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Making Identity on the Swahili Coast

Situated at a crossroads of trade in the late nineteenth century, and later the economic capital of German East Africa, the thriving caravan and port town of Bagamoyo, Tanzania is one of many diverse communities on the East African coast which has been characterized as "Swahili." Seeking an alternate framework for understanding community and identity, Steven Fabian combines extensive sources from African and European archives alongside fieldwork in Bagamoyo to move beyond the category of "Swahili" as it has been traditionally understood.

Revealing how townspeople – Africans, Arabs, Indians, and Europeans alike – created a local vocabulary which referenced aspects of everyday town life and bound them together as members of a shared community, this first extensive examination of Bagamoyo's history from the pre-colonial era to independence uses a new lens of historical analysis to emphasize the importance of place in creating local, urban identities, and suggests a broader understanding of these concepts historically along the Swahili coast.

STEVEN FABIAN is an associate professor of history at the State University of New York at Fredonia. Awarded two of Canada's most prestigious scholarships by the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Trust Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, his research has appeared in journals such as the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, and the *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. He was President of the Tanzania Studies Association from 2015 to 2017 and currently serves as co-chair of *Radical History Review*.

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Making Identity on the Swahili Coast

Urban Life, Community, and Belonging in Bagamoyo

STEVEN FABIAN
State University of New York

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For my family, my teachers and professors, and the Wabagamoyo

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Preface

The East African port town of Bagamoyo first caught my attention while I was pursuing my Master's degree. I learned about how, in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, the townspeople there were used to having their lives interrupted regularly by the arrival of fleets of dhows from across the western Indian Ocean, as well as by caravans of porters numbering in the thousands from the Great Lakes of Central Africa. As someone who grew up in Victoria, British Columbia – a port town – and who benefited from an economy focused on catering to great numbers of people who came from elsewhere – working in the tourism industry – I felt there were some things I could relate to with the people of Bagamoyo.

It should not come as a surprise that scholars often choose research topics based on personal experiences. My interest in examining the history of Bagamoyo through a framework of identity emerges from having lived for extended periods of time in different cities. For anyone who has ever had to move, they will be intimate with the process of orientation and settling-in that I refer to in this book as "localization." This includes getting to know one's neighborhood, one's neighbors, new colleagues, local news outlets, learning new landmarks, where to find the best places to eat, where to shop, and so on. Above all else, one experiences the gradual process of mastering a "local vocabulary": the local bits of history and lore – events, personalities, scandals, crises, celebrations, local feuds of all varieties – that define a place and its community, allowing you to exchange knowing glances with complete strangers you meet on the street. Any town, any city, anywhere possesses its own kinds of codes for assessing levels of familiarity.

The towns of the Swahili coast were no different. Although scholars described diverse groups of Africans, Indians, Arabs, and Europeans intermingling with the Swahili, they rarely focused upon these diverse communities' own sense of local attachments to the towns in which they worked and lived. This struck me as a consequence of the analyses

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they used, which often equated urban culture with Swahili culture. While the Swahili have deep roots in the urban communities of the East African coastline and, thus, have their own system of distinguishing insiders from outsiders, this could not have stopped other communities from having their own systems too. In cities around the world, native inhabitants like to debate about how long it takes for an outsider to become localized; the debate is complex because there is no single correct answer.

The following story is a brief account of how I perceived my own sense of belonging in Bagamoyo. I first began visiting Bagamoyo from Dar es Salaam on weekends. It didn't take long before the *kondas* (the conductors of the mini-busses, or *daladalas*) at the Mwenge bus station in Dar began calling me *mzungu wa Bagamoyo* (the white person of Bagamoyo) because this is where I always traveled to. In Bagamoyo, however, despite my increasing reputation around town as *Bwana Mrefu* – Mr. Tall (I'm 6′3″) – the inhabitants did not view me as a member of their community. When I asked my interview subjects whether I *could* become a member of the Wabagamoyo (the people of Bagamoyo), they would look at me skeptically and nod slowly, but with the qualification that it would take some time. And yet, over nine months, I came to know the landmarks, recognize local personalities, got to know several locals well, knew when the fishermen would arrive on the beach to sell their catches, and gradually got to know some "local vocabulary" as my research assistants and contacts regularly updated me on the latest news (*ngomas*, funerals, crime). Above all, I knew a lot more about the town's history than many of them gave me credit for. What was always fascinating to observe during my interviews with the town elders was their reactions to my interview prompts. If I asked them in an open-ended way to tell me about any aspect of the town's history or its citizens, we never really got anywhere. If, however, I asked them about something specific – like the *lelemama* rivalries examined in Chapter 3 – they would express surprise and ask how I knew about this (the story was in the archives). Knowing this "local vocabulary" became a passkey to opening up a lively conversation about town lore and, in the process, these people further localized me. This book is about exploring this phenomenon in relation to urban life and community historically in a Swahili town.

The task of extracting a sense of local identity among the townspeople of Bagamoyo from European archival material is challenging,

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but not impossible. How does one interpret records written by white men who were often oppressing the very people we are interested in writing histories about? Europeans actually provided illuminating evidence of the existence of a Bagamoyo community, since their very presence in the town often triggered reactions among the townspeople that can be explained as a spatially-based community response to outsiders. This took various forms, such as the town's celebratory and boisterous welcoming of visitors and porters; however, other manifestations were more tense and violent, such as land ownership disputes between French missionaries and the Wabagamoyo, as well as the uproar that marked the Bagamoyo chapter of the Coastal Uprising of 1888–1890, sparked by the German takeover of the Tanzanian coastline. Not all of the townspeople's behavior was prompted by Europeans however; documents also reveal urban community responses to the Sultan of Zanzibar and his representatives stationed in the town. The Sultan's struggle for influence over the bustling port can be witnessed in his efforts to maintain the loyalty of his representatives posted to Bagamoyo. Other manifestations of Wabagamoyo behavior reveal themselves in responses to local crises and local rivalries or tensions. It is also important not to dismiss the descriptions of the mundane found in the sources which reveal the nuances of everyday life; travelers often left behind enlightening accounts as they tried to make sense of various scenes which were wholly novel to them.

The material used in this book is drawn from archives found in Tanzania, Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. It must be noted, however, that sources for the German colonial period (1886–1916) are scant because German colonial administrators destroyed or buried many of their records during World War I. For example, neither monthly nor annual reports of Bagamoyo District are to be found between 1892 and 1916. This made the task of reconstructing the history of Bagamoyo for this period more challenging; however, I supplemented archival sources with a significant body of late nineteenth-century German, English, and French travelogue literature. French Catholic missionary records were also of great assistance in reconstructing the period of German rule. All French and German translations are my own. While a lack of German documentation proved a source of frustration during my research, I did have the good fortune to examine documents which had scarcely been used by other researchers before myself: Father Gallus Marandu of the

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Catholic Mission in Bagamoyo provided me with a transcribed collection of French missionary correspondence written in the crucial years of 1888–1890 during the Coastal Uprising, documents which had only been used once before in a Dutch doctoral dissertation.[1] These letters provided a richly detailed account of the Bagamoyo community during those tumultuous months. Jane Parpart and Marianne Rostgaard also generously provided me with letters from a Danish employee of the German East African Company, Christian Lautherborn, who escaped to Bagamoyo from Pangani during the Coastal Uprising. Lautherborn provides details of the reconstruction of Bagamoyo town in which he took a leading role.[2]

With regards to the issues of representing women and enslaved Africans, the preface written by Matthew S. Hopper for his monograph does a superb job in succinctly reviewing the significant works of Spivak, Prakash, Troutt Powell, and Toledano. These scholars all caution historians about the problems of "re-presenting" the voices of the voiceless, and whether we can ever really do so adequately.[3] With regards to my book, despite having access to diverse archives, I found very few sources written by women and the formerly enslaved population; yet, both of these groups represented substantial percentages of the town's population and counted themselves among the Wabagamoyo. This made the women's interviews that I conducted – sixteen in total – all the more valuable. While elite Muslim women may have limited their visibility in public, and the courtyard space in many homes in Bagamoyo may have been dominated by women performing reproductive labor, there is no question that women of all backgrounds were very much a part of the public spaces in town. Women move throughout the book: guarding shops along Indian Street and managing stalls at the markets; catching and drying fish along the beach; ululating their welcome to the upcountry porters arriving with loads of valuable cargo; dominating community discourse in the 1930s and 1940s; and, as seen in the cover image of this book, performing

[1] H. G. M. Tullemans, *Père Étienne Baur en de Arabische opstaand van 1888–1889*. PhD thesis, Universiteit Utrecht (1982).
[2] Parpart and Rostgaard have since published Lautherborn's correspondence: see Jane Parpart and Marianne Rostgaard, eds., *The Practical Imperialist: Letters from a Danish Planter in German East Africa, 1888–1906* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
[3] Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), ix–xi.

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mundane tasks which enabled them to observe everyday life in Bagamoyo. They later translated their observations into news, gossip, and rumor which became the building blocks of local identity.

The same is true of the enslaved population. Despite having to endure a public status that defined them as the property of their owners instead of owners of their own personal identities, enslaved Africans were to be seen everywhere around town fulfilling tasks, sometimes in a very explicit public function as the eyes and ears of their masters and mistresses.[4] This required them to develop a deep familiarity with local people and places in order to be effective as messengers and spies. But slaves also developed social and economic networks of their own in town, possessing invaluable skills as carpenters, sailors, and farmers which earned them profit. Like in many other port towns and cities around the world that were home to a large, urban slave force, when enslaved Africans purchased their freedom, or their owners emancipated them in recognition of distinguished service, many continued to reside in town to take advantage of their familiarity with the space, as well as the hard-won reputations they had built for themselves while enslaved.[5] While the available evidence does not allow me to treat the enslaved population as thoroughly as I would like, there are enough strands to weave their stories into the book in smaller, but still significant, ways.

In addition to finding a number of petitions and letters to colonial officials authored by Africans, Arabs, and Indians, I gathered nearly forty interviews among the elders of Bagamoyo who offered insight into the British and early independence periods (1919–1961), as well as personal reflections about local urban identity. These interviews were conducted in Kiswahili using two local research assistants, Nzige Kawaka and Kenny Mleke. Both sought out potential interviewees on my behalf and interpreted for me during the course of the interviews. Most conversations took place in the subject's home or wherever they felt most comfortable. Family members would often join at the behest

[4] Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Commodity, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 16–17.

[5] Fair, *Pastimes*; Mieko Nishida, *Slavery and Identity: Ethnicity, Gender, and Race in Salvador, Brazil, 1808-1888* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, *Slavery in New York* (New York: The New Press, 2005); Mariana L. R. Dantas, *Black Townsmen: Urban Slavery and Freedom in the Eighteenth-Century Americas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

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of the interviewee, particularly for older Muslim women who were conscious of their *heshima* and reputation regarding being in the presence of two men. These sessions became somewhat collaborative because the elders' adult children would often fill in the blanks of certain stories, or even prompt particular memories from their parents. The interviews were later transcribed by Kawaka and Mleke, and then finally translated into English by Patricia Luyangi, a Tanzanian living and studying in Halifax, Canada, who used both the transcriptions and tapes.

The completion of this book owes a certain debt to many, many people – directly and indirectly – who assisted me along the way. Research was only made possible due to generous funding by Dalhousie University's Faculty of Graduate Studies, the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am grateful to the staff at the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) for processing and granting me my research permit, as well as Abdul Sheriff and the staff at the Zanzibar National Archives who gave me permission to undertake research in their lovely reading room. At the University of Dar es Salaam, Bertrand Mapunda and Florian Kimolo gave their time to help me secure the COSTECH research permit. In Bagamoyo, I was grateful to Bwana Lucas Kadelya of the Department of Antiquities for providing me with contacts in town, helping me with my research, and for many conversations on the *baraza* of the caravanserai. Father Gallus Marandu of the Museum of the Catholic Mission was extremely kind in not only providing me with access to the library of the mission, but also in allowing me to use a room in the historic sisters' house to work on transcriptions. My oral research in town would not have been accomplished without the help of my two enthusiastic research assistants, Nzige Kawaka and Kenny Mleke; they were also fantastic guides to Bagamoyo and provided many stories of contemporary life in the town. Special thanks goes as well to all the archivists and librarians who made work possible in numerous places in Europe and North America listed in the Bibliography; in particular, I would like to thank Jamie McIntosh, the Special Collections Assistant at the National Library of Scotland, who was of tremendous help in verifying important details for me at the eleventh hour related to Lt. Verney Lovett Cameron's stay in Bagamoyo.

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Excerpts of this book were previously published as journal articles: parts of Chapters 1 and 6 were published as "Curing the Cancer of the Colony: Bagamoyo, Dar es Salaam and Socioeconomic Struggle in German East Africa," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40:3 (2007), while Chapter 4 was published previously as "Locating the Local in the Coastal Uprising of 1888–1890," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7:3 (2013). I thank both journals for permission to reproduce these articles in this book.

I am also grateful to various people from Cambridge University Press for their support and assistance in bringing the manuscript into its current form: Abigail Walkington, Cassi Roberts, Robert Judkins, Ishwarya Mathavan, Liz Steel, Maria Marsh, and Toyin Falola. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers for their thorough comments on my manuscript which strengthened it considerably and saved me considerable embarrassment by raising points I had overlooked. Special recognition must go to Carina Ray, who has been an author's dream editor – despite juggling what must have been several dozen important things at once, Carina still found the time to look over various drafts of my chapters, and to talk for extended periods of time over the phone and at conferences to sort out ideas and issues to strengthen this book. Her reassurances and overall investment in me and this manuscript were invaluable.

Many people who were important to me and my research during the book's first incarnation as a doctoral dissertation have been warmly acknowledged in those pages; since 2007, some of those names bear repeating – while others are newly introduced – for offering me advice, encouragement, and support as I transformed the dissertation into a book: Matt Bender, Jim Brennan, Emily Burrill, Matt Carotenuto, Jan-Georg Deutsch, John Grant, Trina Hogg, Matt Hopper, Benjamin Lawrence, Liz McMahon, Michelle Moyd, Nate Plageman, Stephen Rockel, Brett Shadle, Liz Vlossak, and Sarah Zimmerman. Laura Fair and Roman Loimeier both offered thoughtful suggestions on papers I presented at conferences which became chapters of this book. Corrie Decker and Dave Eaton also provided constructive criticism of various chapters. Michelle Moyd took precious time out of her own archival research to hunt down sources on slavery that I had overlooked in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin. Over the past decade, my colleagues in the Department of History at the State University of New York at Fredonia, particularly David Kinkela and Emily Straus, made sure that my

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work could be understood outside of a specialist audience. I also owe successive chairs of my department – John Staples and Mary Beth Sievens – for giving me the time needed to bring this manuscript to completion without inducing panic attacks. Finally, I owe my PhD supervisor, Phil Zachernuk, a world of gratitude for seeing something in me that I clearly didn't when this all began back in 2001. His brilliance, sense of humor, and (adorably) annoying ability to ask questions that cause a lot of reflection and reconsidering – the "Phil question" – provided me with support and the necessary tools to carry out and complete this project.

Of course, it's also crucial that one has networks outside of academia to ground one's self and which support you in many other important ways. I thank my newest friends across western New York, particularly David Kaplin, for finding all the best ways to distract me from work so I can return refreshed and sane. My parents – Diane and Dave Allan – have been there for me when I've despaired over whether anyone would ever care what I had to say. My siblings and their families deserve mention too, particularly Barb Fabian and Nick Bennett. Finally, my new family – the Breens – have welcomed me with open arms and cheered on my progress with the manuscript. Significant breakthroughs and sections of chapters were conceived in the peace and quiet of their lovely cottage overlooking the northern shore of Lake Erie. To Tom: your patience with me has been nothing short of extraordinary. You gave me the time, freedom, and love that I needed to see this beast through. Thank you.

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A Note on Spellings and Currency

Spelling

I typically left names spelled as I found them in the sources; however, for place names and other Swahili words, I use Swahili spellings instead of German (i.e. Bagamojo [German] = Bagamoyo [Swahili]. Similarly, *Schauri* (German) = *shauri* (Swahili). I left Arabic words generally as they were spelled in the documents, although I use "sheikh" instead of the German "*Schech*." Finally, I refer to African societies without using the plural Wa- prefix (i.e. Swahili instead of Waswahili; Zaramo instead of Wazaramo). I only use the prefix for communities defined by place (Wabagamoyo, Wamrima) to avoid confusion with the names of the places themselves.

Currency

From the 1840s to the early 1900s, there were two main accepted forms of currency in use at Bagamoyo: the Maria Theresa *thaler* ($) and the Indian rupee (Rs).

The rupee was divided into 64 *pice*, or *pesa*, as the Wabagamoyo called them. One *thaler* ($), which was also equal to one American dollar,[1] equaled approximately two rupees (Rs),[2] although this fluctuated throughout the nineteenth century (as much as Rs 2.23).[3]

[1] Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 1977), xv.
[2] J. W. T. Allen, ed., *The Customs of the Swahili People: The Desturi za Waswahili of Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari and Other Swahili Persons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 231.
[3] Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London: James Currey, 1987), xix.

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One *thaler* ($) was equal to approximately 2.92 German marks (Reichsmark or RM) during the 1890s. One British pound sterling (£) was worth about $4.75 in the 1890s, or about Rs 10.[4]

In 1905, the Germans replaced the Indian rupee with the East African Rupee and replaced the *pesa* with the *heller*, so that a rupee became worth 100 *heller* instead of 64 *pesa*.

From 1920 to 1961, the British used the East African Shilling instead of the East African Rupee, equal in value to the British shilling, which was divided into 100 cents. Twenty shillings equaled one British pound sterling.[5] The word *pesa* was still used, however, to refer to two and a half cents, while a *heller* referred to two cents.[6]

[4] Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation Without Abolition in German East Africa c.1884–1914* (London: James Currey, 2006), vii.
[5] John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), xiii.
[6] Allen, *Customs*, 231.

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A Note on Nomenclature

Due to the nature of much of the colonial archive, it is challenging to determine a more clearly articulated identity of certain communities in the sources on Bagamoyo. Europeans often referred to "Arabs" in a very broad sense, which masked various ethnic, religious, and even racial distinctions: Hadrami, Ibadhi, Shihiri, Swahili, Wamanga, etc. European observers treated "Indians" similarly, who otherwise self-identified as Bohras, Goans, Hindus, Khoja Ismailis, Khoja Ithna'-sheris, etc. Where possible, I use these narrower identifications; when they are grouped together more generally, I use the terms "Omani" or "Omani Arab" and "Indian" to at least indicate a narrower geographic terrain. That said, I still employ the vaguely defined "Arab" as an identification, particularly in the context of East Africa, where it may refer to people who are not from the Omani region, like the various Swahili communities. I eschew "South Asian," which strikes me as too broad a definition; most of those referred to as Indian in the sources came from western India, in particular the northwestern region known as Kutch.

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Abbreviations

AAKA	Auswärtige Amt, Kolonialabteilung
ACS	Assistant Chief Secretary
ADM	Admiralty
AStEsp	Archives des St Espirt, Chevilly-Larue, France
BAB	Bundesarchiv, Berlin
BG	Bulletin Général
Bi.	Bibi
BJ	Bagamoyo Journal
BL	British Library
CO	Colonial Office
CS	Chief Secretary
DC	District Commissioner
DKB	Deutsches Kolonialblatt
DKZ	Deutsches Kolonialzeitung
DO	District Office/r
DOAG	Deutsch Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft
DOAZ	Deutsch Ostafrikanische Zeitung
DSM	Dar es Salaam
FO	Foreign Office
IBEAC	Imperial British East Africa Company
MCMB	Museum of the Catholic Mission, Bagamoyo
Mz.	Mzee
NA	National Archives at Kew, United Kingdom
NLS	National Library of Scotland
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PCEP	Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province
RCDO	Regional Commissioner Development Officer
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
TAA	Tanganyika African Association
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union

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TAPA	Tanzania African Parents Association
TNA	Tanzania National Archives
TRPS	Très Révérend Père Supérieur
ZNA	Zanzibar National Archives

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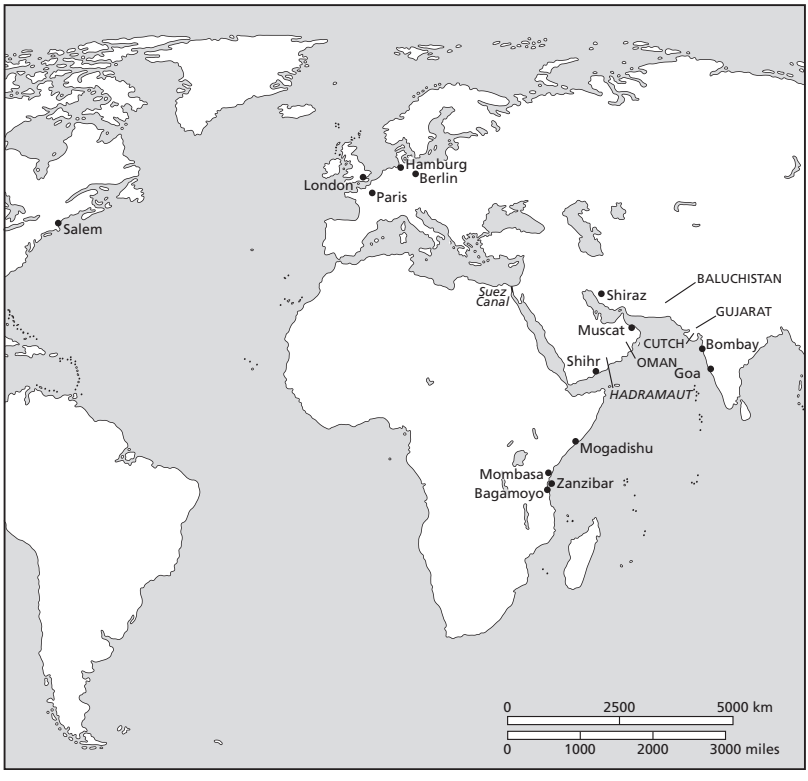

Map 1 Western Indian Ocean

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Map 2 Tanzania and feature ethnic groups

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Map 3 Bagamoyo hinterland and feature ethnic groups

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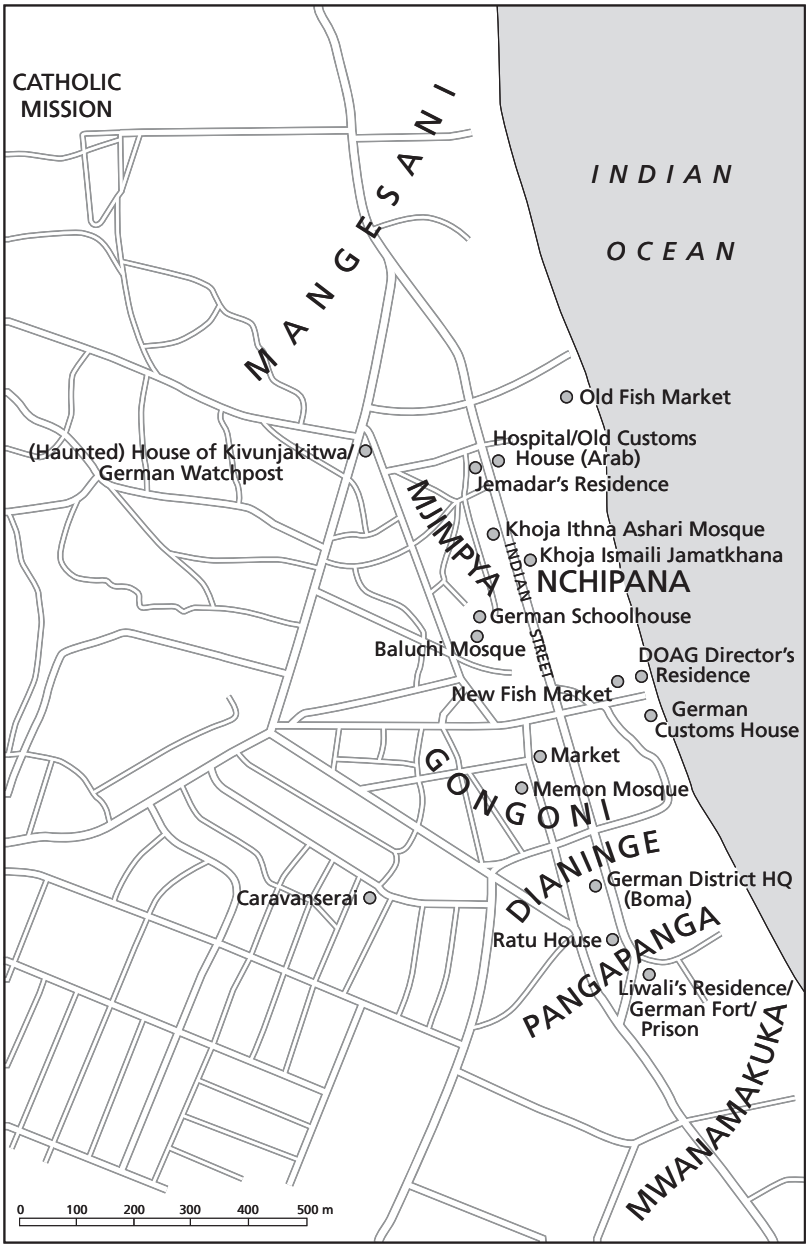

Map 4 Bagamoyo Town

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