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Encounter with an “Injured Buffalo:” Slavery and Colonial Emancipation in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Tanganyika, today Tanzania Mainland, was one of four countries, including Namibia, Cameroon, and Togo, that suffered under German colonial rule in Africa. Formally lasting from 1885 to 1918, German rule over Tanganyika commenced at the peak of slave trading in the region. As such, the politico-economic modes of slavery and colonialism influenced each other variably during German rule. Some of these influences have been better studied and documented than others. Issues regarding hostility between slave traders and Germans as economic competitors exemplify cases that have received better coverage in the region. At the same time, very little is known about responses of enslaved individuals or escapees against the establishment of German rule in East Africa. Using southern Tanganyika as a case study, this article examines the place of slave runaways in the colonial process and diaspora dynamics of the region. This study reveals why and how this group exerted a noticeable force against imposition of German rule in southern Tanganyika through a famous war of resistance, popularly referred to as the Maji Maji War.

KEYWORDS

Maji Maji War; runaways; regional diaspora; Matumbiland; slavery; colonial resistance

Introduction

Along with Togo, Namibia, and Cameroon, Tanganyika, then known as *Deutsch Ostafrika*, was a target of German colonial rule during the period between the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) and the end of the First World War in 1918. Thereafter, from January 1919, Tanganyika was governed by Britain as a mandated territory under the League of Nations. At the time of the Germans’ arrival, East Africa was at the peak of a long-standing slave trade (Deutsch 2006). The intrusion of colonialism into another socio-economic system that had been in operation for almost a millennium (Beachey 1976; Lane 2011; Mapunda 2006) could not proceed without resistance. Obviously, this came from slave traders, to whom Germans were perceived as competitors not only commercially but also socio-politically as the Germans would now enjoy a top status that was previously a prerogative of Arabs and slave traders.

Multiple, seemingly uncoordinated wars ensued along the coast, from Tanga all the way to Mikindani, mostly between 1888 and 1895. The fiercest of these was the one led by Abushiri bin Salim, a slave trader and plantation owner from Pangani who, on 15

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December 1889, was caught and hanged at Pangani, marking the end of serious resistance in the northern coast of Tanganyika. Farther south, around Kilwa Kivinje, Hassan Omari Makunganya, a Yao slave trader, led another attack in 1894. On 15 November 1895, he was also caught and hanged at Kilwa Kivinje (Gwassa 1969).

Contrary to the fears of the slave traders that the Germans would take over or at least disrupt smooth operation of the slave trade, the Germans did neither, as the slave trade continued virtually unabated throughout their reign in Tanganyika (Deutsch 2006). The Germans' major interest was in a cash crop economy. For almost a decade they invested in a plantation economy, with emphasis on crops that were in high demand in Germany and Europe at large. These included coffee, cotton, rubber, tobacco, and sisal, as well as oil crops such as sesame and groundnuts. But after experimenting for almost a decade these ventures proved unsuccessful. The conclusion reached both in Berlin and in Dar es Salaam was that "if plantations were failing and if the presence of white settlers was a more symbolic than economic factor, the only way to improve colonial production and raise the income of the colonial state was to promote African commercial cultivation" (Koponen 1995, 214). The Africans on their part did not readily accept the imposed commercial cultivation. The Germans responded by imposing taxes on them as a means of prodding them into working for colonial purposes (Koponen 1995, 215). In 1897 the tax ordinance was issued and implemented the following year.

Both forced cultivation and taxes were received with multiple resistances from the Africans. The most celebrated of these are the Hehe War (1891–1898) and the Maji Maji War (1905–1907). While the scale of all other wars was relatively small, both in terms of spatial coverage and number of participating groups, that of the Maji Maji War, which is the focus of this study, was by all measures the fiercest, deadliest, and spatially most expansive.

Ignited by the Matumbi people, a relatively small ethnic group living in the Kilwa district in the Lindi region (Figure 1), the War spread across the whole of southern Tanganyika, and drew in over 15 ethnic groups. The War has attracted the attention of a number of professional and amateur historians, covering various questions, including the causes, magnitude, martial operations, results, and aftermath (e.g., Giblin and Monson 2010; Gwassa 1973; Iliffe 1979; Koponen 2010; Lawi 2009; Ng'oge 2010; Remole 2011). This work moves away from those conventional inquiries, and focuses on the question of why the Matumbi people, rather than some other group, started the Maji Maji War. To answer this question, the author conducted field research in Matumbiland in 2007. Multi-disciplinary methods and techniques were employed, including anthropological, archaeological, and historical approaches. This study presents the findings from this research, beginning with examination of the slave trade, which provides the historical background of the Matumbi people.

Matumbi Hills in the context of the slave trade

Some analysts of the slave trade argue that African societies variably practiced some forms of slavery long before the introduction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Indian Ocean slave trade in western and eastern Africa, respectively (Alpers 1967; Deutsch 2006; Lane 2011; Lovejoy 2000; Rodney 1967; Suret-Canale 1971). Having been part and parcel of local cultures, the indigenous forms of slavery were perceived differently when compared to the ones introduced by foreigners. The former were taken to be less

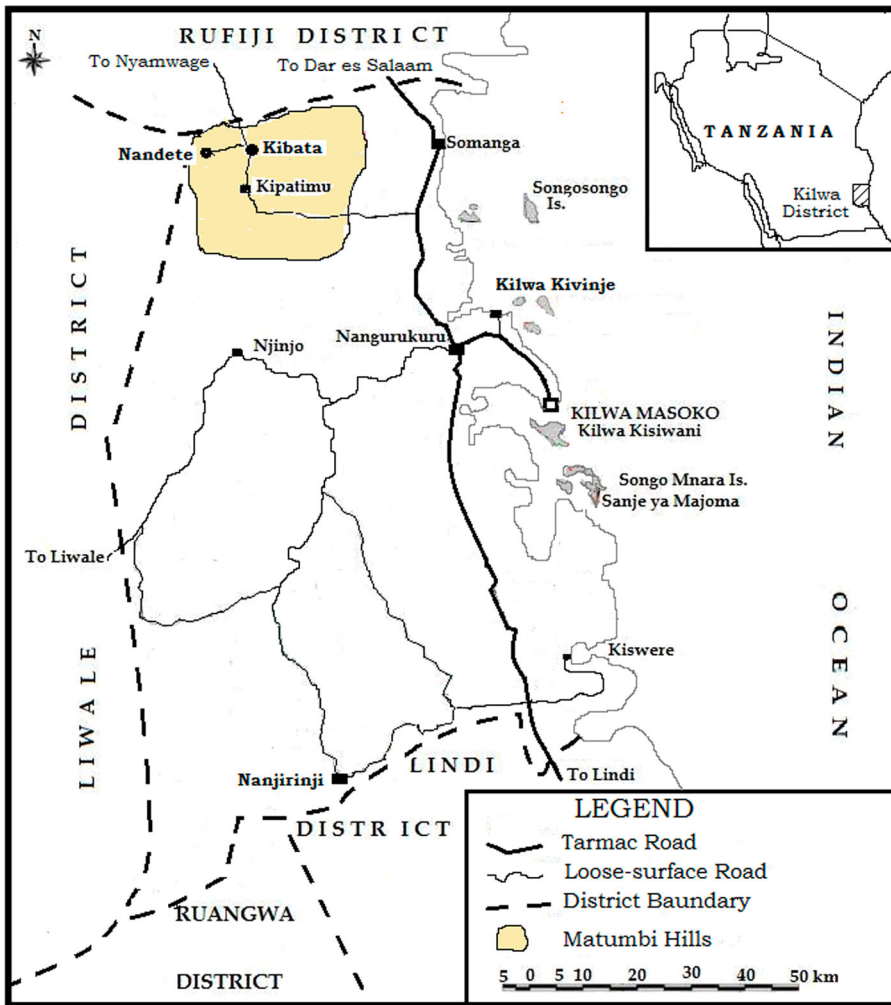


Figure 1. Map of the Kilwa District showing the Kilwa Archipelago and Matumbi Hills. Image by the author.

oppressive than the latter, regardless of the actual level of physical, moral, or psychological trauma to which captives were subjected.

The introduction of foreign-based slavery in East Africa is arguably believed to have started by the ninth century CE, soon after the arrival of resident Arab refugees from Oman. According to *Kitab al-Ajaib al-Hind*, a book written in the mid-tenth century, visitors from Oman preyed on East African inhabitants and stole “their children enticing them away by offering them fruits. They [carried] the children from place to place and finally [took] possession of them and [carried] them off to their own country” (quoted in Beachey 1976, ix). Notably, Oman immigrants settled at Kilwa Kisiwani and other coastal towns from the ninth century onward (Sutton 1998).

Kilwa Kisiwani was once the hub of political, economic, and cultural civilization in the East African region, spanning from Sofala in southern Mozambique to Mogadishu in

Somaliland. The city served as a springboard for a vibrant trade then going on between the interior of southern Africa on the one hand and Arabia, India, and China on the other. Kilwa's power and fame, especially in the period from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, derived mostly from its control of this trade. Archaeological remains of ruined monuments (palaces, mosques, fortress, and residential houses) and artifacts provide prominent evidence of the significant role of Kilwa Kisiwani. By the start of the sixteenth century the city started to experience a decline in both economic well-being and political strength. This is generally attributed to the destructive interruption of the city's political and trade networks by the Portuguese.

The amount of stones, mortar, and timber involved in the construction of the complex and massive structures on the Kilwa archipelago are suggestive of the deployment of enslaved laborers. It comes without surprise, therefore, learning from Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveler, who visited Kilwa Kisiwani in 1332, that the Sultan of Kilwa led frequent raids against Africans on the mainland. Slaves were so plentiful that the Sultan and his son presented 20 of them to an indigent fakir from the Yemen (Beachey 1976, x).

Despite these indications, no evidence has shown an extensive slave catchment area, say beyond 100 km from Kilwa, before the eighteenth century. We are led to this observation by a number of elements of circumstantial evidence. One example is a narrative of an eye witness, Caspar Bocarro, a Portuguese traveler, who in 1616 traversed the southwestern interior of the Kilwa area, from Sema on the Zambezi in what is today Mozambique, across the Ruvuma River to Kilwa. In his report Bocarro did not record any encounter with trade caravans or any devastation caused by wars or raids (Gray 1948). In other words, life in the interior of southern Tanzania was "reasonably stable, the lot of the inhabitants of this region, although they lacked the amenities of the coast-dweller, was not necessarily one to be pitied," noted Smith (1963, 253). Richard Burton, a mid-nineteenth century eye-witness, also confirmed the relative tranquility of the hinterland by saying:

The African is in these regions superior in comforts, better dressed, fed and lodged and less worked than the unhappy Ryot of British India. His condition, where the slave trade is slack, may, indeed, be compared advantageously with that of the peasantry in some of the richest of European countries. (Burton 1860, 278–280, quoted in Smith 1963, 254)

The relative peace and stability described by Burton eroded steadily beginning in the eighteenth century when the European market for enslaved laborers entered into the scene.

One of the key factors in this European impact was the establishment of slave-based sugar plantations in the French colonies of Mauritius and Réunion in the middle of the Indian Ocean. This development dates from 1735 when Bertrand François Mahe de la Bourdonnais became Governor-General of the Mascarene Islands (Alpers 1967). Besides the French colonies, a number of slaves were shipped to Zanzibar, which operated the main slave market in the region. Initially slaves were shipped directly from Kilwa Kisiwani. Following a tightening up of anti-slave trade patrols in the Indian Ocean, captives were later smuggled on fishing boats from Kilwa Kivinje, 20 km north of Kilwa Kisiwani (Biginagwa 2015). Another tactic was to march captives across land to Bagamoyo before smuggling them to Zanzibar on fishing boats and canoes (Lane 2011; Mapunda 2006; Sheriff 1987).

The slave and ivory catchment area had expanded dramatically by the nineteenth century to reach the eastern and western shores of Lake Nyasa (Kalinga 1985; Mapunda

2004). As Sutton (1973, 6) notes: “Though all routes dealt with both ivory and slaves, it was the southern route from the Lake Nyasa region that supplied the bulk of the latter.” Research conducted by the author in recent years has revealed that it was not until the late nineteenth century that Kilwa-borne slave and ivory traders ventured into the central eastern shore of the Lake (Mapunda 2004).

By the nineteenth century, the main receiving port at Kilwa was no longer Kilwa Kisiwani but Kilwa Kivinje, which had previously been a small fishing port. Kilwa Kivinje’s history as a trading town started in the late eighteenth century. Its expansion to a competitive port in the region resulted from the slave and ivory trades (Biginagwa 2015). Located on the mainland, Kilwa Kivinje became a preferred venue for the land-borne commodities of slaves and ivory when compared to the classic port of Kilwa Kisiwani, which was situated on an island (Figure 1). The shift was exacerbated by a power dispute that ensued after the death of Sultan Yusuph of Kilwa in the 1820s. Sir John Gray (1963, 222–223) observed:

There was a dispute as to Yusuf’s successor, which led to the imprisonment at Muscat of Muhammad ibn Sultan, one of the rival candidates. Mohammad was eventually released and set himself up as sultan at Kilwa Kivinje, about fifteen miles to the north of Kilwa Kisiwani. His rival remained at Kilwa Kisiwani, but the trade of that place was gradually transferred to Kilwa Kivinje.

A common associated business in all major slave ports in East Africa in the nineteenth century was the establishment of plantations. For example, Pangani had sugar plantations, Bagamoyo produced rice and coconut, Kilwa Kivinje had coconut and rice, and Zanzibar grew cloves and coconut. Plantations of food crops in the areas of the mainland ports focused on feeding caravan traders during the early nineteenth century (Biginagwa 2012). The caravan business became complicated due to restrictions against trafficking of slaves across the waters to Zanzibar or the French colonies in the Indian Ocean. At this time plantations became the most useful destinations for slaves (Alpers 1967). This development had significant impacts. Treaties that restricted slave trading focused on the terminal points, such as coastal ports and the ocean waters. Those treaties did not target plantations and source areas in the interior, which therefore became focal points for the continuing slave trade. But along the coast it became clear that smuggling slaves across the waters to Zanzibar and other places was quite risky. It is on account of this that plantations around the mainland ports emerged as valuable slave destinations. With time, the plantations grew, leading to an accompanying expansion of trade in cash crops such as coconuts, rice, and sugarcane.

As Paul Lane (2011, 303) observes: “One further consequence of the rise of plantation slavery was that more slaves ran away from their owners and tried to establish settlements of their own.” Such settlements included Koromio and Makoroboi in the hinterland of Mombasa, and Makorora and Kikogwe in the hinterland of Pangani (Iliffe 1979; Lane 2011). The work environment of plantations often presented slaves with chances for escaping. They often worked free of physical restraints, allowing one to run away if the opportunity arose and an individual was ready to confront the potential risks involved. Runaways could be shot by their supervisors, die from hunger and disease, or suffer harm from wild animals. In fact “even if they escaped from the Europeans before they could be placed in chains on the slave-ships,” notes Rodney (1967, 12), “it was extremely difficult to avoid being captured once more by the chiefs through whose territory they had

to pass.” As a result, escaping slaves often traveled far distances, with or without anticipation of tracing back to their homelands. These dynamics of escape led to a regional displacement and diaspora of escaped slaves who made new homes distant from the plantations from which they departed.

We need to bear in mind that running away was a common phenomenon, regardless of the distance from one’s homeland (Agorsah 2007; Lane 2011; Lovejoy 2000; Marshall 2009). That is why even those who crossed seas and oceans still harbored the desire to free themselves although they clearly knew that they could not get back to their original homelands. Still, as Agorsah (2007, 333) notes, it was better for them to face risks in the unknown wilderness than remain enslaved:

[A]s early as 1502 an African slave escaped from his enslaver into the interior hills of Hispaniola and that during the early sixteenth century, strongholds established by escaped African slaves already existed on one of the islands referred to as Samana, off the coast of Hispaniola. These groups eventually developed into Maroon communities who fought to retain their freedom.

Major slave ports on the East Africa coast often included escapees’ stations or villages. Yet, nothing of the kind has been reported as to Kilwa Kivinje. This does not necessarily indicate that Kilwa Kivinje was exceptional, and instead reflects the fact that very little research has been done on the southern caravan route so far.

Research in 2007 revealed that the Matumbi Hills served as a haven for slave escapees from Kilwa Kivinje. The Hills were covered with dense forest throughout the year, interwoven with an elaborate labyrinth of caves, both dry and wet, and some with underground streams. As a result, the Hills provided escapees with a landscape of useful resources. In total there are 20 caves with a cumulative length of 14,731 m. Some of them are interconnected beneath the surface. Most important of all is the Nandembo cave system, which is 7,510 m long, making it the longest cave in Tanzania and the fifteenth longest in Africa (Laumanns 2001, 12). Most of these cave spaces were accessible and well-ventilated, and so enabled the Matumbi people to take cover without being noticed. In his investigation in 1908, Ambros Mayer is reported to have seen “hearths and traces of food (presumably bones) still remaining in the middle part of the cave [Nang’oma]” (Shaw 1989, 33). Our investigation a century later did not uncover hearths, but pottery and bones as detailed in Table 1 below. We also found plenty of eels in some of the wet caves. What this suggests is that the Matumbi Hills provided valuable resources and havens for escapees: freedom, isolation, security, water, and, food, including fish.

Evidently, the locations of these caves remained in the exclusive knowledge of the Matumbi people; no stranger was allowed to know. It is not surprising, therefore, that no Germans knew about any cave in Matumbi Hills before the Maji Maji War ended. The first white person to cast an eye on a Matumbi cave was Police Sergeant Weckauf in August 1909 (Shaw 1989, 32), four years after the start and two years after the end of the Maji Maji War. Weckauf’s discovery resulted from serendipity propelled by curiosity, as Shaw (1989, 32) reports:

During a march Weckauf saw a hill which in contrast to all the others was densely forested. Weckauf climbed the hill to check the wood for its value, although the natives sought to stop him. As he entered the thicket he found in a hollow the entrance to the cave which he explored to its exit on the other side of the hill.

Table 1. Cultural materials excavated from Matumbi Hills (by sites and levels).

Unit	Provenance	Materials								Total
		Level (cm)	Microlithic	Pottery	Bead	Slag	Metal	Bone	Other	
1	Nanondo Hill, Kibata; 2 x 1 m; depth to bedrock 40 cm; Open-air site	0–10	8	5		2	2			17
		10–20	144	26	12	24	4		Seeds 2	212
		20–30	50	1	3	6	1		Chrc. 2	63
		30–40	23							23
		0–40	225	32	15	32	7	0	4	315
2	Nanondo Hill, Kibata; 2 x 1 m; depth to bedrock 70 cm; open-air site	0–10		29	2					31
		10–20	2	48	5				Chrc.1, amber3	59
		20–30	2	62	13	1		2	Chrc. 4	84
		30–40	2	53				16	Chrc.2	73
		40–50		19						19
		50–60		4						4
		60–70								0
Total	0–70	6	215	20	1	0	18	10	270	
3	Nang’oma Cave, Nandembo; 2 x 1 m; depth to bedrock 80 cm; cave site	0–20	4	60		1				65
		20–30	14	51				2	Fe ore 2	69
		30–40	2	4		2				8
		40–50	1	2		1				4
		50–60	5	2						7
		60–70		1						1
		70–80								0
Total	0–80	26	120		4		2	2	154	
4	Nang’oma Cave, Nandembo; 2 x 1 m; depth to bedrock 115 cm; cave site	0–20		14					Chrc.1	15
		20–30		2						2
		30–40		1		2				3
		40–50								
		50–65								
		65–75			1					1
		75–85	1	1						2
		85–105								0
Total	0–105	1	19	0	2	0	0	1	23	
Grand total			258	386	35	39	7	20	17	762

The Matumbi strongly guarded these caves against strangers. Michael Laumanns (2001) reveals that some of the caves remained secret up to the 1990s. A good example is the Maji Maji Cave, a name doubtlessly derived from its use during the Maji Maji War. Laumanns (2001, 30) writes:

[I]t has to be noted that the cave has always been used as a shelter for the locals to hide in war time. No footpath is leading to the cave by default. The knowledge about the cave is still today [1995] treated as a secret and we were the first whites ever to see Maji-Maji Cave. ... Every visitor to the area is strongly recommended to respect this tradition and to create a climate of confidence with the locals before looking out for Maji-Maji Cave.

We turn now to the ethnographic, archaeological, and linguistic evidence of the history of the Matumbi people as a population engaged in an internal, regional diaspora.

The settlement of the Matumbi Hills: Archaeological, ethnographic, and linguistic evidence

The archaeological investigation conducted in 2007 in the Matumbi Hills was aimed at establishing who the Matumbi people were and why they were the first to start the Maji Maji War. The research concentrated on four villages and included ethnographic

inquiries, walk-over surveys coupled with shovel-test pits, and excavations. The villages were Kibata, Nandete, Nandembo, and Mtondo wa Kimwaga, which together with Kipatimu constitute the core settlement of the Matumbi people (Figure 1). Kipatimu was left out of the research area because it already had become semi-urban and cosmopolitan (Mapunda 2008).

On account of heavy vegetation cover, survey in all four villages was confined to open farmland (Figure 2). Artifacts recovered in surface collections included local pottery, metal objects, mammalian bones, and microlithics. Findings from survey and ethnographic inquiries guided the researchers in selecting places for excavations. A total of five test excavation trenches (units) were established, one measuring one meter square and the remaining four measuring two meters by one meter in size. Two of these units were dug in an open-air site (Nanondo Hill), while the remaining three were excavated in caves as specified in Table 1. All except one unit yielded cultural materials of different types, including local potsherds, imported beads, slag, daub, mammalian bones (including two pieces of elephant ribs), charcoal, and microlithics. The exceptional case was Singia cave, located in Mtondo wa Kimwaga village, where a one meter square unit was opened. The chamber we excavated in this cave had been shown to us by an informant who claimed that it had been used during the Maji Maji War by a blacksmith who was making muskets and supplying them to the Matumbi fighters. But we dug down to bedrock, 100 cm, there was no trace of cultural materials. The stratigraphy consisted of thin layers of sand deposited by runoffs as the cave had a wide opening.

Close examination of the archaeological findings (both surface and sub-surface) suggests the following settlement patterns. First, the Matumbi Hills had been occupied long before the nineteenth century CE. This is deduced from the occurrence of microlithic objects, indicative of Late Stone Age (LSA) culture. These were noted across the Hills during survey, and with high concentration during excavation of Unit 1, at Nanondo



Figure 2. A typical Matumbi landscape during June and July, the coldest time of the year, with the Nanondo Hills in the background. Photograph by the author.

Table 2. C₁₄ dates from Matumbi Hills (calibration made with the OxCal software).

Site	Provenance	Calibrated dates (68.2% probability)	Calibrated dates (95.4% probability)
Kibata, Nanondo Hill	Unit 1, Level C, 20–30 cm	4258–4071 BCE (4,165 BCE)	4322–4051 BCE (4,187 BCE)
Kibata, Nanondo Hill	Unit 2, Level D, 30–40 cm	906–1018 CE (962 CE)	893–1025 CE (959 CE)

Hill, Kibata Village (Table 1). Most of the microlithics were débitage, and only a few represented definitive tools.

The stratigraphy of Unit 1 shows that the site had been impacted by disturbance, causing older and younger materials to get mixed up. That is why microlithics, slag, metal fragments, beads, and pottery come from almost all levels. Most likely the disturbance was caused by blacksmith activities, as evinced by deposits of smelting slag, metal fragments, and ashes. A charcoal sample collected from Level C, 20–30 cm below the surface, has yielded a C₁₄ date (calibrated) of 4,187 BCE (Table 2), which falls in the bracket of the LSA period. As of now, we can refer to the producers of the LSA culture as the earliest inhabitants of the Matumbi Hills.

The other three excavation units, which contain relatively intact stratigraphic layers, suggest an intermediary phase of occupation before the last occupation in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. This intermediary occupation period is evident from such materials as beads and pottery as well as a C₁₄ date and linguistic evidence. Beads ($n = 35$), all of them imported, were dominated by the drawn type (Figure 3). Neville Chittick (1974) conducted an excavation at Kilwa Kisiwani in the 1960s and also reported distribution of this bead type. He found such beads occurred in deposits starting in what he called Period II (late twelfth to late thirteenth centuries CE), with a predominance in period IIIb (fourteenth to fifteenth centuries) and period IV (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) (Chittick 1974). This bead type has also been uncovered at the site of Kilwa Kivinje in deposits dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Biginagwa 2015).

Pottery collections from both sub-surface (excavation) and surface (survey) show a dominance of a ribbed motif (Figure 4). Chittick (1974) called this “Husuni modeled ware” and dates it to period IIIa, ranging from 1,250 to 1,400 CE. This pottery ware, just like drawn beads, was also uncovered at Kilwa Kivinje (Biginagwa 2015). Intriguingly,

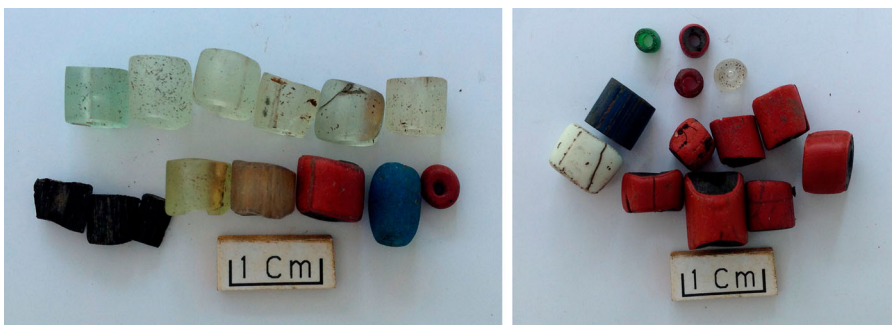


Figure 3. Sample of beads excavated from a site in Kibata, Matumbi Hills, dominated by drawn type: (left) from Unit 1, Level B; (right) from Unit 2, Level C. Photograph by the author.



Figure 4. Sample of ribbed-motif pottery, a dominant tradition in Matumbi Hills sites, from surface collections. Photograph by the author.

ribbed-motif pottery was absent in the neighboring area such as the lower Rufiji River basin (see, e.g., [Bufure and Vakolavene 2010](#); [Chami and Mapunda 1998](#)), and southern coastal region ([Kwekason 2009](#)). Instead, this pottery type was dominant farther south along the Lakes Nyasa-Tanganyika corridor, southwestern Tanzania ([Fagan and Yellen 1968](#); [Mapunda 2010](#)), northern Malawi ([Davison 1993](#)), and upper Ruvuma river basin ([Mapunda 2003](#)). [Davison \(1993\)](#) cites the zone around the northern tip of Lake Nyasa in both Tanzania (among Nyakyusa, Kisi, and Sangu) and in Malawi (among the Tumbuka) as a source of this ribbing motif, and dates it to the Late Iron Age (post 1,500 BCE). The cultural similarity between northern Malawi and southern Tanzania and the Matumbi Hills is not a mere coincidence. As shall be shown below, this similarity suggests that the ceramics were made by individuals schooled in the same tradition. Our interest therefore is to find out how those ceramics became present in Matumbiland.

A C14 date from Unit 2, Nanondo Hill, Kibata village (Table 2) places the level to the late first millennium CE. This is in congruence with historical-linguistic postulations that place the arrival of the Matumbi together with their cousins the Ngindo and Rufiji, around the late first millennium CE ([Ehret 1998](#)). [Ehret \(1998, 201\)](#) locates the immediate origins of the Matumbi in the area east of Lake Nyasa:

Probably also no later than about the fourth century, the Mbinga cluster of communities began its divergence into two successor societies, the Ruhuhu whose territory lay in the region of the Ruhuhu River of the modern-day northern Mbinga and northwestern Songea districts, and the Lwegu, whose earliest territories probably occupied the areas running eastward from Lake Nyasa into the far upper Ruvuma River watershed. Their

name is taken from the spread of many of their descendants northwards, late in the first millennium A.D., through the drainage basin of the Luwegu River as far as the delta of the Rufiji River. In those regions they eventually gave rise to the well-known Matumbi, Ngindo, and Rufiji societies of recent centuries.

Archaeological evidence from the central eastern Lake Nyasa region shows that iron working communities inhabited the area by the sixth century CE (Mapunda 2002; Mapunda and Burg 1991); not very far from Ehret's timing for the split of proto-Matumbi, the Lwegu. The archaeological evidence from the Matumbi Hills indicates that the ancestral Matumbi lived in the lowlands for quite some time before settling on uphill locations.

Both the C14 date and the historical-linguistic timing suggest that the northward movement of the ancestral Lwegu groups (the Matumbi, Ngindo, and Rufiji) took place before the ribbed-motif pottery was developed in the Lake Nyasa region. Otherwise that pottery type would have also been common among the Ngindo and Rufiji, but it was not. The arrival of the ribbed-motif pottery, along with the beads, likely followed a westward route from the Kilwa coast. Arrival of the ribbed-motif ceramics at the coast from the northern Lake Nyasa region was likely associated with pre-nineteenth century, coast-interior interactions, the specific details of which have yet to be established. Connections between the Kilwa coast and the interior, going as far inland as northern Malawi and eastern Zambia, generally involved exchanges of goods as far back as the Early Iron Age (Mapunda 2009).

Apparently, the intermediary inhabitants, who, according to the historical-linguistic evidence presented above can be termed as the early Matumbi, occupied largely the high altitudes of the northern flanks of the Hills, including Kibata, Imbilya, and Nandete. According to oral sources recorded during this research, as well as oral-historical sources collected by some local amateur historians (Mandai, n.d.; Ng'oge 2010), clans that are said to belong to this early group (also referred to by the local people as "original" Matumbi) included the Upunda, Mandwanga, Mandai, and Ndenje.

Another observation revealed by the archaeological data and supported by oral traditions is that the Matumbi Hills witnessed a later group of newcomers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although a few claim to have come from other directions, including east and north from among the Rufiji and Ndengereko respectively, the majority locate their origins in different parts of the shores of Lake Nyasa in what is today southwestern Tanzania and eastern Malawi. Emmanuel Mandai, an amateur Matumbi historian, asserts: "Wamatumbi asili yao ni kusini katika eneo linalozunguka Ziwa Nyasa [The Matumbi originate from the south in the area around Lake Nyasa]" (Mandai, n.d., 7). Mandai supports his contention by citing similarities in clan names between Matumbiland and the Lake Nyasa region. He writes: "Hivyo asili yao ni Wamalawi. Baadhi ya koo za Wamatumbi zipo Malawi kwa mfano Mpili, Mtumbuka, Mbonde, Kipengele na Mangaya, Kilindo, Kimbache, Lai, Mweyo na koo zingine [Therefore originally they are Malawian. Some Matumbi clans are found in Malawi, for example Mpili, Mtumbuka, Mbonde, Kipengele and [sic] Mangaya, Kilindo, Kimbache, Lai, Mweyo and others]" (Mandai, n.d., 8).

Furthermore, we also note some place names that are found in the two areas. For example the Mbinga Hills are a range of hills along the southwestern border of the Matumbi Hills and possess a name very likely derived from Mbinga Hills of the

Livingstone Mountains east of Lake Nyasa. Ngingama, a village located 5 km northeast of Nandete, shares a name with a village east of Lake Nyasa, 10 km east of Lituhi. Kingole, a village along the southern flanks of the Mbinga Hills, relates to a village with the same name along the Livingstone Mountains, 10 km north of Manda port, Ludewa district. Hanga village, found almost 15 km northeast of Kipatimu, shares a name with a village in Namtumbo District, 32 km northeast of Songea town. Kikole village is located 25 km west of Kilwa Kivinje, along the southern slave route. Kikole bears the same name as found 15 km south of Songea, where an Arab slave trader from Kilwa Kivinje established a slave facility in the late nineteenth century (Mapunda 2004). These similarities cannot be coincidental, but rather purposeful. The research in question attributes them to the slave trade (Mapunda 2008).

It is worth noting here that the Matumbi Hills are not the only place far away north with people originating from the Nyasa area. Others have been identified as far north as the Benadir coast in what is today southern Somalia. Descendants of former slave populations are found in areas along the lower Jubba River where they are known as Mushunguli or Gosha. Paul Lane (2011, 305) identifies these communities as including “residual groups of Zigua, Zaramo and Magindo originating from the Tanzanian coastal hinterland; Manyasa from the Lake Malawi [Nyasa] area, and Yao and Makua from areas of south-eastern Tanzania and north-western Mozambique.” What is important to note is that the reason for such long-distance migration for these people was the impact of the slave trade. It is therefore not surprising for the Matumbi, a people from the Lake Nyasa region, to bear a history shaped by the slave trade.

Matumbi and the Maji Maji War

Presently, the Matumbi people are one of several ethnic groups situated in the administrative Region of Lindi in southern Tanzania. The Matumbi people live in an area of hills of the same name, with a root word that means hills or mountain ranges in their language. Thus, the “Matumbi” people, or “Wamatumbi” in Kiswahili, simply means “mountain people” or “mountain dwellers.” The Matumbi Hills are located about 60 km west of the famous heritage sites of the Kilwa archipelago, namely Kilwa Kisiwani, Songo Mnara, and Kilwa Kivinje (Figure 1). Ethnically, the Matumbi are neighbors to the Ngindo and Mwera in the south, the Rufiji in the east and north, and the Pogoro in the west, across the Selous Game Reserve (MLT 2009).

To many people, the Matumbi are just another of the over 100 Bantu-speaking groups living in Tanzania today. But to historians, the Matumbi are a special people, a precious subject for research. They gained fame over a century ago when they triggered a war of resistance against German colonialists. Set in motion in July 1905, the War initially looked simple and seemingly controllable. However, the conflict promptly attracted one follower after another and over 15 ethnic groups from across southern Tanzania. Among those groups were the Ngindo, Ndengereko, Rufiji, Zaramo, Mwera, Makua, Makonde, Yao, Ngoni, Ndendeule, Matengo, Bena, Pangwa, Vidunda, Mbunga, and Pogoro. The War lasted for two years, up to August 1907.

Oral accounts indicate that the War was instigated by two Matumbi men, Ngulumbalyo Mandai and Lindimyo Machela. They uprooted three cotton plants in a communal farm at Nandete, a village northwest of the Matumbi Hills, which were cultivated under the order

of the German government (Figure 1; Gwassa 1973; Mapunda 2008). The Germans had introduced cash crops in Tanganyika in response to product demands in Europe and also as a means of enabling local Africans to pay taxes needed to help the government to run the colony. As Jan-Georg Deutsch (2006, 221) notes: “In the early 1900s *majumbe* and *akida* in the coastal districts were instructed by the colonial district offices to plant a certain acreage of export crops, especially cotton.” It is in this context that the Matumbi were required to grow cotton.

To the local people, both compulsory tax and the means of obtaining the money to pay it (forced labor, often associated with brutality) were considered inhumane and were largely opposed throughout the country. The act performed by the two Matumbi men at Nandete in July 1905 was therefore a political statement to the Germans that “enough is enough”; they could take it no more and they were ready to face the consequences. The two men, who must have acted on behalf of a mass of supporters, were very much aware that the Germans would take it as an act of contempt and would strike back; and that is exactly what they wanted. As John Iliffe (1979, 168) remarks, the two men “did this in order to declare war on the German Empire.” And indeed, a war ensued.

Behind the two men, and indeed behind the entire War, was a medicine man named Kinjekitile Ngwale who was a Ngindo in ethnic affiliation. Having been possessed by a snake spirit and claiming to have been immersed in water for a day (this was before the start of the War), Kinjekitile (as he is popularly referred to) proclaimed that the spirit gave him medicine that would enable the local Africans to defeat the Germans. The medicine consisted of water from the well where he had been immersed. This was to be mixed with some herbal concoctions and then sprinkled on and drunk by combatants in preparation for war against the Germans. Thus prepared and if administered to a warrior, the water, it was believed, had the power to turn the opponent’s bullets into water once it hit a treated and “clean” combatant. A clean combatant was a person who observed all taboos associated with the ritual, which included abstinence from sexual intercourse and bathing during the entire time of war, as well as observing oaths and maintaining secrecy. The war later came to be popularly referred to as the Maji Maji War (literary meaning Water-Water War), because of the water treatment and a cry “water, water, water” that the fighters yelled when in battle in reference to the medicinal water (Gwassa 1973).

The Maji Maji War was the first multi-ethnic mobilization in Tanzania and to a certain extent in Africa engineered by local people themselves and for their own cause. One year before, the Germans experienced another war of resistance in Namibia. However, that earlier conflict did not pull together as many ethnic groups as the one initiated by the Matumbi people in southern Tanzania. The earlier war only engaged two ethnic groups, the Herero and Nama (Mbwiliza 1989).

Why did the Matumbi initiate the Maji Maji War?

A number of students of the Maji Maji War have addressed the question of what made the Matumbi rise and fight, and why others joined them. Some contend that the Matumbi wanted to free themselves from the Germans’ cruelty, forced labor, land dispossession, and many other evils associated with German colonialism (e.g., Gwassa 1969; Iliffe

1979; Mapunda and Mpangara 1969). But these are cross-cutting factors, which affected not only the Matumbi but over 120 ethnic groups then living in and impacted by *Deutsch Ostafrika*. This answer does not, for example, explain why the War did not start among the Sukuma who were (and still are) the largest ethnic group in Tanganyika; or the Maasai, who were then said to be “war-like”; or the Zaramo, in whose land the Germans placed their headquarters (Dar es Salaam); or Ngoni, the military superiors of the day. Why the Matumbi, a comparatively small group, with no previous experience in war, and by then virtually unknown to other people?

This research project has established that the Matumbi initiated the War for socio-cultural reasons, embedded in their ethnic history. The Matumbi were not one people, but an ethnic mosaic, with a majority coming from around Lake Nyasa region, in present day eastern Malawi and southwestern Tanzania. The available archaeological, linguistic, and ethnographic evidence suggest three phases of settlement in Matumbi Hills. The first took place some 6,000 years ago evinced by microlithic objects and supported by C14 dates; the second dates to the late first millennium and early second millennium CE, evinced by pottery, linguistic evidence, and supported by C14 dates; and the last dates to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE, evinced by pottery, beads, metal work, and animal bones. While we are not certain of the ethnic identity of the first occupants of the area, we are confident with the latter two groups as being of Bantu affinity (Ehret 1998). With time the two latter settlement groups became integrated culturally through intermarriage and other socio-cultural practices due to social proximity.

The population that settled in the Matumbi Hills in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries experienced the diasporic history of escaped slaves. That population comprised the ancestors of a majority of the Matumbi people today. Those runaway slaves relocated to the Matumbi Hills to escape from their putative owners at Kivinje, almost 60 km away along the coast. This self-liberation enabled them to regain the dignity they had lost through enslavement. Most importantly, their regaining of dignity and respect took place in conditions that molded their behavior and culture. First, they acquired freedom and dignity through their own initiative. This likely made them audacious and confident. Second, by escaping and relocating to a neutral place and not going back to their respective homelands, they were now free from any form of subordination, be it political, social, or labor-based. With time, a socio-political nucleus grew with a focus on the family unit and clan. Up until the late nineteenth century, when colonialism reached the Matumbi Hills, the socio-political organization there was still clan-based. Clan heads, referred to as *Nkulungwa*, literary meaning the “master” or “head,” were the topmost socio-political leaders. On account of these facets of their history, the Matumbi were very likely inclined to resist any new forms of subjugation.

On account of their history of escapes, diaspora, and settlement, the Matumbi can be said to have likely possessed the predilections of an “injured buffalo.” Traditional accounts report that an injured buffalo is the deadliest animal to be confronted in a hunting expedition as it becomes particularly vengeful. If a buffalo has been shot, but does not die and instead runs away, it is unwise to track it. The injured buffalo will often lie in wait to ambush and kill the tracking hunter in revenge. Having freed themselves from the yoke of enslavement, the Matumbi people were not only unprepared for another form of indignity, but also likely remained inherently vengeful to anyone who reminded them of their bygone agonies. Therefore, when Germans imposed colonial rule upon

them, especially forced labor, those actions reminded the Matumbi people of the pains and dehumanization they had fought so hard against.

The fortitude of the Matumbi, as escaped slaves and their descendants, was not unique to that group. [Iliffe \(1979, 93\)](#) notes that when Abushiri bin Salim, an Arab slave trader and owner of sugar plantations at Pangani, took up arms against the Germans in 1888 the “escaped slaves of Kikogwe rallied” to his aid. Kofi [Agorsah \(2007, 333\)](#) writing about the Caribbean, captures a similar reaction:

Maroon societies or “runaways,” wherever they were, formed colonies of core communities that preserved their freedom and identity as the pioneers in freedom fighting, after escaping from bondage in the New World and becoming the symbol of a special type of nationalism. Relentlessly pursued by the colonial forces in a new, harsh, and mostly hostile environment, these people faced a protracted struggle against slavery. In fact, they were the first in the Americas, in the wake of 1492, to resist colonial domination.

Conclusion

German colonialism as an economic mode of production in Tanganyika, and indeed in much of East Africa, operated in tension with the regional slave trade. German colonial interests variously clashed with slave traders and the populations targeted for enslavement. Slave traders included individuals of Arabic heritage and East Africans referred to as Swahili traders. Those operators of the regional slave trade often viewed German colonial enterprise as an economic and political competitor. Those opponents therefore often fought against that colonial structure with great zeal. A clear example was Abushir bin Salim, whose war of resistance has been called the Abushir War. That conflict started in Pangani, on the northern coast of Tanganyika in 1888, and spread along the coast to encompass slave trading towns all the way to Mikindani. “The Germans called the movement ‘the Arab Revolt,’” observed [Iliffe \(1979, 93\)](#), “implying that it was the work of slave traders.” In essence, those German officials were correct.

All of the indigenous population of Tanganyika were susceptible to enslavement during this period. Yet, to them colonialism was no better; both slavery and colonialism presented the specter of oppression. That is why some groups, such as the Hehe of south central Tanganyika, stood firm to fight against the Germans in the 1890s. They failed in their resistance, and managed only to delay the colonial process in Heheland for some time. German colonial officials no doubt hoped the defeat of the Hehe would teach a lesson to all Tanganyikans. That was not the case. Less than a decade later, a collaborative, multi-ethnic team attempted rebellion once again under the name of the Maji Maji War. Unfortunately, they also lost after two years of fierce fighting. Their defeat occurred only after the Germans employed scorched-earth methods, subjecting the local people to starvation and mass deaths.

Nonetheless, the Maji Maji was a distinctive War initiated by a very ordinary, clan-based people, the Matumbi. What gave such a socio-politically frail and militarily inexperienced people the fortitude to confront the military mightiness of the German colonialists? This study has shown that the Matumbi were an intra-African diasporic people. Having escaped from the yoke of slavery, they were a people who had suffered it all, and were likely scared of nothing, including death. Like an injured buffalo that readies for retaliation, the Matumbi were likely full of vengeance and had no tolerance for new

forms of subjugation and humiliation. It is for this reason that they triggered the Maji Maji War.

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