they selected, and the activities they undertook in urban spaces from the city's earliest times, ever shaped by the political, economic, and ecological conditions at hand.[13] Rendering visible the (dis) continuities of emplacement and material expressions of citizenship across precolonial and colonial urbanisms, this study pushes against the reproduction of these as clear-cut chronological periods. Broadening the temporal frame also shows how early building processes took shape, and how subsequent rulers, builders, and everyday inhabitants grappled with *left-behind* architectural structures and remnants. Given the expansive breadth of time addressed, *Children of the Soil* does not attempt a comprehensive historical account of the city, but rather works through select sites that reveal broader dynamics of placemaking at key moments in time.

Chapter 1 offers a deep history of Mahajanga, describing how its founding and transformation in the mid-to-late eighteenth century emerged from major ecological, political, and migratory shifts in the region. Architectural tactics informed the regulation of communal life and the opening of new political possibilities during early Sakalava monarchal rule in the late eighteenth century. Chapter 2 charts the biography of a key site—the hilltop *rova* (governor's palace and fort)—and explores how Merina administrators in the mid-1800s drew on the knowledge and labor of competing groups to build themselves into power. Their authority was constructed and contested through the selective use of materials and architectural forms through which

they intended to magnify their presence in the city and beyond. Chapter 3 examines how, following the French military conquest, colonial planners' visions to amplify their presence through built forms collided with the obstinate stone structures long established by Indian and Antalaotra traders. Indians in particular harnessed the architectural inertia of their homes and mosques to contest and negotiate colonial encroachment, but outbreaks of the bubonic plague in 1902 and 1907 stemming from the arrival of newly recruited workers from China and India brought unforeseen challenges to their efforts to retain autonomy.

The second half of the book considers what happened in the early to middle decades of the 1900s, when large numbers of Comorian migrants established households, drew on building acts to stake politically potent claims of autochthony, and positioned themselves as rightful heirs to the city. Chapter 4 excavates how burgeoning Comorian communities prioritized mosque construction as foundational means to root their attachments, even as they grappled with internal discord and intensifying colonial regulations. Enterprising leaders and everyday experts in these migrant groups creatively exploited the malleability of property regulations and erected gleaming limestone mosques that enunciated their ties to their adopted city, imprinted an Islamic presence on urban spaces, and invigorated their historic connections to the Muslim *umma* that spanned the Indian Ocean. Chapter 5 focuses on how mixed Malagasy-Comorian families established households and harnessed their homes to transform themselves, in contrast to new migrants from elsewhere on the island, from *vahiny* (outsiders) to *zanatany* (insiders)—the latter constituting a key idiom of inclusion, inflected by ideas of indigeneity and predicated on acknowledgment of the reciprocal relationships between the living and the already-present spirits dwelling in and around the city. By the 1960s, this generation of mixed progeny developed new expressive practices rooted in the street—a zanatany urbanism—that both reinvigorated and challenged long-standing moral norms around fraternal sociality, gendered spatial practices, and ancestral obligations. Comorian-Malagasy laborers played an important role in infrastructural work, and chapter 6 considers the city's waste and water systems as a lens through which to chart the political contours and affective dimensions of colonial-era infrastructure over the twentieth century. By flipping the script to show how particular people are worked into built forms, the chapter documents the continuous forms of harm spanning the life and afterlife of the colonial-era waste system. A brief epilogue connects Mahajanga's history of contested presence(s) to a critical, violent

event in 1976–77 known as the *rotaka*, which revealed the perils of zanatany belonging and the unfinished work of decolonization.

Madagascar In and Beyond: The Port Town of Mahajanga

Far from a mythical, isolated "world apart," Madagascar has been central in the nexus of Indian Ocean, African, and Asian movements and migrations for centuries.[14] Settled at least 2,000 years ago by migrants coming from Indonesia and coastal East Africa, Madagascar's genetic and linguistic composition reflects these intertwined Asian and African influences. Archaeological evidence reveals how early migrants introduced technical knowledge in ceramics, metallurgy, and ironworking; plants, animals, and varieties of rice (which would become the island's staple); and divination and time-keeping systems.[15] In recent decades, scholars have documented the vital but overlooked role of Madagascar in African and Indian Ocean historical economies as a crucial site of provisioning that "tied together various regions of the world."[16] Within Madagascar, Mahajanga has a distinctive history of linguistic and cultural influences from Comoros, parts of East Africa, and beyond. Unlike its Swahili-coast counterparts, which emerged in the first millennium AD, Mahajanga was founded significantly later in the mid-1700s. Nourished by the lucrative trade in food provisions, cattle, and enslaved persons, it grew into what historian Sebouh Aslanian has termed a "nodal center" within southwestern Indian Ocean trade routes.[17] Nestled on a peninsula jutting into the Mozambique Channel and abutting the mouth of the Betsiboka River, the city benefited from its abundant limestone deposits, mangrove forests, and palm-studded grasslands as well as from the ample rice fields in its hinterlands. Culling from the earth's archive of stone, sand, and wood, compressed over decades and centuries, successive waves of migrants labored away, incrementally calcifying much of the city over generations. The correlation between durability and longevity was not always straightforward, however. Rather than following a simple teleology of soft to hard, ephemeral to obdurate, or thatch to stone, the becoming of Mahajanga witnessed the tangled coexistence of multiple materials with overlapping temporalities and distinctive meanings.

Profound historical transformations from the eighteenth century—including increased demand for enslaved workers in the French Mascarenes, Omani and European encroachment in the Indian Ocean trade region, and

competition between island monarchies in Madagascar—brought an array of aspiring migrants and rulers to the city, each with distinctive ambitions and repertoires of expertise. Among the city's founders were Antalaotra seafaring merchants (akin to Swahili traders), whose Islamic ancestors hailed from parts of Arabia, East Africa, and Comoros and who, since the eleventh century, had traded along the shores of northwest Madagascar.[18] They forged coalitions with reigning leaders from the Sakalava Zafimbolamena dynastic state who had governed large swaths of the northwest in overlapping monarchies since the late seventeenth century. Traders and indentured workers from India (commonly referred today as *Karana*) arrived in the eighteenth and (in larger numbers) mid-nineteenth centuries, and many of them shared a common Islamic faith, but their Muslim ritual practices were by and large different from local iterations.[19] Those identified as Makoa (also known as Masombika), who came initially as captives through the trans-Mozambican channel slave trade in late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, adopted many of the Islamic customs of their Antalaotra, Comorian, and Karana slaving families.[20] Modest numbers of migrants from across Madagascar joined this polyglot community throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Ruling over this vibrant trading port from the mid-1700s until 1824, Sakalava dynastic rulers faced challenges common to many precolonial African leaders. They needed to secure the allegiance of highly mobile political subjects of diverse origins, negotiate degrees of engagement with strangers, and navigate the ancestral presences through which they derived their power. Royal monarchs in and around Mahajanga built political community by pulling together people with different kinds of knowledge—technical, ritual, pastoral, and commercial.[21] They allied with Antalaotra traders who possessed commercial acumen, which afforded control over trade and access to lucrative tributes, enslaved captives, and imported goods like cloth and guns. They harnessed these prestige commodities into staged encounters with European traders, which almost always took place in royal architectural buildings. Royal compounds were constitutive to Sakalava political strategies of "extraversion," through which leaders cultivated ties to outsiders and selectively wielded foreign material objects to exert power in situ.[22]

Sakalava dynastic rulers combined these outward-facing strategies with tactics of architectural governance that linked them to their constituencies in reciprocal relationships of responsibility. Ritual prescriptions and prohibitions over building materials was a key way living royal rulers enacted hierarchies and called forth political communities through labor. In Mad-

agascar, prohibitions on actions (*fady*) have historically been the means through which ancestral presences impose themselves and ruling elites demonstrate their authority over the living.[23] Many fady were rooted in specific places, designated the bounds of acceptable activity in a given locale, and were expected to be observed by all people dwelling in the city, not only those of Sakalava descent. Among these was a ban on constructing homes in durable materials that endured well into the eighteenth century. Hardened substances, especially limestone, were the preserve of the dead, material expressions of coldness and rigidity. By exclusively enforcing vegetative construction, Sakalava royal rulers (*mpanjaka*) sought to build their presence into the urban landscape.

Yet like any cultural practice, fady were and are dynamic processes that shift and change. By the 1780s, reigning monarchal leader Ravahiny (1780–1808) lifted this particular prohibition, making it possible for influential Islamic traders to solidify their political and economic connections.[24] Antalaotra masons and Makoa laborers brought well-honed stone-working techniques, which they used to erect double-storied, limestone homes near the port. In so doing, they drew on regional aesthetic and technical traditions that stretched from Mocha to Lamu and Mutsamudu.[25] These enduring stone houses became defining landmarks in the city, and their owners later drew on them as devices of architectural refusal to disrupt French planning initiatives.

During the early 1800s, the port city quickly became a key theater of contestation between two competing indigenous monarchies (*fanjakana*): the Merina kingdom in the highlands and the Sakalava monarchies on the northwest coast.[26] By the 1820s, Mahajanga had grown to between ten thousand and twelve thousand inhabitants who continued to claim wide-ranging origins: Antalaotra, Sakalava, Makoa, Hadrami Arab, Indian, Comorian, and migrants from across Madagascar.[27] Building on long-standing aspirations to dominate the island and with substantial British support, Merina monarch Radama I invaded the northwest region and took hold of its crown jewel, Mahajanga, in 1824–25. The conquest was violent, much of the city burned, and the reigning Sakalava ruler, Andriantsoly, together with part of the population, fled the region.[28] Merina administrators immediately occupied the Saribengo hilltop and rapidly constructed a military fort and governor's palace, informed by concepts of altitudinal power that equated elevation and access to air with political authority.[29] To efface the memories of the violent takeover and inaugurate a new era in the city's political path, Merina authorities ordered that a new shrine (*zomba*)

be constructed within the fort's enclosure to encase the Sakalava royal relics (which Merina soldiers forcibly took from the existing shrine some 60 kilometers [40 miles] away), thus positioning Saribengo Hill as the ritual node of the region. By eviscerating the living presence of the Sakalava fanjakana in the urban landscape, Merina rulers foisted their dominating presence on the city. With this change, Mahajanga moved from relative resemblance to its Swahili coastal counterparts, with its mosques and stone houses, to a multi-confessional town in which Islamic religious structures were tightly juxtaposed with the town's Sakalava ritual shrine through the nineteenth century and joined by a wide array of churches in the early twentieth century.[30]

From 1825 until the 1880s, Merina rulers occupied the city. Despite the long-standing economic link between Mahajanga and the highlands, Merina authorities found themselves outsiders, unfamiliar with the city's distinctive Islamic and Sakalava political presence and cultural ambiance.[31] Nonetheless, eager to reap lucrative revenues from the city's trade flows, rulers imposed steep levies on arriving ships and incoming goods.[32] Beyond construction on the customs house and repair of the governor's residence, state-sponsored building projects lagged. Resentment mounted among inhabitants against the predatory state practices of local military officers who exploited their privileged positions to enrich themselves in the name of the Merina monarch. As English sailor J. S. Leigh journaled during his visit to the city in 1836, "the property of all inhabitants of Madagascar is at the queen's disposal, and she frequently makes use of it to pay her debts."[33] This policy of imperial plunder stretched into the 1830s and '40s and generated trade revenues that were critical for executing the monarchy's ambitious island-wide plans.[34]

Much of this hinged on unfree labor, a category encompassing both enslaved workers and obligatory labor required of all free men (*fanompoa*). Merina officials relied increasingly on the latter as French demands for slave labor in the Mascarene plantations depleted access to captives within the island; but for much of the nineteenth century, Madagascar's role within Indian Ocean slave trade was one of simultaneously demanding, supplying, *and* retaining enslaved persons.[35] Although scholars continue to debate the precise volume of enslaved persons transported through northwest Madagascar, and Merina official correspondence is silent on these figures, enslaved communities were an important presence in the city. Visiting Mahajanga in 1869, Alfred Grandidier observed that "the slaves were *more numerous* than the free; there were more than 1500."[36] These enslaved individuals

were hardly a homogenous community; they derived from different origins within the region stretching between Malindi in the north and southward to the mouth of the Zambezi River, near Quelimane in present-day Mozambique.[37] Their demographic prominence in the city was matched by their critical role in labor regimes.

Even with the emancipation of enslaved Makoa (or Masombika, as highland officials referred to them) in 1877, Merina authorities continued to rely on forced labor regimes. By the late nineteenth century, an exhaustion of labor reserves, sweeping economic troubles, and persistent hostility from coastal regions caused the highland monarchy to falter. Mahajanga's economic future had already waned in the 1830s and '40s following the onerous imposition of taxes and a shift in trade routes to Zanzibar as the new hub of regional exchange.[38] Throughout much of the nineteenth century, French scientists, diplomats, and travelers eyed the prospective riches that could be extracted from Madagascar, such as cattle, honey, gum copal, and minerals. Building on their long-standing trading presence along the northwestern shores and growing aspirations for imperial conquest, the French military capitalized on the Merina kingdom's weakened state and undertook a series of attempted invasions during the 1880s. If Mahajanga served first for Sakalava rulers and then for Merina authorities as the gateway to Indian Ocean trade streams, for the French it provided a portal for colonial conquest. In 1895, French troops invaded the city, traversed overland to seize the highland capital of Antananarivo (Tananarive), and established Madagascar as their nucleus of colonial power in the Indian Ocean until 1960.

Building projects were foundational to French rule in Madagascar. The raising of buildings, monuments, and infrastructure served not only to justify France's *mission civilisatrice* on the island, but also to mediate colonial power through forced-labor regimes, demonstrations of technological prowess, and extraction of ecological plenty. Architectural absence was, for French colonizers, an impetus and justification to begin the material construction of colonization and to magnify their overall presence in the urban landscape, masking the paltry numbers of colonizers on the ground and expanding the dimensions of their control over local populations.[39] If colonial-era cities in Madagascar were "laboratories" for French planners experimenting with solutions to urban problems, as they were across the empire, they were also brought about through the pluralistic labor and knowledge regimes employed by colonial subjects.[40] Under French colonial rule, however, a conceptual category of buildings—*en dur*—that mirrored past privileging of durability under Sakalava dynastic and Merina rule was

worked out through encounters between colonial subjects and officials. Initially, colonial officials prohibited *en dur* (durable, permanent) structures in an effort to ensure that the laboring population remained temporary. But certain groups, especially Comorians and their Malagasy-Comorian children, found ways to bypass those regulations and to construct mosques and homes in hardened forms that materialized their collective (even if fractured) hopes for the city in architectural forms.

Planners in Mahajanga redrafted the city's layout into a linear grid by dismissing long-standing Malagasy practices of cardinal spatial orientation and engagements with the spirit world, appropriating private properties (often owned by Indians), and forcibly displacing whole communities of Malagasy, Antalaotra, and Comorians. These measures cleared the way for transforming the city into what authorities hoped would be an engine of extraction, "the capital of the west and the future great port of the whole island."[41] Although officials saw economic potentiality in Mahajanga, their grandiose ambitions continually collided with ongoing labor shortages.[42] Turning to labor recruitment abroad, French rulers sought laborers from China, India, and Comoros, and streams of migration intensified from the Comorian archipelago in particular, bringing the Comorian population to some 50 percent of the city's residents by the 1950s.[43] By the mid-twentieth century, Mahajanga held the largest concentration of Comorians *worldwide*, including within Comoros.[44]

Comorians and their mixed Comorian-Malagasy families were particularly adept at integrating, partly through acknowledgment of the "customs of the land" (*fomban'tany*) associated with Sakalava ancestral presences that long inhabited the landscape. Featured as key protagonists in this material history, Comorians had for centuries traveled to and from Madagascar as traders, established Islamic communities, and exchanged linguistic practices with the Malagasy. With their long-standing ties to Madagascar and shared cultural lexicon, Comorian migrants ardently shaped the city's spatial and cultural terrain, marrying into existing Malagasy families, constructing mosques, and animating the street life. By pouring their vital energy and hard-earned capital into built forms, Comorian migrants positioned themselves as prime architects in the remaking of Mahajanga during the twentieth century. Contracted as wage laborers and joined by other migrant workers, they constructed roads, tin-roofed marketplaces, and a reinforced, cement wharf that, among other structures, ultimately overlaid the city's existing connective tissue. In bold, emotively infused ways, Comorians and their Comorian-Malagasy children leveraged these built forms to remake themselves into

insiders of the city, weaving themselves into new lexicons of belonging that revolved around the concept of *zanatany* (children of the soil). Yet the durability of their emplacement was disputed by newer waves of migrants in a violent expulsion in the 1970s, exposing the ephemerality of their belonging.

Building Presences: Temporalities, Labor, and Indigeneity

In thinking about how and why urban buildings become political (and how urban politics are built), this book builds on a valuable inheritance of scholarship on urban pasts in Africa. This scholarship has traditionally been characterized by two overarching themes. On the one hand, scholars have shown how political institutions have instrumentalized built forms and urban designs to exert control and order society. Their work has explored how rulers—precolonial, colonial, or postcolonial—have drawn on urban space to perform their authority; set in motion economies of extraction; gather, separate, and discipline "unruly" subjects; harness heritage; and experiment with spatial solutions to urban problems on the continent and metropole.[45] In a second line of inquiry, urban studies scholars have explored the creative ways residents inhabited spaces of the city, carving out niches for sociality and self-determination, whether through leisure, conspicuous consumption, and expressive cultures; labor, religious, and nationalist movements; or associational ties and commercial endeavors. This work has revealed how city dwellers across the continent developed liberatory imaginaries and vibrant collectivities that animated everyday life and, at times, exceeded the scope of state governance.[46]

More recently, scholars have drawn together these two perspectives to grasp how urban spaces were transformed through the friction-filled encounters between inhabitants and political institutions and (especially when state presence faded into the background) among competing groups of inhabitants.[47] As historian David Morton notes in his important study of Maputo's built environment, urban space in much of colonial and contemporary Africa "constitutes a kind of multilateral politics that has not always announced itself as politics—or even in words."[48] This work has revealed that the dichotomized lens of "colonizer versus colonized" leaves in the shadows the ways subordinated groups have appropriated spaces and architectural forms to defiantly refuse dehumanizing conditions of racial capitalism through acts of construction, albeit with varying degrees of suc-

cess. Large-scale urban planning projects were not technocratically driven, top-down processes, but rather were profoundly shaped by local officials, on-the-ground knowledge and praxis, and regional ecological conditions.[49] Scholars have shown how urban dwellers have constituted their claims to belonging and challenged colonial and contemporary regimes of power through the erection of domestic structures at times "illegally" and on the margins of the planned city.[50] More broadly, anthropologists have demonstrated how urban inhabitants construct buildings as an affectively saturated political act within creative repertoires of urban life.[51] Collectively taken, this body of work has shown how built forms are not only symbolic reflections of asymmetrical socioeconomic relationships, but also integral to the making of political lives and imaginaries.

Children of the Soil extends this burgeoning field of urban studies by offering a fresh approach to understanding urban becoming as a *material* process in which power, labor, and affective ties are woven and interwoven through built forms over time. Bringing together the world of materials and the world of symbols, this analysis attends to how people sought to build themselves into power, presence, and indigeneity through material forms, while buildings simultaneously shaped the conditions of urban possibility over time. If material forms are historical processes that have emerged from (and necessitated) particular conditions, then a fundamental task is untangling how the specificities of building materials and design have brought forth uneven sociopolitical relationships. Attention to materiality across several fields, including anthropology and archaeology, history, and science and technology studies, has shown how following objects across overlapping networks, geographical spaces, and timescales can help illuminate patterns of socioeconomic and political life in specific times and places.[52]

My approach draws inspiration from this scholarship by tracking the trajectories of particular materials—limestone, *satrana* palms, mangrove—over time as they were alchemically transformed from earthly matter into built forms, imbued with meanings that reflected emotive attachments, and gradually gained or lost import. For instance, limestone structures that enunciated authority under Merina rule in the late nineteenth century contrasted with earlier meanings of limestone as the realm of the dead, the material of ancestral tombs, and forbidden for the abodes of the living under precolonial Sakalava rule. The increasing use of limestone over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries required specific technical know-how held only by some masons, shifted the temporality of maintenance, and reduced the frequency with which collectivities were brought

together to restore structures and reenact their shared ties. Employing this approach to understand Mahajanga's history reveals how built forms and materials can become unhinged from their original associations, and then taken up and infused with novel meanings by historical actors in reconfigured constellations of agency. As material devices, buildings may be entangled in governance regimes rooted in particular logics—whether by Sakalava monarchs tethering veneration to ephemeral construction, or by French colonial authorities linking calculated standardization and notions of propriety with obdurate homes. Building materials were never exclusive instruments of *architectural governance*, however, and could just as easily be employed in acts of *architectural refusal*, such as when colonial subjects invoked their stubborn stone and rigid sheet metal houses to lay claims on French officials for compensation during the first half of the twentieth century. Even the most energetic efforts to radically transform urban spaces, whether from "above" or "below," were stymied by *architectural inertia*—the resolute resistance buildings impose through their material properties of malleability, porosity, or brittleness.

Centering the composition of buildings—whether ephemeral or lasting beyond generations—challenges conventional historical periodization and invites us to ponder multiple temporalities. The temporalities of matter—that is, the speed at which palm thatch decays, limestone crumbles, or corrugated tin roofs become brittle—stand incongruously with the finite lifespans of political dynasties, colonial rule, or successive postindependence republics, let alone the undisciplined temporality of ancestral spirits who intrude continuously on the living. As Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi recently noted, architecture is a "form of knowledge" with a distinctive "capacity to draw arrows to the past and, from there, the future."[53] Though building materials do not possess agency of their own accord, Tim Ingold has pointed out how they can "threaten the things they comprise with dissolution" through their comingling, decay, and intentional or unintentional destruction.[54] Once infused with vital substances (umbilical cords, animal fat, and bodily effluvia) and the vestiges of lives lived within their walls, moreover, building materials can carry residues that transcend generations and temporal passages. They can also serve as anticipatory devices through which different groups work to bring about their dreams—in the case of Mahajanga, for the revivified presences of past ancestors, the prosperity of their progeny, or the preservation of European dominance.

This book builds on the work of historians who have argued that objects are "vital sources of historical knowledge" that lodge the memories and ex-

periences, emotions, ideologies, and intellectual aspirations of people "beyond" that which can be inscribed in textual or representational sources.[55] Although historians have considered material things as emotionally-laden "sources," I extend this to built forms, excavating how they can be ascribed overlapping, contradictory, and sometimes unspoken (though widely known) affective meanings through both everyday and ritualistic interactions of people and places.[56] This move coalesces with increasing attention among architectural historians to the nature of evidence and builds on earlier insights that buildings are revelatory of the moral valuations of those who produced them.[57] By privileging multiple, oft-marginalized voices—those of builders, caretakers, dwellers—I work to counter dominant narratives about the significance of spaces to show the pluralistic perspectives and knowledges at play. Like Mama Nasra described in the opening vignette, the labor of building construction and ongoing repair, which often stretched across family generations, enabled people to establish strong, emotive ties and enduring memories to the forms they inhabit.

What remains visible after the passage of time are the hardened forms—durable constructions of stone, brick, and concrete—that testify to compressions of aspiration, geological time, and particular assemblages of power. But if the city is an archival tableau, then, like the documentary archive, it holds not just political potentiality but also layered silences. Rather than latent, static things, the durable built forms that persist give credence to subsequent claims to authority and shape how historical facts are created, assembled, and narrated.[58] And like archival documents, these structures offer only partial insights into the past. How then does one apprehend the ephemeral, fleeting forms that have been effaced from urban horizons? This book offers one answer by attending continually to patent traces *and* willful erasures, and by charting *transgenerationality* and *ephemerality* as intertwined tactics through which builders, migrants, and governing authorities struggled to determine the built archive of the city. At times, the explicit choice to use ephemeral, vegetative building materials by Sakalava ritual practitioners afforded the fulfillment of unceasing, obligatory ties between the living and the dead, and assured the reconstitution of sociopolitical hierarchies through continual engagement in building maintenance.[59] At other times, architectural absence signaled the refusal of coerced laborers to build roads and civic buildings under conditions that stripped them of personhood during French colonial rule. As Saidiya Hartman has pointed out for archival silences in the Atlantic world, absences in the landscape sometimes signal violence that forever extinguished the hopes, thoughts,

and dreams of those who once inhabited a particular place.[60] This study adopts a holistic approach that yokes together absences and presences, unbuilding and building, abandonment and transformation as relational practices that unfolded within the same spatial field of the city, but often to very different ends over time.

This attention to material statements and silences is particularly important in order to shed light on the agentic role of African builders and the valences they ascribed to materials. Cities are continual processes of dynamic struggle between competing groups, each of whom etch their presence on the archival tableaux of the built world through the (intellectual, political, ecological) means at hand. *Children of the Soil* takes successive waves of migrants—Sakalava ancestors and ritual experts, Islamic traders, Makoa captives, Merina soldiers, Comorian migrants and their Malagasy-Comorian families—to be the memorialists, each possessing varying degrees of latitude to construct epitaphs in the city's architectural history. The second half of the book, in particular, examines how acts of emplacement—whether through the building of a sturdy house, the burial of a newborn's placenta, or the suffusion of human excrement underground—involve not only reckoning with the accrued sediment of human, ancestral, and geological time, but also projecting into the past and the future claims to identity and belonging. Here, the book engages with and contributes to scholarly debates on ethnicity and citizenship by exploring how material designs and places have been tied to articulations of nativism and indigeneity—most often through the slippery concept of *zanatany*, which I examine in depth in chapter 5.

African societies have long been organized by paradigmatic principles of native and newcomer, even if ethno-racialist discourses have increasingly saturated debates over belonging in more recent times. Ethno-racial thought has been an important dimension to studies of the formation of indigeneity and to contemporary categories of ethno-territorial belonging in Africa. Recent studies have departed from the persistent but constraining questions of whether and to what extent ethnicity was "invented" and reified by colonial regimes; instead, they have investigated the ways local intellectuals have propagated and negotiated ethno-racial consciousness for the realization of exclusionary political projects.[61] While some scholars have tracked the convergence of violent new forms of exclusion and intensified discourses of indigeneity as relatively recent phenomena linked to African postcolonial political crises, neoliberal reforms, and globally circulating identity discourses, others have emphasized the layered, not-so-

new histories of nativism.[62] Work in both streams, however, has primarily privileged the world of symbols and discourses and has not adequately addressed the significance of materiality in processes of collective association. My approach builds on recent work that unsettles rigid binary frames of insider/outsider by signaling how people have performed affiliations with multiple communities of practice in material ways.[63] Architectural labor, that is, building, repair, and restoration—and at other times, architectural *refusal* to build in a certain place or to use certain materials—has constituted a central way Mahajanga inhabitants have expressed their moral standing as constituents of the Sakalava polity and established affective ties to the city.

Informed by the everyday theories and historical struggles of city dwellers, this book centers *zanatany* as an emic concept that contributes to scholarly understandings of indigeneity, the politics of urban space, and the significance of labor and affect by providing a fuller understanding of cities as ever-unfolding material and discursive historical processes. The multigenerational Comorian-Malagasy families who guided this research offered up the idiom of *zanatany* as a mode of life and historical category of belonging that is forged through struggles over placemaking in Mahajanga. Mahajanga inhabitants signaled *zanatany* as a category of urban citizenship, an intergenerational process of physically building one's presence into the city, and a critical mode of urbanism inflected by solidarity and conviviality. I ask: How has the concept of *zanatany* been redefined and constituted across shifting historical contexts? How have material designs and place—and their appropriation and reworking—been tied to articulations of *zanatany*-ness? What are the "techniques of the body," the bodily engagements with the material world of the city, by which *zanatany* has been rendered visible and made to appear natural?[64] These questions guide the latter chapters of the book, where I probe the historical construction of "names of belonging" in Mahajanga.[65]

Like terms of belonging elsewhere, identifying as zanatany has historically been part of a forceful claim to insider status. Deriving from *zanaka* (offspring, but also plants, trees, or bushes that have been transplanted) and *tany* (earth, terrain, soil, land, country, kingdom), *zanatany* has an explicit autochthonous valence.[66] *Zanatany* is a slippery term full of contention about who can identify as an insider and which material indices authenticate zanatany claims. By tracing the genealogy of the idiom *zanatany*—which defies easy categorizations of autochthony, *créolité*, or cosmopolitanism—in Mahajanga, *Children of the Soil* reveals that nativist idioms can be much more capacious, encompassing far more than simply a reference

to first-coming. *Zanatany* was not simply an autochthonous category; it was rather, as some residents suggested, a morally informed way of urban life replete with particular assumptions about consumption, habitus, and public decorum. As a category it implied a whole host of material, spatial, and bodily practices rather than just a claim to belonging by which some differentiated themselves from their neighbors.

The story of zanatany in Mahajanga offers a parable on the ethics of being a good settler. Interrogating the category of *zanatany* across time reveals a particular conception of belonging that is intrinsically anchored in spatial transformation and undertaken with reverence for earlier-dwelling (human and spirit) beings rather than in occupancy, property-holding, or nativist rhetoric alone. Self-identified zanatany inhabitants in Mahajanga emphasized repeatedly that the material realm and the symbolic, moral realm are mutually constitutive—one cannot be severed from the other. For many zanatany, being a settler came with a weighty moral responsibility to explicitly recognize the presence of those who already inhabited the land—the living and the dead—and to act responsibly toward the ritual prescriptions that governed those spaces, most of which were often associated with Sakalava political forebears and spirits. Unlike other documented cases of newcomers-turned-natives, zanatany claims to belonging were not constructed as negations of the presence of earlier groups, but rather were bound up with mutual recognition of ongoing reciprocity between living humans and already-there spirits in situ.

Methods and Sources

This book emerges out of the space between the animate presences in the city and the material vestiges of the past and the ways those architectural and archival remains are recapitulated, remembered, and effaced. In large part, the project was guided and shaped through my encounters with the living in Mahajanga, who then taught me how to attend more purposefully to the dead—to listen to their voices arising in the dusty archive, in *tromba* (spirit possession) gatherings, and in places inhabited by irksome spirits, throughout the city.

Children of the Soil draws on more than a decade of historical and ethnographic research, of which three years were spent in Madagascar, between 2011 and 2014. My family and I visited Mahajanga briefly in 2009 for preliminary research and then returned in December 2011 for twenty-

nine months of intensive fieldwork. With our two young children in tow, we rented a home in the small fishing village of Amborovy-Petite Plage, just outside of Mahajanga, and we soon formed relationships with our neighbors and with families in town. Although I had studied Malagasy language for three years before arriving, I quickly encountered the politics of regional dialects and the shortcomings of using standard highland Malagasy in Mahajanga. Owing to ongoing tensions between coastal dwellers (*côtiers*) and highlanders and the historical dominance of highland polities across the island (discussed in chapter 2), standard Malagasy often carries negative connotations in the city. My search for a language instructor who could teach me the northwestern dialect spoken in the city led me to Ben Taoaby. Taoaby quickly became a dear friend and crucial intellectual collaborator. Born and raised in Mahajanga, Taoaby was from a mixed Comorian-Malagasy family that traced its roots across the region and to the Comorian archipelago. He was equipped with exceptional linguistic sensibilities and deftness for navigating social dynamics across ethnolinguistic lines. My first meeting with his parents, Mama and Papa Taoaby, revealed that our encounter was one knot in a broader tapestry of timescales and generations. Upon learning that I was an American researcher, Mama Taoaby fondly recalled her family's friendship with an American and her family who had lived for several years in Mama Taoaby's hometown, Analalava (some 430 kilometers [270 miles] away), in the 1970s. The realization that she was speaking of my mentor and dissertation advisor, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, brought us instant recognition and kinship; Mama Taoaby later insisted that our meeting was not happenstance but had been "destined" (*voa-soratra;* literally, "prewritten").

My collaborations with Ben Taoaby and his family shaped the course of this research in profound ways. During the early period of my research, Taoaby and I conducted many interviews together, and thereafter we spent countless afternoons with his parents on their veranda discussing the city's complicated social geography and layered histories. Mama and Papa Taoaby offered our family moral support, parenting advice, and stimulating intellectual provocations; our close partnership guided every step of my inquiry into how the past was remembered, invoked, and harnessed in contemporary Mahajanga. Their positioning as self-identified zanatany immersed me in the genealogical background and pressing concerns of this group of city inhabitants. A decisive shift came when Mama Taoaby facilitated my introduction to two *fikambanana*, which invited me to join them. She and the fikambanana members introduced me to other Comorian-Malagasy fami-

lies who traced their ancestry to the unions between Malagasy women and migrant men from present-day Comoros. Comprising women from varying generations and class levels, the fikambanana was historically an important social institution through which large events were organized. Most but not all of the fikambanana members observed Sunni Islam to varying degrees, and a small but noteworthy group engaged in Sakalava spirit possession.

In addition to ethnographic encounters through the fikambanana, I sought out families of varied backgrounds, including newer migrants of different geographical, ethnic, and generational positions, to provide a wider purview of the contested ways people have negotiated the politics of space in the city. Our family's immediate neighbors and their daughter introduced us to many more recently arrived migrant families and invited us to consultations with ritual practitioners as well as to funerals, burials and exhumations (*famidihana*), marriages, and circumcision celebrations. Several times we travelled with other migrants to their ancestral lands (*tanindrazana*) and family tombs in the northwest region and as far as the highlands. These overlapping networks enabled multiple entry points through which I met and spoke with long-standing residents and newer migrants from wide-ranging backgrounds. Altogether, I conducted more than 120 semi-structured interviews with city inhabitants, urban planners, shopkeepers, ritual specialists, and religious leaders in Mahajanga. Within these personal accounts, I tracked how and when narratives congealed around key events, people, and concepts—and where they diverged.

Buildings and crucial sites—their design, material composition, residues, and destruction—are the book's primary portals into the past. Although oral accounts and ethnographic fieldwork shed light on contemporary concerns, remembered pasts, and the historical consciousness of those living in the city, extensive archival research formed the base for accessing the sedimented histories of built forms. The National Archives of Madagascar in Antananarivo hold incredibly rich correspondence between Merina government officials and provincial representatives detailing wide-ranging attempts to rule and manage the northwest region. Authored entirely by Malagasy administrators from the 1820s (when highland monarchs conquered the coastal city of Mahajanga) to the 1890s (when French colonial authorities were encroaching), these precious sources illuminate the micropolitical struggles over urban sites and the ways city dwellers drew on built forms to negotiate colonial occupation by highlanders, long before French military troops arrived. To learn more about key terms and concepts that emerged, I juxtaposed these sources with historical dictionaries, histori-

cal linguistic studies, and collections of proverbs (*ohabolana*) and poetry. To render biographies of places and built forms during French colonial times, I collected documentary records, including city council records, regulatory acts, reports and correspondence, maps and blueprints, newspaper accounts, and photographs from the Centre des archives d'Outre-Mer in France and from multiple archives within Madagascar, as well as nineteenth-century missionary reports, shipping logs, and detailed diaries of two Europeans envoys collected at archives in North America and the United Kingdom. Personal family collections of photographs and land deeds, and discussions with families about the documents I gathered in the French colonial archives, generated collaborative, ongoing conversations that indelibly shaped this book.

My role as a researcher in this urban archive fluctuated, and the genres of this book reflect those changing roles. At some moments, I was a medium transmitting what people told me to write down—transferring relatively raw, firsthand oral narratives to curved letters on the page. At other times, I was an observant interpreter working with Malagasy collaborators to track how residents inhabited their houses, breathed life into them, and drew on them to craft subjectivities and navigate competing demands of nurturing life, hospitality, and protection. But built forms are not only singular, living places; they also have textual counterparts in government files and offices.[67] In that vein, I was also sometimes a sleuth, scouring through dusty municipal land deeds and records to pursue the documentary life of these selected buildings. Thus this book weaves together a variety of genres, including first-person narrative, textual sources, theoretical analysis, maps, and visual images, to tell a broader story of competing urbanisms, informed by affective ties, materials, and moral expectations.

This research was propelled by a desire to reckon with the material and ideological legacies of colonialism and racial capitalism, processes with which my personal family history is deeply entangled. The journey of writing this book was filled with profound uncertainty about how best to navigate the political weight of writing from my subject position—as a white Dutch-American woman, a descendant of colonial settlers, a privileged beneficiary of global systems of violent extraction—and from afar about people's lives and struggles in Madagascar. No words can resolve the material gap that enabled me to gather the recounted histories and far-flung documents of Mahajanga's past in ways wrongly denied to residents of the city. Encouraged by friends and collaborators in Mahajanga and emboldened by my vast ethical debts to them, I have chosen to write this

book to chronicle overlapping histories of belonging, exclusion, and city-making that are still unfolding. It is my hope that this book calls into question how urban societies, replete with conviviality and coercion, are made over time, and aids reimagined possibilities for building a different, livable world.

My positioning as an outsider and as a secondary-language learner of Malagasy both constrained what I could know and understand and allowed me to move across different social, linguistic, and status groups in Mahajanga, opening conversational lines that were more difficult for city residents to initiate among themselves. Yet this was not without risks and challenges. As my relationships with families of different backgrounds deepened, I found myself pulled into a tension-filled field marked at times by jealousy and allusions to the ethical dubiousness of the other families. When friends questioned my whereabouts or why I was spending time with families of suspect character, I continually explained that my purpose was to understand how Mahajanga's history (*tantara*) was remembered by different groups in the city. My account reflects my attempts to navigate these different loyalties and ongoing debts of knowledge production.

Writing histories of Mahajanga is an especially fraught endeavor within the contemporary context, when many Comorian-Malagasy families find themselves on the margins of political power and, in the aftermath of an expulsion of Comorians in the late 1970s, vulnerably marked as a religious minority in a predominantly Christian national context. Memories of the expulsion of Comorian and zanatany residents in 1976–77, which I address in the epilogue, are sometimes said to have been expunged from popular historical consciousness, but I found them to be still palpable and raw among older inhabitants, many of whom expressed explicit desires for the recuperation of early Islamic, Sakalava, and Comorian contributions to the city's history. As a scholar interested in lived memories and historical ethnography, I found myself burdened to expose the political fault lines on which partial apprehensions of the past unfurled, while attending to what David William Cohen called the forces at "the edges of our stories and of the stories being told to us."[68] This book reflects my attempt at historical bricolage, at bringing together the multiple, sometimes incommensurate, fragments of the past, sifting through and amalgamating them into a textured reinterpretation of lives lived.

Throughout this project, I take the city as a site of archival struggle—an accumulation of sediment, ever morphing and shifting, in which some deposits

adhere and solidify, while others erode with passages of time or active processes of neglect. There are very real geological processes of sedimentation of the city, but there are also human interventions in this sedimentation, where people layer their building materials, waste, memories, and personal belongings into a plastered palimpsest abounding with imprints of lives in transformation. If the city is a laminated archive, then its inhabitants are the archivists, curating—whether through preservation and repair, burial and destruction—their homes and mosques, streets and parks, as well as their personal photographs, documents, and possessions that bear witness to some pasts, while forgetfully effacing others. Interrogating this archive requires privileging Malagasy and Comorians as the primary knowledge-makers and brokers, the intentional curators of their architectural archive, and the anticipatory casters of their city.

In the end, it is just one story among the many that could be told.

Introduction

Abbreviations: CPL/EIC (Cleveland Public Library, East India Collection, Cleveland, Ohio, United States); NWL (Rare Books Collection, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University Library, Evanston, Illinois, United States).

1 While the official spelling of honorific names is Maman'i Nasra, Maman'i Khalil, and so forth, I will use "Mama" throughout to reflect the local verbal usage of these names. All names are fictitious to guarantee anonymity, except in circumstances where interlocutors provided consent. In some cases, individuals selected their own pseudonyms.

2 Stone houses have a long, important history in Indian Ocean architecture, which will be addressed further in chapters 2, 3, and 5. Fieldnotes, September 17, 2012.

3 My approach to biographies of built sites is inspired by Wynne-Jones, "Biographies of Practice," 157–58, with an emphasis on labor as a key practice.

4 Lefebvre made the foundational argument that built space is highly politicized, socially constructed, and deeply intertwined in socioeconomic forces. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 33–46. Scholars working across many fields—anthropology, geography, urban studies, architectural history—have built on this insight to unpack the relationship between agency and built environment. This work has been surveyed in Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, *Anthropology of Space and Place*; Buchli, *Anthropology of Architecture*; Beauregard, *Planning Matter*. On the structuring capacities of buildings, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Bourdieu, "Kabyle House."

5 A vast literature discusses the symbolic dimensions of houses. See Blier, *Anatomy of Architecture*; Carsten and Hugh-Jones, *About the House*; Waterson, *Living House*. On material arrangements and properties, see Gieryn, "What Buildings Do"; Yaneva, *Five Ways*; Hommels, *Unbuilding Cities*.

6 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*; Ginzburg, *Cheese and the Worms*; Cohen, *Combing of History*; Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*.

7 For discussions of post-structuralist influences on historians, see L. Hunt, *Writing History*, 19–23; Eley, *Crooked Line*, 154–60.

8 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Anderson and Soto Laveaga, "Decolonizing Histories"; Murphy, "Some Keywords"; Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor."

9 Meskell, "Introduction," 1–2.

10 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past,* 30.

11 Engelke, "Spirit." African studies scholars have long foregrounded the role of ancestors and spirits in the politics and practice of everyday life. Selected works include Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*; Feeley-Harnik, *Green Estate*; Graeber, *Lost People*; S. Green, *Sacred Sites*; Johnson, *Spirited Things*; Lambek, *Weight of the Past*; West, *Kupilikula*; R. Shaw, *Memories of Slave Trade*; Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces*, 58–65; Fontein, *Politics of the Dead*.

12 As archaeologist Zoë Crossland pointed out, in her rich study on the presence of the dead in highland Madagascar, "There is little sense of a separate world of the dead for many people in Madagascar." Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters*, 15.

13 Here, I build on an extensive body of scholarly work that challenges the notion of the colonial (or postcolonial) state as the primary shaper of urban life, and instead reveals the hopes, ideas, tactics, and agentive acts of Africans in the eras leading up to European imperial expansion, including Schoenbrun, *Green Place*; Fields-Black, "Untangling"; Allman and Tashjian, *I Will Not Eat Stone*, xxiii; de Luna, *Collecting Food*.

14 *Madagascar: A World Apart*, released in 1998, is the title of season 2 of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series *The Living Edens*.

15 Beaujard, "First Migrants to Madagascar"; Radimilahy and Crossland, "Situating Madagascar"; Boivin et al., "East Africa and Madagascar."

16 Hooper, *Feeding Globalization*, 5. See also Larson, *History and Memory,* and *Ocean of Letters*; Sanchez, "État marchand et État agraire."

17 Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean*, 11–15.

18 Literally "people of the sea." Rantoandro, "Une Communauté Mercantile"; Sanchez, "Navigation et gens de mer," 119; also see Middleton, *World of the Swahili*, 20–22. There is some slippage between categories of "Comorian" and "Antalaotra" as many Antalaotra came from Hadramawt to Madagascar in the latter nineteenth century via the Comoros; see Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks*, 72.

19 Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*.

20 Boyer-Rossol, "De Morima à Morondava."

21 Guyer and Belinga frame this strategy of pulling together people with diverse knowledge and expertise as "composition"; see Guyer and Belinga, "Wealth in People," 110. See also Schoenbrun, "(In)visible Roots"; Stahl, "Africa in the World"; Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Authorisation." On Madagascar, see Lombard, *Le Royaume Sakalava*; Feeley-Harnik, *Green Estate*.

22 Bayart, "Africa in the World," 237.

23 Ruud, *Taboo*; Lambek, "Taboo as Cultural Practice"; Walsh, "Responsibility."

24 Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 34–35.

25 Ghaidan, "Lamu"; H. Wright, "Early Islam"; Blanchy et al., "Guide"; Gensheimer, "Globalization"; Um, *Merchant Houses*; Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*. For overviews, see Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili*; Wynne-Jones and LaViolette, *Swahili World*.

26 *Fanjakana* denotes a culturally and historical mode of governance by "state," "kingdom," or constellation of royal rulers. As early as 1658, French administrator Étienne de Flacourt defined *fanjakana* as "administration, administrator, master, to reign, kingdom" (*Dictionnaire de la langue*, 20). Rich, subsequent scholarship on Madagascar in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has documented the wide variation of governance approaches associated with fanjakana; see, for instance, Raison-Jourde, *Les souverains*; Feeley-Harnik, *Green Estate*; Larson, *History and Memory*; Ballarin, *Les reliques royales*; Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters*.

27 James Hastie estimated the population in 1824 at 12,000; Hastie, journal, July 2, 1824, CPL/EIC. Guillain writing two decades later estimated 10,000. Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 213.

28 Noël, "Ile de Madagascar"; Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*.

29 Kus and Raharijaona, "House to Palace," 103.

30 Key traits across many Swahili coastal cities are the central location of mosques, concepts of ritual purity, and spatial control and containment of women. On this and fuller explorations of Swahili urban settlements, see Pradines, "Commerce maritime"; Wynne-Jones and Fleisher, "Swahili Urban Spaces," 117; Fleisher et al., "When Did the Swahili Become Maritime?"; Horton, "Islamic Architecture."

31 Rasoamiaramanana, "Pouvoir merina," 323.

32 Rasoamiaramanana, *Aspects économique*; Campbell, *Structure of Slavery*.

33 J. S. Leigh, "Journal of Travels in Eastern Africa, Including Somalia, Mozambique, and Zanzibar, 1836–1840," December 28, 1836, unpublished manuscript, Rare Books Collection, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University Library (NWL).

34 Campbell, "History of Nineteenth Century," 332–33.

35 Campbell, "Slavery and Fanompoana," 468–72.

36 Grandidier, *Voyage à Madagascar*, 121–22; emphasis added.

37 Ferrand, "Notes sur Madagascar," 232.

38 Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory*; Campbell, *Economic History of Imperial Madagascar*.

39 Archaeologist Severin Fowles notes that this defining feature of "absence" stretched across Western understandings of nonwestern histories in "People without Things"; similarly, Trouillot pointed out in "Anthropology and the Savage Slot" that such absences and lacks were critical to constructions used to justify colonization.

40 On "laboratories," see Wright, *Politics of Design*; Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities*; Harris and Myers, "Hybrid Housing."

41 De Raulin, "Majunga," 310.

42 See, for example, de Lanessan, *L'expansion colonial*, 362–65.

43 The ethnonym "Comorians" is problematic because it effaces both the wide range of ethnic and religious affiliations and the varying cultural practices, across the archipelago. It also collapses the complicated history by which the category of "Comorians" was constructed through French census reports and administrative mechanisms. Following local usage in Mahajanga, however, "Comorian" here denotes individuals from the archipelago islands, and primarily from Ngazidja (Grande Comore) and Ndzwani (Anjouan). It refers to first-generation immigrants and those who continued to identify themselves as "Comorians" in oral interviews, yet it is critical to note that identities in contemporary northwest Madagascar are never singular, unilateral, or mutually exclusive. Thompson and Adloff, *Malagasy Republic*, 270. On the 50 percent figure, see Deschamps, *Les migrations intérieures*, 146–47. Importantly, national censuses may have classified zanatany (first-generation descendants of Comorian and Malagasy parentage) as "Malagasy."

44 Gueunier, *Chemins de l'Islam*, 44.

45 Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social*; Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*; Cooper, *Struggle for the City*; Burton, *African Underclass*; Penvenne, *Women, Migration*; Abu-Lughod, "Tale of Two Cities"; Swanson, "Sanitation Syndrome"; Goerg, "From Hill Station"; Wright, *Politics of Design*; Rabinow, *French Modern*; Çelik, *Urban Forms*; Bissell, *Urban Design*. For a synthesis, see Coquery-Vidrovitch, *History of African Cities*, 277–316.

46 White, *Comforts of Home*; P. Martin, *Leisure and Society*; Akyeampong, *Drink, Power*; Fair, *Pastimes and Politics*; Mager, *Beer, Sociability, and Masculinity*; Ivaska, *Cultured States*; Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*; Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*; Quayson, *Oxford Street*; Callaci, *Street Archives*; Fair, *Reel Pleasures*; De Boeck and Baloji, *Suturing the City*.

47 Myers, *Verandahs of Power*; Harris and Myers, "Hybrid Housing"; Brennan, *Taifa*; Makhulu, *Making Freedom*; Melly, *Bottleneck*; Morton, *Age of Concrete*; Gastrow, "DIY Verticality"; Fourchard, "Between World History."

48 Morton, *Age of Concrete*, 14–15.

49 Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*; Nys-Ketels et al., "Planning Belgian Congo's Network"; Miescher, "Building the City," 367–76.

50 Hansen, *Keeping House*; Hoffman, *Monrovia Modern*; Morton, "Shape of Aspiration." Beyond African contexts, see Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship*; Fischer et al., *Cities from Scratch*; Harms, *Saigon's Edge*; Agha and Lambert, "Outrage."

51 See especially Nielson, "Wedge of Time"; Gastrow, "Cement Citizens"; Archambault, "One Beer, One Block." Beyond Africa, see Navaro-Yashin, *Make-Believe Space*; Abourahme, "Assembling and Spilling-Over." On im-

provisational strategies in Africa, see De Boeck and Plissart, *Kinshasa*; Simone, *For the City*.

52 For example, Otter, "Locating Matter"; Bennett and Joyce, *Material Powers*; Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces*; Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs*; Hecht, "Interscalar Vehicles"; Tsing, *Mushroom at the End*; Raffles, *Insectopedia*; Pilo and Jaffe, "Introduction"; von Schnitzler, *Democracy's Infrastructure*; Fehérváry, *Politics in Color and Concrete*. In East African and Swahili coast contexts, Wynne-Jones, "Thinking Houses through Time," 166–67; Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption"; Hanson, *Landed Obligation*; Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Authorisation and the Process," 189.

53 Siddiqi, "Introduction," 495.

54 Ingold, "Materials against Materiality," 9–10. My approach to "materials and materiality" is especially inspired by the work of Ingold, as well as by other anthropologists and archaeologists, including Miller, *Material Cultures*; Miller et al., *Materiality*; Insoll, *Material Explorations*.

55 Auslander, "Beyond Words," 1018. Over the past two decades, other scholars have made related observations, including LeCain, *Matter of History*; N. R. Hunt, "History as Form"; Findlen, "Objects of History." Didier Nativel makes this point for Madagascar in "À chacun selon ses moyens," 47. For a discussion of the relationship between historical texts and material culture, see Auslander, et al., "AHR Conversation," 1354–1404. Key material-centered histories include N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects*; N. R. Hunt, *Colonial Lexicon*; Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land*; Jütte, *Strait Gate*; Hecht, *Being Nuclear*; Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial*.

56 Scholz, "Ghosts and Miracles," 493.

57 See Ballantyne, "Architecture as Evidence," 36–37; Apotsos, *Architecture, Islam, and Identity*, 20–27; see also the special issue "On Evidence," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 76, no. 4 (2017). For considerations of African architecture, see Prussin, "Introduction"; Blier, *Anatomy of Architecture*; Strother, "Architecture against the State"; Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*; Carey, "Creole Architectural Translation."

58 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 49–53.

59 Feeley-Harnik, *Green Estate*; Lambek, *Weight of the Past*.

60 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

61 Spear, "Neo-traditionalism and the Limits"; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*; Peterson, "Be Like Firm Soldiers"; Brennan, *Taifa*. John Lonsdale contrasts "moral ethnicity" with "political tribalism," which concerns the ways collective ethnic identities get harnessed in political contestations, in "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau." On the concept of "race" within African studies, see Pierre, *Predicament of Blackness.* Highly relevant for this study, historian Jonathon Glassman has emphasized how racialized discourses animated exchanges between elite intelligentsia (who considered themselves Arab) and "subaltern intellectuals" (linked to African and Shirazi groups) in Zanzibar for whom the rights of citizenship were increas-

ingly allocated based on claims to place and belonging; see Glassman, *War of Words*.

62 For the former, see Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, "Capitalism and Autochthony"; Hodgson, "Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous"; Pelican, "Complexities of Indigeneity and Autochthony"; Meiu, "Panics over Plastics." For the latter, see Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 96–100, 178–200; Hanson, *Landed Obligation*; Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging*; Newbury, *Cohesion of Oppression*; Hall, *History of Race in Muslim West Africa*; Lee, *Unreasonable Histories*. Taken collectively, this scholarship has demonstrated several important insights: the distribution of citizenship rights based on territorial claims has been observed in some regions since earliest times; being "local" is reworked by historical actors to accord to their particular circumstances; and the long-standing presence of racial and ethnic difference shaped fervent, exclusionary nationalisms in post-independent times.

63 This study is particularly informed by the work of Prita Meier, who has illuminated how Swahili urban citizens drew on distinctive stone architectural designs of homes and mosques to express their "in between" ties to historical Indian Ocean littoral communities. Meier argues that generations of Swahili coastal dwellers paradoxically summoned the fixity of calcified stone architecture to make overlapping, and at times competing, claims to authentic belonging that hinged on nonterritoriality and transoceanic connections, even if the import of stone structures shifted over time. See Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*, 187. Debates about belonging in Mahajanga diverge from those described in Swahili coastal towns, however, in that they have always unfolded in a more-than-human landscape—one inhabited by ancestral presences, spirits, and associated prohibitions tied to the land—that has shaped not only understandings of who can claim mastery over land, but also moral norms defining ethically responsible land occupation and construction.

64 Mauss, "Les techniques du corps"; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. See also Casey, *Fate of Place*.

65 Pier Larson called for "careful readings of African names of belonging" as a critical way to excavate how and when particular practices of ethnicity gained traction and helped shore up political allegiances. See Larson, "Desperately Seeking 'the Merina,'" 560.

66 Other zana-terms described by Abinal and Malzac include *zanakazo* (young plant or tree), *zanadandy* (chrysalides of silk worms), and *zanabiby* (offspring of an animal). See Abinal and Malzac, *Dictionnaire*, 832.

67 Hull, *Government of Paper*.

68 Cohen, *Combing of History*, 21.