



Part 4:

Case Studies: Oct 22-27: “Zanzibar”

Oct. 22 ‘The Omani Empire’





The Omanis in Zanzibar

Arrival Portuguese, sack Kilwa (1505) not only drew Europeans into East African sphere but Omanis from Arabian Peninsula

- Oman: Ibadi Muslim sultanate, engaged in trade throughout Indian Ocean, as far east as China
- in 16th c, both East African Coast and Oman's capital Muscat became part of Portuguese 'seaborne empire'
- Portuguese occupied several East African 'city states' and Muscat



The Omanis in Zanzibar

- Driven from Muscat 1750
- Oman assisted several other East African 'sultans' to drive out Portuguese
- then claimed control of the region, albeit measured in rights to maritime trade rather than land-based political authority
- Rebuilt power (political, economic) both at home and sea late 18th c
- Consolidated under rule of Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1804-1856)



The Omanis in Zanzibar

- Oman reached zenith as regional power: possessions on both sides of Gulf and East Africa
- Sayyid Said concentrated on developing country's economy and commerce
- made Zanzibar his 'second capital '
- concluded agreements with Britain and France
- sent special envoy to United States
- Built up navy, secured control of Persian Gulf



The Omanis in Zanzibar

Sayyid Said's death posed succession problem:

- dispute threatened Oman's prosperity

British Viceroy of India stepped in to mediate:

- sultanate 'divided'
- Oman, Muscat to one son
- Zanzibar, its 'dependencies' to the other

Unfortunately for Oman, Zanzibar was financial centre of empire:

- 'subsidy' built into agreement (Zanzibar to subsidize Oman)
- not enough
- Oman declined, became dependent 'backwater' for next century
- Zanzibar flourished



The Omanis in Zanzibar

1830s, Sayyid Said chose Zanzibar, surrounding islands as centre of clove and spice production:

- Encouraged migration Omani merchants, traders
- Drew on Indian trade network to attract Indian financial capital
- Drew on East African slave trade to purchase slaves for plantation development

1840 Omani capital moved definitively to Zanzibar



'Omani Sultans'



SEYYID SAID BIN SULTAN



SEYYID BARGHASH BIN SAID



'Omani Sultans'



SEYYID MAJID BIN SAID



SAID ALI BIN SAID



Sultan Bargash and Advisors





The Omanis in Zanzibar

Developed complex plantation economy, rooted in trade to interior:

- Invested in grain plantations on mainland (now Tanzania)
- Expanded ivory, slave-trading network to interior
- Indian merchants provided credit for goods that moved as far inland as (today) eastern Congo
- New settlements grew up facilitating, servicing, feeding network
- 'Swahili' traders of mixed cultural descent operated caravans
- famous 'Tippu Tip' epitomized system at most effective
[see last lecture 'who were these 'Arabs'?]



Tippu Tip

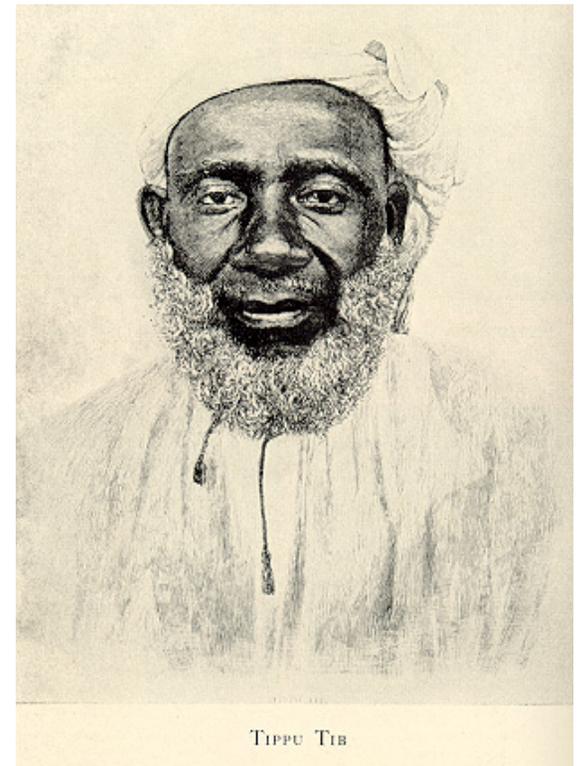
Expanded Sultan's 'domains' half-way across the continent taking language, culture and religion with them

But raises key issues:

- Tippu Tip: both Omani and 'African' ancestry; Muslim, real name:

Hamed bin Mohammed el Marjebi; served 8 sultans as explorer, guide, soldier, diplomat, judge, governor and slave merchant; 50 years of 'Carrying the flag and [Omani] civilization to its furthest geographical boundaries'

[see 'Zanzibar Unveiled' website, Resources]





Tippu Tip

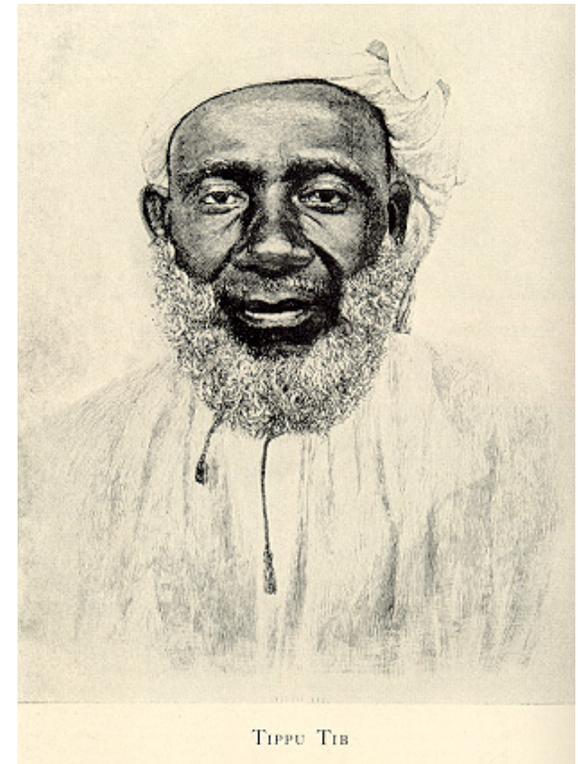
- Tippu Tip Swahili speaking
- Shared Swahili culture of coast
- typical of Burton's 'low coast dark 'Arab''
- Muslim but practicing 'which Islam':

'Swahili' Islam of Coast?

or

'Ibadi' Islam of Oman?

This last question became increasingly critical





Identity in Zanzibar Empire

Tipu Tip's biography in particular epitomizes the complexities of understanding the 'Zanzibar case study' with respect to a history of Islam and Muslim Peoples:

- Challenges idea of unidirectional 'gateways' that were open for Islam in universal fashion
- Raises thorny issue not only of who was Arab, but – who was a Swahili?
- And what, exactly, was an Omani?
- Complicates question of 'intrusion' and foreign power: Omani as colonized by British, Swahili as colonized by Omani, 'Africans' (many slaves or freed slaves) as exploited by both

[First, third points further developed in "Another 'Andalus'...", last in 'Rashid bin-Hassani', both Additional Readings'; third "Being Baysar...", Resources]



Identity in Zanzibar Empire

Reference here to Amal Ghazal's article "Another 'Andalus'...":

- She works the 'frontier' between African and Middle Eastern history with respect to Islamic intellectual networks
- Comments/arguments relevant both to 'Omani Empire' and 'British Protectorate'
- Here explaining (in 'historiography' context) why Omanis not fully incorporated into 'Muslim' worlds of either Africa *or* Middle East
- Key: taking seriously their Islamic beliefs, politics, communications, networks



Identity in Zanzibar Empire

Omani elite in Zanzibar characteristic of Islamic studies:

- Muslim elite, members belong to sect called 'Ibadism'
- Islamicists have devoted little attention to Ibadism
- one of earliest sects of Islam
- offshoot of Kharijism (had presence in early West Africa)
- Initially, intolerant of other Muslims – differ from Sunni and Shia in aspects of beliefs
- has generated limited interest among researchers
- 'double marginalization', due to sectarian affiliation and to geographic location [Ibadi 'outside mainstream'; Zanzibar 'outside geographical 'centre'].



Identity in Zanzibar Empire

Omani Ibadis in Zanzibar as much part of African as of Arab/Middle Eastern history: fields complementary, overlapping

- definition of ‘Arab’ allowed to defy geography but an ‘African’ often made to manipulate geography, insulating itself within borders, rigidly marked by the demarcations of a specific color, race, tribe, religion, or language.
- Arabs and Islam do not belong within those borders
- do not usually fit the categories of ‘African’ races and religions
- tend to be rejected as part of African heritage [eg ‘Arab’ North Africa and Sahara carved out of ‘African’ history assuming they belong to another category of history]
- communities born out of this conjuncture of histories remain marginalized
- This is the case of the Omani ruling elite in Zanzibar
[Ghazal, paraphrased p.45 “Another Andalus...”]



Identity in Zanzibar Empire

“The ambitious plan of its founder, Sayyid Sa’īd (r. 1806-1856), to transform Zanzibar into a major economic center and an international seaport opened the gates for a flood of migrants from Oman as well as Hadramawt and India.

A number of those were ‘ulama whose presence in Zanzibar institutionalized the long presence of Islam on the island and resulted in an unprecedented spread of Islamic institutions and of a literate Islamic tradition that was Arabic in character. They also brought ideas and ideologies, ties and connections, and along with the rulers, they changed the intellectual and political landscape of Zanzibar.

*Together they pulled Zanzibar closer to the Arab and Muslim world”
[will be explored further next day in context of ‘British Protectorate’]*



Ibadi Scholars



Sheikh Abdulla Saleh Farsy:

A 20th Century example of a very long line of Islamic Scholars from Zanzibar. His most famous contribution to Islam was the publication of his 807-page QUR'AN TAKATIFU (Glorious Qur'an).

Sheikh Abdullah was appointed the Inspector General of primary schools on Zanzibar and Pemba in 1949, the Headmaster of the Arabic medium School in 1957 and the Chief Kadhi of Zanzibar in 1960. He left the Isles after the revolution of 1964 and died in Oman on November 9, 1982.

[text from 'Zanzibar Unveiled', Resources]



Identity in Zanzibar Empire

Sets context for two stories revealing different, yet intersecting dynamics of emergent society:

- “the marriage that never was” [from ‘Being Baysar...’, Resources]
- “story of Rashid bin-Hassani”



Marriage that never was...

“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. 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. . . .



Marriage that never was...

*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.**

[* suggests bin Juma had both an Omani wife (Tippu Tip's mother) and an African wife – probably not unusual.]



Marriage that never was...

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. 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 ...



Tabora and the Slave Trade



Photograph of the slave trade in Tabora, East Africa, 1880s.



Marriage that never was...

... 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.



Marriage that never was...

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.

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.



Marriage that never was...

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. Zuwayna lived with Sulayman and his family, and it was with him that the young suitor Sulayman bin Sleyum was to finalize the wedding.



Marriage that never was...

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. Sulayman bin Sleyum was a baysar, and thus, to Omanis and their trusted slaves, unfit for marriage to an Omani of noble birth.



Marriage that never was...

‘Baysar’ is not a clear status but suggests an Omani Arab descended from slave status – or at least not of ‘pure blood’; in Oman occupied somewhat inferior position in society

“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.

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. “



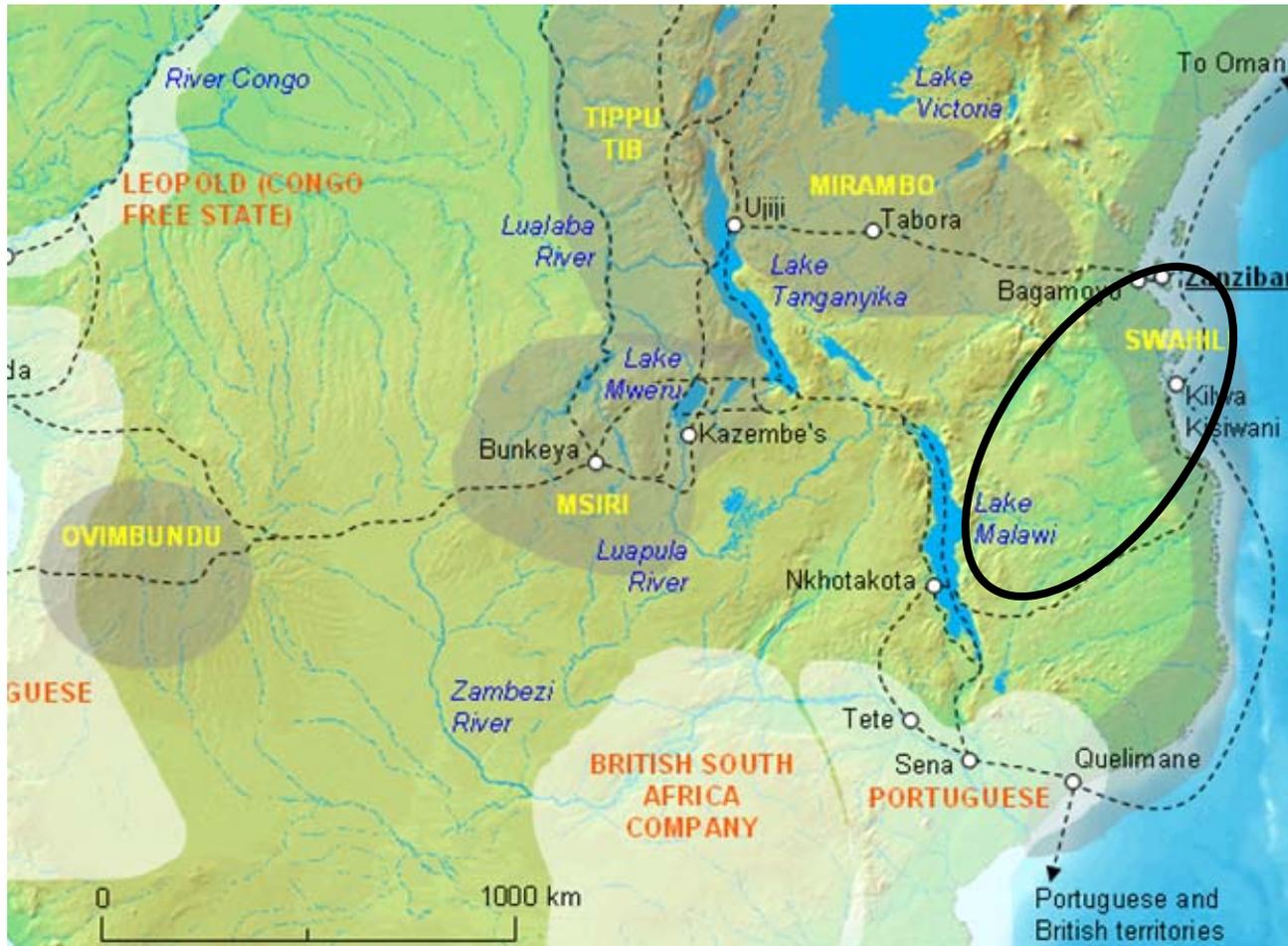
Rashid bin Hassani

Story of Rashid bin Hassani:

- Story contemporary with 'marriage that never was'
- Rashid captured in interior (near Lake Nyasa) by Nguni (African) slave raiders
- Sold to farmer; resold to Yao (African) slave trader
- 'well treated, clothed, fed'
- Reached coast, sold to Manga Arab from Kilwa, who lived in Zanzibar
- Slave market 'master' (Arab) came to purchase him (and others)
- Then sold to sister of Sultan Bargash, Bibi Zem-Zem



Rashid bin Hassani



Rashid bin Hassani's area of capture and sales



Sultan's Sister



This is NOT Bibi Zem-Zem
but Shamboa, who was daughter
of Khaled, son of Sayyid Said.

Unclear to which Sultan she
was sister.



Rashid bin Hassani

Began life on her 'shamba' (plantation):

- Given to slave couple who had no children
- Circumcised, taught Islam and to read Qur'an
- Given new Muslim name
- Later married to another slave (born in slavery) of Bibi Zem-Zem, his (slave) father paid dowery
- Continued to work 'under Bibi's protection'; now allowed to keep wages



Rashid bin Hassani

Met Swahili porters working with Europeans (British) in Uganda:

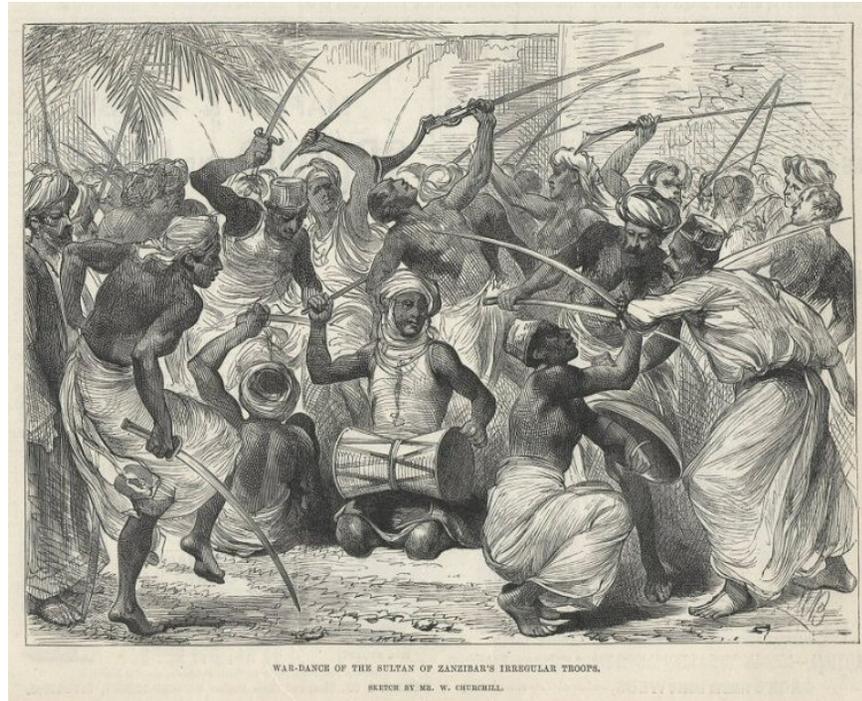
- Began life as ‘porter’ [*could have been one of the porters we met in Tabora*]
- Next 5 years, three safaris: he was paid half his wages, the other half went to Bibi Zem-Zem (European ‘policy’)

Next phase as ‘askari’ (soldier) for Sultan:

- Describes battles, officers
- Note presence of Comorian and Swahili officers, Persian engineer
- Rashid’s ‘company’ forcibly enlisted



Sultan's Soldiers





Askari with Convicts (Zanzibar)





Rashid bin Hassani

Next phase in Mombassa:

- Took Kikyu (African) wife
- While there, Bibi Zem-Zem died: all her 500-600 slaves freed
- Story of jealous wife: note by editor “Rashid, as a Moslem and a detribalized African, *lived like a Swahili.*”
- Clear that Rashid and his wife were regarded by other Swahili as ‘being Swahili’



Rashid bin Hassani

From Rashid's Story:

- We see completely different slave-trading system, one that was in the hands of 'Africans' of the interior until coastal markets reached
- Even on coast/Zanzibar, different 'categories' of Arabs involved (eg Manga Arab, 'Arab')
- Complex process of 'becoming Muslim' as slave, moving back onto mainland (eventually he moved further into the interior), marrying with presumably non-Muslim women as freed-slave
- Reveals complexity of 'being Swahili' as well but clearly came to include freed-slaves in many instances
- Swahili still distinguished from 'African' and from 'Arab'

[see 'Wonders of the African World': 'Swahili Coast' – 'Retelling' videos]



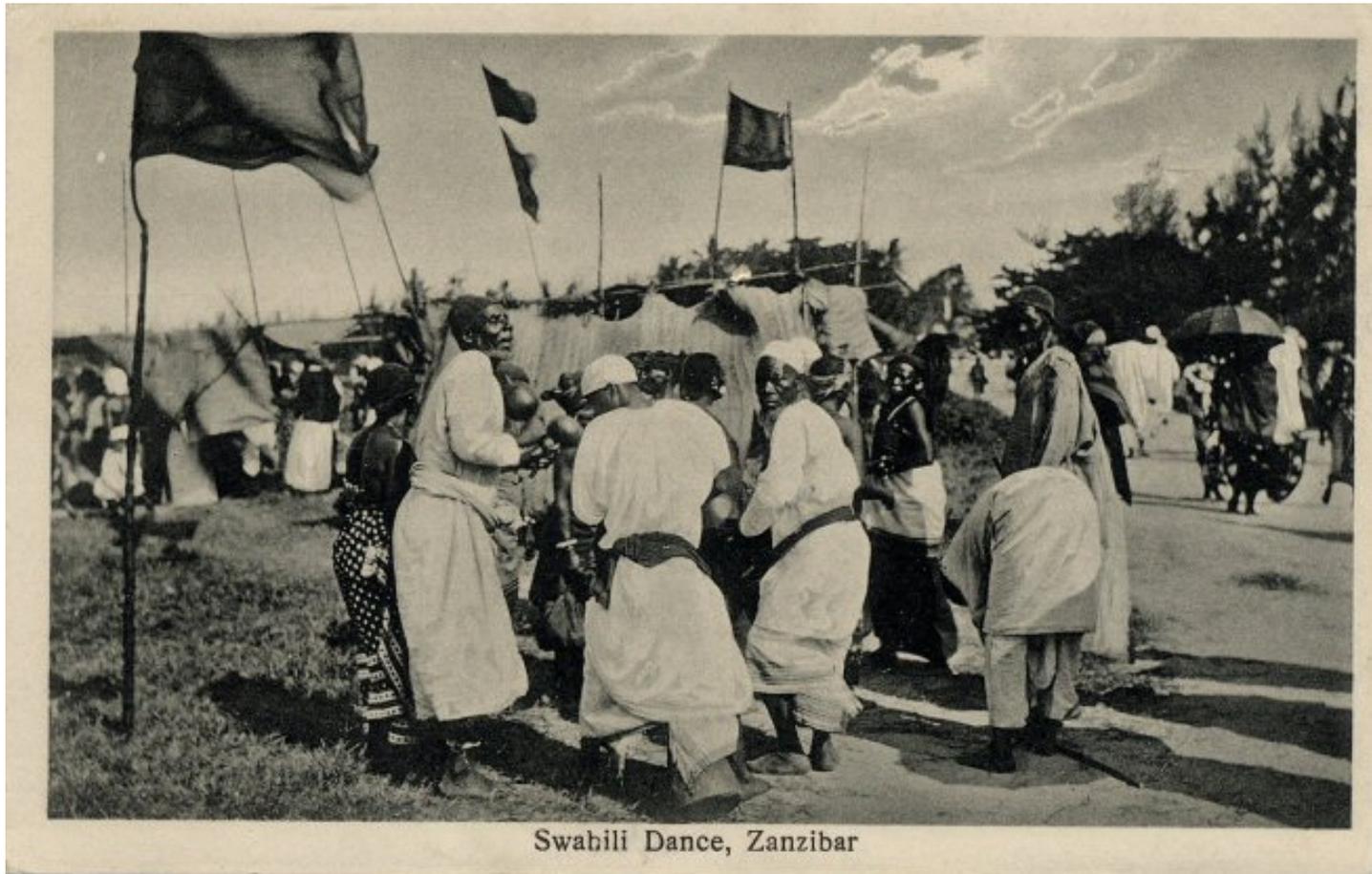
Swahili Identity/ies

[see 'Wonders of the African World': 'Swahili Coast' – 'Retelling' videos]

- Sheikh Badawi: *a respected Lamu [Island of] elder and Muslim scholar who claims pure Arab lineage. The sheikh believes that the Swahili people are descendants of Arab men who took African concubines. Ali Salim, the sheik's grandson, translates*
- Tour Guide, Mombasa: *who offers a complex [somewhat confusing!] definition of the Swahili people*
- Ummi Mahsouda Alley Hamid: *descendant of Tippu Tip “notorious black slave trader”, Zanzibar who rationalizes that the Arab system of slavery was purely business and that it was different from American slavery [Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s words – not mine!]*



Swahili Identity/ies

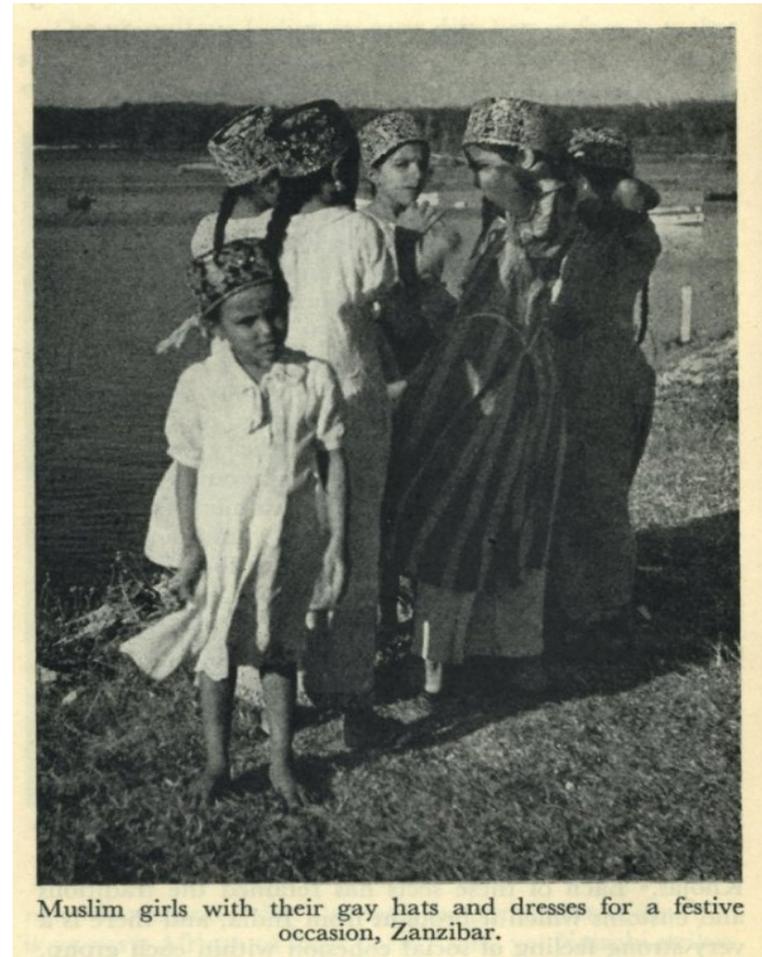


Swahili Dance, Zanzibar

c. 1890



'Swahili' Identity/ies



Muslim girls with their gay hats and dresses for a festive occasion, Zanzibar.



'Swahili' Identity/ies

'Ivory
Merchant'



'Zanzibari'

