Introduction

Visitors arriving in Bagamoyo by dhow in the nineteenth century often remarked upon the pleasant and welcoming impression the town made upon them as they approached it from the wide expanse of its shallow bay. The beach sloped gently upward from the shoreline toward a street lined on either side with whitewashed, two and three-storied houses of coral rag laid out parallel to the Indian Ocean shore. Elaborately carved wooden doors, arched or rectangular, greeted visitors and passers-by with ornate designs of lotus flowers, fish, and other symbols of the owners' wealth and ancestry. On either side of the doors stretched long, stone benches – *baraza* – where neighbors sat or stopped and chatted with one another, often within the cool shade provided by the elegantly constructed wooden balconies overhead. The buildings emerged from a lush, green backdrop of palm and mango trees, and looked out upon the hard, wet sand strewn with beached wooden dhows of all shapes and sizes. Less conspicuous from the ocean were the hundreds of single-storied, rectangular homes made of wattle and daub, covered by enormous sloping roofs of thatch, known as *makuti*, filling in the spaces between the clusters of stone houses, shops, and warehouses.

This idyllic image, however, could prove to be a seductive illusion for visitors. Once beyond the beach, they might be confronted by "an indescribable smell coming from everywhere … of fish drying and incense burning, cloves and rancid butter, rosewater and the sweat of men."[1] In the town, they encountered a myriad of narrow and twisting alleyways and paths intersecting with one or two main streets. Coconut shells and other refuse littered these roads, "making the barely three meter wide passageways all the more narrow and impassable …

[1] Archives Générales de la Congrégation du Saint Esprit (hereafter AStEsp), *Bulletin Général de la Congrégation du St. Esprit et de l'imé Coeur de Marie* (hereafter BG), TOME XIII, May 1880–October 1883, pp. 43–62.

in the rainy season, foot-deep ponds fill up the entire road and are only taken care of by the good work of the sun."[2] The winding paths led to large, open spaces – sites of brisk activity between May and December when thousands upon thousands of porters from the central African interior camped there and proffered their goods for sale on woven mats and blankets. These Africans, having just completed a long, arduous journey taking weeks or months, were in a celebratory mood and could often be found stumbling around the town at night drunk.[3] Whatever their impressions of the locals' behavior, most visitors agreed that Bagamoyo was the liveliest and most important town of the central East African coastline, better known as the *Mrima*.[4]

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, Bagamoyo dominated the commerce of this region.[5] Yet, by this time, Bagamoyo was only about a century old, one of the newest towns to develop along the seaboard.[6] Several qualities facilitated its emergence as a site for settlement. The first was the fertile hinterland irrigated by the nearby Kingani River. Foodstuffs such as millet, rice, cassava, maize, plantain, sugarcane, mangos, and coconut flourished there. Second, the harbor, although open, was protected by coral reefs and sandbars, allowing for good anchorage conditions for fishing and transport dhows. Third, given Bagamoyo's location directly on the oceanfront, there was always a refreshing sea breeze revitalizing its inhabitants. Its reputation as a breezy locale is so well known that it plays a significant role in one of the town's most recollected events.[7] Finally, its close

[2] H. F. von Behr, *Kriegsbilder aus dem Araberaufstand in Deutsch-Ostafrika* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1891), 129.

[3] August Leue, "Bagamoyo," *Beiträge zur Kolonialpolitik und Kolonialwirtschaft,* 2 (1900/1901), 15.

[4] The region between the Umba and Rufiji Rivers, incorporating the towns from Tanga to Kilwa, is considered to be the approximate boundaries of the *Mrima*. Charles Sacleux, *Dictionnaire Français-Swahili* (Zanzibar: Mission des PP. du Saint Esprit, 1891), xi.

[5] Norman R. Bennett, *Arab vs. European: Diplomacy and War in Nineteenth-Century East Central Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1986), 30. Kilwa and Mombasa, which are located just beyond the Mrima, were ranked the second and third most important trading ports after Bagamoyo.

[6] Walter T. Brown, *A Precolonial History of Bagamoyo* Ph.D. thesis, Boston University (1971), 134.

[7] It is said that, during the funeral procession of Sheikh Mohammed Ramiya, one of the town's most prominent citizens in the twentieth century, the breeze stopped blowing completely. This indicated not only a miracle, but the incredibly high standing Ramiya held in Bagamoyo.

proximity to Zanzibar, the trade nexus of the western Indian Ocean, guaranteed its economic prosperity so long as it offered goods which traders desired. Bagamoyo attracted merchants, financiers, fortune hunters, sailors, farmers, fishermen, and artisans from across the western Indian Ocean rim; by the end of the nineteenth century, its permanent population numbered approximately 18,000.[8] Tens of thousands of African porters, transporting ivory and other products to sell, journeyed each year from as far away as Lake Victoria to Bagamoyo, multiplying its population in a dramatic fashion, and making this African port renowned worldwide. The town's wealth attracted trading company agents from Bombay, Hamburg, and Salem, and fueled political tensions among local African leaders, Omani sultans, and European imperialists alike.[9] All these elements contributed to a very dynamic urban arena.

Bagamoyo is situated in a geographical region known as the Swahili coast which extends from Mogadishu to Mozambique. "Swahili" was a term coined by Arab visitors as early as the thirteenth century to describe the inhabitants of the East African littoral.[10] The word was subsequently adopted by other foreign travelers and, more recently, has been used by scholars of anthropology, archaeology, and history who have come to associate the Swahili people with various cultural characteristics: an adherence to Islam; their role as mercantile middlemen connecting the economies of the African interior with the western Indian Ocean; use of a common trade language (Kiswahili); and urban

[8] *Deutsch Ostafrikanische Zeitung (DOAZ)*, I/26, 26/8/1899. The French Mission reported that, by 1888, there were 12,000 inhabitants in the town, while another 15,000 lived within four leagues (23 km) of it in a southwesterly direction through Uzaramo. This would imply an urban/peri-urban population spread, but also that Bagamoyo served as a center for 27,000 permanent local inhabitants. AStEsp, BG, TOME XIV, April 1886–July 1888, 615–623.

[9] Iliffe, *Tanganyika*, 382; Brown, *A Precolonial History*; Salatiel Togolai Shemhilu, *The Economic History of Bagamoyo, 1885–1950*. MA thesis, University of Dar es Salaam (1977); August H. Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: The Sufi Order in Tanzania* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); and Steven Fabian, *Wabagamoyo: Redefining Identity in a Swahili Town, 1860s–1960s*. PhD thesis, Dalhousie University (2007). See also Walter T. Brown, "Bagamoyo: An Historical Introduction," *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 71 (1970), 69–83, and Steven Fabian, "Curing the Cancer of the Colony: Bagamoyo, Dar es Salaam and Socioeconomic Struggle in German East Africa, 1860s–1907," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40:3 (2007): 441–470.

[10] Mark Horton and John Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 16.

residency. Consequently, the ports along the coastline are referred to as Swahili towns. This is not an arbitrary description; the communities defined as Swahili see themselves, and are seen as the original settlers and inhabitants of these towns. While they do not always define themselves as Swahili, the elite do refer to themselves as *wenyeji*, or "the owners of the town";[11] cultural outsiders are looked down upon in varying degrees as *watu wa kuja* (newcomers), *wageni* (guests/strangers), *waAfrika tu* ("just Africans"), and *washenzi* (barbarians, uncivilized), roughly in that descending order. Scholars have tended to reinforce this social stratification, consciously or not, in their efforts to understand and define this rather elusive identity, often in relation to how other social groups sought access to the town through the adoption of Swahili cultural traits.[12]

Yet, despite Bagamoyo's location on the Swahili coast, it is rare to find a visitor in the nineteenth century who described the town simply as "Swahili."[13] In 1873, Bagamoyo consisted of "(a) varied assemblage of Indian merchants, Arabs, Waswahili, and [Wamrima], slaves and Wanyamwezi *pagazi* (porters)."[14] A year later, a traveler singled out groups of Arabs and Baluchis among the "miscellaneous rabble" in

[11] Preference is given to clan names instead, such as Shomvi, Shirazi, or BaAlawi. Geoffrey Ross Owens, "The Shomvi: A Precursor to Global Ethnoscapes and Indigenization in Precolonial East Africa," *Ethnohistory*, 53:4 (2006), 718.

[12] Randall L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 82–86; Horton & Middleton, *The Swahili*, 18, 21–23; John Middleton, *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 19–23; Derek Nurse & Thomas Spear, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 25–26; Justin Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 20. Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995).

[13] Henry M. Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa* (London: S. Low, Marston, Low, and Searle, 1874), 42; Joseph Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes and Back* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), 267; Baur and LeRoy, *A Travers le Zanguebar* (Tours: Alfred Mame et Fils, 1886), 117–118; Oscar Baumann, *In Deutsch-Ostafrika Während des Aufstandes* (Wien: Eduard Hölzel, 1890), 30; *Zanzibar Gazette*, October 14, 1896; Dr. A. Becker, *Aus Deutsch-Ostafrikas Sturm und Drangperiode: Errinerungen eines alten Afrikaners* (Halle: Otto Hendel Verlag, 1911), 46.

[14] Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa* (New York: Harper and Sons, 1877), 24.

the town.[15] By the mid-1880s, little had changed: "The indigenous of Bagamoyo belong to the 'Oua-Rimas,' a variety of 'Oua-Souahilis,' under the authority of a governor delegated by Said Barghash. There are fewer Arabs (here) than at Zanzibar, but on the other hand there are more Hindis and Banians, competing for the spoils."[16] In 1891, there were "Arabs and Baluchis, Banians, Hindus, and Parsis, Goans, Swahili slaves, and caravan people from the interior, Greek and Levantine traders, even Chinese" in the streets of Bagamoyo.[17]

It was not, however, only passing travelers and explorers who noted Bagamoyo's demographic diversity: the Holy Ghost Fathers – a French Catholic order – published the following description of the townspeople after having lived among them for over twelve years: "(In) the town of Bagamoyo … one (sees) … men of all colors, of all languages … The population of Bagamoyo consists of representatives of all tribes from the interior, to which are added the Arabs of the Persian Gulf, the Indians, the Baluchis, the Goans, and the strange products of one and the other."[18] Large, thatched – *makuti* – houses built by the Africans filled up much of the town's space, but these also intermingled with

> the lovely homes of the Arabs which have been erected over the past ten years, and the rich stores of the Muslim and [Hindu] Indians from Cutch and from Bombay. Bagamoyo has thus become, after Zanzibar, the most important market of all the places most visited along this entire coast … In a good season, the caravans from the interior sometimes bring as many as seven, eight and ten thousand foreigners in a single week. It is seldom that they stay for long in Bagamoyo; however, some of them stay nearly always at the coast.[19]

What is striking about this collection of observations is how they portrayed the Swahili as simply one community among many, instead of being the town's preeminent residents. In the French missionaries' description – the most informed among the comments – the Swahili are

[15] Henry M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (Toronto: J. B. Magum, 1878), 57.
[16] Jerome Becker, *La Vie en Afrique ou Trois Ans Dans L'Afrique Centrale* (Paris: J. Lebègue & Cie., 1887), 47.
[17] *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (DKB), #11, 1/6/1891, p. 242.
[18] AStEsp, BG, TOME XIII, May 1880–October 1883, pp. 43–62.
[19] AStEsp, BG, TOME XIII, May 1880–October 1883, pp. 43–62.

even reduced to "the strange products" of various ethnic and racial groups.[20]

The Holy Ghost Fathers' trite, social Darwinist characterization of the townspeople does not mean that the Catholic missionaries underestimated the political power of the Swahili of Bagamoyo – by the time of this account, the order had become intimately familiar with the strength of their influence – but it does shift the focus from the scholarship's usual emphasis on Swahili culture. The upcountry African porters – presumably the Nyamwezi – receive the most attention in the missionaries' report, followed by the Arab and Indian communities, even though each of these groups would have been seen as cultural outsiders by the Swahili *wenyeji*. Yet, even if the Swahili saw themselves as the "owners of the town" by ancestry and lineage, this did not preclude Bagamoyo's other inhabitants from feeling their own sense of ownership over the town, too. The Arabs' "lovely homes" and the Indians' "rich stores" both speak to local attachments developed through significant social and economic investment rooted in the town. Furthermore, if ever there was a group of people deserving of the title "owners of the town," it was the Nyamwezi, numbering in the thousands, who dominated the plazas, the warehouses, the shops, the courtyards, the beach, and the streets of Bagamoyo for months at a time. Life in town revolved around these "*washenzi*," regardless of how uncivilized the *wenyeji* perceived them. Finally, this was not a community summed up by a singular culture; multiple communities were, after all, recognized in the account given by the Holy Ghost Fathers. As this book will make apparent, the communities also recognized differences amongst each other.

Despite such demographic diversity, visitors rarely mention any serious tensions disrupting the peace. John Iliffe comments, "A small town with no predominant ethnic group, Bagamoyo had gained from slavery and porterage an unusually diverse population, yet,

[20] The pejorative reference most certainly alludes to the Swahili – a society often characterized by scholars, in part, as a mixed race. Nurse & Spear, *The Swahili*, 97; Horton & Middleton, *The Swahili*, 17; Patricia W. Romero, *Lamu: History, Society, and Family in an East African Port City* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1997), 12. Some Swahili have even tacitly defined themselves in this way: "my parents came from different places and as such we call ourselves Waswahili." Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of a Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955–1965* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997), 74. The quote is Bi. Halima Hamisi's, first Secretary of the TANU Women's Section.

paradoxically, few ethnic groups were generally recognized, each embracing people from a broad area."[21] Iliffe does not, however, explain where this "embracing" nature that he identified among Bagamoyo's population came from. Slavery and porterage were typical of other Swahili towns as well, even if the latter was a defining characteristic of Bagamoyo. One might argue that Swahili culture accounts for the creolizing environment that Iliffe describes; however, just like the nineteenth century travelers cited above, he also acknowledges multiple communities by name who lived in the town. While the townspeople of Bagamoyo certainly adopted aspects of one another's cultures, they still recognized differences amongst each other.

Cosmopolitanism is often offered as a framework to explain how unity emerged out of diversity. Port towns around the world are seen as the quintessential sites of cosmopolitanism because they function as entrepôts where diverse cultures from far distances meet and interact. Yet, as Glassman notes, this phenomenon has a tendency to be romanticized.[22] To be useful as a concept, cosmopolitanism demands careful explanation, given the diversity of places and historical experiences to which it can be applied;[23] otherwise, it threatens to rob port towns of their unique identities by failing to recognize the differences which distinguish one maritime entrepôt from another. In the context of the eastern African coast, the inhabitants of Swahili towns like Bagamoyo – in particular the fisherfolk – are considered to have more in common with the inhabitants of ports along the Arabian and Indian coasts than with towns located in the African interior.[24] While there is little

[21] Iliffe, *Tanganyika*, 382.

[22] Jonathon Glassman, "Creole Nationalists and the Search for Nativist Authenticity in Twentieth-Century Zanzibar: The Limits of Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of African History*, 55 (2014), 230–231.

[23] Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, "Introduction: Cosmopolitanism Contested: Anthropology and History in the Western Indian Ocean," in Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, eds., *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 2; Carol Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Cosmopolitanisms," *Public Culture*, 12:3 (2000), 584; Henk Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered," *History and Anthropology*, 16:1 (2005), 137.

[24] Michael N. Pearson, "Littoral Society: The Concept and its Problems" *Journal of World History*, 17:4 (2006), 353–354. Henk Driessen observes a similar thesis in the scholarship on the port towns of the Mediterranean: Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities."

question that Bagamoyo possessed cosmopolitan characteristics, the term itself evokes a strong connotation of looking outward, while also suggesting the cultural distancing of cities from their geographical moorings: New York City is not New York State; Paris is not France; Cairo is not Africa.

One remedy to this problem, inferred by Ato Quayson with regards to the African context, is to examine how Africans have produced, among themselves, cosmopolitan practices across the vast distances of their continent – a phenomenon that typically has been neglected in favor of Africans' transoceanic connections.[25] Another remedy, and one crucial to this book, is that scholars must recognize the enduring significance of place and localism to port towns, even as they maintained global connections.[26] While it is true that cosmopolitan centers share in common an exchange of peoples, ideas, commerce, and culture, each one is rooted in local realities, often tied to the hinterland and original settlers. *Making Identity on the Swahili Coast*, therefore, seeks to ground cosmopolitanism in its local setting. This provides an answer to Iliffe's implicit question above about how social stability was maintained amidst a heterogeneous community in a major trade town: Bagamoyo functioned more as a pluralist society rather than a melting pot; a society which recognized the autonomy of different communities whose "differences could be managed by . . . emphasizing a community of interests and fostering a local identity."[27]

Swahili identity – a regional form of cosmopolitanism – is somewhat of a paradox in that peoples from Somalia to Mozambique are defined as part of a common culture, while at the same time large numbers of people who played significant roles in this region are seen as peripheral. The diverse societies who settled in the coastal towns did not

[25] This call is articulated by Carina Ray in her article "*Oxford Street, Accra*: Rethinking the Roots of Cosmopolitanism from an Africanist Historian's Perspective," *PMLA*, 131:2 (2016), 511–512. See also Trevor Getz, *Cosmopolitan Africa: c. 1700–1875* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xiv; Stephen Rockel, *Carriers of Culture: Labour on the Road in Nineteenth Century East Africa* (New Haven: Heinemann, 2006), 203.

[26] Getz, *Cosmopolitan Africa*, xv; Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 10–11; Simpson & Kresse, "Cosmopolitanism Contested," 16; Glenda Sluga and Julia Horne, "Cosmopolitanism: Its Pasts and Practices," *Journal of World History*, 21:3 (2010), 370–371.

[27] The quote is Driessen's summary of Robert Ilbert's ideas concerning Alexandria, Egypt. Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities," 136.

necessarily all want to become Swahili. Many of these people were happy to adopt from other cultures extant in the communities, but largely retained their own languages and traditions. This book, then, seeks a new framework for understanding community and identity historically along the Swahili coast. It does not attempt to reopen the debate about defining who the Swahili were; as will be examined later below, the scholarship on this topic is rich and succeeds in helping us understand the complexities of this coastal culture. Instead, I argue that it is time to expand the focus to include other groups who are often only seen *in relation to* the Swahili.[28] Indeed, people who inhabited the coast had a stronger sense of place as a unifying marker of identity than they did any particular culture. The Swahili were but one society among many in the towns; it is time to see the Swahili in relation to the others who called these urban centers home.

To better interpret and appreciate the historical actions and behavior of these urban communities, we need to stop seeing the people of the East African littoral strictly through a cultural lens, and explore how place affected identity and belonging. In his magisterial history of Tanganyika, John Iliffe uses the concept of spatial identity by looking at the influence of locality – or "situationalism" as he phrased it – on the Manyema in order to understand why this particular society behaved differently in two different urban centers, Ujiji and Bagamoyo. He explains that each place's unique history and socioeconomic structure account for why the Manyema were divided in one town, but united in the other.[29] *Making Identity* reverses his framework and uses

[28] Glassman, *Feasts*; Jonathon Glassman, "The varieties of cosmopolitanism: A reply," *Cultural Dynamics*, 28:3 (2016), 335; Middleton, *World of the Swahili*, 10–15; Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili*, 17–23; John Middleton, *African Merchants of the Indian Ocean* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004), 17–25; A. J. H. Prins, *The Swahili-Speaking Peoples of Zanzibar and the East African Coast (Arabs, Shirazi, and Swahili)* (London: International African Institute, 1967), Carol M. Eastman, "Who Are the Waswahili?" *Africa,* 41:3 (1971), 228–236, and W. Arens, "The Waswahili: The Social History of an Ethnic Group," *Africa,* 45:4 (1975), 426–438 do not include the Indian communities in their studies of the Swahili. C. S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast: Politics, Diplomacy and Trade on the East African Littoral, 1798–1856* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), A. I. Salim, *The Swahili-Speaking Peoples of Kenya's Coast* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973), and Middleton, *African Merchants*, regard the Indians as actors or immigrants within the "Swahili coast."

[29] Iliffe, *Tanganyika*, 382–384.

locality to investigate its influence on how diverse communities behaved in a single town. It seeks to understand how different groups of people came to identify themselves with a particular place in common. I use the case study of Bagamoyo – a "Swahili town" – yet do not privilege Swahili culture as the sole defining characteristic; consequently, this book reveals an identity that is more inclusive of differences.

Among the various inhabitants who made up the townspeople of Bagamoyo, or *Wabagamoyo* in local parlance, a greater community emerged based on people's relationships with place. The practices of everyday life within the town, including such mundane activities like daily greetings, shopping, and attending mosque, further reinforced people's sense of belonging to Bagamoyo, as did joining various social networks (*dansi* clubs, *lelemama* societies, *sufi* brotherhoods) that extended beyond kinship and ethnicity. Conceptions of insiders and outsiders came to be equated with those who adhered to local customs and codes of conduct, and those who ignored them. Yet, these local codes and customs were not created solely by the Swahili; newcomers also influenced aspects of urban life, whether social, economic, or political. The heterogeneous social make-up of Swahili towns also forced its inhabitants to develop systems of administrative consultation to ensure the peace and order of the urban community. This book argues that everyday life was a phenomenon that facilitated the emergence of a spatial identity – the Wabagamoyo – out of multiple communities; townspeople's gossip and awareness of reputation enforced codes of conduct and created a localized frame of reference among them. At the same time, a spatial framework still reveals how people of different backgrounds clashed with one another, but in ways which crossed racial, ethnic, class, and gender categories.

One important corollary of this approach to understanding urban community along the Swahili coast is that it reveals how the Swahili themselves were not simply interchangeable from one town to the next; it shows how each urban group differentiated itself from others according to their sense of spatial loyalty and identity. Swahili who came from other towns were unwelcome if they did not respect local codes of behavior. Spatial identity thus avoids generalizing the historical experiences of the Swahili, restoring among them a sense of uniqueness, or *genius loci*. In this way, this book provides a new method for identifying urban insiders and outsiders in Swahili towns: