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Fugitives and the Political Patronages on the Peripheries of the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the 19th Century

Resumé

L'article parle du patronage politique dont bénéficient les esclaves fugitifs (*watoro*), dans la zone d'influence du Sultanat de Zanzibar, au XIX siècle. Suite aux changements économiques survenus à cette époque, un grand nombre de personnes furent obligées de quitter leur groupe parental et ethnique. Les esclaves fugitifs constituent une des catégories de ces gens déracinés. Exposés aux attaques de propriétaires d'esclaves, certains choisissaient de vivre à l'écart, dans des bourgades fortifiées, loin des villes et des routes principales. Certains devenaient des pillards: ils attaquaient les caravanes, saccageaient les plantations, se procuraient des captifs, et pratiquaient le commerce d'esclaves. Leur économie avait également des composantes plus légales que celles énumérées plus haut, elles sont pourtant moins bien documentées.

La région costale de l'Afrique de l'Est, dans son développement, manquait de population. Malgré le caractère illégal de la fuite, les *watoro* pouvaient agrandir les réserves de mains d'oeuvre et intégrer les différentes armées. C'est la raison pour laquelle les dirigeants politiques leurs offraient leur patronage. Parmi eux, on compte aussi bien des chefs de communautés non-musulmanes de l'intérieur, que des dissidents originaires des anciennes élites de la région, écartés du pouvoir par les Bu Saidi vainqueurs au XIX siècle, comme Ahmed Simba al-Nabahani ou Mbaruk bin Rāšid al-Mazrū'i. Les *watoro* qui devenaient leurs clients recevaient souvent des terres et tiraient d'autres bénéfices, en échange du service militaire. Les patrons toléraient les actes de pillage exercés par leurs protégés, apparemment ils en tiraient également profit.

L'administration du sultanat combattait en principe les villages indépendants des *watoro*, mais leur liquidation ou leur soumission s'avéraient souvent très difficile. Certains étaient donc tolérés, et peut-être même soutenus par Zanzibar. De nombreux *watoro* servaient dans l'armée régulière du Sultanat, créée en 1877.

One of the results of the economic boom in the Sultanate of Zanzibar and its hinterland was the growth of uprooted persons living outside the traditional communities and outside the control of the state. This category of people included indebted persons and criminals from the coast, members of those communities that were dispersed and decimated by either slavers or the aggressors of the interior such as Oromo, Maasai and Nguni-related groups (such as 'Maviti' and 'Gangwara') as well as fugitive slaves. They migrated, joined different ethnic communities or borrowed the methods and tactics of their persecutors, pursuing raiding themselves and serving as mercenaries to whoever was ready to hire them.¹ The Swahili term *watoro* (sing.: *mtoro*), literally speaking, referred to fugitive slaves, although in fact the *watoro* group could have included all the above mentioned categories of persons.

Most *watoro* lived at the cost of the coastal communities and in the direct hinterland.² The desertion escalated in the periods of accelerated growth of the plantation sector that took place in the second half of the 19th century. It resulted from the advancing restrictions on slaves' freedom imposed by planters during that time.³ Dur-

¹ E. Steere, *Central African Mission. Its Present State and Prospects*, London 1873, Rhodes House, Oxford, Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), Box A1 (II) A; J. Thomson, "Notes on the Basin of the River Rovuma, East Africa", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* nms. IV, 1882, 2, p. 75; Steere to Kirk, 31 I 1877, House of Commons. *British Parliamentary Papers* (hereafter: PP) 1878 LXVII/236/1; Archives générales spiritaines [hereafter: AGS], Chevilly-Larue, France, *Tununguo Journal* [Introduction, no pagination].

² R. F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa: a Picture of Exploration*, vol. I, s.l., s.d., pp. 97ff.

³ J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riots. Rivalry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*, Portsmouth-London-Nairobi-Dar es Salaam 1995, p. 109.

ing the same period, following the growth of the caravan trade, there were an increasing number of failed businessmen who were forced to seek refuge inland.⁴ Yet, the settlements of *watoro* were being founded earlier in the century. Johann Ludwig Krapf in his journal of 1848 wrote about a village lying near Shimba Hills south of Mombasa, mostly inhabited by fugitives from the town. Since its residents attacked passing caravans it was considered a major obstacle on the important route between Mombasa and Usambara.⁵

To freemen, the runaway slaves brought to mind violence and banditry, which left its mark in the Swahili vocabulary. In Krapf's dictionary, based primarily on the material collected in the 1840s and 1850s in Mombasa and its vicinity, there is the word *mkimbizi* meaning runaway slave but also:

One who causes people to run off from the road, to escape, because he endeavors to rob them or lay hold of their persons to sell them into slavery. A robber, highwayman, a vagabond, thief.

The dictionary also provides the reader with other information about individuals of that kind:

He never has his hair cut, carries about a large knife, a bow and many arrows, and stays in the woods.⁶

⁴ Rebmann to the Secretary of the CMS. 27 X 1847. Rebmann Letters. Church Missionary Society Archive. Birmingham and London (hereafter: CMS). C A5/O/24/50; J. Thomson. *Through Masai Land: a Journey of Exploration among the Snowclad Volcanic Mountains and Strange Tribes of Eastern Equatorial Africa*. London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1885, p.70.

⁵ L. Krapf, *Journal of Journey to Usambara*, 15 VII 1848, CMS, C A5/O/16. Krapf mentions another big village of *watoro* : L. Krapf, *Journal*, 29 XII 1849, CMS, C A5/O/16.

⁶ L. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours during an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa*, London: Cass 1968, p. 233.

Arguably, even if many fugitives pursued banditry,⁷ the majority aimed at joining the numerous stable and well-organized communities. It was probably due to cultural and psychological factors, but first of all the need for security in the world dominated by slave owners. As Jonathon Glassman argues, the British missionaries and diplomats presented a distorted picture of the objectives of the *watoro*. In his opinion the British were convinced that the slaves desired, above all, an “abstract” personal freedom. This was supposedly due to the misunderstanding of the African perception of the status of a freeman and a slave. In reality, in East Africa the notions overlapped much more than they did in the slave societies of the Western Hemisphere. According to Glassman, the African runaways looked more for a better patron than for “personal freedom”.⁸

Evidently, in Africa the relationship of the patron-client type was not so different from that of the owner-slave type, especially when it came to the so-called *wazalia*, i.e. slaves born on the coast and brought up in its culture.⁹ It seems in 19th century East Africa, the choice of escape from any authority was a risky one. It meant living outside the civilization centres and far from the possibilities created by the participation in the economic life of the region, as that could expose slaves to retrievals attempted by their former owners. Despite the fact that towns were not altogether closed for former slaves,¹⁰ very often the runaways kept themselves far from the coast since there was a danger of being recognized and returned to the master.¹¹ On the other hand, settling alone or in small groups near towns and the main caravan routes could lead to conflicts with the existing communities who still more often accumulated part of their

⁷ W. W. A. Fitzgerald, *Travels in the Coastlands of British East Africa and the Islands of Zanzibar and Pemba: Their Agricultural Resources and General Characteristics*, London: Dawsons 1898, p. 130.

⁸ Glassman. *op. cit.* p. 107.

⁹ It is expedient to note that this category was not numerous among the *watoro*. F. Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, Yale University Press 1977, p. 219, 240.

¹⁰ Glassman, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

¹¹ Gissing to Wakefield, 2 II 1884, Zanzibar National Archives (hereafter: ZNA) AA 10/2.

wealth in the form of slaves.¹² The choice of the patronage of a ‘big man’ not only offered physical and economic security but also the chance of entering economic life.¹³

Yet not all the *watoro* were ready to be subordinated to the grandees. The fugitives who were not inclined to robbery and did not want to become clients, settled in places remote from the main town centres of the coast. There is information of the directions of escape undertaken in 1880 by the inhabitants of a few *watoro* villages of Duruma territory. These villages were destroyed by Swahili catchers. Some of the escapees decided to go under the wings of either a patron resident on the coastal zone – *kubo* of the Digo or a scion of the ruling clan of Mbaruk bin Rāšid al-Mazrū‘i. Other *watoro* went to Taita hills – a country about 150 km from the coast – or to the village of Makongoni, lying on the territorial borders of Giriama and Oromo, a few dozen kilometres north-west of Mombasa.¹⁴ In the latter two cases one can suspect that the refugees chose ‘abstract freedom’ so vehemently called into question by Glassman – it was freedom from both the owner and the patron. Yet the freedom in the country of Oromo or Taita was not absolute and had its price. The right of settlement was to be paid to the hosts in grain and ivory.¹⁵ Thus the affinity between the pre-existing community and the immigrants could bear traits of the patron-client relationship, though, contrary to the nature of the latter, it appears that here the mutual obligations were rather limited and fixed.¹⁶

The information about the runaways from Duruma country is also interesting because agriculture, commerce or hunting were at least an important part of the *watoro* style of life. It contradicts the image of the runaways whose sole sources of subsistence were rob-

¹² Kirk to Granville, 14 XI 1880, The National Archives, London, Foreign Office (hereafter: NA FO) 84/1575.

¹³ J. L. Gibling, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania 1840-1940*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1992, p. 60-70.

¹⁴ Ramshaw to Felkin, 25 XI 1880, CMS G3 A5/O.

¹⁵ Binns to Lang, 15 II 1888, CMS G3 A5/O5.

¹⁶ On the theory of clientelism see: J. Tarkowski, *Patroni i klienci*, Warszawa 1994.

bery and putting others into slavery. Most likely many fugitive communities jumped on the opportunities created by the economic development of the region – produced food, traded, collected items demanded by merchants.

The hostility provoked by the *watoro* among the slave owners can be explained in two ways. First, they obviously raided villages and plantations, stole or destroyed crops and kidnapped slaves whom they subsequently sold to other masters.¹⁷ The sheer presence of the *watoro* restrained planters from bringing new lands into cultivation, as in the area of Takaungu and Lamu. Secondly, the *watoro* set a bad example for other slaves who, when hearing about an alternative for their fate, could escape.¹⁸

The Arabs and Swahili, as well as the members of non-Muslim ethnic groups, used violence in order to recover runaway slaves.¹⁹ *Watoro* defended themselves by building fenced villages, most often in inaccessible areas. If they had good weapons they could make an independent political force capable of defying both slave owners and the Sultan's authority. Some of the refugee communities numbered up to a few thousand inhabitants, i.e. they were more populous than the majority of the big villages of the interior.²⁰ The largest village settlement mentioned in the sources lay in the deep south of the Sultanate of Zanzibar, close to the port of Mikindani. It had between seven and fourteen thousand residents. It was founded about 1886.²¹ The source gives no clue as to whether in the villages of that sort the desire of personal freedom was realized, neither do we know much

¹⁷ Gissing to Kirk, 14 IX 1884, ZNA AA 10/1; Kirk to Granville, 8 V 1884, NA FO 84/1677; Kirk to Granville, 14 XI 1880, NA FO 84/1575; Haggard to Kirk, 8 VII 1884, ZNA AA 10/1.

¹⁸ Haggard to Kirk, 9 IV 1884, ZNA AA 10/1; Gissing to Kirk, 14 IX 1884, ZNA AA 10/1; Haggard to Kirk, 25 VIII 1884, PP 1886 LXVII/42/1 and NA FO 541/26/317/1.

¹⁹ Kirk to Salisbury, 12 XI 1879, PP 1880/LXIX/371; Kirk to Granville, 19 X 1880, NA FO 84/1575.

²⁰ Krapf to Coates, 22 X 1845, L. Krapf, *Letters*, CMS C A5/ 0 16.

²¹ Bülow to Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gessellschaft, 20 IX 1888, Bundesarchiv (Berlin), RKA 406, p. 164.

about life in such communities. The only exceptions are the villages which maintained contact with Christian missionaries.²²

The choice of patron was not always one of desperate escapees who fell into dire distress. In fact, the decision about submitting to a big man could be the only reason for escape. In East Africa, where the labour was short, the slaves were often incited to flee so they could be caught and sold, or transformed into formally free clients who, when necessary, served as military aides. The latter method was practiced by the leaders of Bondei country (east of the Usambara mountains) during the period of the civil war in both regions, i.e. from 1867 until the 1890s.²³

The fugitives were often welcomed by the leaders of the communities living along the central East African caravan route, e.g. the *mapazi* of Zaramo. There the *watoro* could feel secure. Their status did not differ much from that of the free newcomers. Similarly, they could obtain permission for a settlement, at first for one or two years on probation, where they cultivated the ground allotted to them by the chief. Afterwards they would obtain wives. Their children were considered free.²⁴

In the acephalous societies the employment of the 'loose people' created a chance for building a centre of power whose influence transgressed the traditional community based on kinship and common cultural institutions. In this manner the founder of the line of chiefs of the Digo people bearing the title *kubo*, Mwana ki Konga and his brother Mwana wa Ngombe, came into ascendancy.²⁵ Sometimes the members of the former ruling class of the coast offered

²² F. Morton, *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873-1907*, Boulder-London: Westview Press 1990, p. 86-90.

²³ Glassman, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

²⁴ Holmwood to Smith, 18 VIII 1876, 'Church Missionary Intelligencer' (hereafter: CMI) ns. II, 1877, p. 12.

²⁵ L. Krapf, *Journal of Journey to Usambara*, 15 VII 1848, CMS C A5/O/16. Initially the brothers lived together but, as tradition has it, after a quarrel Mwana wa Ngombe moved to his own village where he accepted fugitives. While the chiefly lineage of Mwana ki Konga survived until the end of the century, there is no information about the successors of his brother after the second half of the century.

protection to runaways. Ahmed Simba, heir of the dynasty of the Nabahanis – former rulers of the Sultanate of Pate – based his position on the *watoro*. His family lost Pate to Bu Saʿīdis in the 1820s. In the early 1860s, Ahmed Simba founded the Sultanate of Witu near the estuary of Tana and Ozi. His pocket state existed at the cost of the Sultanate of Zanzibar and that part of the elites of the northern Swahili coast who recognized the rule of Bu Saʿīdi. Witu became a refuge for the escapees (not exclusively slaves) from the whole of the Lamu archipelago, as well as other parts of the Sultanate of Zanzibar.²⁶ All were treated as freemen. Every newcomer was encouraged to build a hut and cultivate land. A good incentive for this was that Witu had the best lands on the mainland directly opposite the Lamu archipelago. Settlers could also expect to obtain a wife who would originate from one of the neighbouring peoples. In exchange, they were obliged to enter military service for two days a week. Each subject obtained a musket and munitions. Fugitives, to some extent, participated in governing. The governors appointed in every village from among Ahmad's trusted associates had aides, advisors and judges, usually runaway slaves.²⁷

All the villages of *watoro* in the neighborhood of Witu were subjected to the Sultan of Witu in one way or another. According to the British vice-consul in Lamu, John Haggard, all the *watoro* sheltered in Witu lived exclusively by kidnapping. Haggard thought the victims were to be exported to Somalia.²⁸ In the 1880s, a short period of cohabitation between Barghash and Ahmad Simba took place during which the latter received a salary in exchange for catching runaway slaves. When, however, the governor of Lamu demanded from him the dispersal of *watoro* who marauded on plantations belonging to Arabs, he refused, excusing himself by citing the lack of arms and powder.²⁹ Yet the main reason for his indisposition towards living up

²⁶ Materials to the investigation concerning the murder of an Indian in Lamu 21 VI 1877, PP 1877, LXXVIII/313/1.

²⁷ M. Ylvisaker, *Lamu in the Nineteenth Century: Land, Trade and Politics*. Boston: Africa Studies Center, Boston University 1979, p. 87.

²⁸ Haggard to Kirk, 26 XII 1884, PP 1886, LXII/99/1.

²⁹ Miles to Granville, 17 XI 1881, PP 1882 LXV/244.

to the commitment was the fact that hospitality to fugitives was fundamental to his position.

Another leader who offered patronage to *watoro* was the previously mentioned Mbaruk bin Rāšid al-Mazrū'ī. He was the son of the last independent *liwali* of Mombasa. Since the late 1850s until 1896, Mbaruk threatened the social and political order of the town's area. For most of the time he was conflicted with Bu Sa'īdis and then with the British colonial authorities. On the other hand all the Sultans of Zanzibar accepted Ahmad's overrule in Gazi – a Mazrū'ī settlement some 100 km south of Mombasa.³⁰

Being descended from the former political elites of the region, who had ruled a long stretch of the coast for almost hundred years, Mbaruk could initially count on the support of a large part of its residents, who were uneasy about the loss of political and economical status that followed Bu Sa'īdis' takeover. The real advantage brought about by his support was of no consequence. Not unlike Ahmad Simba, Mbaruk chose open conflict with the Sultanate, based on the economic and military potential of the hinterland. He started to ally himself with some of the Mijikenda tribes and some of their 'big men'. At the same time, he used violence and extortion to obtain cattle and slaves at the cost of the Mijikenda.³¹ In the 1870s, even if some communities still collaborated with him, the residents of the hinterland generally considered Mbaruk a parasite.³² As a consequence, the leader had to look for other, more stable, support. He finally found it among the growing population of uprooted peoples, including runaway slaves. *Watoro* were looking for refuge in Gazi as early as the 1840s³³ yet it appears that it was much later when Mbaruk forced settlement on the Digo territory, one of the Mijikenda tribes, having removed the rightful owners of the land.³⁴

³⁰ T.H.R. Cashmore. "Sheikh Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Salim el Mazrui". in: *Leadership in East Africa: Six Political Biographies*, ed. N. Bennett, Boston: Boston University Press 1968, p. 111-137.

³¹ G. David, A Journey to Duruma, 16 XI 1878, CMS CA 5/O/17.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Krapf to Coates, 22 X 1845, L. Krapf, *Letters*, CMS C A5/0 16.

³⁴ W. F. McKay, A Precolonial History of the Southern Kenya Coast, Boston University 1975 (non-published), p. 192-194.

In the 1880s Mbaruk's forces were attacking almost exclusively Muslim merchants and planters.³⁵ Even earlier his people used to steal the slaves of the Swahili.³⁶ Now they began to rob caravans. The British consul to Zanzibar, John Kirk, wrote in 1886 that Mbaruk's men deprived a group of merchants of goods worth nearly 4000 Maria Theresa Dollars.³⁷ Personally, the rebel went as far as to attack his own kinsmen of the branch of the lineage who settled in Takaungu, north of Mombasa.³⁸ In 1885, tired of his past way of life Mbaruk, having found himself in a seemingly hopeless situation, surrendered to the commander of the Zanzibar regular army Lloyd Mathews and asked him for protection. In conversation with the Anglican bishop Hannington he explained his attitude in recent years saying that:

It was difficult for him to escape from the band of marauders he created himself.

Col. Mathews gave him permission to take residence in Gazi:

Where however a band of the same class of lawless adventurers, runaway slaves and of old retainers of the Mazrui family, soon began to gather about him, and he made a livelihood by levying tribute from the native tribes inland whom he regards as his feudatories.³⁹

It is possible there were many criminal acts attributed to Mbaruk for which he was not responsible. One such case was when his people were charged with the murder of merchants; an act actually committed by runaways residing in the Church Missionary Society station in Rabai.⁴⁰

³⁵ Correspondence of Taylor from Kisulutini [no date], CMI 11, 1886, p. 830; Streeter to Lang, 12 VII 1884, CMS G3 A5/O/81.

³⁶ Kirk to Derby, 4 I 1878, PP 1878-79 LXVI/238.

³⁷ Kirk to FO, 7 VI 1886, NA FO 84/1774.

³⁸ Binns to Milesa, 6 VII 1882, NA FO 84/1622.

³⁹ Kirk to Granville, 3 VII 1885, NA FO 84/1727.

⁴⁰ Gissing to Kirk, 13 II 1884 and 2 III 1884, ZNA AA 1/38.

Combating *watoro* was always one of the main duties of the Sultan's governors in fulfillment of which they were willingly assisted by Muslim planters.⁴¹ Once the escapees were caught they would go to jail and, afterwards, back to the master.⁴² The efficiency of the irregular forces commanded by governors in the struggle with fugitives was most often poor.⁴³ The Baluchis hardly ever dared to attack a larger settlements or groups of *watoro*.⁴⁴

The problems brought up by the *watoro*, especially the fact that so many of them aided rebels such as Mbaruk al-Mazrū'ī and Ahmed Simba, compelled the Sultanate authorities to, more or less, openly accept their settlements. In the early 1860s, in the vicinity of Pangani, an uprising of slaves broke out. As the Zanzibar forces were not capable of coping with the situation, the Sultan Mağīd assigned them a place for settlement. With the permission of the Sultan, a kind of 'Negro republic' was founded near the village Kikowa. The fugitives built a fortress there, with three metre high walls and towers. The 'republic' was in permanent conflict with the Arabs residing in the neighborhood, since it welcomed the escapees from their plantations.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the sources contain only one reference to the village. Yet this fact does not seem to be unusual. In 1873 a mass escape of slaves took place near Pangani. After the failure of the expedition of the Sultan's army, John Kirk predicted that Barghash would not take any other measures, since the *watoro* did not seem to be a threat to anybody.⁴⁶ In 1874 the Sultan attempted to come to terms with the rebels and allotted a small port to them as a place of settlement.⁴⁷ Glassman quotes his interviewees who claimed Barg-

⁴¹ Ramshaw to Felkin, 25 XI 1880, CMS G3 A5/O; Kirk to Granville, 4 IV 1881, FO 881/4638/12; Hutchinson to Granville, 14 I 1881, NA FO 881/4638/1; Kirk to Granville, 21 I 1884, PP 1884-85 LXXIII/73.

⁴² Gissing to Kirka, 14 IX 1884, ZNA AA 10/1.

⁴³ Kirk to Granville, 9 XI 1883, NA FO 84/1645.

⁴⁴ Kirk to Granville, 8 XII 1873, PP 1875 LXXI/11.

⁴⁵ P. Reichard, *Deutsch-Ostafrika. Das Land und seine Bewohner, seine politische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, Leipzig 1892, p. 120.

⁴⁶ Kirk to Granville, 8 XII 1873, PP 1875 LXXI/11.

⁴⁷ H. Greffuhle, "Voyage à Lamoo", *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Marseille* 2, 1878, p. 328.

hash was sending weapons to the colony. However, the historian doubts it himself since the Sultan of Zanzibar, who was one of the bigger planters around, would not expose his property to loss by pursuing the policy of strengthening fugitives.⁴⁸ Even if the doubts are well-founded it is certain that some recognized settlements of the *watoro* obtained aid from the Zanzibar government.⁴⁹

On the territories of Mijikenda, in the vicinity of Mombassa, the runaways' villages benefited from the political support of the Church Missionary Society.⁵⁰ Perhaps the *watoro* perceived the mission as an alternative to the patronage of leaders, such as Mbaruk al-Mazrū'ī or Ahmed Simba. The missionary patronage was based on different rules than those described above. Offering roughly the same as the rebels – protection and aid in times of shortage – and, on the other hand, requiring participation in defence of the mission, they did not accept banditry even if they were not always capable of enforcing the rules in this regard.⁵¹ The Christian missions' means of self-defense were not impressive. Yet, being alien to the religion and culture that prevailed in the Sultanate, they could hope, to some degree, for political protection of its authorities and thus to serve as power brokers against the interests of the subjects of the Sultan. Even if the situation was awkward for the latter there was a positive aspect in it. It created another field of conflict that he could skillfully play out by putting himself in the position of arbiter. Despite the fact that the British Consulate in Zanzibar, on the request of Barghash, fought the sheltering of the *watoro* in the mission stations, many of them resided in them.⁵² The local authorities considered as criminals the missionaries who accepted *watoro* and used them as agricultural workers, claiming they were 'stealing' slaves. Yet instead of prosecuting the Christian communities they were obliged to protect them

⁴⁸ J. Glassman, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁴⁹ Kirk to Granville, 14 XI 1880, NA FO 84/1575.

⁵⁰ The issue of the relationship between the *watoro* from the surroundings of Mombasa and the Christian missions has been analysed by Fred Morton, *op.cit.*

⁵¹ Gissing to Kirk, 2 III 1884, ZNA AA 1/3, also: F. Morton, *op. cit.*, p.111.

⁵² Kirk to Granville, 19 X 1880, NA FO 84/1575.

against the enraged slave owners. Not surprisingly, this policy diminished their authority rather than that of the distant Sultan.⁵³

Following negotiation, the missionaries managed to obtain the status of legality for some of the runaway settlements near Mombasa.⁵⁴ In the same region the *watoro* were able to achieve the same without any help. The best example is the village of Fuladoyo, governed by Christian runaway slaves, lying north west of Mombasa. In 1883 it had been destroyed by coastal planters.⁵⁵ When, however, acting hand-in-hand with Giriama warriors, the residents of the settlement demolished the port of Takaungu, its legality became formally recognized.⁵⁶

In explaining the attitude of the Zanzibar state towards the *watoro* one should not overlook the role played by *nizām* – the regular army of the Sultan – organized since 1877 by the British pensioned officer Lloyd Mathews. To a large extent it was created as an instrument of implementation of the anti-slavery laws of 1873 and 1876. Contrary to the actions of local garrisons, it did not fight against the *watoro*. One can even suppose that it silently sided with them.⁵⁷ The policy corresponded well to the cadres of Mathews' army. It absorbed men who, when left to themselves, could easily reinforce the rebel armies or simply rob on their own account. The soldiers were recruited from, among others, prisoners, slaves freed from illegal transport and slaves hired from their owners. At times, fugitives suspected of serious crimes joined the *nizām*.⁵⁸

It is difficult to answer many of the questions related to the desertion of slaves in Sultanate of Zanzibar's sphere of influence. Little is known about the lives of concrete persons who experienced the fate of escape from slavery. One can assume that their mobility be-

⁵³ Hutchinson to Granville, 14 I 1881, NA FO 881/4638/1.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Kirk to Granville, 9 XI 1883, NA FO 84/1645.

⁵⁶ Handford to Lang, 19 V 1884, CMS G3 A5/O.

⁵⁷ Kitchener to Rosebery, 10 II 1886, NA FO 403 5271/155; R. N. Lyne, *An apostle of Empire. Being the Life of Sir Lloyd William Mathews, K.C.M.G.*, London 1936, p. 51.

⁵⁸ Kirk to Granville, 31 V 1884, NA FO 84/1677; N. Bennett, *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar*, London 1978, pp. 99, 101.

came greater than that of the majority of free members of traditional communities. The sources do not allow for establishing whether those who chose patrons tended to be faithful to them, or whether they often changed their place of residence.

The mass desertion lent variety to the social landscape of the region and transformed its political situation. The issue is strictly related to the economic development of the East African coast and its hinterland since it was the people who constituted the scarcest agents of production in the region. They were subject to competition between Arab and Swahili planters and the political leaders of the hinterland. The fugitives could threaten the legal order but also to contribute to the development of the area by working as cultivators.

The employment of fugitives enabled the people representing the order from before the rule of Bu Sa'īdis a long resistance to the new state. The desertion was one of the biggest, never resolved, problems of the Sultanate of Zanzibar, who, besides, for many decades was fully capable of utilization, both of the resources of the region and the international situation. It is therefore not surprising that Bu Sa'īdis attempted to assimilate either single runaways or the communities created by them.