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***Frontier Geography
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Islam and Arabs in East Africa

*A Fusion of Identities,
Networks and Encounters*

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FRONTIER GEOGRAPHY AND BOUNDLESS HISTORY

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BEING BAYSAR (IN)FLEXIBLE IDENTITIES IN EAST AFRICA

Thomas F. McDow*

Unitary notions of Arabness in East Africa mask processes of migration and settlement, and older interpretations of African history based on the geographical unity of Africa occlude a fuller picture of the processes of history in East Africa. Without reference to Arabia and the Indian Ocean world, the history of Zanzibar or the Swahili world is difficult to understand, and this broader analysis can extend into the interior of East Africa, to the caravan trails and trade towns that sprang up in the nineteenth century. Omani migrants were one of the groups that traveled to the interior of East Africa, but these migrants and itinerants identified subgroups among themselves, casting doubt on the idea of a single Arab identity in East Africa. Indeed, by focusing on Omani migrants and taking into account categories that circulated across the Indian Ocean it is possible to disaggregate Arab identity in nineteenth century East Africa and clarify at least one little known category of identification—“baysar”—among Omani residents. Certain marriages cast differences of social categories among Arabs into stark contrast.

Consider one particular marriage. Sulayman bin Sleyum had brought a proposal to marry Zuwayna bint Muhammad. It must have been sometime before 1910. Zuwayna had not been in Tabora long—she had fled into German East Africa from the Congo Free State after her father, Muhammad bin Khamis al-Kiyumi (an Arab born in Oman) had been killed fighting the Belgians in the late 1890s.¹

Both Sulayman and Zuwayna were part of a community of Omanis who lived in Tabora, a bustling town on the central plateau of East Africa. Tabora had grown up in the mid-nineteenth century from a series of hamlets in the Unyanyembe region, more than 500 miles from the Indian Ocean. Groups of Arabs and coastal traders established a base for themselves in Unyanyembe in the 1830s and 40s by allying with local chiefs, making them business partners and fathers-in-law. The best known example of this is Muhammad bin Juma al-Murjebi, whose son Hamed, also known as Tippu Tip, was one of the most famous traders in the interior in the late nineteenth century. Muhammad bin Juma married Karunde, a daughter of a Nyamwezi chief in the 1840s and, in so doing, established a base for himself and other people who had come from the coast to that vicinity.²

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As the caravan trade in ivory and slaves grew in the nineteenth century, Tabora became a principal way-station and cross roads for caravans coming from Zanzibar and coastal towns. By the 1890s more than 80,000-100,000 porters were passing through Tabora every year, and with them came more people from the coast—a variety of Arabs and Swahili people—as well as Africans from all parts of the interior.³ From Tabora the routes continued north to the kingdom of Buganda, west to Lake Tanganyika and the Congo, and southwest to the slave-hunting regions south of Lake Tanganyika.

The Omani community in Tabora began with itinerant traders who had reached the far interior from Zanzibar.⁴ From the early decades of the nineteenth century Zanzibar was the center of Omani power in East Africa. In the 1830s, the Omani ruler Sa'id bin Sultan al-Busa'idi had moved his court some 2000 miles from Muscat in Arabia to Zanzibar, just south of the equator to expand commercial opportunities in the face of encroaching British suzerainty over the Persian Gulf and sea routes to India.⁵ As the seat of the Omani empire and a booming trade port, Zanzibar became the jumping off point for the interior of East Africa. As ivory prices rose in India and Europe throughout most of the nineteenth century, Arab traders pursued ivory on the African mainland opposite Zanzibar, eventually moving west in search of cheaper ivory and more abundant herds.⁶

Admittedly, the trading post and way-station of Tabora was far from the interior oases of Arabia, and the number of Arabs who claimed Omani heritage in Tabora was not large. In the early years of the town, the size of the community varied seasonally, as traders arrived and departed with the caravans. Increasing numbers of Arabs and coastal Muslims settled there in the latter half of the nineteenth century, making Tabora the most important Muslim town in the interior. Men of Omani descent controlled important sectors of the economy and, through business partnerships, linked the Congo River basin with the Indian Ocean.⁷

Zuwayna, the bride to be, was born in East Africa. Her father was born in Oman and emigrated to East Africa in search of new opportunities.⁸ With the expansion of trade and trade routes throughout eastern and central Africa, many Arabs, coastal people, and their clients moved into the Congo Free State where ivory was plentiful and the market good for trade items from Zanzibar. In the 1890s, representatives of Belgium's King Leopold and their mercenaries came into increasing competition with the east coast and Indian Ocean traders. They fought openly for the first half of that decade, and many Zanzibari Arab and Swahili people escaped or were killed.⁹ Zuwayna and her two sisters crossed Lake Tanganyika to Kigoma in German East Africa and then went to Tabora where their father's business partner, Sulayman bin Zahir al-Jabri, resided. Sulayman had been established in the interior for many years and enjoyed good credit in Zanzibar from the Indian financiers of the ivory trade.¹⁰ Zuwayna lived with Sulayman and his family, and it was with him that the young suitor Sulayman bin Sleyum was to finalize the wedding.

Old Sulayman bin Zahir was ill when the wedding day arrived, and he had to ask his trusted slave, Marjani bin Othman to conclude the wedding arrangements. Everyone wore their finery, and when Sulayman bin Sleyum arrived, he was well dressed in Omani style, with a long white *kanzu* [dishdasha] and a *joho*, the woolen cloak favored by well-to-do Arabs for occasions such as these. Sulayman bin Sleyum greeted Marjani and the assembled group, "Al-Salaam 'alaykum," and the servant Marjani answered, "Wa'alaykum al-salam, ya shaykh Sulayman."

Sulayman corrected the slave. He was not a shaykh, he said, but a servant of shaykhs. With that, as the story is told, the wedding was called off.¹¹ Sulayman bin Sleyum was a baysar,¹² and thus, to Omanis and their trusted slaves, unfit for marriage to an Omani of noble birth.

This failed attempt at marriage between two people of Omani descent in the town of Tabora, several hundred miles from Zanzibar and several thousand miles from Oman, hinged on notions of status imported from Oman. This raises important questions. Who were the people who identified others as baysar, and who were identified that way?¹³ In nineteenth and early twentieth century East Africa, Omanis became part of increasingly multi-ethnic societies in Zanzibar and the East African interior, yet it is clear in a number of examples that this societal differentiation from Oman continued to operate. At the same time, however, new opportunities for mobility, wealth, and marriage in new communities offered people identified as baysar new contexts in which to escape social limitations imposed by other Omanis. The tension here is between the kind of constructed and fluid identities that could occur in frontier places and the kind of identifications and fixed social statuses within established communities. A review of historical accounts and usage of baysar helps illuminate its meanings, but it is only in a certain social milieu that one can see the results of the status in practice.

In popular conceptions today, people of Arab descent in East Africa and Oman identify baysar as those without a tribe and who may or may not be Arabs.¹⁴ This set of labels exists for those with a claim on Arabness; those who do not claim Arab descent were unfamiliar with the status of baysar. Perhaps their predecessors in East Africa may have known of this strand of Arab identity—certainly the slave in the story of the failed wedding did—but, “baysar” is not included in early Swahili dictionaries.¹⁵ The contemporary lack of knowledge of this category today may be attributed to a compression of all categories of Arab and Arab descended people in eastern Africa over the last century.

The term baysar, as it is used in East Africa, derives from the Omani Arabic word *baysari* (plural *bayāsira*). Written sources give a variety of meanings, all of which connote low status and suggest the lack of origin.¹⁶ Serjeant equates it with the *da'if* (ضعيف)[weak] class in southern Arabia, and there maybe a historical link to both the concept and the region.¹⁷ Some consider baysar to be a different race than Arabs, and thus *mawālī*.¹⁸ The concept of baysariness has circulated in Arabia beyond Oman including Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates.¹⁹ With Arabian migrants, the status traveled to East Africa. After considering the literature on baysar and treatment of the various Arab identities in East Africa, we will return to the topic of baysar in Oman and East Africa to explore the limited references to this status from the nineteenth century.

To date the most sustained writing on baysar status and identity in Oman is J.C. Wilkinson's 1974 article comparing *bayāsira* and *bayādir*. He identifies the former as perhaps the earliest inhabitants of eastern and southern Arabia, a group without origin (اصل) who were never assimilated into the dominant Arabic social order after the rise of Islam.²⁰ *Bayādir*, on the other hand, operates as a social class linked to agricultural work that has been incorporated into tribal structures in the Ibadi areas of Oman, but not in the Sunni regions, where the status remains marked as low.²¹ Here Wilkinson is interested in “the underlying layers in the palimpsest of present traditional social organization in South East Arabia.” Wilkinson argues that the explanation of *bayāsira* that rest on a deep history of Arabia and Islamic conversion is one that works socially, but not historically. He overstates his case,

however, when he suggests that the reason *bayāsira* failed to be integrated into Omani society is that they had no racial origins so that those with known origins, Arabs and Persians, spurned them.²² Some baysar groups have *nisba* adjective names representing tribes, and some are linked as clients with Arabs.²³

One of the keys to understanding nineteenth-century East African history, especially in the interior, is determining what drove settlement of Arab and coastal migrants. Within this, the question of who were the “Arabs” in East Africa is very important. During the colonial period, historians of East Africa were interested in the role of outsiders as they sparked change.²⁴ In these works, Arabs, sometimes vaguely defined, played an important role as innovators. Early post-independence and nationalist scholarship glossed over Arab roles to structure arguments around African initiative. Too often all Muslim people in the interior were lumped together. For instance in writing about the role such people played in Manyema, in the eastern Congo, one scholar has posited, “The Islamic traders from Zanzibar and the east coast saw themselves as the political and social overlords of Manyema,” partially, he suggests because they were already accustomed to this role in the Tabora area.²⁵ Identifying Muslims in the interior in such a sweeping way impedes an understanding of the ways in which people and ideas moved within the interior.

More recent scholarship has taken pains to be more clear on social (and economic) categories, distinguishing between Omani and Yemeni migrants to East Africa, thus showing the complicated interactions of various Arab and African groups at the coast.²⁶ Examining the interior of East Africa, however, such disaggregation must go further in order to better understand the role of historical actors. For instance, a common contention among historians of nineteenth century East African history is that Arab migrants took part in the caravan trade and traveled to towns like Tabora and Ujiji in order to amass wealth and retire to Zanzibar or Oman.²⁷ Some, however, remained in East Africa, and played important roles in the early colonial economy. Furthermore, all of these “Arabs” were not necessarily Arabs. Among these “Arabs” were Baluchi men, the mercenaries and adventurers from the Makran coast and Oman who served the Arab elite. They were of relatively low status among the Arabs and thus less fixed on the idea of returning to Zanzibar after a sojourn in the interior.²⁸ Perhaps the same incentives applied to people considered baysar in Oman or even at the coast. Making better sense of Arab identities in East Africa in the nineteenth century will enable us to better understand such processes.²⁹ Furthermore, examining the role and status of baysar in East Africa provides a more complicated picture of idioms of Arab-ness as they were deployed at the coast and in the interior in the nineteenth century.

Only a few historical accounts that address Arabs in Oman and East Africa in the nineteenth century identify people as baysar. While traveling in northern Oman near the town of Nakhl in 1876, the British officer S.B. Miles found the “mixed character of the population” remarkable, and noted that the “Bayâsir” made up a large proportion of those in the area. He described them as “as an industrial and peaceable folk,” many of whom were wealthy, though not given positions of command or authority.³⁰ They were considered alien by the tribal Arabs—their origin was thought to be the Hadramaut.³¹ Indeed when, five years later, Miles attempted to estimate the population of Oman he included “the foreign element, *viz.*, African, Belooch, Indians, Persians, Byasir, and Gipsies.”³² Just as the Africans, Baluchis, Indians, and Persians were linked to flows of goods and people to and from East Africa and the Indian Ocean, so were baysar.

When Tippu Tip (properly Hamed bin Muhammad al-Murjebi) related his life as a trader and adventurer in eastern and central Africa in his autobiography, he recalled an incident from 1867 in which his porters warned him against advancing on Isamu's territory in Urungu, southwest of Lake Tanganyika. They cautioned him to halt his advance because Isamu, though he had plentiful ivory, was cruel. They noted that he had already killed various Arabs, baysar, and coastal people.³³ This hierarchy and grouping of people would have been one that a man of Omani descent such as Tippu Tip would have understood. Tippu Tip's biographer, the German writer Heinrich Brode, a long-term resident of East Africa, described a baysar as an Arab from Oman who was not pure blooded but was descended from a slave caste. This marked them in contrast to "full-blooded" Arabs who were "Kubails," i.e. *qabā'il*, tribesmen.³⁴ Whether or not the porters' warnings represented their own conception and naming of various layers of Muslim society is an open question.

In both Oman and East Africa, baysar faced social restrictions and Arabs expected them to conform to some behaviors of servants. Some places in Oman may have had substantial numbers of baysar inhabitants and little or no slave populations.³⁵ In Oman, baysar meeting a shaykh were not allowed to go directly to the man, kiss his hands, and greet him. The expectations were that baysar, like slaves and other inferiors, would first drop their sandals at the side of the path.³⁶ In both Oman and East Africa, baysar were expected to defer to Arabs in social situations and greet Arabs of higher status, i.e. those with a tribal name, as "Hababi" (master).³⁷ Thus social proscriptions reified the status of baysar as a category in every day practice.

The social restrictions extended, as the story of Zuwayna and Sulayman illustrates, to marriage. The prohibition of marriage between baysar men and Arab women was strong, and seemed to follow some aspects of the Islamic legal principle of *kafā'a*, or equality and sufficiency for marriage. In classical Islamic legal doctrine, *kafā'a* relates to the social status, fortune, and profession of the groom (vis-à-vis his father-in-law to be) and parity of birth of the couple. *Kafā'a* protects Muslim women from "inadequate" matches; Muslim men were permitted to marry women "below" them on a social—or economic—hierarchy.³⁸ A classical understanding of this would suggest differences of descent as part of parity of the couple, but such differences could be mitigated over time. A freed slave or Islamic convert was to be considered an equal to all Muslims after three generations.³⁹ It seems, however, that even though baysar were Muslim, they were subjected to more stringent social codes.

Beyond these social restrictions, baysar seemed to enjoy some measure of freedom. In the 1920s a British traveler in southern Arabia noted that although the social position of a baysar was by definition subordinate, his societal roles and occupation were not limited by his status.⁴⁰ In East Africa, Brode noted that despite their inferior social status with respect to the Arabs, baysar were "far superior to them in intelligence" and because of this were able to become quite wealthy and "raise their importance."⁴¹ This freedom to amass wealth and raise their status became important to baysar in East Africa. In a region where people from Oman were in the minority, the differentiations of status among Omanis became less important when the majority population was able to see both non-baysar and baysar people from Oman as Arab.

By the mid-twentieth century, the status of baysar in East Africa had changed. From the comfort of his home near Muscat, an Arab man born in

Zanzibar and educated at al-Azhar related that in Africa baysar ate with other Arabs and sat together with them at the *baraza*, the men's meeting place. This was in striking contrast to the situation in Oman where baysar had meals apart and did not take coffee and halwa [sweets] with Arabs. In East Africa, baysar bought farms, worked them, and enjoyed social mobility. Some of them became wealthy and through prestige removed what he called "the color bar."⁴²

Attempts to analyze historical categories of identity are fraught with difficulty in contexts such as East Africa where the sources for such information are limited. Some sources are also not reliable. In Brode's early twentieth century biography of Tippu Tip, for instance, he identifies Snay bin Amer as baysar, but this is a red herring in understanding baysar status in the interior of East Africa. Snay bin Amer was a merchant in Kazeh (later Tabora) in the 1850s and 1860s who was a close ally of the early Arab and coastal settlers there and also Richard Burton's principal guide and companion for the time that he was in Kazeh.⁴³ Snay left Muscat, where he had been a sweetmeat seller, in the 1840s and less than two decades later, he was one of the leading merchants in central Africa and a pillar of the Arab community in Kazeh.⁴⁴

Brode identifies Snay bin Amer as a baysar in his biography of Tippu Tip, the trader born as Hamed bin Muhammad al-Murjebi.⁴⁵ Although this identification would shed new light on the social mobility and the fluid construction of identity in the interior, until more data is available, this seems an incorrect identification. Tippu Tip makes no mention of Snay's status in his autobiography, and Burton did not include any reference to being baysar in his descriptions of Snay. When Burton traveled to central Africa and befriended Snay, he had already learned Arabic and made his pilgrimage to Mecca. The fact that he did not mention that Snay was a baysar and that he refers to Snay specifically with the honorific "shaykh," suggests that Brode may have been mistaken.⁴⁶

And what of the rescued bride and jilted bridegroom? Zuwayna, as an "Arab" woman born in East Africa was most likely the daughter of an African wife or concubine. The fact that her mother does not fit into the story of flight from the Congo suggests this as well. Standards of *kafā'u* may have been important in a few cases in the interior of East Africa in the nineteenth century, but as was likely in the case of Zuwayna's father, marriages involving Arab or baysar migrants tended to follow the pattern of Omani men marrying African women. As both Arab and baysar men were free to marry African women or take them as concubines, the immediacy of the debate over sufficiency was removed but, as we see in Zuwayna's case, still applicable in later generations.

Zuwayna's guardian later found a suitable match for her. She married Sayf bin Hamed al-Busa'idi, a man who shared a name with the ruling family of Zanzibar. They had one child, Hemedi bin Sayf, who was born near Tabora.

Suleiman bin Sleyum, the baysar bachelor, arrived in Tabora sometime in the last decade of the nineteenth century or early in the first decades of the twentieth century. He was said to be born in Oman. Perhaps he made his way to Zanzibar where, either through clientship with a well-to-do Arab or through his own wits he joined a caravan to the interior. Such maneuvering for patronage was common among migrants and freed slaves in the second half of the nineteenth century because established Arabs had greater access to capital in Zanzibar and thus more easily financed trading ventures for ivory into the interior.⁴⁷

That Zuwayna's guardian did not know Suleiman Sleyum and his status suggests that the bridegroom had not been in Tabora long. He remained in the

town afterwards, however, and may have been in a position to buy and sell houses.⁴⁸ In his neighborhood he became known as “Suleiman Chai,” for anytime a guest would appear he would call into his house for someone to prepare tea (Swahili, *chai*). His descendants still own property in Tabora, not far from the soccer stadium. And there are not many people left in Tabora who identify with the early Arab settlers or know their stories.⁴⁹

The fact that the memory and idea of baysar people is fading in East Africa indicates a longer term process of assimilation of nineteenth century migrants. This also suggests that important oral sources for understanding both the variety of Omani migrant identities and the process of assimilation are limited. This paper has attempted to draw some attention to the category of baysar in East Africa as a way of thinking about the mobility of such categories and their appropriateness for making sense of the Omani traders and merchants in the East African interior. In doing so, many questions remain. To what degree was this status negotiable? In what ways were baysar identities constructed socially and historically? How did colonial policy in Tanganyika create an Arab ethnic identity along with other African identities?

The presence of the category baysar in the interior of East Africa indicates the circulation of people, goods, and concepts between Oman and East Africa, coast and interior, in the nineteenth century. Though relevant only for a seemingly small group within a relatively small migrant community, the persistence of the category of baysar into the early twentieth century grants insight into an incomplete process of racial assimilation in Oman and the ways in which such attitudes traveled and remained operative in a new multi-ethnic context. By disaggregating nineteenth century Arab identity, we better understand processes of migration and settlement, and the social gradients of opportunity and constraint in East Africa.

ENDNOTES

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¹ The story of his death is, in fact, a tragic one. As the Arabs fled the Belgian forces, Muhammad bin Khamis realized that his teenage son Khamis was not there, so he returned to rescue him. Both father and son were killed by the Belgian forces. Interview with Sayf Muhammad Sulayman al-Jabri, Tabora, Sept. 2001. All interviews cited were conducted by the author. The recordings and transcripts are in the author’s possession. All interviews were carried out in Swahili unless otherwise noted.

² Hamed bin Muhammed al-Murjebi, *Maisha ya Hamed bin Mubammed el-Murjebi, Yaani Tippu Tip kwa Maneno Yake Mwenyewe*, W.H. Whitely trans. (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1966), 9.

³ Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (London: James Curry, 1987).

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the expansion of trade into the East African interior, see Stephen J. Rockel, *Caravan Porters of the Nyika: Labour, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth Century Tanzania* (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1997).

- ⁵ M. Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: Roots of British Domination*, Exeter Arabic and Islamic Series (London: Routledge, 1992).
- ⁶ For a general economic history of East Africa in this period see Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*.
- ⁷ The best known example of this is Hamed bin Muhammad al-Murjebi, better known in Africa as Tippu Tip. His exploits as a slave and ivory trader; his control of a vast territory in central Africa; and the fact that he wrote an autobiography make him comparable to the role and fame of Zubayr Pasha in Nilotic Africa. See Heinrich Brode, *Tippu Tip: The Story of His Career in Zanzibar and Central Africa; Narrated from his Own Accounts* (Zanzibar, 2000); al-Murjebi, *Maisha*.
- ⁸ Interview with Sayf Muhammad Sulayman al-Jabri, Tabora, Sept. 2001.
- ⁹ Norman R. Bennett, *Arab versus European: Diplomacy and War in Nineteenth Century East Central Africa* (New York, Africana Publishing Company, 1986), 235-244.
- ¹⁰ See, for instance the contract between Sulayman Zahir and Sewa Haji, 29 Dhu al-Hijja 1302, Zanzibar National Archives, AA12/20/4, registered deed 1080 of 1888 and records of land transactions in Tanzania National Archives G50/29-LR.
- ¹¹ This account comes from a series of interviews with Sayf Muhammad Sulayman al-Jabri, in Tabora, in September 2001 and August 2002.
- ¹² Throughout this paper the term is rendered "baysar," though it has a variety of spellings (besar, beisar, etc.) in historical accounts, and, although used in Swahili oral accounts, Swahili orthography would not support this transliteration.
- ¹³ These thoughts on identity were shaped by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000). See particularly the discussion on page 17 and following.
- ¹⁴ Interviews with Mas'ud Rashid al-Gheithi, Muscat, 18 December 2001; SAR al-Bahri, Ujiji, 1 August 2002.
- ¹⁵ See for example, Frederick Johnson, *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1939]), which was based on Madan's 1903 work.
- ¹⁶ For an account of the various interpretations, see J.C. Wilkinson, "Bayasirah and Bayadir," *Arabian Studies* 1 (1974): 76.
- ¹⁷ R.B. Serjeant, "Fisher-Folk and Fish-Traps in al-Bahrain," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31 (1968): 486.; Wilkinson, "Bayasirah and Bayadir," 79.
- ¹⁸ Wilkinson, "Bayasirah and Bayadir," 231.
- ¹⁹ Serjeant, "Fisher-Folk," 486; Wilkinson, "Bayasirah and Bayadir," 76.
- ²⁰ Wilkinson, "Bayasirah and Bayadir," 80.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 82.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 80.
- ²³ Sarhan ibn Sa'id al-Izkiwi, *Annals of Oman to 1728* (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1984), 105. J.C. Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia: A Study of the Aflaj of Oman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 232.
- ²⁴ See for instance Reginald Coupland, *East Africa and its Invaders: From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1938).
- ²⁵ Melvin E. Page, "The Manyema Hordes of Tippu Tip: A Case Study in Social Stratification and the Slave Trade in Eastern Africa," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7:1 (1974): 74.
- ²⁶ See Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995; Randall Lee Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800-1900* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Anne K. Bang, "Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: The Sufi and Family Networks of Ahmad ibn Sumayt and the Tariqa 'Alawiyya in East Africa c. 1860-1925," (Dr. Art. Dissertation, University of Bergen, 2000).
- ²⁷ A.J. Wills, *An Introduction to the History of Central Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 76; Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 32.
- ²⁸ Marcia Wright and Peter Lary, "Swahili Settlements in Northern Zambia and Malawi," *African Historical Studies* 4:3 (1971): 548-549.
- ²⁹ For an informative approach to such issues in Sudan, see Anders Bjorkelo, *Prelude to the Mahdiyya: Peasants and Traders in the Shendi Region, 1821-1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- ³⁰ S.B. Miles, "Across the Green Mountains of Oman," *Geographical Journal* 18:5 (1901): 468.
- ³¹ Given the south Arabian caste systems that Bertram Thomas and others discuss, this is not surprising. See Bertram Thomas, *Arabia Felix* (London, 1938), 26, 12.
- ³² S.B. Miles, "Notes on the Tribes of 'Oman by Lieutenant-Colonel S.B. Miles," [1881] Reprinted in *Annals of Oman* (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1984), 98.
- ³³ Al-Murjebi, *Maisha*, 16.
- ³⁴ Brode, *Tippu Tip*, 11.

³⁵ When Wilkinson carried out his research in Oman in the 1960s he observed that in some towns little evidence of an ex-slave class existed, but that there were “considerable numbers of bayāsira.” Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement*, 231. See also Matthew Hopper’s forthcoming work on Omani history.

³⁶ Miles, “Across the Green Mountains,” 468.

³⁷ Brode, *Tippu Tip*, 11; Bertram Thomas, *Alarms and Excursion in Arabia*, (London, 1931), 153.

³⁸ “Kafā’a,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam, new ed.*, vol. IV (Leiden: Brill): 404. For more on *kafā’a* in the contemporary Omani and Zanzibari context, see Mandana Limbert, “Of Ties and Time: Sociality, Gender and Modernity in an Omani Town” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2002), especially chapter six, “Gender, Race and Genealogy: Being and Becoming Bahlawi,” which also includes a story of near marriage (p. 266). I am grateful to Mandana Limbert for her stimulating discussion of these topics.

³⁹ Wilkinson, “Bayasirah and Bayadir,” 86.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions*, 153.

⁴¹ Brode, *Tippu Tip*, 11.

⁴² He said, “Walipata mali nyingi helafu *color bar* iliondolewa.” Mas’ud Rashid al-Gheithi, 18 December 2001, Muscat.

⁴³ Burton’s knowledge of the region derived, it seems, largely from conversations with Snay bin Amer. Snay taught him local languages and the geography of eastern and central Africa. Burton consulted with Snay about place names and double checked his journal with Snay. One is tempted to conclude that many of Burton’s views were in fact Snay’s views, for it was he that interpreted central Africa for Burton during their long halt in Kazeh and subsequent visits. Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa* (New York, Dover Publications, 1995 [1860]) 454, 263, 428.

⁴⁴ Burton, *Lake Regions*, 226-229, 233, 258, 259, 260.

⁴⁵ Brode, *Tippu Tip*, 11.

⁴⁶ Obviously one of the clearest ways to determine whether or not other Arabs regarded one among them as a baysar is through sufficiency for marriage. It is unclear whether or not Snay bin Amer was married, and the opportunity for marrying Arab women was extremely limited in Kazeh in the middle of the nineteenth century. The only woman mentioned in relation to him was Mama Khamisi, who Burton called the “buxom housekeeper in Snay’s establishment.” Whether she was Arab, Swahili, or Nyamwezi is unclear. Perhaps all that we can tell is that she had a son named Khamis and that she knew how to cook a wide variety of Omani delicacies like kawurmeh, firni, rice-jelly, and halwa, and the proper way to cook rice. Burton, *Lake Regions*, 263.

⁴⁷ See for instance the debt contracted by Salum Sa’ad Khamis Khadim from Sewa Haji, 29 Moharram 1305, ZNA, AA12/20/4, registered deed 1075 of 1888; and the series of mortgages taken out by Hamdan Shwain Salmun Khadim al-Harthi, ZNA, AA12/20/4, registered deeds 1096-1098 of 1888.

⁴⁸ See deed of sale from Tanzania National Archives G50/29-LR 1906.

⁴⁹ Most people in Tabora have little invested in the precolonial or early colonial history of the region. Those who had some knowledge invariably also had a link to one of the families who had been prominent. These few descendants preserve an older sense of Arab identity in the interior of East Africa. Many of those in East Africa with strong links to Oman have migrated there in the years since 1970, when, with a new ruler, the country welcomed overseas Omanis and their descendants.