

## **A Tale of Two Cities, c. 1900: Infrastructure Divestment as Tool of Spatial Transformation in Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo**

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This paper discusses processes of spatial transformation through infrastructure investment and divestment in the colony German East Africa (1891–1918), comprising present-day mainland Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. Focusing on the development of two towns on Tanzania’s Indian Ocean coast, Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam, it demonstrates that the German colonizers sought to break and realign patterns of movement and trade established in the precolonial period. As the following analysis illuminates, through infrastructure investment and divestment connection and isolation were no longer to be defined by trade relations but according to colonial demands.

### **PRECOLONIAL NETWORKS**

Throughout the nineteenth century, vast areas of East and Central Africa were infested with the animal sleeping sickness (*nagana*) and its vector, the tsetse fly. The flourishing tsetse belts along with other livestock diseases shaped the life and economy of both humans and animals. Along with impassable terrain and difficult climate, they rendered almost every use of pack or draught animals over longer distances impossible. Therefore, human portage was the only available transport mode in the region. Marching for a distance of up to thirteen miles (or 21 kilometers) per day, porters traveled in caravans of varying size, ranging from a dozen to over 1,000 members.

Patterns of long-distance caravan trading emerged in the 1830s and 1840s in Central and East Africa. By the mid-nineteenth century, a fluid network of trade routes existed in the region. The most important trade route, the so-called central route, ran from the mainland coastal towns opposite Zanzibar across central Tanzania to the trade center Tabora and beyond to Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria. The three main products which were traded along these routes were, in direction of the coast, slaves and ivory in exchange for imported textiles, beads, brass wire, rifles, and gun powder. Later, gum copal and rubber grew to export commodities of significant value, too.

Route networks transformed the geographical region into an economic and social space by connecting the coast with the interior, as well as the interior communities with each other. A consequence was that trade relations created new spatial hierarchies. Marketplaces that were entirely new or had only been of regional significance became important stopping places for porter

caravans. In caravan hubs such as Tabora, Mpwapwa, or Ujiji, located at the farthest end of the central route, caravans stopped to resupply, trade, and recruit porters. In coastal termini, the long-distance trade space merged with the Indian Ocean maritime world.

After the 1850s, Bagamoyo emerged as the most important coastal town, owing to its favorable position opposite the Zanzibar archipelago, the entrepôt from which ivory was shipped to buyers in Europe, America, and India. Serving as the terminus and starting point of the central caravan route, it was in Bagamoyo where most caravans set off and where they arrived from the inland. During the trade season, the town regularly saw more than ten thousand porters taking temporary residence at the same time. In Bagamoyo and other coastal towns, traders outfitted upcountry caravans and send them into the interior or functioned as wholesale buyers for ivory tusks brought to the coast by caravans from the interior. Through networks of trust and kinship, the Swahili, Omani, Nyamwezi, and South Asian trade agents held business relations far into the interior, to which the European outsiders had no access.

While Bagamoyo became the main trade center, a small fishing village 60 kilometers to the south of the town remained mostly untouched by caravan traffic: Dar es Salaam. It was as early as 1866 that the Zanzibari Sultan Majid attempted to give coastward caravan mobility new directions, away from the major terminus Bagamoyo. Instead, he shifted his interest to Dar es Salaam and invested in infrastructure to develop this town into a new major caravan terminus. However, when Majid died rather suddenly in 1870, his successor Sultan Barghash decided to abandon the building project. Two years later a hurricane dislodged the harbor and the town fell into a period of decline until the Germans later revived it.

### **THE OLD TRADE CENTER AND THE NEW CAPITAL**

In 1885, a German chartered company established a protectorate in East Africa which, in 1891, was converted into the colony of German East Africa (GEA). For the new German colonial state, the established transport system and its commerce remained important throughout the 1890s and 1900s. As the only readily available export product, ivory from Central Africa and the Tanzanian interior became a main source of income, while the labor of porters was required as engine of colonial occupation and administration.

At the same time, however, the caravan economy was regarded as problematic. First, for Europeans, caravan transport never worked smoothly as porters were accused of being unruly and

unpredictable, of stealing from their employers, and of deserting them. Even more problematic were the constraints manual transport imposed on colonial capitalism. Those German entrepreneurs and agitators who promised a profitable plantation economy in the vast plains of Tanzania regarded caravan transport as a hindrance to economic exploitation. To them, it appeared inefficient in terms of time, cost, and manpower. Because all goods had to be carried on human shoulders, products of comparatively little value, such as coffee, could not be brought to the coast without financial losses. Beginning in the 1890s, the German colonizers thus invested themselves in overcoming this allegedly archaic transport system, as well as in establishing a plantation industry to compliment (and eventually supplant) caravan commerce.

Along with the development of new commercial patterns, the German colonizers aimed at developing new spatial structures reflecting and promoting these changes. Ambitious to finally emancipate GEA from precolonial patterns of mobility, they sought to give trade as well as movement through space new directions by cutting off specific places from the new network while centering it around others. This becomes evident from the case of Bagamoyo and the German efforts to emancipate colonial trade from the established trade center.

By the late 1880s, Bagamoyo was the boom town of caravan commerce. When the German chartered company *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft* had acquired its first territorial possessions in Eastern Africa, it had strategically selected the town as its headquarters, expecting it to serve as a gateway for the company's expeditions and trade ventures into the interior. When the German Empire officially took over in 1891, however, the Germans decided to make Dar es Salaam the colonial capital. According to historian Steven Fabian, who has studied Bagamoyo's history extensively, it was the commercial ties of Bagamoyo's South Asian merchant class that "motivated the Germans to move their capital away from Bagamoyo in an effort to outmaneuver its established political and economic power".<sup>1</sup> Blaming the unprofitable outcomes of the colonial businesses on unfair competition from South Asian merchants and shopkeepers, the administration sought to undermine their alleged manipulation of commerce by re-routing the lucrative central caravan route to Dar es Salaam. In an attempt to undermine the far-reaching kinship and business

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<sup>1</sup> Fabian, Steven. 2007. "Curing the cancer of the colony: Bagamoyo, Dar es Salaam, and socioeconomic struggle in German East Africa". *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40: 441–469, 444.

relations of Bagamoyo's merchant elite, they planned to develop the economically less significant town into the new administrative and economic center on the Indian Ocean coast.

This relocation was also expected to rectify German East Africa's maritime trade links. For most of the nineteenth century, Zanzibar had served as the gateway to the East African mainland with all trade goods being shipped in sailing vessels, so-called dhows, to the archipelago and then transferred to ships from around the globe. Most of GEA's external trade was channeled through Zanzibar's market. Because Bagamoyo could only accommodate dhow traffic, and thus inevitably mediated only the trade to the archipelago, the portion of direct imports from the German motherland to its own colonial belonging had remained low. Moreover, in 1890, the archipelago had fallen into the British sphere. To increase commercial entanglements within the German Empire, the colonial state thus strived to avoid Zanzibar as an entrepôt for international trade. Thus, the German government began to strengthen Dar es Salaam's seaborne logistics. Other than Bagamoyo, the new capital possessed a fine natural harbor which allowed steamships to cast anchor. In 1890 the *Reichstag* conceded to subsidize a regular mail steamer service to East Africa for which the *Deutsche Ost-Afrika-Linie (DOAL)* was founded. Choosing Dar es Salaam over Bagamoyo was thus envisaged as a re-routing in both directions, on land and by sea.

### **INVESTMENT AND DIVESTMENT IN ROADS**

But what good were overseas trade links without economic activity in Dar es Salaam? By 1902, over a decade into colonial rule, Zanzibar was still the main import-export market for GEA, with a share of 57 percent in GEA's imports and 67 percent in exports.<sup>2</sup> Within German East Africa, caravan traffic was visibly shrinking by that time. This was a result of the depletion of ivory owing to a decrease in the elephant population, hunting laws, and export bans in the Congo Free State, then the main area of hunting. According to official records, the number of porters arriving in Bagamoyo declined from 27,080 (1899) to 23,065 (1904). While the caravan traffic was thus shrinking, Bagamoyo was still the prime destination for the remaining porters. The town still mediated mostly non-European trade in beeswax, ivory, and especially the booming rubber trade.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For these figures, cf. Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), R 1001/640, Strandes to Foreign Office, Zanzibar, 28 November 1902, 151.

<sup>3</sup> "Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee im Jahre 1904/5". In *Verhandlungen des Reichstages: 11. Legislaturperiode, 2. Session, 4. Anlageband*. Berlin: Sittenfeld: 2705–2750, 2722.

Previous studies have hinted to the series of measures with which the authorities sought to redirect trade to Dar es Salaam, such as a two-year long closure of Bagamoyo's harbor for dhow traffic.<sup>4</sup> As the following pages will show, as much as the colonial government cut off Bagamoyo from its maritime links, it also considered land-based infrastructure planning and investment a tool to channel movement and divert trade flows.

In order to persuade trade caravans to take Dar es Salaam as the new destination, the administration sought to complicate their movement on the route to Bagamoyo. Under governor Eduard von Liebert (1897–1900) the colonial administration began to strategically use infrastructure investment to weaken Bagamoyo's links with the network of trade routes. It made use of divestment in infrastructure to complicate caravan journeys to Bagamoyo. From Kilosa, one of the places in the coastal hinterland in which the central route branched into paths in direction of either Bagamoyo or Dar es Salaam, road extensions and bridge construction in 1897 eased travel to the coast. Preference, then, was given to the caravan trail leading to the colonial capital Dar es Salaam, on which a long-needed solid wooden bridge was erected. From this investment, "it can be expected that these improvements will drag the caravan trade more and more from Bagamoyo to Dar es Salaam and the import and export will be diverted from Zanzibar to our coast,"<sup>5</sup> as the administration promised in its Annual Report.

This process was fostered under von Liebert's successor Gustav Adolf von Götzen (1901–1906). His administration envisioned centralized infrastructure planning and the massive investment in specific roads to engender longer-lasting processes of spatial alteration in Tanzania. Nineteen state roads in all parts of the colony were to be reworked to cater for both, human travelers and vehicles. They included sections of the central caravan route as well as a new road connecting Dar es Salaam with Bagamoyo. The established trade center itself, however, was not to be connected via any of these planned state roads with the interior. While Bagamoyo was mostly excluded from von Götzen's plans, a new highway starting in Dar es Salaam was to connect the capital with the old central route.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf., for instance, Krajewski, Patrick. 2006. *Kautschuk, Quarantäne, Krieg: Dhauhandel in Ostafrika 1880–1914*. Berlin: Schwarz.

<sup>5</sup> "Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Deutschen Schutzgebiete im Jahre 1896/7". In *Verhandlungen des Reichstages: 9. Legislaturperiode, 5. Session, 2. Anlageband*. Berlin: Sittenfeld: 917–994, 954.

At the same time, investment in Bagamoyo's infrastructure was kept to a minimum. Asked by a German overseas trader active in Bagamoyo to invest into the caravan route leading out of the town in order to keep the town's trade alive, the governor explained in April 1904,

that only those roads will be extended which are important and serve the wider national interest [...]. To Mr. Schuller, who argues that the caravan route from Bagamoyo inland was an equally important road to national interest [...] it is answered that this caravan route cannot be considered yet [for national funding].<sup>6</sup>

With its section of the central caravan route being reduced to a road of allegedly only local importance in official planning, the government did not consider itself responsible for any road running westward in the Bagamoyo district. The only road to be extended with national funds was a newly planned highway to the new center Dar es Salaam.

Deliberate non-investment brought all infrastructure works in the Bagamoyo district to a standstill. The Bagamoyo district office's request for an additional 50,000 Rupees of government funding to invest in other projects was refused, likewise the appeal for the small amount of 1,200 Rupees to re-construct a bridge that had been destroyed by floods on the route to Kilosa, i.e. on Bagamoyo's artery to inland trade. The government's short answer from October 1905 that "financial assistance cannot be granted"<sup>7</sup> embodied its infrastructure policy in a nutshell: the more the road to Bagamoyo decayed and the harder it became to pass for human traffic, the more trade activity would be drawn to Dar es Salaam.

Still, the impact of infrastructural exclusion on Bagamoyo remained low during von Götzen's tenure. Official statistics suggest that by 1905, Zanzibar's share in the import-export to GEA had decreased to 31.5%, being for the first time outdone by Germany.<sup>8</sup> But these numbers only came about through the great portion of German imports for government and infrastructural purposes. Bagamoyo's established trade relations proved resilient and the caravan sector, dominated by South Asian and African traders, did not easily follow the reorientation. In spite of the temporary closure of its harbor for quarantine against a plague epidemic and the fact that all trade caravans were re-routed to the nearby town of Pangani for several months in 1906 because of food scarcity, the old terminus could manage to maintain its leading position as destination of

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<sup>6</sup> BAB, R 1001/812, "Protokoll über die Erste Sitzung des Gouvernementsrates," 27–28 April 1904, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Tanzania National Archives, G4/123, Government to Communal Council Bagamoyo, 25 October 1905, 38.

<sup>8</sup> BAB, R 1001/641, 'Der Außenhandel des Schutzgebietes Deutsch-Ostafrika im Kalenderjahr 1905', 1906, 3.

most coastbound caravans. In the fiscal year 1905/6, the authorities still counted the arrival of 1,689 caravans with over 22,000 porters from the interior, compared to 1,211 caravans in the previous year. By 1907, economic activities in Bagamoyo had decreased as a result of the harbor closure, but the caravan hub still ran close to Dar es Salaam as a trading center, their export revenues amounting to 1,507,788 Marks resp. 1,709,508 Marks (Dar es Salaam). Before long, it became apparent that, as a German observer remarked, “the roads [...] ease journeys but cannot suffice to change the proportions of trade.”<sup>9</sup> This power was ascribed only to the railway.

### COLONIAL LEGACY IN SPACE

In 1907 the pro-colonial Reichstag majority consented to finance the so-called Central Railway with public funds, a railway line from Dar es Salaam to Kigoma at Lake Tanganyika where the railhead arrived in February 1914. Simultaneously, a northern line, the Usambara Railway, was extended from the northern coastal town of Tanga to Moshi at Mount Kilimanjaro. Mechanized transport continued the process of spatial alteration begun with the systematic planning of highways under von Götzen. With the extension of the Central Railway out of Dar es Salaam, the railway planners devised the ultimate blow to Bagamoyo’s trade.

The effects on the old trade center, as far as they can be assessed through colonial statistics, were devastating. As soon as the railway started operating on its first section in 1907, Bagamoyo faced a steady demise, its export revenue declining to 645,387 Marks in 1910 and down to 315,024 Marks by 1912. Simultaneously, the capital could attract ever more trade, registering 5,384,717 Marks of export revenues in 1912.<sup>10</sup> A Swahili poem, published in the government-owned newspaper *Kiongozi*, documented this process. Under the title *Kupotea kwa Bagamoyo* (“The Loss of Bagamoyo”), the author wrote that “Bagamoyo burns down; [...] years ago, visitors came to us; the city left the roads unattended; [...] Bagamoyo was famous, now it abandons us.”<sup>11</sup> The town shrank from a size of 18,000 (1891) to 5,000 in 1913 with only about 400 dhows still calling there within one year.

Even by the 1910s, porterage and caravans were still an important link in many Tanzanian regions that remained untouched by the two static railway lines. But for Bagamoyo, the proximity

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<sup>9</sup> Stentzler, Julius. 1910. *Deutsch-Ostafrika: Kriegs- und Friedensbilder*. Berlin: W. Weicher, 111.

<sup>10</sup> *Die deutschen Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee: 1912/13*. Berlin: Mittler & Sohn, 175.

<sup>11</sup> “Kupotea kwa Bagamoyo,” *Kiongozi* (January 1911), 1.

to Dar es Salaam and the Central Railway, constructed along a large proportion of the former central caravan route, proved fatal. With the railhead reaching the important trade center Tabora in central Tanzania in 1912, the numbers of porters in Bagamoyo dropped to an all-time low with only 851 porters counted as arriving and 193 as leaving. By then, South Asian merchants were reported as having withdrawn and re-located their businesses along the railway or to neighboring Kenya and the German merchant houses still active in Bagamoyo finally moved to Dar es Salaam.<sup>12</sup>

Through infrastructure planning and investment, to conclude this paper, the German colonizers of East Africa intervened into existing structures, eager to transform and realign them according to colonial demands. Bagamoyo, the established trade center was to be replaced with a new trade center, Dar es Salaam, in an effort to undermine the influence of non-European traders in the colonial economy. Ambitious investments in roads around 1900 allowed for a first departure from the pre-colonial network. But it was only through the massive investment in railway lines after 1907 that colonial rule was able to transform space and to break the old structures. At the same time, deliberate non-investment in existing infrastructural arrangements helped foster this process. It was understood that if infrastructure fashioned circulation, its absence or decay was likewise capable of doing so.

The exclusion of Bagamoyo and its ensuing demise provide evidence that German colonial rule could assert transformative power, although at great expense. It took almost thirty years to create new social and commercial ties, but then German colonialism initiated long-lasting effects. The German administration initiated the rise of Dar es Salaam, a process which was continued under British rule and after independence. Different from most other towns along the Swahili Coast, it was not commerce but state investment that helped the new capital to develop. Of all German spatial interventions, this decision had probably the longest-lasting impact. Today, Dar es Salaam is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world, its population estimated at about 5.5 million people. Over a hundred years after the Germans decided to cut off Bagamoyo, it has become a backwater town that even today remains disconnected from any of the national highways.

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<sup>12</sup> BAB, R 1001/6569, "Jahresbericht über Ostafrika 1912/3 [draft]," 176.