

**MOLECULAR DETECTION AND GENETIC CHARACTERIZATION
OF *Coxiella burnetii* AND *Bartonella* spp INFECTIONS IN SMALL
MAMMALS FROM MOSHI, NORTHERN TANZANIA**

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ABSTRACT

Zoonotic pathogens, including *Coxiella burnetii* and *Bartonella* species, are known causes of febrile illness globally; however, knowledge on their animal hosts is still limited in many countries including Tanzania. This study aimed to: 1) determine the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella spp* in small mammal; 2) identify risk factors for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* infection in small mammals; and 3) characterize the *Bartonella* genotypes present in small mammals and their fleas. Spleen samples were tested for the presence of *C. burnetii* (n=382) and *Bartonella spp* (n=381) DNA. Overall, 12 (3.1%) of 382 (95% CI: 1.6-5.4) spleens from small mammal tested were positive for *C. burnetii* DNA. *Coxiella burnetii* DNA was detected in five (71.4%) of seven (95% CI: 29.0-96.3) small mammal species; *Rattus rattus* (n=7), *Mus musculus* (n=1), *Acomys wilsoni* (n=2), *Paraxerus flavovottis* (n=1) and *Atelerix albiventris* (n=1). Eleven (91.7%) of twelve (95% CI: 61.5-99.8) *C. burnetii* DNA positive were trapped within Moshi Urban District. Overall, 57 (15.0%) of 381 (95% CI: 11.3-18.5) small mammal spleens tested positive for *Bartonella* DNA. *Bartonella* DNA was detected in three species (*R. rattus* n = 54, *M. natalensis* n = 2 and *P. flavovottis* n = 1) using qPCR targeting the *ssrA* gene. Analysis of *R. rattus* species only for risk of *Bartonella* infection indicated that *Bartonella* infection was more likely in reproductively mature as compared to immature small mammal (OR = 3.42, p<0.001). Multiple *Bartonella* genotypes closely related to known zoonotic *Bartonella* species were identified in the tested small mammals and fleas. These findings demonstrate that small mammal in Moshi, are hosts of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella spp* and may act as a source of these pathogens to humans and animals. Further studies covering broad range of potential hosts should be considered in order to understand the distribution of these pathogens in other animals. Efforts are needed to determine the clinical impact of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* infection in humans. Further studies are needed to fully characterize the prevalence, genotypes and diversity of *Bartonella spp* and *C. burnetii* in different host populations and their potential impacts on human health.

DECLARATION

I, Ndyetabura Theonest do hereby declare to the Senate of Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology that this dissertation is my own original work. Some areas of diagnostic testing, methodologies and analysis were performed in close partnership with study collaborators. Where others have contributed to this work, this has been clearly acknowledged in the text or in citation.

Finally, I declare that the work presented in this thesis has not been nor being concurrently submitted for degree award at any other institution

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CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certify that have read and hereby accept the dissertation titled “Molecular detection and genetic characterization of *Coxiella burnetii* and *Bartonella spp* infections in small mammals from Moshi, northern Tanzania”, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Life Sciences and Bioengineering (LiSBE) at the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST).

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Deborah Lintu, children (Neema and Joyce) and to my parents Mr. Theonest and Mrs. Monica.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

µl	Microlitre
AE	Qiagen® elution buffer
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BHQ	Black Hole Quencher
bp	Base Pair
COSTECH	Commission for Science and Technology, Tanzania
CSD	Cat Scratch Disease
Ct	Cycle Threshold
df	Degree of Freedom
DMSO	Dimethyl Sulphoxide
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
EIA	Enzyme –linked Immunoassay
ELISA	Enzyme –linked Immunosorbent Assay
FAM	Fluorescein Amidites
Fg	Femtogram
FI	Febrile Illness
GLMM	Generalized Linear Mixed Model
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency virus
icd	Isocitrate Dehydrogenase
IFA	Indirect Immunofluorescence assay
IS	Insertion Sequence
KCMC	Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre
KCRI	Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute
LCV	Large Cell Variant
LiSBE	Life Science and Bio-engineering
LoD	Limit of Detection
MEGA	Molecular Evolution Genetic Analysis

MRH	Mawenzi Referral Hospital
NIMR	National Institute for Medical Research
NM-AIST	Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology
NMFI	Non-Malaria Febrile Illness
NZD	Neglected Zoonotic Diseases
°C	Degree Celcius
OR	Odds Ratio
PCR	Polymerases Chain Reaction
PH	Peliosis Hepatis
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PTC	Peltier Thermal Cyclers
qPCR	Quantitative Polymerase Chain Reaction
RML	Rocky Mountain Laboratory
rRNA	ribosomal Ribonucleic Acid
RT-PCR	Real-Time Polymerize Chain Reaction
SCV	Small Cell Variant
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TAWIRI	Tanzania Wild Life Research Institute
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the problem

More than 61% of all known pathogens to humans are zoonotic and over 75% of emerging pathogens have zoonotic origin (Taylor *et al.*, 2001). Zoonotic pathogens and diseases have severe impacts on the health of people and animals, and consequently on the economy especially of poor people in developing countries (Christou, 2011; Perry *et al.*, 2002; Seimenis, 2012). Majority of zoonotic diseases are often neglected as public health problem by primary healthcare systems and policy makers (Ehizibolo *et al.*, 2011). Several research studies have revealed that neglected zoonotic diseases (NZD) and pathogens constitute large proportion of causes of febrile illness among people seeking health care especially in developing countries (Bouyou-Akotet *et al.*, 2009; Crump *et al.*, 2013; Otten *et al.*, 2009; Reyburn *et al.*, 2004). In northern Tanzania a retrospective study was conducted among patients admitted at either one of the two referral hospitals; Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre (KCMC) and Mawenzi Referral Hospital (MRH) to evaluate the etiology of febrile illness, surprisingly the study found that zoonotic pathogens were the cause of large proportion of hospital admissions due to febrile illness (Crump *et al.*, 2013). In that study *C. burnetii* were responsible for 20.3% (24 of 118) cases which later were identified as zoonotic bacterial infections (Crump *et al.*, 2013). In that study none of zoonotic infections were included in the admission differential diagnosis for any patient, indicating lack of awareness of public health importance of zoonotic pathogens and diseases. In recent years, an increasing number of *Bartonella* species have been identified in several animal hosts and ectoparasites (Theonest *et al.*, 2019). Several of these *Bartonella* species are emerging zoonotic pathogens globally and which have been detected in patients with febrile illness and other clinical presentation (Koehler *et al.*, 2003; Kosoy *et al.*, 2010). It is therefore likely that *Bartonella* species could be contributing to yet unknown burden of human febrile illness in this area. Furthermore, the animal hosts for *Bartonella* species have not yet been investigated in rural and urban Moshi district. Although zoonotic pathogens were responsible for large proportion of febrile illness in this area (rural and urban Moshi district), questions still remain on where and how people acquired these infections and what are the roles of different animal hosts. To answer the questions and gain understanding on animal sources for these pathogens was conceived. Therefore this PhD was conceived to explore the epidemiology of *C. burnetii* and

Bartonella spp in different animal hosts in Moshi rural and urban districts in greater detail. The aims of this PhD study was to: a) To use molecular tools for detection of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species in small mammals, b) Use these tools to determine the presence and prevalence of these infection in small mammal populations and fleas collected from them, c) To genotype and characterize these pathogens to a species level and link to global biological database to assess similarities and identities and d) To assess the risk factors for infection in these small mammal populations.

Both *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species have been detected in small mammals especially in rodent species across the globe and are linked to increasing burden of febrile illness and other clinical presentation mostly in vulnerable populations such as people living with HIV/AIDS, homeless, alcoholic and in immunocompromised individuals (Brouqui *et al.*, 1999; Foucault *et al.*, 2002; Spach *et al.*, 1995). However, the epidemiology of these pathogens in small mammals from Tanzania is unknown, such understanding is important to the public health and diseases control programs. For centuries small mammals especially rodents have been linked to infectious diseases, and more recently with emerging infectious diseases as twice as any other mammal (Enria & Pinheiro, 2000; Meerburg *et al.*, 2009; Mills & Childs, 1998). In this study I hypothesized that small mammals are the animal host for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species in rural and urban Moshi district. These pathogens are known to contribute to the burden of febrile illness in many regions of the world.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Zoonoses, including Q fever and Bartonellosis, have severe impacts on the health of people and animals, and consequently on the economy especially of poor people in developing countries. Medical conditions due to neglected zoonotic diseases are the major causes of yet unappreciated morbidity and mortality due to febrile illness in northern Tanzania and in many other developing countries especially in Sub-Sahara Africa (Crump *et al.*, 2013; Halliday *et al.*, 2015). Although zoonotic pathogens represent considerable proportion of number of hospital admissions, this problems remains unappreciated due to multiple reasons, such as lack of diagnostic capacity in many laboratories and lack of awareness among clinicians (Crump & Kirk, 2015). Research into the aetiology of febrile illness conducted among 870 patients admitted at either Mawenzi Referral Hospital (MRH) or Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre (KCMC) hospitals in Moshi, Tanzania revealed that a diverse range of zoonotic pathogens were responsible for large proportions of hospital admissions (Crump *et*

al., 2013). On admission, in that study more than 60% of patients received a clinical diagnosis of malaria, but only 2% of study participants received an aetiological diagnosis of malaria after laboratory confirmatory testing indicating potential problem of misdiagnosis/overdiagnosis and uninformed patient management. In contrast Q fever (*C. burnetii*) was detected in 20.3% (24 of 118) of identifies bacterial zoonoses (Crump *et al.*, 2013). Generally large proportions of febrile illnesses were due to bacterial or viral zoonoses which were unappreciated in the initial clinical and laboratory diagnosis. This finding demonstrated the relative importance of zoonotic pathogens in this area, but also highlighted many knowledge gaps critical for detection and control of the disease. Firstly, all diagnoses of human zoonotic pathogens were made retrospectively with little opportunity to directly inform patient management. In addition, little was known about animal hosts of these zoonotic pathogens in the study catchment area, limiting the potential to design and target effective disease control interventions. Accurate diagnostic is thus critical for treatment outcome of patients, as several zoonotic diseases that cause febrile illnesses have non-specific clinical presentation, which makes it difficult for clinician to consider them as a possible cause of illness to patients. In most cases symptoms for zoonotic diseases causes of febrile illness cannot be differentiated from that of malaria and other viral infections, therefore tools and methods that can be used to accurately detect these pathogens are needed.

Molecular detection and typing methods have been widely used for identification and characterization of several pathogens including zoonotic pathogens. For *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species, molecular detection and typing methods are widely used due to their greater sensitivity and ease of use in comparison to culture and serology-based approaches. In addition to that, several samples obtained from animal host are to be treated with extreme care due to the potential of unknown risk they may carry. The use nucleic acid-based methods for detections and typing are often recommended as best for handling samples with unknown risk Molecular diagnostic method capable of detecting the diverse repertoire of *Bartonella* species while maintaining genus specificity has been a challenge to find. The citrate synthase gene (*gltA*) is a common genetic target for *Bartonella* detection and is considered a reliable tool for distinguishing genotypes (Norman *et al.*, 1995). However, the *gltA* gene target has some limitations, sequence from this locus has homology with sequences found in some host genomes, such as mouse, rat and human, along with other human pathogens (Diaz *et al.*, 2012). Therefore experts in *Bartonella* recommend targeting second additional gene which is genus specific in order to improve the strength of findings and diagnosis. An *ssrA* sequence

has been found sufficiently able to discriminate *Bartonella* species and provides phylogenetic data consistent with that of *gltA*, a commonly used gene for differentiating *Bartonella* genotypes. The *ssrA* RNA, also known as transfer-mRNA (tmRNA), is a single-copy prokaryotic-specific molecule involved in processing of incomplete peptides and resolution of stalled ribosomes during translation.

For the detection of *C. burnetii*, several PCR-based diagnostic methods have been successfully applied for the direct detection of *C. burnetii* (Klee *et al.*, 2006). However the use of quantitative real-time PCR (qPCR), targeting the IS1111 insertion element which is present in multiple copies, has been reported to be highly sensitive for the detection of *C. burnetii* DNA (Bruin & Rotterdam, 2011). Q fever is known to cause significant burden of human disease, economic losses and outbreaks in many regions of the world (Van Asseldonk *et al.*, 2013). *Bartonella* species are one of emerging zoonotic pathogen being detected in various region of the world in different animal hosts, their vectors and in humans. They are both zoonotic pathogens known to cause various clinical presentations in humans, including febrile illness, a leading cause of sickness among people seeking health care in hospitals in developing countries. *Coxiella burnetii* and *Bartonella* species have been detected in several genera of small mammals including using different diagnostic methods. Several literatures support the idea that small mammals especially rodents could be playing yet unknown or poorly known role in the epidemiology of these pathogens. Therefore, this study was developed based on the hypothesis that small mammals are the animal host for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species, pathogens which are known to cause febrile illness and that molecular diagnostic and typing tools could be used to effectively to detect and characterize pathogens in animals hosts. Such understanding will not only be usefully in increasing awareness on patient care and management but also provide best treatment options based on empirical laboratory evidence.

1.3 Rationale of the study

Zoonotic diseases have impacts on the health of humans and livestock with severe downstream socioeconomic impacts that contribute to perpetuating cycles of poverty. Over the last few decades several new pathogens have been identified, large proportion of them are zoonotic (Taylor *et al.*, 2001). Both developed and developing countries are affected by zoonotic diseases, however in developing countries the burden is high especially due to endemic neglected zoonotic disease (Halliday *et al.*, 2015). Outbreaks of zoonotic diseases

have also increased with no or little epidemiological understanding of the pathogen and diseases, including lack of knowledge on the animal sources of infection.

The high prevalence of non-malaria febrile illness (NMFI) is an increasingly important public health concern in Tanzania, and research in this area exemplifies the need. In northern Tanzania there have been dramatic declines in the incidence of malaria in the past decade (Crump *et al.*, 2013). These declines have exposed the previously under-recognized health burdens of NMFI. Research into the etiology of febrile illness from Moshi, Tanzania shows that just 1.6% febrile admissions were due to malaria. In contrast, a diverse range of zoonotic pathogens are responsible for large proportions of admissions (Crump *et al.*, 2013). These data raise the important questions of where and how people acquire these infections and the role of different animal hosts. Both *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species are known to cause fever but their epidemiology in small mammal have not been studied in Northern Tanzania. Several factors hinder the diagnostic of zoonotic pathogens including lack of standard diagnostic tool. This study used molecular diagnostic and typing tools for detection of zoonotic pathogens (*C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species) that are known causes of NMFI. These tools were used to determine the prevalence of infections in small mammals, assess risk factors for animal infection and genotype positive samples. Genotypic data from this study is important in comparison of the pathogens present in animals host and assessment of their likely transmission route by construction of phylogenetic trees inclusive of gene sequences from GeneBank.

Findings from this study will help the clinicians/medical doctors and researchers who are interested in zoonoses to increase their awareness on zoonotic causes of NMFI through use of similar or related approaches of molecular tools used in this PhD study. Several other zoonotic pathogens can be diagnosed using protocol and standard operating procedure (SOP) generated from this study (Appendix 1 and 2) following minor revisions and validation the protocols.

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General objective

To determine the presence and prevalence, genetic characteristics and risk factors for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species in small mammals and their fleas from Moshi, Tanzania.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

- (i) To determine the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp infections in small mammals from Moshi, northern Tanzania.
- (ii) To determine the genetic characteristics of *Bartonella* species infections in small mammals from Moshi, northern Tanzania.
- (iii) To identify risk factors for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* infection in small mammals from Moshi, northern Tanzania.

1.5 Research questions

- (i) Are small mammals hosts of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species in northern Tanzania? What is their prevalence?
- (ii) What is the genetic similarity and identity between *Bartonella* species in ectoparasites and in small mammals and how are they related to sequences from GenBank databases?
- (iii) What are risk factors associated with *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species infections in small mammal?

1.6 Significance of the study

In addition to understanding the epidemiology and genotypes of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species in these small mammal populations, this study compliments with the government priority on research on zoonotic diseases. In March, 2018 the Government of United Republic of Tanzania and partners launched the One Health Coordination Desk and the National One Health Strategic Plan which is an important milestone towards addressing zoonoses as emerging health challenges. Establishment of the One Health Coordination Desk and other elements of the National One Health Platform, underscores national commitment to strengthen mechanisms for prevention, detection and response to zoonotic diseases and pathogens inclusive of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species. It is therefore inevitable that the knowledge gained and findings of this study will help to increase the understanding on *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species, this work will also be of interest for diagnosis and detection of many other zoonotic causes of febrile illness, hence bring impact on public health policies, improve animal productivity and human health in future.

Poor laboratory capacity for detection of zoonotic causes of febrile illness is one of the major setbacks for their management and treatment. Culture isolation of *C. burnetii* is hazardous thus should only be done in level three or four laboratory infrastructure by highly trained laboratory personnel. This study provides means for use of molecular tools for detection of these pathogens; these tools are much safer, faster and reliable. On the other hand *Bartonella* species are many and takes long period of time for culture isolation, molecular tools used for their detection in this study provides means for characterization and its quick detection in resource limited settings were its hard to keep culture for such longer duration of time. Determination of the presence, prevalence and types of these infections in small mammal is important not only to generate awareness but also in the assessment of their infection risk factors, transmission routes, prevention and control.

1.7 Delineation of the study

This study focused on application of molecular detection tools for detection of several zoonotic pathogens at Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute (KCRI) research laboratory with initial emphases on detection of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species in small mammals. Therefore the results of this study is based on molecular detection and genetic characterization of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp using molecular assays optimized and used to detection of these pathogens in spleen tissue samples and ectoparasites from small mammals species trapped in Moshi rural and urban districts, northern Tanzania. Although I was able to report the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp, the findings from this study were subjected to some limitations which are further discussed in section 4.2.3 page 60.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The global problem of zoonotic diseases and non-malaria febrile illnesses

The World Health Organization warned in its 2007 report that infectious diseases are emerging at a rate that has not been seen before and that large proportional of them are zoonoses (Vinet & Zhedanov, 2010). Evaluation of a list of pathogens known to cause diseases in humans revealed that over 61% of all pathogens are of zoonotic origin (Taylor *et al.*, 2001) and that over 75% of all emerging pathogens are of zoonotic origin as well (Slingenbergh *et al.*, 2004; Taylor *et al.*, 2001). Zoonotic diseases are diseases or infections that are naturally transmitted between vertebrate animals and humans. Zoonoses have severe impacts on the health of people and animals, and consequently on the economy especially of communities and family in developing countries (Molyneux *et al.*, 2011). Unfortunately impacts of zoonotic diseases are often unnoticed due several reasons such as lack of awareness, lack of sustainable surveillance systems, scarce epidemiological studies on zoonoses and lack of developed laboratory infrastructure for their diagnostic among many other factors (Halliday *et al.*, 2012). Zoonotic diseases have been recognized in different parts of the world as one of the major causes of febrile illness (Crump *et al.*, 2013; Hersch & Oh, 2014; Hildenwall *et al.*, 2016; Prasad *et al.*, 2015; Vijayachari *et al.*, 2008). Febrile disease is one of the most common reasons for patients to seek health-care in Sub-Saharan Africa (Crump & Kirk, 2015; Guracha *et al.*, 2011). Malaria is the major infectious cause of fever in many countries in Africa but there is growing evidence that the burden of malaria is decreasing in many parts of the continent (D'Acremont *et al.*, 2010; O'Meara *et al.*, 2010). Declines in malaria incidence are particularly prominent in East Africa over the last decade where marked reductions of up to ~ 80% have been reported in Tanzania (Bhattarai *et al.*, 2007; Mmbando *et al.*, 2010) and Kenya (O'Meara *et al.*, 2008; Okiro *et al.*, 2007). However, there is no evidence that the reduction in malaria morbidity has been accompanied by an overall reduction in the prevalence of febrile illness in Sub-Saharan Africa (D'Acremont *et al.*, 2010). Over diagnosis of malaria is a serious problem in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Amexo *et al.*, 2004; D'Acremont *et al.*, 2010). Malaria continues to be diagnosed clinically and treated in a high proportion of febrile patients with little recognition or treatment of alternative causes of febrile illness. For example, in one study performed in northern Tanzania, only 46% of more than 4000 patients who received a clinical diagnosis of severe

malaria were positive for Plasmodium parasitaemia on blood- smear examination (Reyburn *et al.*, 2004). In this population, case fatality was significantly higher in patients with non-malaria febrile illness (NMFI) (12.1%) than those with laboratory-confirmed malaria (6.9%; $p < 0.001$). Similar scenarios have been described in other parts of the continent including in Kenya (Ye *et al.*, 2009) and Sudan (A-Elgayoum *et al.*, 2009). As yet, relatively little is known about other causes of fever in this part of the world.

2.1.1 Bacterial zoonoses as the major cause of NMFI in Tanzania

In response to growing awareness of the problem of NMFI in Tanzania, a cohort study to evaluate the aetiology of febrile illness was performed in two hospitals in northern Tanzania (Crump *et al.*, 2013). In total 870 patients with non-specific febrile illness were enrolled between 2007 and 2008, and tested for a range of infectious causes of fever known to occur in tropical areas (Crump *et al.*, 2013). On admission, more than 60% of patients received a clinical diagnosis of malaria, but only less than 2% of study participants received an aetiological diagnosis of malaria after laboratory testing. In contrast, a diverse range of zoonotic pathogens majority being bacterial zoonotic pathogens were responsible for large proportions of admissions (Crump *et al.*, 2013). Unfortunately, no zoonotic infections were included in the admission differential diagnosis for any patient in that study, indicating lack of awareness and diagnostic capacity. These findings demonstrated the relative importance of bacterial zoonotic pathogens in this area, but also highlighted many knowledge gaps critical in accurate identification of cause of febrile illness and zoonoses in this area. Firstly, all diagnoses of human zoonotic pathogens were made retrospectively with little opportunity to directly inform patient management. In addition, little was known about animal hosts of these pathogens in Moshi rural and urban districts limiting the potential to design and target effective disease control interventions. This PhD was conceived to explore the epidemiology of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp from small mammals trapped in Moshi rural and urban districts in greater detail. Furthermore this PhD was a linked study designed for the purpose using molecular approach for diagnosis and typing zoonotic pathogen (initially *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp), and assessment of risk factors for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species infection in small mammals trapped from Rural and Urban Moshi Districts, northern Tanzania. These tools would eventually be adopted and updated accordingly to target other zoonotic pathogens in future.

2.1.2 Rodent as reservoir and host of several zoonotic pathogens

Small mammals especially rodents are the most abundant and diversified order of living mammals in the world, comprising approximately 43% of global mammalian biodiversity (Schmid *et al.*, 1993). Almost 2277 species of small mammals (rodents) are known which have nearly a worldwide distribution with exception of Antarctica and some isolated islands (Huchon *et al.*, 2002). For centuries rodents among the group of small mammal are well-known reservoirs and hosts for a number of infectious diseases (e.g., plague, leptospirosis, leishmaniasis, salmonellosis and viral hemorrhagic fevers) and play an important role in their transmission and spreading. However, also in modern times rodents still form a threat for public health thus they are linked to infectious diseases, and more recently revealed to be responsible for emerging infectious diseases as twice as any other mammal (Enria & Pinheiro, 2000; Meerburg *et al.*, 2009; Mills & Childs, 1998). There is little information available on the prevalence of rodent-borne diseases in Tanzania. One of the striking study on rodent borne diseases was the Ratzooman project (2003-2006) which was conducted in different countries in Africa in urban/peri-urban Tanzania and in other African countries, to determine the role of rodents and shrews in the transmission of three important zoonoses, namely plague, leptospirosis and toxoplasmosis in rodent population and in human (Machang'u, 2006). For instance, plague which has been described to occur sporadically in different parts of Tanzania was still detected at the end of that study; the overall prevalence of leptospirosis in rodents was 17% and in human was between 0.5-10 percent in different locality. I therefore consider that studies to determine zoonotic pathogens carried by rodents are of great importance to public health in Tanzania taking into consideration of current information on their role as the main cause of febrile illness.

2.1.3 The role of vectors in transmission of rodent borne zoonoses

Rodent borne diseases including Coxiellosis and Bartonellosis are known to be transmitted to humans via two different pathways in two routes; direct or indirect route (Fig. 1). Direct route happens when rodents spread pathogens to humans through their bite or consumption of food products or water contaminated with their feces, urine or other by-products from an infected rodent (Meerburg *et al.*, 2009). Another route is indirect route; this happens usually through ectoparasitic blood-sucking arthropod such as fleas, ticks and mites. Indirect route can also happen when pets/livestock such as cat or dog ingest infected rodent and consequently get infected. The pet/livestock can itself get infected or act as a vehicle to transfer pathogens to

humans (Meerburg *et al.*, 2009). *Coxiella burnetii* and *Bartonella* species have been identified in rodents in many regions across the globe (Abdel-Moein & Hamza, 2018; Li *et al.*, 2007; Meerburg & Reusken, 2011; Rozental *et al.*, 2017). Ectoparasites have been reported to be involved in transmission of *Bartonella* species (Li *et al.*, 2007; Silaghi *et al.*, 2016) and *C. burnetii* (Abbassy *et al.*, 2006; Mediannikov *et al.*, 2010) to animals and humans. For instance the review of rodent borne diseases in middle east (Iran) showed that 11 of 34 identified rodent borne diseases were transmitted by vectors, these diseases include plague, tularemia, tick-borne relapsing fever, babesiosis, Lyme disease, Q fever, Crimean Congo hemorrhagic fever, leishmaniasis, babesiosis, schistosomiasis and fasciolosis (Rabiee *et al.*, 2018). Almost one-third of the reported rodent-borne diseases in Iran in that study were transmitted by vectors. Based on this evidence it is therefore important to consider rodents and their ectoparasites in the epidemiology of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species in this region. Assessment of risk factors for their infection would also create understanding and awareness in their epidemiology and consequently will help in informed control measures.

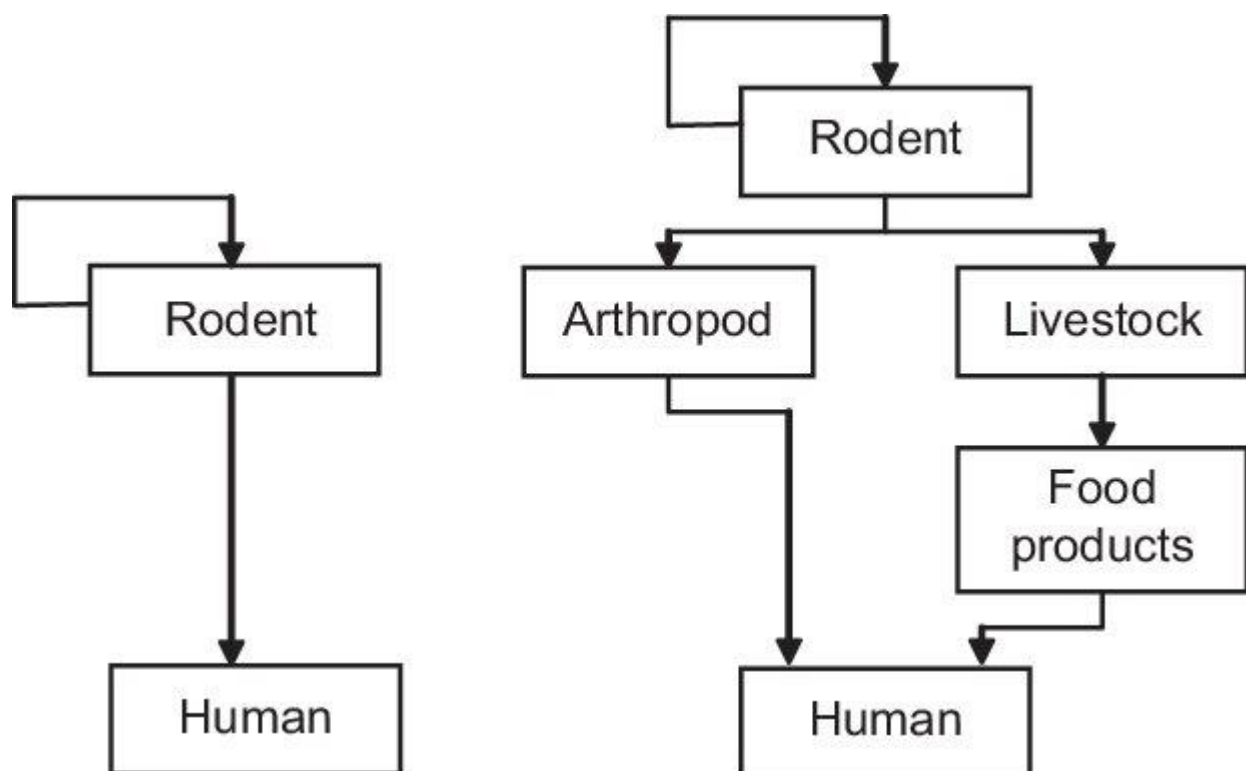


Figure 1: Two different pathogen transmission pathways for rodent borne diseases: On the left the direct route, on the right the indirect route. The pathogen is the arrow in the flowchart (Meerburg *et al.*, 2009)

2.1.4 Factors leading to increases of emerging and re-emerging of rodent borne zoonoses

There are many factors which have been identified to be linked to increase in emergence or re-emergence of infectious diseases (Daszak *et al.*, 2001; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Morse, 1995; Taylor *et al.*, 2001). Studies to evaluate factors for emergence and resurgence of infectious diseases have shown that anthropogenic factors including change of land use (e.g. deforestation, mining, oil extraction, etc.), food production changes, global trade and travel are among the leading causes of disease emergence and spreading (Daszak *et al.*, 2001; Harrus & Baneth, 2005). Moreover, global climate change and changing human settlement patterns (especially in developing countries) have been found to be highly associated with increasing problems of several diseases emergence or re-emergence including rodent-borne diseases (Gubler *et al.*, 2001). Climate change is responsible for creating conditions suitable for outbreaks of diseases such as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, malaria, dengue fever, and viral encephalitis by providing favorable conditions for reproduction of rodents and their associated vectors. For instance outbreaks of Hantavirus in the United States (USA) in 1993 was preceded by a dramatic increase in rainfall (Climatic change) in 1992–1993. This led to increased rodent food resources and increase in the rodent population, followed by invasion of buildings by rodents, and an increased risk of human disease (Hjelle & Glass, 2000). In Northern Tanzania like in many other regions in developing countries increase in anthropogenic activities and climatic change is evident and consequently leading to the disturbance of biodiversity. Therefore it is imperative to speculate that rodent habitat and their ectoparasitic vectors has been affected and therefore their role in the epidemiology of diverse zoonotic pathogens needs to be understood.

Understanding of the epidemiology and factors leading to the emergence or re-emergence of rodent borne diseases is complex which requires consideration of many factors. To date there are few epidemiological studies on rodent borne diseases and pathogens from Africa including Tanzania. Research information about rodent borne diseases are often times from studies from other regions for instance a study done in Iran to determine rodent borne diseases and their public health found that some specific rodent species including *M. musculus*, *R. rattus* and *R. norvegicus* had high rank of rodent-borne diseases in comparison to other species included in that study (Rabiee *et al.*, 2018). More than half of the reported diseases in that study were strongly connected to commensal rodent species, however lack

of sufficient surveys among non-commensal rodent species could have affected the findings (Khaghani, 2007). Therefore studies to determine the prevalence and assessing risk factors for rodent infection in an area that have been found to have high burden of zoonotic infections among patients seeking healthcare with febrile illness (Crump *et al.*, 2013) are needed.

2.2 *Coxiella burnetii*

2.2.1 Brief overview and history of *Coxiella*

Coxiella burnetii is an obligate intracellular gram negative bacterium measuring (0.2 to 0.4µm wide and 0.4 to 1µm long), the causative agent of a zoonotic diseases Q fever in humans and Coxiellosis in animals. The bacterium has a worldwide distribution with the exception of New Zealand and Antarctica (Raoult *et al.*, 2005; Voth & Heinzen, 2007). The agent of Q fever was first recognized in 1935 by Edward Holbrook Derrick in febrile livestock handlers in Australia (Derrick, 1983). The agent of Q fever was independently isolated in 1938 by Dr. Herald and colleague from *Dermacentor andersoni* ticks near Nine Mile Creek in the United States at the Rocky Mountain Laboratory (RML) in Montana and subsequently named it *Rickettsia diaporica* (Davis *et al.*, 1938). The Australian and *D. andersoni* isolates were compared for virulence and infectivity and determined to be the same species. Cox re-named the pathogen *Rickettsia burnetii* after discoveries made by Dr. Burnet. Dr. Cornelius Philip solicited that the pathogen be placed in a new genus, *Coxiella*, to honor Dr. Cox's discovery (Philip, 1948). For decades only *Coxiella burnetii* was the only species in the genus *Coxiella* however recently other candidate species have now been recognized in crayfish and reptile (*C. cheraxi*) (Tan & Owens, 2000), birds (*C. avium*) (Shivaprasad *et al.*, 2008) and in humans (*C. massiliensis*) (Angelakis *et al.*, 2016). Additionally *Coxiella*-like bacteria are also common in ticks (Almeida *et al.*, 2012), and one of these organisms was recently found in horses (Seo *et al.*, 2016). Members of the genus *Coxiella* are now classified in the family Coxiellaceae, order Legionellales and gamma subdivision of the phylum Proteobacteria.

2.2.2 Structure of *C. burnetii*

Coxiella has a unique intracellular life with two distinct morphological forms, the large cell variant (LCV) and the small cell variant (SCV) (McCaul & Williams, 1981). The two distinct forms can be differentiated by size, morphology, peptidoglycan content and resistance to

physical disruption. Small cell variants are the environment extracellular form of the organism. They are 0.2 to 0.5 μm long, compact and typically rod-shaped with an electron-dense core bounded by cytoplasmic and outer membranes (McCaul & Williams, 1981). Small Cell Variant is metabolically inactive, and show a high degree of resistance to chemical agents and physical conditions, such as osmotic pressure and sonic disruption (McCaul & Williams, 1981). This confers the ability for the organism to survive for prolonged period of time in the environment. In contrast, LCVs resemble Gram-negative bacteria; they can exceed 1 μm in length, but are more pleomorphic than the SCVs. They possess a thinner cell wall, with a more dispersed filamentous nucleoid region (Roest *et al.*, 2013). They are metabolically active, and are the intracellular form of the organism.

2.2.3 Epidemiology of *C. burnetii* and Q fever outbreaks

Coxiella burnetii, a zoonotic strictly intracellular bacterial pathogen has been found in all regions of the world (Klaasen *et al.*, 2014; Rolain *et al.*, 2005; Schimmer *et al.*, 2014) except in the New Zealand and some isolated Islands (Vanderburg *et al.*, 2014). *Coxiella burnetii* is the causative agent of Q fever, human being are infected through animal faeces, urine, milk, birth products, inhalation of contaminated aerosols originating from contaminated materials from infected animals (Honarmand, 2012; Klaasen *et al.*, 2014; Noden *et al.*, 2014; Schimmer *et al.*, 2014; Vanderburg *et al.*, 2014). The bacteria have broad ranges of host including sheep, goat, cattle, birds, dogs, cats, rodents and ectoparasites. People at high risk are farmers, laboratory workers, dairy workers and Veterinarians (Honarmand, 2012; Noden *et al.*, 2014). Infection by *C. burnetii* in human can be asymptomatic or symptomatic (Vanderburg *et al.*, 2014), and can present as acute Q fever that have nonspecific symptoms such as chest pain with breathing, cough, fever, headache, jaundice, muscle pain and shortness of breath or as chronic Q fever that may present with chills, fatigue, night sweats, prolonged fever and shortness of breath (Bechah *et al.*, 2014). Complications if not diagnosed and treated includes cirrhosis, hepatitis, encephalitis, endocarditis, myocarditis, interstitial pulmonary fibrosis, meningitis and pneumonia (Honarmand, 2012; Vanderburg *et al.*, 2014). *Coxiella burnetii* infection in livestock have been associated with decreased livestock productivity which can have socioeconomic impact to livestock keeping population particularly in resource limited settings (Vanderburg *et al.*, 2014). Since its discovery *C. burnetii* was not given priority until several recent outbreaks in Europe and Middle East. Q fever outbreaks have been reported in the Netherlands (Roest *et al.*, 2011), Slovenia (Grilc *et*

al., 2007), the United Kingdom (Van Woerden *et al.*, 2004; Wallensten *et al.*, 2010), Israel (Amitai *et al.*, 2010), Iraq (Faix *et al.*, 2008), the United States (Bamberg *et al.*, 2007), Italy (Manfredi, 1996) and France (Tissot-Dupont *et al.*, 2007). Probably one of striking Q fever outbreak episode in the history of Q fever was the one that happened in The Netherlands between 2007-2010 where more than 4000 human Q fever cases was reported (De Rooij *et al.*, 2016). Analysis of the Netherlands Q fever outbreak revealed that outbreak was associated with small ruminants rather than cattle (Klaasen *et al.*, 2014; Schimmer *et al.*, 2014). Follow up studies and laboratory experimental studies revealed that *C. burnetii* can persist in humans and rodents adipose tissues (Bechah *et al.*, 2014; Comer *et al.*, 2001). It has been postulated that the transmission cycle of *C. burnetii* is associated with sylvatic or domestic transmission cycles, with rodents being suspected to link the two cycles (Meerburg & Reusken, 2011).

2.2.4 Detection and prevalence of *C. burnetii* in small mammals

To date the epidemiology of *C. burnetii* in animal host or reservoir is not fully understood, however *C. burnetii* have been detected throughout the world with exception of New Zealand and Antarctica (Fournier *et al.*, 1998). For the past few decades interest to find new and possible reservoir and hosts for *Coxiella* species have gained much attention especially after several recent Q fever outbreaks (Abdel-Moein & Hamza, 2018; Meerburg & Reusken, 2011).

In the United Kingdom (UK), antibodies to *C. burnetii* have been detected in wild brown rats on farms (Webster *et al.*, 1995). Recent studies in the Netherlands have also indicated that wild brown rats, especially those near farms, may act as true reservoirs for *C. burnetii* (Reusken *et al.*, 2011) and may be implicated in the Q fever outbreaks in livestock and humans in the Netherlands in 2007-2010. *Coxiella burnetii* have been found in rodents trapped in pristine environments that are infrequently visited by humans or livestock indicating that rodents may be a natural reservoir of *Coxiella*. In Canada *C. burnetii* was detected in rodent species trapped in forest and pristine environments, where human activities such as livestock keeping do not occur, suggesting that rodents in these livestock free areas could be acting as a host or reservoir of *C. burnetii* (Burgdorfer *et al.*, 1963; Thompson *et al.*, 2012). Similar findings was reported in USA where *C. burnetii* was isolated from wild rodents in western Montana (Lackman, 1963) an area that was inaccessible to livestock and

infrequently visited by humans, indicating that rodents could be possible host or reservoir of *C. burnetii* in that area.

In Africa there is paucity of studies and information on detection and prevalence of *Coxiella* in small mammals including rodents. The few studies done in Africa have reported considerable variation in prevalence of *C. burnetii* in rodent population. A study done in Zambia, a country bordering Tanzania to the Southwest; *C. burnetii* DNA was detected in 9 out of 20 (45%) rodents trapped in urban and peri-urban areas using PCR assay (Chitanga *et al.*, 2018). There was evidence of variation of prevalence within individual rodent species as follows: *Saccostomus campestris* (2/2), *Gerbillinae* sp. (4/7) and *Mastomys natalensis* (3/11). Another study done in Africa was performed in Nigeria, *C. burnetii* DNA was detected by PCR assay in 4 out of 194 (2.1%) in rodents trapped in peri-urban areas (Kamani *et al.*, 2018). In the Nigerian study, the sampled rodents comprised 3 out of 121 (2.5%) *Rattus norvegicus* and 1 out of 48 (2.1%) *Rattus rattus* (Kamani *et al.*, 2018). In Egypt *C. burnetii* DNA was found in 2 of 55 (3.6%) *R. norvegicus* and 3 of 20 (15%) *R. rattus*, with overall prevalence of 6.7% (Abdel-Moein & Hamza, 2018) using molecular methods. In Cape Verde and Canary Islands *C. burnetii* antibodies were detected in 12.4%; 21.1% for Cape Verde and 10.2% for the Canary Islands by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and indirect immunofluorescence assay (IFA) (Foronda *et al.*, 2015).

Table 1: Review of *C. burnetii* detection in small mammals

Author	Detection method	Rodent species	N, n (%)	Country
Lackman (1937)		Woodrat (<i>N. cinerea cinerea</i>)	20, 1 (5)	
		Golden-mantled ground squirrel (<i>L. escaurum</i>)	111, 2 (1.8)	USA
	Culture	Chipmunk (<i>E. amoenus</i>)	46, 1 (2.2)	
Webster <i>et al.</i> (1995)	ELISA	Wild brown rats	127, 44 (34)	UK
Abdel-Moein & Hamza (2018)	Nested PCR	<i>R. norvegicus</i>	55, 2 (3.6)	Egypt
		<i>R. rattus</i>	20, 3 (15)	
Pluta <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Nested PCR	Not indicated	119, 0 (0)	Germany
Bolaños-Rivero <i>et al.</i> (2017)	PCR- IS1111	<i>R. norvegicus</i>	100, 8 (8)	Spain
Thompson <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Real-Time PCR IS1111	Woodland jumping mice, deer mice	30 (83.3), 71 (76.1)	Canada
Izquierdo-Rodríguez <i>et al.</i> (2019)		<i>R. rattus</i>	103, 9 (8.7)	France
	ELISA	<i>Mus musculus domesticus</i>	15, 2 (13.3)	
Foronda <i>et al.</i> (2015)	ELISA & IFA	Black rats (<i>R. rattus</i>)	108,12 (11.1)	Canary Islands
		Mice (<i>M. musculus</i>)	77,11 (14.3)	and Cape Verde
Kamani <i>et al.</i> (2018)	PCR,IS1111	<i>R. norvegicus</i> , <i>R. rattus</i>	194, 4 (2.1)	Nigeria
Chitanga <i>et al.</i> (2018)	PCR, icd	Gerbillinae sp, <i>Saccostomus campestris</i> , <i>Mastomys natalensis</i>	20, 9 (45)	Zambia
Rozental <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Conventional PCR- IS1111	Akodon cursor, <i>Oxymycterus dasytrichus</i> , <i>Oligoryzomys</i>	131, 6 (4.6)	Brazil

N=Total number of rodent per specie tested, n= number of *C. burnetii* positive rodents found, % = percentage of positive rodents

2.2.5 Routes of transmission of *C. burnetii*

(i) Inhalation

This is the most common route of infection in both animals and human (Russell-Lodrigue *et al.*, 2006; Welsh *et al.*, 1958). Under experimental conditions, inhalation of a single organism can produce infection and clinical disease in humans (Tigertt *et al.*, 1961). The infectious dose for human airborne exposure to *C. burnetii* required for fifty per cent of the exposed population to become infected (inf_{d50}) is estimated at 1.5 bacteria (0.75–38.7, 95% credible interval (CI) (Brooke *et al.*, 2013, 2015). Contaminated dusts and wind have been found to cause spread of *C. burnetii* at far distance from the point source (Nusinovici *et al.*, 2017; Tissot-Dupont *et al.*, 2004).

(ii) Other routes for *C. burnetii* transmission in humans

The means by which humans can acquire the *C. burnetii* is broad, studies have demonstrated infection through oral route mainly consumption of raw milk (Rodolakis, 2006), Human to human transmission (Watanabe & Takahashi, 2008), sexual transmission (Miceli *et al.*, 2010). Transmission of *C. burnetii* has also been reported to occur through blood transfusion (Delsing & Kullberg, 2008), transplacental transmission, intradermal inoculation, and postmortem examinations have been associated with sporadic cases of Q fever (Harman, 1949).

2.2.6 Diagnosis of *C. burnetii* (Q fever)

Diagnosis of *C. burnetii* is generally difficult and poses potential risk to laboratory personnel especially in areas where laboratory infrastructures are inadequately developed. In most instances the diagnosis of Q fever in humans relies on serology (Fournier *et al.*, 1998). Various other methods are also being employed, these includes: a) Microagglutination (Crăcea, 1987), b) Complement fixation (Horigan *et al.*, 2011), c) Radioimmunoassay (Döller *et al.*, 1984) and d) Indirect immunofluorescence antibody tests (Bouvery *et al.*, 2003).

Each of these methods have some limitation, for instance the major limitations of serological assay includes the issue of cross reaction with other microorganism such as *Legionella* species (Musso *et al.*, 1997), dependent on rise of antibody titre, which takes about two weeks and use of blood or blood derivative samples only (Dupont *et al.*, 1994). On the other hand culture of *Coxiella* from blood or tissue is highly specific for the diagnosis of Q fever,

but is insensitive and poses a substantial infection risk to laboratory personnel without proper biosecurity measures (Omsland *et al.*, 2013; Roest *et al.*, 2013). *Coxiella burnetii* culture requires specialized cell or yolk sac media which are often not readily available nor commonly used in routine clinical microbiological diagnostic (Musso & Raoult, 1995). Consequently, the use of culture for the diagnosis of Q fever is rarely done outside specialized laboratories, which there are few in developing countries. The use of real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) assays for detection of *C. burnetii* have been used variably successfully to detect *C. burnetii* from various sample types such as blood, milk, ticks and tissues (Piñero *et al.*, 2014). Polymerase chain reaction assay targeting isocitrate dehydrogenase (*icd*), *com1* and the insertion sequence IS1111 and other genes for *C. burnetii* has been previously described (Duron, 2015; Klee *et al.*, 2006). The use qPCR for detection of *C. burnetii* based on IS1111 gene target has been demonstrated as more sensitive compared to detection of other genes (Vaidya *et al.*, 2008).

2.3 *Bartonella* species

2.3.1 Brief overview and history of *Bartonella* species

The bacterium was first described in Peru in 1909 by Alberto Barton of which the bacteria is named after him in recognition of his work (Maurin *et al.*, 1997). Prior to 1993, the genus *Bartonella* was composed of a single species, *B. bacilliformis*, the causative agent of Oroya fever, or Carrion's disease, first described in South America in the late 1800's (Minnick *et al.*, 2014). *Bartonella bacilliformis* remained the sole member of the genus *Bartonella* for nearly a century (Brenner *et al.*, 1993). As a consequence of various factors, highlighted by improved detection and diagnostic capabilities, as well as reclassification of several bacterial genera on the basis of phylogenetic relatedness using 16S rRNA gene sequences, the genus has undergone a substantial expansion. In 1993, the genus was initially broadened through unification with the genus *Rochalimaea* (Brenner *et al.*, 1993), which was comprised of the species *R. quintana* (formerly *Rickettsia quintana*), *R. henselae*, *R. Vinsonii* and *R. elizabethae*, and again in 1995 through a subsequent unification with the genus *Grahamella* (Birtles *et al.*, 1995), which contained the species *G. grahamii*, *G. taylorii*, *G. talpae* and *G. doshiae*. Following these amalgamations, all of the aforementioned species were reclassified as *Bartonella* and the genus was removed from the order *Rickettsiales* (Birtles *et al.*, 1995). The genus *Bartonella* has continued to grow in recent years with the isolation and characterization of numerous additional species, including multiple strains recovered from a

broad range of rodents and other wild and domestic mammals in various regions of the world (Anderson & Neuman, 1997; Breitschwerdt, 2017; Breitschwerdt & Kordick, 2000; Chomel & Kasten, 2010; Holmberg *et al.*, 2003; Molin *et al.*, 2011; Pérez *et al.*, 2011; Rolain & Raoult, 2006). Currently, the genus has been broadened to include over 45 named species or subspecies (Table 2) (Okaro *et al.*, 2017). More than half of recognized *Bartonella* species are zoonotic with varying clinical presentation (Kaewmongkol *et al.*, 2011). Zoonotic *Bartonella* species are included among the list of emerging and re-emerging human pathogen (Boulouis *et al.*, 2005).

Table 2: Currently designated *Bartonella* species, their hosts and associated human disease

Species	Host (s)	Human diseases associated	Reference
<i>B. acomydis</i>	Golden spiny mouse (<i>Acomys russatus</i>)	Unknown	Sato <i>et al.</i> (2013)
<i>B. alsatica</i>	Rabbits	Endocarditis	Heller <i>et al.</i> (1999) and Raoult <i>et al.</i> (2006)
<i>B. ancashensis</i>	Human patient	Verruga peruana	Mullins <i>et al.</i> (2013, 2015)
<i>B. apis</i>	Honeybee symbiont	Unknown	Kešnerová <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>B. australis</i>	Kangaroos	Unknown	Saisongkorh <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<i>B. bacilliformis</i>	Human	Oroya fever, verruga peruana	Noguchi and Battistin (1926) and Thornton <i>et al.</i> (1990)
<i>B. birtlesii</i>	Mice	Carrion's disease	Bermond <i>et al.</i> (2000) and Noguchi and Battistin (1926)
<i>B. bovis</i>	Dairy cattle	Endocarditis in cattle	Rudoler <i>et al.</i> (2014)
<i>B. callosciuri</i>	Plantain squirrel	Unknown	Sato <i>et al.</i> (2013)
<i>B. capreoli</i>	Deer	Unknown	Bermond <i>et al.</i> (2002)
<i>B. chomelii</i>	French cattle	Unknown	Maillard <i>et al.</i> (2004)
<i>B. clarridgeiae</i>	Cat	Lymphadenopathy, fever, papule, CSD	Kordick <i>et al.</i> (1997)
<i>B. coopersplainsensis</i>	Rat	Unknown	Kordick <i>et al.</i> (1997) and Saisongkorh <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<i>B. doshiae</i>	Voles	Unknown	Birtles <i>et al.</i> (1995)
<i>B. dromedarii</i>	Camels	Unknown	Rasis <i>et al.</i> (2014)

Species	Host (s)	Human diseases associated	Reference
<i>B. elizabethae</i>	Rats	Endocarditis, neuroretinitis	Brenner <i>et al.</i> (1993)
<i>B. florenciae</i>	Shrew, mouse	Unknown	Li <i>et al.</i> (2015)
<i>B. fuyuanensis</i>	Field mouse	Unknown	Li <i>et al.</i> (2015)
<i>B. grahamii</i>	Rodents, voles	Neuroretinitis, CSD	Inoue <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>B. heixiaziensis</i>	Vole	Unknown	Li <i>et al.</i> (2015)
<i>B. henselae</i>	Cat	CSD, endocarditis, bacillary	Anderson <i>et al.</i> (1992)
<i>B. jaculi</i>	Greater Egyptian jerboa	angiomas, bacteremia	Koehler <i>et al.</i> (1994) and Sato <i>et al.</i> (2013)
<i>B. japonica</i>	Mice	Unknown	Inoue <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>B. koehlerae</i>	Cat	Endocarditis	Avidor <i>et al.</i> (2004)
<i>B. koehlerae subsp. bothieri</i>	Bobcat	Unknown	Chomel <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>B. koehlerae subsp. boulouisii</i>	Mountain lion	Unknown	Chomel <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>B. mayotimonensis</i>	Bats	Endocarditis	Breitschwerdt <i>et al.</i> (2011)
<i>B. melophagi</i>	Sheep	Unknown	Kosoy <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>B. naantaliensis</i>	Bats	Unknown	Kosoy <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>B. peromysci</i>	Mouse	Unknown	Birtles <i>et al.</i> (1995)
<i>B. pachyuromydis</i>	Fat-tail gerbil	Unknown	Lydy <i>et al.</i> (2008)
<i>B. phoceensis</i>	Rat	Unknown	Gundi <i>et al.</i> (2004)
<i>B. queenslandensis</i>	Rats	Unknown	Saisongkorh <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<i>B. quintana</i>	Human	Trench fever, endocarditis, bacteremia,	Foucault <i>et al.</i> (2002)

Species	Host (s)	Human diseases associated	Reference
<i>B. rattaustaliani</i>	Rats	bacillary angiomatosis	Gundi <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<i>B. rattimassiliensis</i>	Rats	Unknown	Gundi <i>et al.</i> (2004)
<i>B. rochalimae</i>	Foxes, raccoons, coyotes	Bacteremia, splenomegaly	Eremeeva <i>et al.</i> (2007) and Henn <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<i>B. silvatica</i>	Mice	Unknown	Inoue <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>B. schoenbuchensis</i>	Deer	Unknown	Dehio <i>et al.</i> (2001)
<i>B. senegalensis</i>	Tick	Unknown	Mishra <i>et al.</i> (2012)
<i>B. talpae</i>	Moles	Unknown	Birtles <i>et al.</i> (1995)
<i>B. tamiae</i>	Rodents, humans	Fever	Kosoy <i>et al.</i> (2008) and Saisongkorh <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<i>B. taylorii</i>	Rats	Unknown	Birtles <i>et al.</i> (1995)
<i>B. tribocorum</i>	Rats	Unknown	Heller <i>et al.</i> (1998)
<i>B. vinsonii subsp. arupensis</i>	Mice	Endocarditis	Fenollar <i>et al.</i> (2005) and Welch <i>et al.</i> (1999)
<i>B. vinsonii subsp. berkhoffii</i>	Dog, coyotes	Endocarditis	Breitschwerdt and Kordick (2000) and Roux <i>et al.</i> (2000)
<i>B. vinsonii subsp. vinsonii</i>	Voles	Unknown	Brenner <i>et al.</i> (1993)
<i>B. vinsonii subsp. yucatanensis</i>	Rodents	Unknown	Fischedick <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>B. weissii</i>	Cat	Unknown	Breitschwerdt and Kordick (2000)
<i>B. washoensis</i>	Dog	Unknown	Chomel <i>et al.</i> (2003)

2.3.2 *Bartonella* as the cause of febrile illness and other clinical presentation in humans

Several different *Bartonella* species have been reported to cause diseases in human and have been included in the list of emerging and re-emerging pathogens. The list of potential zoonotic *Bartonella* species continues to grow (Okaro *et al.*, 2017). However, the vast majority of infections in humans are attributed to *B. bacilliformis*, *B. henselae*, or *B. quintana*. The most vicious species of the *Bartonella* species historically is *B. bacilliformis*, which causes Carrion's disease with a mortality rate of up to 80% if untreated (Bass *et al.*, 1997). *Bartonella quintana* the agent of trench fever, a disease that affected millions of soldiers during World War I (Bass *et al.*, 1997), recently re-emerged among homeless people in Europe and in the USA (Brouqui *et al.*, 1999; Foucault *et al.*, 2002). *Bartonella quintana* is an opportunistic pathogen, which means that it causes much more severe symptoms in immunocompromised individuals, such as HIV infected patients (Koehler *et al.*, 2003). It is likely that *Bartonella* is prevalent in Sub-Sahara African countries due to high prevalence of HIV and Tuberculosis. In the USA majority of *Bartonella* infections in humans are caused by *B. henselae* which is transmitted by a cat bite or scratch or by the cat flea, and causes cat-scratch disease (CSD). *Bartonella henselae* causes symptoms similar to *B. quintana* (trench fever) in immunocompromised individuals. Detection of pathogenic *Bartonella* species in febrile illness patients have been reported in several other countries including Thailand (Bhengsri *et al.*, 2010). Several other *Bartonella* species have occasionally been associated with human disease, including *B. elizabethae* (endocarditis, neuroretinitis), *B. koehlerae* (endocarditis), *B. clarridgeae* (cat-scratch disease), *B. vinsonii arupensis* (fever, neurological symptoms) and *B. vinsonii berkhoffi* (endocarditis) (Bruno *et al.*, 2006). *Bartonella rochalimae*, have been report to cause symptoms similar to *B. bacilliformis* (Eremeeva *et al.*, 2007), *B. tamiae* was isolated in patient with fever and anemia in Thailand (Kosoy *et al.*, 2008, 2010). It has been proposed that any *Bartonella* species found in animals may be capable of infecting humans and cause diseases as opportunistic pathogens (Lin *et al.*, 2010).

Table 3: *Bartonella* species known and reported to cause diseases in humans

Species	Diseases	Brief description	Reference
<i>B. quintana</i>	Bacteremia, bacillary angiomatosis, chronic lymphadenopathy, Trench fever and endocarditis	Accounts for about three-fourths of <i>Bartonella</i> endocarditis cases	Huarcaya <i>et al.</i> (2006)
<i>B. henselae</i>	Cat Scratch Diseases	Accounts for about one-fourth of <i>Bartonella</i> endocarditis cases, has worldwide distribution	La Scola and Raoult (1999)
<i>B. alsatica</i>	Endocarditis	Was isolated from a patient diagnosed with BCNE who also had a preexisting valve lesion	Raoult <i>et al.</i> (2006)
<i>B. ancashensis</i>	Verruga peruana	Was isolated from two patients with verruga peruana in the Ancash region of Peru	Huarcaya <i>et al.</i> (2006)
<i>B. bacilliformis</i>	Bacteremia, bacillary angiomatosis, chronic lymphadenopathy, Trench fever and endocarditis	May result in death for more than 80% of infected patients in the absence of antibiotic treatment, and is increasing at an alarming rate in the pediatric population	Ihler (1996)
<i>B. clarridgeiae</i>	Severe fever, lymphadenopathy, chills, sweating and malaise	headache, Has been isolated from immunocompromised patients reported to have CSD	Kordick <i>et al.</i> (1997)
<i>B. elizabethae</i>	Endocarditis	Have been found in a patient with endocarditis.	Parra <i>et al.</i> (2017)
<i>B. grahami</i>	Neuroretinitis, fever	Has been reported as being a causative agent of CSD-like illness in an immunocompromised patient	Oksi <i>et al.</i> (2013)
<i>B. koehlerae</i>	Depression and anxiety, headaches, joint stiffness and hallucinations	Cat-Associated Agent of Culture-Negative Human Endocarditis	Avidor <i>et al.</i> (2004)
<i>B. mayotimonensis</i>	Infective endocarditis	Infective endocarditis,	Lin <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>B. rochalimae</i>	Bacteremia, fever and splenomegaly	Has genetic resemblance to <i>B. bacilliformis</i> , the causative agent of Oroya fever	Eremeeva <i>et al.</i> (2007)
<i>B. tamiae</i>	Fever, mild anemia, headache, myalgia, liver function abnormalities	Closely related to <i>Bartonella</i> species previously identifies in rats in Thailand	Kosoy <i>et al.</i> (2008)
<i>B. vinsoni</i>	Endocarditis, arthritis, neurological disease and vasoproliferative neoplasia	Have been isolated in cattle rancher in USA	Fenollar <i>et al.</i> (2005) and Welch <i>et al.</i> (1999)

2.3.3 *Bartonella* species in rodents and small mammal populations

Several *Bartonella* species which are found in small mammals, such as wild mice, squirrels and rats have been linked to human disease. For instance *B. grahamii* with ocular syndromes, *B. elizabethae* with endocarditis, *B. vinsonii* subsp. *arupensis* with fever and bacteremia, and *B. washoensis* with fever and myocarditis (Gil *et al.*, 2010). *Bartonella* species that are able to infect rodents and small mammals include *B. elizabethae* (Ying *et al.*, 2002), *B. grahamii* (Ellis *et al.*, 1999), *B. vinsonii* subsp. *arupensis* (Welch *et al.*, 1999), *B. doshiae* (Birtles *et al.*, 1995), *B. taylorii* (Richard, 1995), *B. vinsonii* subsp. *vinsonii* (Ellis *et al.*, 1999), *B. tribocorum* (Heller *et al.*, 1998), *B. washoensis* (Kosoy *et al.*, 2003), *B. rattimassiliensis* (Gundi *et al.*, 2004), *B. phoceensis* (Gundi *et al.*, 2004), *B. birtlesii* (Bermond *et al.*, 2000), *B. rochalimae* (Lin *et al.*, 2008), *B. japonica* (Inoue *et al.*, 2010) and *B. silvatica* (Inoue *et al.*, 2010).

Recent evidence from several studies on detection of *Bartonella* species in small mammals suggests that rodent-borne *Bartonella* species may play an important and previously unrecognized role as a source of infection in other animals such as stray dogs and febrile human patients (Bai *et al.*, 2008; Kosoy *et al.*, 2003; 2010). Rodents and several other small mammals are responsible for maintaining the highest number of *Bartonella* species and subspecies, including several Candidatus (Gundi *et al.*, 2009; Billeter *et al.*, 2012; Inoue *et al.*, 2010). *Bartonella* species are continuing to be discovered in novel potential reservoir species of small mammal and rodent populations around the world, including Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America (Bai *et al.*, 2008; 2009; Castle *et al.*, 2004; Gundi *et al.*, 2012; Jardine *et al.*, 2005; Kosoy *et al.*, 2003; Kosoy *et al.*, 1998; Pretorius *et al.*, 2004; Theonest *et al.*, 2019; Winoto *et al.*, 2005).

Several studies support the hypothesis that *Bartonellae* have very effectively co-evolved with rodent species as reservoir hosts (Buffet *et al.*, 2013; Buffet, Pisanu *et al.*, 2013; Hayman *et al.*, 2013; Lei & Olival, 2014; Paziewska *et al.*, 2011; Telfer *et al.*, 2005). It has also been described that closely related phylogenetic groups of *Bartonella* are present in populations of related species of rodents separated by considerable geographical distances and land barriers (Bai *et al.*, 2009; Castle *et al.*, 2004; Kosoy *et al.*, 1998; Pretorius *et al.*, 2004). In an experimental infection of cotton rats (*Sigmodon hispidus*) and white-footed mice (*Peromyscus leucopus*) with *Bartonella*, resulted in bacteremia only when variants were originally isolated from the same species or a close taxonomic relative (Kosoy *et al.*, 2000).

However, the diversity of *Bartonella* species that can exist within a single rodent species or individual is highly variable. Multiple distinct *Bartonella* species have been documented in a single rodent species (Birtles *et al.*, 2001) or within a rodent population within a single site (Kosoy *et al.*, 1997).

It has been reported that the relative abundance of each *Bartonella* species within these rodent populations is thought to be dependent on host density of the rodent species, density of flea species and spill-over infection between each species of rodent (Telfer *et al.*, 2007). Different means of transmissions among rodents have been reported including, transplacental transmission for some rodent species (Kosoy *et al.*, 1998). Studies on detection of *Bartonella* species are expanding and occurs in different animal hosts, ectoparasites and majority of these are found in small mammals especially rodents species.

2.3.4 Transmission of *Bartonella* to humans

Species within the *Bartonella* genus are transmitted mainly by arthropod vectors, such as fleas, sand flies, lice, biting flies, potentially ticks and other vectors (Billeter *et al.*, 2008). Transmission from an animal reservoir to human may also occur directly by way of skin trauma (i.e. scratch or bite), epitomized by the transmission of *B. henselae* by a cat scratch, resulting in cat scratch disease (CSD) (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Specificity in ectoparasites transmission of *Bartonella* to humans are known; the rodent flea for *B. grahamii* and *B. taylorii*, the cat flea *Ctenocephalides felis* for *B. henselae*, the human body louse *Pediculus humanus corporis* for *B. quintana* and the sandfly *Lutzomyia verrucarum* for *B. bacilliformis* (Billeter *et al.*, 2008). There are however many more potential vectors in which *Bartonella* has been detected, including ticks, keds, mites and various kinds of fleas and flies (Billeter *et al.*, 2008). Since some of these can feed on many different mammals, the vectors may play an important role for cross-transmission and host shifts.

2.3.5 Host diversity and specificity for *Bartonella* infection

Studies have indicated that some *Bartonella* species have preference for one or a group of mammalian hosts (reservoir host) in which they infect and multiply within erythrocytes. Occasionally, they infect another host (incidental host), in which they are not capable to infect the erythrocytes, but only vascular endothelial cells (Kosoy *et al.*, 1997; Vayssier-Taussat *et al.*, 2009; 2010; Withenshaw *et al.*, 2016). Some *Bartonella* species infect only a single host, research and experiment studies have observed that closely related *Bartonella*

species also infect closely related hosts (Withenshaw *et al.*, 2016). For instance to date, humans are the only known reservoir hosts for both *B. bacilliformis* and *B. quintana* (Drancourt *et al.*, 2005; Lydy *et al.*, 2008); likewise, cats have been shown to serve as the only known mammalian reservoirs for *B. henselae* and *B. koehlerae* (Chomel *et al.*, 2006). Several *Bartonella* species have been associated with rodents or their ectoparasite. The underlying factors contributing to the predilection for a given species of *Bartonella* to exhibit preferential infectivity in specific host species are not fully understood.

2.3.6 Diagnoses of *Bartonella* species

Bartonella species are pathogens of emerging and re-emerging significance, causing a wide array of clinical syndromes including febrile illness. Some of the known sequelae for *Bartonella* infection include endocarditis (mostly negative on culture), neuroretinitis, chronic lymphadenopathy, peliosis hepatis (PH), fever, chronic bacteremia, bacillary angiomatosis (BA). Proper diagnostic is critical for optimal case management and treatment options of any infections including *Bartonella*. Several methods have been applied in the diagnoses of *Bartonella* species, these include:

(i) Isolation and culture methods

Bartonellae are fastidious, pleiomorphic, gram-negative bacilli that are oxidase- and catalase-negative and require a CO₂-rich environment, enriched media, and prolonged periods for growth (Brenner *et al.*, 1997). On blood agar, primary isolates of *Bartonella* species are obtained after 12 to 14 days, although prolonged incubation periods of up to 45 days are sometimes necessary (Maurin *et al.*, 1994). On subculture of the primary isolate is also often difficult, with colony formation again taking 10 to 15 days (La Scola & Raoult, 1999). However subsequent subcultures grow more rapidly (3 to 5 days), but with varying colony morphology (Koehler *et al.*, 1997). It is often difficult to evaluate the sensitivity of cultures due to the difficulty of cultivating this organism. Several studies have reported blood culture negative of samples taken from patients with endocarditis due to *Bartonella* (Lamas, 2003; Mainardi *et al.*, 2010; Okaro *et al.*, 2017; Roux *et al.*, 2000).

(ii) Serology methods

For several decades the diagnostic of *Bartonella* infection relied on serological assays. Serologic test for diagnostic of *Bartonella* species was first developed at the Centers for

Disease Control (CDC) by Regnery (English *et al.*, 1988; Regnery *et al.*, 1992) for diagnostic of cat-scratch diseases (CSD) caused by *B. henselae*. This indirect fluorescent antibody (IFA) test was subsequently validated clinically in several trials (Demers *et al.*, 1995; Karem *et al.*, 2000). Several other IFA and enzyme-linked immunoassay (EIA) tests to diagnose *Bartonella* species especially *B. henselae* infection have been developed and several have become commercially available (Patnaik & Peter, 1995; Rolain *et al.*, 2001; Zbinden *et al.*, 1995). The major limitation for serological methods is that the assay is unable to differentiate different species of *Bartonella* with antigenic similarity such as *B. henselae* and *B. quintana* due to cross reactivity in IFA testing for these organisms (McGill *et al.*, 1998; Sander *et al.*, 2001). Serological assay for diagnostic of *Bartonella* have also shown cross-reactivity with other intracellular bacteria such as *Coxiella burnetii*, *Toxoplasma gondii*, *Francisella tularensis*, *Chlamydia*, Epstein-Bar virus, have been shown to result in false-positive test (La Scola & Raoult, 1996; Nadal & Zbinden, 1995; Sander *et al.*, 1998) .

(iii) Molecular methods

The development of molecular identification and typing methods has markedly advanced the diagnosis and epidemiologic investigation of several diseases and causative pathogens including *Bartonella* species. In the study of Bartonellae, the use of molecular techniques has provided evidence of the bacterium from several sample sources and has aided in the demonstration of the diversity of human disease caused by these organisms, has allowed epidemiologic investigation both in individual cases and in populations, and has provided important phylogenetic information regarding to reclassification of *Bartonella* species (Goral *et al.*, 1994; Mouritsen *et al.*, 1997). Several different molecular methods have been used for the identification and differentiation of *Bartonella* species including southern blot, gel and capillary electrophoresis, polymerase chain reaction (PCR), DNA-hybridization, restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), real-time PCR (RT-PCR) and genetic sequence analysis (Bereswill *et al.*, 1999; Diaz *et al.*, 2012; Handley & Regnery, 2000; Matar *et al.*, 1999; Renesto *et al.*, 2001; Tay *et al.*, 2014). Polymerase chain react isn't just one of the mainstays for diagnosing *Bartonella* infections, but it's played a critical role in fulfilling molecular Koch's postulates to associate *Bartonella* with new disease syndromes. The detection of *Bartonella* 16S rRNA gene sequences within the lesions of patients with bacillary angiomatosis provided the primary link of *Bartonella* with this condition (Relman *et al.*, 1990). Similarly, the detection of *B. henselae* 16S rRNA gene sequences in skin test

antigens used to diagnose CSD helped resolve a longstanding mystery about the etiology of CSD (Regnery *et al.*, 1992). Multiple PCR or coupled with restriction fragment digestion to detect polymorphisms, enrichment broth culture, or DNA sequencing has all been used to identify *Bartonella* isolates (Cook, 2006). Many different specific primer pairs and techniques have been described to detect *Bartonella* DNA in clinical specimens by PCR (When specifically applied to *Bartonella* endocarditis, amplification of *Bartonella* DNA from valvular tissue by PCR has been shown in multiple case series to have higher sensitivity and specificity, ranging from 72 to 98% (Bosshard *et al.*, 2003; Fournier *et al.*, 2001). The use of PCR assay for detection of *Bartonella* species can be performed on range of sample sources including whole blood, plasma, or serum samples, with studies reporting sensitivity of 58% and specificity of 100% (Sanogo *et al.*, 2003).

CHAPTER THREE

MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Brief description of study site

The samples for this study were collected from small mammals trapped from two districts in Kilimanjaro Region of northern Tanzania. Trapping of the small mammals was conducted in two of seven districts of Kilimanjaro Region in a previous study (Allan *et al.*, 2018). The two districts, Moshi Municipal (Urban) and Moshi Rural (Fig. 2), were chosen as the site of the study due to the high reported incidence of febrile illness due to zoonotic pathogens (Crump *et al.*, 2013). The climate of the two the district for this area is tropical, with two rain seasons in the year. Subsistence farming is common; agriculture which is mainly mixed cropping and livestock farming is the main activity in the study area.

3.2 Sampling and sample size determination

Spleen samples from difference small mammal species and ectoparasites were collected during field work from a collaborative cross-sectional study conducted to explore the role of small mammals in the epidemiology of leptospirosis and other zoonoses in the Kilimanjaro region of northern Tanzania (Allan *et al.*, 2018), for which I was part of the field staff (Figs. 3 and 4). Small mammals were trapped in five villages within Moshi Urban District and seven villages within Moshi Rural District, as previously described (Allan *et al.*, 2018) and shown in Fig. 2. The target sample size for detection of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp for this study were 50 small mammals per village to give sufficient power ($\alpha = 0.95$, $\beta = 0.8$) to detect a minimum infection prevalence of 10% (Allan *et al.*, 2018). Villages for sampling were randomly selected from a list, home to people that had sought care, and had been enrolled in previous febrile illness surveillance studies at local hospitals (Crump *et al.*, 2013). Small mammal trapping was performed in three sessions: a) May-June 2013 (wet season); b) May-June 2014 (wet season); and c) August-September 2014 (dry season). Small mammal were trapped in households in a total of 12 villages through cross-sectional visits, with one additional round of repeat sampling conducted in one village (based on high trap success in the initial visit) (Allan *et al.*, 2018). Trapped small mammals were euthanized by terminal halothane anaesthesia and cervical dislocation. Data gathered for every trapped small mammal included: species (determined by observation of phenotypic characteristics and measurement of morphological features), season (Wet or dry), location of sampling (Urban vs

Rural District), sex and reproductive maturity status (mature or immature determined based on external sexual characteristics (Cunningham & Moors, 1993). A full necropsy and tissue sampling were performed for each small mammal sampled (Figs. 3 and 4). A fresh sterile scalpel blade was used for each small mammal and all other necropsy equipment was washed using 5% Virkon and dried between usages to avoid cross-contamination. Spleen tissue samples were collected into sterile Eppendorf tubes and stored at -80°C prior to DNA extraction. Ectoparasites observed on trapped small mammal were collected and stored in 70-96% ethanol; all ectoparasites from the same small mammal were stored together (Allan *et al.*, 2018). Collected fleas were identified to species level using a dissecting microscope and a pictorial flea identification guide (Mathison & Pritt, 2014). Selection of fleas and their testing for the presence of *Bartonella* was performed in collaboration with colleague in UK, sequence editing, analysis and phylogenetic construction. The work has been included in a co-authored published paper (Theonest *et al.*, 2019). *Xenopsylla cheopis* fleas were selected for DNA extraction and *Bartonella* testing based on their known contribution to *Bartonella* transmission (Billeter *et al.*, 2011). For each small mammal with at least one *X. cheopis* collected, DNA was extracted from one (if only one *X. cheopis* present on that host) or two (if more than one *X. cheopis* present on that host). Where multiple *X. cheopis* were collected from the same small mammal, selection of individual fleas for DNA extraction was opportunistic.

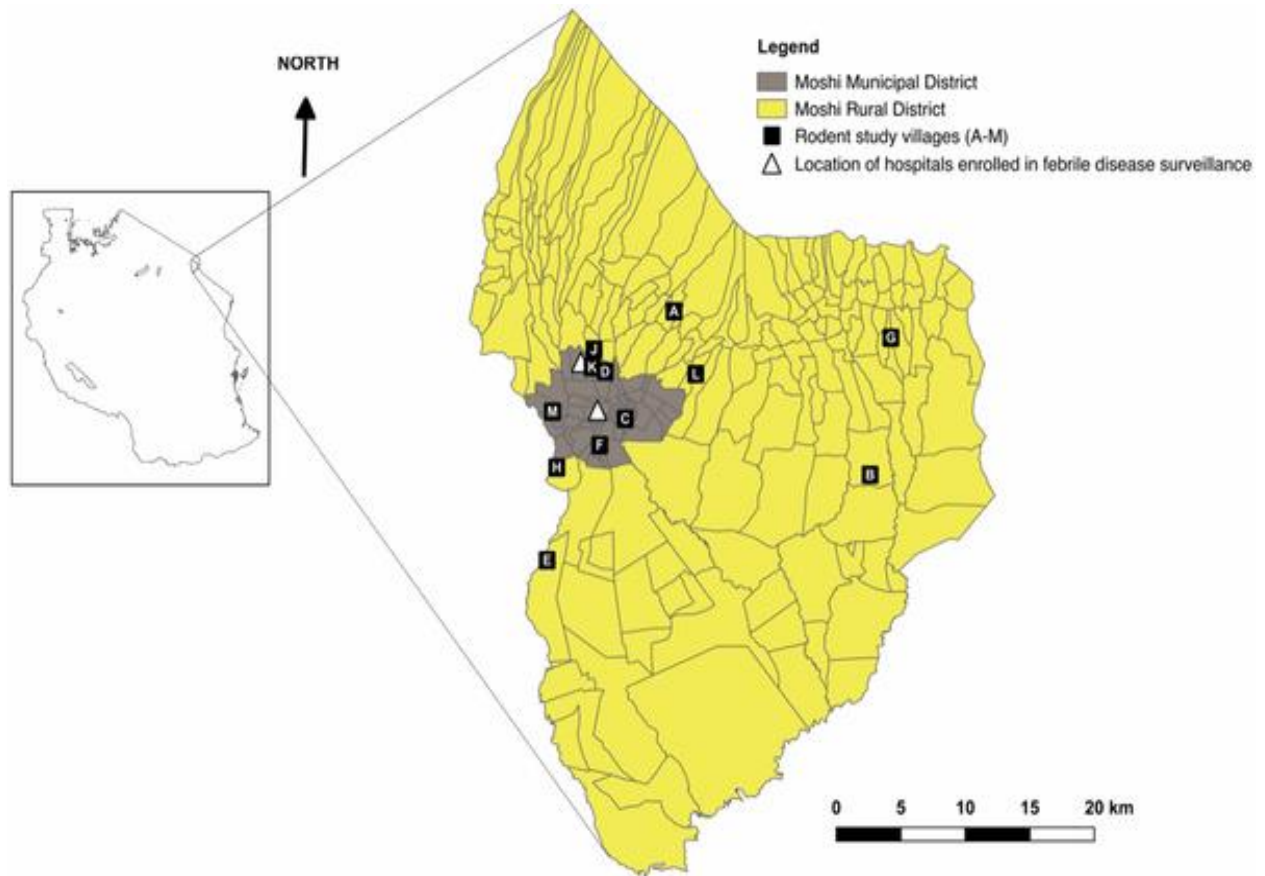


Figure 2: Map indicating Moshi Urban and Moshi Rural Districts, showing locations of rodent study villages in relation to the two hospitals (Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre and Mawenzi Regional Referral Hospital) at which febrile illness surveillance has been conducted in previous studies (Credit to Kathryn Allan in designing and editing the Map) (Allan *et al.*, 2018)



Figure 3: Necropsy and tissue sampling for each sampled rodent (Credit to Rigobert Tarimo)



Figure 4: Determination of weight and other demographic characteristics for each trapped rodent (Credit to Rigobert Tarimo)

3.3 Laboratory analysis

3.3.1 Deoxyribonucleic acid extraction from spleens of small mammals

Deoxyribonucleic acid was extracted from approximately 10 milligrams (mg) of spleen tissue (after initial processing (Appendix 1: SOP 1) using the DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit spin-column protocol for DNA purification from tissues (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). Deoxyribonucleic acid from spleen tissues was eluted in 100µl of AE buffer and quantified using a Nano-Drop spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA). DNA from individual whole fleas were also extracted using the DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit, following the protocol for purification of total DNA from ticks and eluted in a final volume of 65 µl AE buffer. For all extractions, a no-template extraction control (PCR-grade water) was included for every 20 samples. Deoxyribonucleic acid extracts were stored at -20 °C prior to testing. Prior to screening all DNA extracts were diluted in 20 µl of AE buffer to a standard DNA concentration of 10-50 ng/µl for PCR testing, to minimize the potential for PCR inhibition due to the high concentration of host DNA in the small mammal spleen extracts.

3.4 Laboratory analysis for detection of *Bartonella* species

3.4.1 Quantitative PCR for detection of *Bartonella* species from spleens of small mammal and fleas samples targeting *ssrA* gene

The work for this section was conducted in the UK with exception of extraction of DNA from spleens of small mammal. Deoxyribonucleic acid extraction was conducted at Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute biotechnology laboratory (KCRI BL), the data generated was included as part of co-authored research paper (Theonest *et al.*, 2019). Deoxyribonucleic acid extracts from spleens of small mammals and fleas were screened for the presence of *Bartonella* species using a *Bartonella* genus-specific real-time PCR assay (qPCR) targeting the transfer-mRNA *ssrA* gene, using a previously published protocol (Diaz *et al.*, 2012). Lower limit of detection of < 5 fg of *Bartonella* DNA, equivalent to < 3 genomic copies per reaction when tested against four *Bartonella* species (*B. quintana*, *B. henselae*, *B. bovis*, and *B. elizabethae*) was adopted for this work from paper describing this assay by (Diaz *et al.*, 2012). The primers *ssrA*-F(5'-GCTATGGTAATAAATGGACAATGAAATAA-3'), *ssrA*-R(5'-GCTTCTGTTGCCAGGTG-3') and 6-carboxyfluorescein FAM-labelled probe (5'-ACCCCGCTTAAACCTGCGACG-3'-BHQ1) were used to amplify an *ssrA* gene fragment of approximately 300bp. qPCR reactions were carried out in total of 20 µl volumes comprised

of 10 µl QuantiNova Probe PCR mix (Qiagen), 0.8 µl of each primer (10 µM) and probe (5 µM), 2.6 µl nuclease-free water and 5 µl DNA template. Positive control (rodent tissue DNA extract obtained from a previous study (Laudisoit *et al.*, 2014) positive for *Bartonella* with closest similarity to *B. tribocorum*), extraction controls and no-template controls were included in each qPCR run. Assays were performed on a Rotor-Gene Q/6000 (Qiagen) with optimized thermocycling conditions as follows: 95 °C for 2 minutes, followed by 45 cycles of 95 °C for 5 seconds and 60 °C for 5 seconds. A qPCR run was considered valid when all negative controls showed no evidence of amplification and the positive controls amplified with a Ct value of < 40. Extracts were tested in duplicate and considered positive when amplification was recorded in one or more test wells with a Ct value ≤40.

3.4.2 Conventional PCR for detection of *Bartonella* species from rodent spleen samples

Conventional PCR amplification of the *gltA* gene was performed on all rodent spleen DNA extracts, based on a previously published protocol (Norman *et al.*, 1995). Each PCR reaction (25 µl) comprised 12.5 µl of PCR 2X master mix (Promega, Madison, WI, USA), 1.25 µl of 5% dimethyl sulphoxide (DMSO) (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, USA), 1.25 µl molecular grade water (Qiagen), 2.5 µl of each oligonucleotide primer (10 µM), BhCS781.p(5'-GGGGACCAGCTCATGGTGG3') and BhCS1137.n(5'AATGCAAAAAGAACAGTAAAC A-3') (Norman *et al.*, 1995) and 5 µl DNA template. Amplifications were performed on a PTC-240 DNA-Engine (MJ Research/BioRad Technologies, USA) with the following thermocycling conditions: 94 °C for 2 minutes, followed by 40 cycles of 94 °C for 30 seconds, 54.3 °C for 30 seconds, and 72 °C for 2 minutes, then a final step of 72 °C for 7 minutes. Positive and negative controls were included in each PCR run. PCR products were visualized by electrophoresis in a 1.5% agarose gel stained with ethidium bromide (Invitrogen, USA). A sample was considered positive if a clearly defined DNA band of approximately 379 bp for *Bartonella gltA* was visible in the gel and confirmed as *Bartonella* by sequencing of the product. Purification, sequencing and BLAST analyses were conducted as for the *ssrA* gene.

3.4.3 Sequencing and phylogenetic analysis of *ssrA* and *gltA* PCR products

Sequencing work was performed in the UK. In addition to the sequences of *gltA* and *ssrA* products obtained from spleens of small mammals as described above, sequences of the *ssrA* target obtained from fleas collected from the same rodents were also available for analysis.

Phylogenetic analyses were performed as part of this thesis work. Generated sequences were shared, after receiving raw sequences, all sequences were initially edited using BioEdit sequence editor software (Hall, 1999). Incomplete and poor quality sequences (e.g. sequences with ambiguous peaks and short length) were excluded from phylogenetic analysis for both *ssrA* and *gltA* gene fragments. For each gene, sequences were aligned using the ClustalW algorithm, implemented in MEGA 7.0 (Kumar *et al.*, 2016). The model test function in MEGA 7.0 was used to select the best-fitting nucleotide substitution models, which were then incorporated into a phylogenetic analysis based on a maximum likelihood optimality criterion for tree reconstruction, with 1000 bootstrap pseudoreplicates. For the *ssrA* sequence analysis, rodent spleen and flea sequences from this study were aligned with reference *ssrA* sequences from cultured *Bartonella* species downloaded from GenBank (see GenBank accession numbers in Fig. 5). A *Brucella melitensis* sequence was used as the outgroup (Frank *et al.*, 2018). For analysis of the *gltA* sequence data, sequences from study rodent spleens were aligned with those from *Bartonella* reference strains obtained from GenBank and also with representative sequences from previous studies conducted in East Africa (see GenBank accession numbers in Fig. 6). Reference sequences in the alignment included *gltA* sequences from previous studies of *Bartonella* in rodents from Tanzania (Gundi *et al.*, 2012)), Kenya (Halliday *et al.*, 2015), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Gundi *et al.*, 2012; Laudisoit *et al.*, 2014) and Uganda (Billeter *et al.*, 2014) that included either similar rodent species or *Bartonella gltA* sequences similar to those obtained in this study. A *B. tamiae gltA* sequence obtained from an African bat was used as the outgroup (Ying *et al.*, 2015).

3.5 Laboratory analysis for detection of *C. burnetii*

3.5.1 Determination of sensitivity and limit of detection (LoD) for IS1111 qPCR assay

Initial set-up and verification of the assay was performed on the Rotor-Gene Q/6000 System (Qiagen). The approximate sensitivity and limit of detection (LoD) of the IS1111 qPCR assay for this study was determined using a 10-fold dilution series of DNA from *C. burnetii* Nine Mile RSA493 reference strain. The primer and probe for the IS1111 detection for reference strain and samples was as follows:-Forward primer (5'-CATCACATTGCCGCGTTTAC-3'), Reverse primer (5'-GGTTGGTCCCTCGACAACAT-3'), and 6-carboxyfluorescein FAM-labelled probe (5'-AATCCCCAACAACACCTCCTTATTCCCAC-BHQ1-3') as described in previous study (Klee *et al.*, 2006).

3.5.2 IS1111 qPCR for detection of *C. burnetii* DNA from rodent spleens

DNA extracts from rodent spleens were also screened for the presence of *C. burnetii* by qPCR using the same primers, probe and target (IS1111) used for the determination sensitivity and LoD of the assay as described above (Appendix 2, SOP 2). The qPCR reactions were carried out in a total volume of 20 µl comprising of 10 µl QuantiNova qPCR mix (Qiagen), 0.8 µl of each primer (10 µM) and probe (5 µM), 2.6 µl nuclease-free water and 5 µl DNA template. Positive controls, extractions controls and no template controls were included in each qPCR run. Assays were performed on a Rotor-Gene Q/6000 with thermocycling conditions as follows: 1 cycle of 95 °C for 2 minutes followed by 45 cycles of 95 °C for 5 seconds then 60 °C for 5 seconds. Fluorescence readings were acquired via the green (510 nm) detection channel at the end of each annealing/extension phase. A qPCR run was considered valid when the negative controls (PCR-grade water) showed no amplification and the positive controls (Nine Mile RSA493 strain) amplified with Ct value < 40. Samples were tested in duplicate initially and then in an additional three wells if amplification (Ct < 40) was seen in just one of two initial duplicate wells. A sample was considered positive for *C. burnetii* if at least two test wells, out of the maximum five, produced amplification with Ct <40 and all other assay conditions above were fulfilled.

3.6 Data analyses

3.6.1 Data analysis for detection of *Bartonella* species

Statistical analyses were performed in R (R Development Core Team, 2018). Exact binomial proportions and confidence intervals for prevalence estimates were calculated using the package ‘binom’ (Dorai-Raj, 2014). Generalized linear mixed models (GLMM), with binomial family and logit link function, were used to examine variables associated with small mammal and flea *ssrA* qPCR test status (qPCR positive vs negative) and implemented using the package ‘lme4’ (Bates *et al.*, 2015). For small mammal, the dataset for these analyses was limited to *R. rattus* only, given the dominance of this species. Explanatory variables considered in the GLMM for small mammal *ssrA* qPCR status included host sex and reproductive maturity (mature or immature), which were determined based on external sexual characteristics (Cunningham & Moors, 1993). Trapping season (wet or dry), trapping district (Moshi Urban or Moshi Rural) and small mammal abundance were also included as explanatory variables for analysis. Adjusted trap success data were calculated by dividing the

total number (n) of small mammal caught per village by the corrected number of trap nights, which is calculated as: total number of trap nights (number of traps x number of nights) minus lost trap nights (sum of number of closed, damaged or lost traps / 2) and expressed as a percentage (Allan *et al.*, 2018). The village identification variable was included as a random effect to account for the clustered sampling strategy. For fleas, small mammal *ssrA* qPCR test status was the only explanatory variable evaluated in the GLMM and the village identification variable was included as a random effect. Initial maximal multivariable models were created including all candidate explanatory variables and likelihood ratio tests were used to compare candidate models and guide model selection.

3.6.2 Data analysis for detection of *Coxiella burnetii*

Due to small number (12/382) of positive samples obtained with Ct values greater than 33, statistical analysis and genotyping were difficult to perform. Where appropriate for some selected variables statistical analyses were performed in R (R Development Core Team, 2018), binomial proportions and confidence intervals (95%) for prevalence estimates were calculated using the package ‘binom’ version 1.0-5 (Dorai-Raj, 2014).

3.7 Ethical consideration

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH 2012-471-ER-2005-141 and 2015-71-NA-2011-199); Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre (KCMC) Ethics Committee (535 & 537); National Institute of Medical Research ethics certificate (NIMR), Tanzania (NIMR/HQ/R.8a/Vol.IX/1499 and NIMR/HQ/R.8a/Vol.IX/1522); Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) (Certificate number could not be retrieved); University of Glasgow College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences Ethics Committee (200120020), and University of Glasgow Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Ethics and Welfare Committee (01a/13 & 02a/13). Written consent for study participation was obtained for each participating household, using forms translated into Swahili. Small mammal sampling was performed in accordance with the UK Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals (Home Office, 2014; Leary *et al.*, 2013).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Results

Sections and contents of results mirrors work which has been presented in papers published in peer review journals. The first paper (attached as research output) is about molecular detection and genetic characterizations of *Bartonella* species in small mammals from Moshi, northern Tanzania. In this paper I was able to present the detection of *Bartonella* species in small mammal using both conventional and real time PCR. I was also able to present *Bartonella* sequences (deposited in Genbank). Comparison of *Bartonella* *ssrA* and *gltA* sequences similarities and identities from this work to *Bartonella* *ssrA* and *gltA* reference sequences found in Genbank were performed. In the second paper (attached as research output) titled molecular detection of *C. burnetii* in small mammals in Moshi, northern Tanzania, I was able to present detection of *C. burnetii* in 3.1% (12/382) of small mammals screened. Risk factors for *Bartonella* and *C. burnetii* infection in rodents and others small mammals were assessed. Further analysis for *Coxiella burnetii* was not possible due to small number of positive samples and high Ct values at above 33 which does not give best outcome for genotyping using multilocus sequence typing (MLST), a common method for genotyping of *C. burnetii* (Tilburg *et al.*, 2010).

4.1.1 General sample characteristics

A total of 381 and 382 spleen samples from small mammals were available for *Bartonella* species and *C. burnetii* testing respectively. The majority (n=317, 83. %) were black rats (*Rattus rattus*). Other small mammal species tested included: house mice (*Mus musculus*, n=44, 11.5%); African pygmy mice (*Mus minutoides*, n=3, 0.8%); multimammate rat (*Mastomys natalensis*, n=8; 2.10%), spiny mice (*Acomys wilsoni*, n=6, 1.6%), the four-toed hedgehog (*Atelerix albiventris*=1; 0.2% and striped bush squirrels (*Paraxerus flavovittis*, n=3; 0.8). Of the tested host population, 219 individuals (57.5%) were female and 224 (58.8%) were classified as sexually mature based on external sexual characteristics. The majority of small mammal (n=265, 69.6%) were trapped during the wet season and 227 (59.4%) were trapped from Moshi Urban District while the rest were trapped from Moshi Rural District. Flea species collected and identified from the trapped small mammals were *Xenopsylla cheopis* (n=306), *Echidnophaga gallinacea* (n=204) and *Ctenocephalides felis* (n=3) (work

was performed in collaboration with research fellow based in UK). Deoxyribonucleic acid extracts from a total of 193 *Xenopsylla cheopis* collected from 124 small mammals (*Rattus rattus* n=118, *Mus musculus* n=4 and *Mastomys natalensis* n=2) were used for *Bartonella* species testing by targeting the *ssrA* gene fragment.

4.1.2 *Bartonella* detection in spleens of small mammal and risk factors for their infection

Bartonella DNA was detected by *ssrA* qPCR in a total of 57 of 381 (15.0%, 95% CI 11.5 – 18.9%) small mammals screened (Table 4). Samples derived from three out of seven species; *Mastomys natalensis*, *Paraxerus flavovittis* and *R. rattus* (Table 5) were all classified as *Bartonella* positive by this test. The positive control used in *ssrA* qPCR runs to test small mammals spleen extracts had a mean Ct value of 32. The assay showed a 100% lower limit of detection of 1.8 fg of *Bartonella quintana* DNA control. *Rattus rattus* species was the only species considered for logistic regression analysis due to their dominance and abundance. Further analysis on *Bartonella* species only data indicate that rodent reproductive maturity status was the only significant risk factor (LRT: $\chi^2 = 13.30$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.0003$) for their infection, with reproductively mature individuals more likely to be *ssrA* qPCR positive (OR 3.42, 95% CI 1.69-6.89, $p < 0.001$) than immature. None of the other candidate variables evaluated (small mammals sex, trapping season, trapping district or rodent abundance at trapping village) were significantly associated with *R. rattus* *ssrA* qPCR test status. The breakdown of small mammal trapped by village, test and sequencing outcome for *Bartonella* species only is given in Table 5.

Table 4: Summary of small mammal species and their *Bartonella* detection status defined by *ssrA* qPCR and sequence confirmed by *gltA* PCR testing of spleen samples

Rodent species	Number of spleen samples tested	<i>Bartonella ssrA</i> qPCR positive n (%)	<i>Bartonella ssrA</i> qPCR Ct value for positive	<i>Bartonella gltA</i> product sequence positive n (%)
<i>Acomys wilsonii</i>	6	0 (0)	Not available	0 (0)
<i>Mastomys natalensis</i>	8	2 (25.0)	33.23 & 33.54	1 (25.0)
<i>Mus minutoides</i>	3	0 (0.0)	Not available	0 (0)
<i>Mus musculus</i>	44	0 (0.0)	Not available	0 (0)
<i>Paraxerus flavovittis</i>	3	1 (33.3)	36.49	0 (0)
<i>Rattus rattus</i>	317	54 (17.0)	Median value of 33.07, range 24.25-39.56	16 (5.0)
Total	381	57 (15.0)		17 (4.4)

Table 5: Summary of small mammal trapping data and the *Bartonella* *ssrA* and *gltA* genotypes detected in trapped small mammal by village around Moshi, Tanzania. Village codes correspond to village locations indicated in Fig. 2. Distinct *ssrA* and *gltA* genotypes are identified by a sequential number and “s” or “g” respectively

Village code	District	Total number of rodents tested for <i>Bartonella</i>	Adjusted trap success	<i>Bartonella</i> genotypes identified, with data on the number of individuals and small mammal species each genotype was detected in	
				<i>ssrA</i> genotypes	<i>gltA</i> genotypes
A	Rural	12	9.79	1s – 2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	3g – 2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
B	Rural	13	4.28	7s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
				10s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
C	Municipal	31	4.77	10s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
D	Municipal	25	2.68	10s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
				2s - 1 * <i>Paraxerus flavovittis</i>	None
E	Rural	39	5.28	4s – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
				10s - 2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	3g – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
F	Municipal	76	10.8	1s - 5 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
				9s – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	3g – 3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
				10s – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
				11s - 5 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
				1s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
F (visit 2)	Municipal	33	4.42	11s - 3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
				6s - 1 * <i>M. natalensis</i>	3g - 1 * <i>M. natalensis</i>
G	Rural	15	1.94	1s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g – 2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
H	Rural	35	4.69	5s - 5 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	3g – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
				8s – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
				10s - 3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
				10s - 4 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	2g – 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
K	Municipal	23	3.19	10s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None
L	Rural	22	2.93	1s - 2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 10s - 3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g - 2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
M	Municipal	38	5.06	3s - 1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	None

4.1.3 *Bartonella* species detection in fleas

Detection of *Bartonella* species was performed in collaboration with research fellow in the UK, positive samples were sequenced and raw sequence data were shared for further analysis and phylogenetic tree construction. *Bartonella* DNA was detected by *ssrA* qPCR in 53 of 193 (27.5%, 95% CI 21.3 – 34.3%) *X. cheopis* flea extracts. All *ssrA* qPCR positive flea extracts were collected from *R. rattus* individuals. The positive control used in *ssrA* qPCR runs to test flea extracts had a mean Ct value of 32. Logistic regression analysis identified a relationship between flea *ssrA* qPCR test status and the *ssrA* qPCR test status of the small mammal that each flea was collected from (LRT: $\chi^2 = 20.73$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). *Xenopsylla cheopis* fleas collected from *ssrA* qPCR positive small mammal were more likely to themselves be *ssrA* qPCR positive (OR 7.23, 95% CI 2.90-17.97, $p < 0.001$).

4.1.4 Genetic characterization of *Bartonella* in Tanzanian rodents and fleas by *ssrA* sequencing

Full length sequences of the *ssrA* gene target were obtained from 45 of 57 small mammal spleen samples (*Rattus rattus* n=43, *Mastomys natalensis* n=1 and *Paraxerus flavovittis* n=1) and 39 of 53 *ssrA* positive *X. cheopis* fleas. From the 237 bp trimmed *ssrA* sequences, 12 unique genotypes (1s to 12s) were identified in the sequences from small mammal and flea populations combined (Table 5; Fig. 5). The 12 genotypes were grouped into monophyletic groups with $\geq 97\%$ similarity within the group. The following groupings were identified: a) group As: Genotypes 1s to 5s clustering with a *B. tribocorum* reference sequence from strain GDHL73 (GenBank accession number MF765681); b) group Bs: genotype 6s was unique but clustered with a *B. elizabethae* reference sequence (GenBank accession number MF765617); c) group Cs: genotypes 7s to 10s clustering with a sequence from *B. tribocorum* strain GDHL25 (GenBank accession number MF765675); d) group Ds: genotype 11s clustering with a *B. rochalimae* reference sequence (GenBank accession number MF7651); and e) group Es: genotype 12s from *P. flavovittis*, which was mostly closely related to a *B. quintana* reference sequence (GenBank accession number HG518998). The distribution of *ssrA* genotypes between trapping villages (Table 6) show that more frequently detected *ssrA* genotypes (1s, 10s and 11s) were present in small mammals trapped at multiple villages and provides no evidence of spatial segregation of the genotypes in this rodent population. Data on *ssrA* genotypes were available for fourteen pairs of *X. cheopis* fleas and *R. rattus* hosts (n = 11 *R. rattus* including three from which two *X. cheopis* were collected and tested). For seven pairs

the *ssrA* genotype detected in fleas and small mammal hosts were identical, but in the other seven pairs the genotypes differed. At the group level, 11 flea and host pairs had sequences from the same *ssrA* group and three pairs differed.

Table 6: Summary of *Bartonella* *ssrA* genotypes identified in small mammal spleens and fleas from Moshi, Tanzania

<i>ssrA</i> genotypes	<i>ssrA</i> Group	Small mammal species and number of positive samples	Flea species and number of positive samples	Closest <i>Bartonella</i> species (GenBank ID)*	% similarity to closest <i>Bartonella</i> spp. (number of base pair identities/ total base pair length)
1s	As	11 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25672)	11 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25673)	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (240/244)
2s	As	-	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25674)	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (217/222)
3s	As	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25675)	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25676)	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (228/233)
4s	As	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25677)	-	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (239/244)
5s	As	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25678)	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25679)	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	98 (237/244)
6s	Bs	1* <i>M. natalensis</i> (MN25680)	-	<i>B.elizabethae</i> (MF765617)	99 (222/224)
7s	Cs	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25681)	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25682)	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	99 (242/244)
8s	Cs	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25683)	-	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	99 (239/244)
9s	Cs	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25684)	-	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	99 (236/237)
10s	Cs	18 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25685)	9 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25686)	<i>B.tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	100 (244/244)
11s	Ds	8 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25687)	15 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25688)	<i>B.rochalimae</i> (MF765651)	100 (246/246)
12s	Es	1* <i>P. flavovottis</i> (MN25689)	-	<i>B.quintana</i> (HG518998)	98 (233/239)

The number of individuals of each small mammal (n=45) and fleas (n=39) species from which each genotype was obtained are shown, as well as data on % similarity to reference *Bartonella* species sequences, with the number of base pair identities indicated in parentheses. The Genbank accession numbers for each genotype are also indicated in parentheses in columns 2 and 3. * The closest reference sequences to the study sequences were selected from fully characterized sequences in Genbank obtained from cultures.

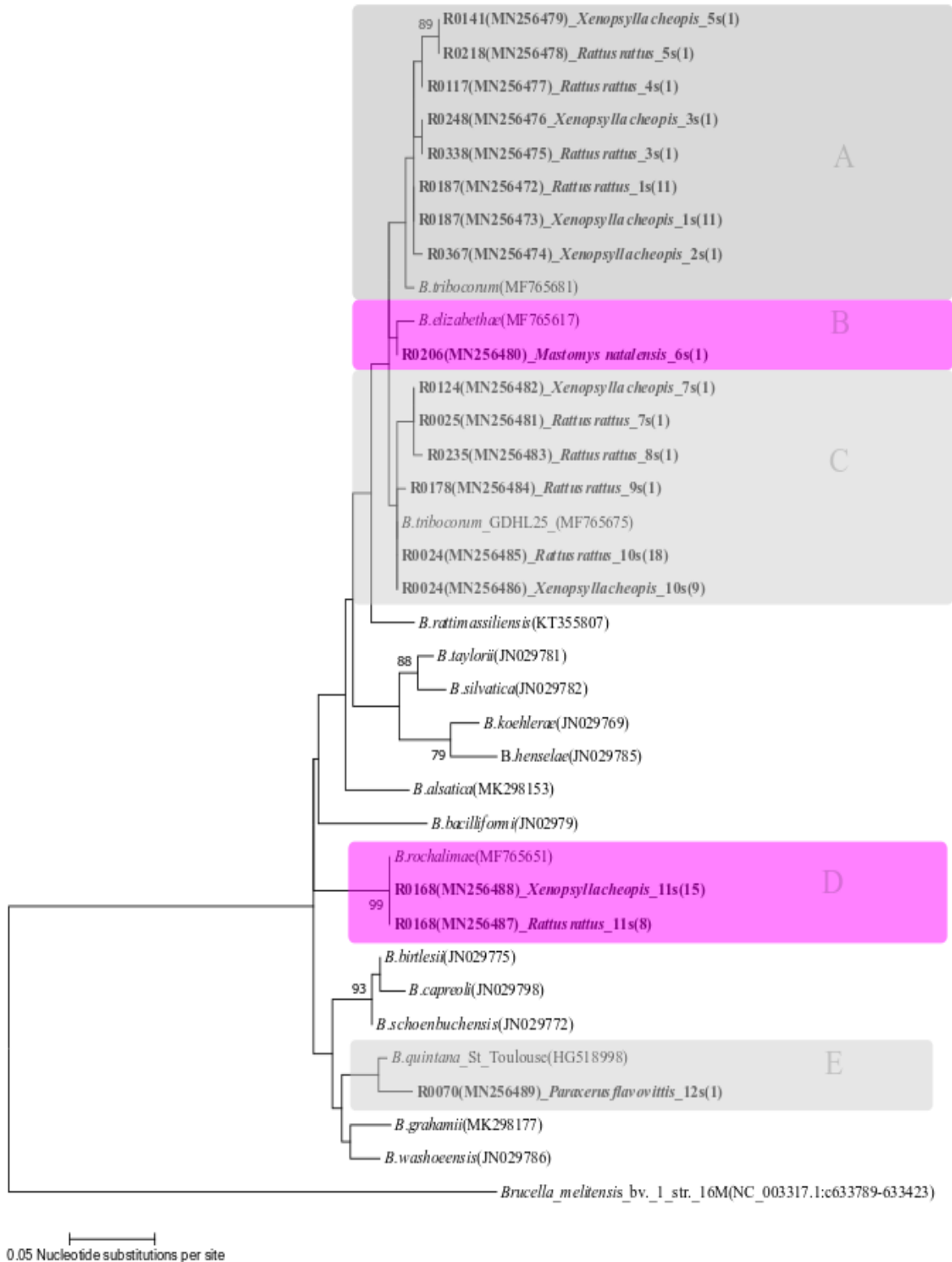


Figure 5: Phylogenetic tree showing the relatedness of the *Bartonella* *ssrA* gene Sequences (237bp gene fragments) derived from 45 small mammal spleen tissue samples (43 *R. rattus*, 1 *M. natalensis* and 1 *P. flavovittis*) and 39 *X. cheopis* fleas collected in northern Tanzania

A single representative sample sequence is included for each combination of *Bartonella* genotype identified in this study and host of origin. Genotypes (1s - 12s) and groups (As – Es) are indicated by lettering. Groups A, C and E are shaded grey, with groups B and D in pink. The phylogenetic tree was constructed using the maximum likelihood method based on a Kimura 2-parameter substitution model (Tamura, 1992), as determined by Model test as implemented in MEGA 7.0 (Kumar *et al.*, 2016). The tree with the highest log likelihood is shown and drawn to scale, with branch lengths shown in terms of the number of substitutions per site. Vertical branches indicate identical sequences. The numbers at the nodes correspond to bootstrap values higher than 70% after 1000 replicates. Sequences from this study are labelled with unique identifiers, with prefix “R” followed by sample identifier numbers, Genbank accession number, the small mammal or flea host species, the genotype code and the number of samples yielding each genotype (in parentheses). Sequences from reference strains of *Bartonella* are included with the *Bartonella* species name and GenBank accession numbers given in parentheses. *Brucella melitensis* was included as an outgroup.

4.1.5 Characterisation of *Bartonella* in Tanzanian small mammals by *gltA* sequencing

Full length sequences of the *gltA* gene were obtained from 17 small mammal spleen DNA extracts (*R. rattus* n=16 and *M. natalensis* n=1). To be conservative, the alignment was pruned to the length of the shortest sequence (283 bp out of 379 bp expected) and three unique genotypes were identified in this fragment (Fig. 6). The correspondence between *gltA* and *ssrA* genotypes and groups is shown in Table 7. Only one *R. rattus* individual had a *gltA* sequence without a corresponding *ssrA* sequence. For the 16 remaining *gltA* genotypes, the same individuals all yielded *ssrA* sequences falling into groups As to Cs (Table 5). Eight sequences (genotype 1g, GenBank accession number MK906044) collected from *R. rattus* were identical to a *B. elizabethae* sequence obtained from a *R. rattus* sampled previously at a rural site in Kenya (strain B29297 (Halliday *et al.*, 2015), GenBank accession number KM233489). A second genotype (2g, GenBank accession number MK906046) was identified in one *R. rattus* and showed similarity of 97% (278 of 284 base pair matches) to a *B. elizabethae* reference sequence (GQ225710) found in GenBank. Eight sequences (genotype 3g) collected from *M. natalensis* (GenBank accession number MK906045) and from *R. rattus* (GenBank accession number MK906043) were identical to a sample identified in a *R. rattus* from an urban site in Kenya (strain B28391 (Halliday *et al.*, 2015), GenBank accession

number: KC763968) and to a cultured reference strain of *B. elizabethae* (strain BR02, GenBank accession number: GU056192).

Table 7: Summary of *gltA* genotypes identified in spleens of small mammal(n=17) from Moshi, Tanzania and the correspondence with *ssrA* genotypes identified in the same species and individuals

<i>gltA</i> Genotype	GenBank accession number	Rodent species and number of positive samples	Closest <i>Bartonella</i> species (GenBank ID)*.	% similarity to closest <i>Bartonella</i> spp. (number of base pair identities/ total base pair length)	<i>ssrA</i> group and genotype
1g	MK906044	8 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B.elizabethae</i> (GQ225710)	99.65 (282/283)	Group C:10s
2g	MK906046	1 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B.elizabethae</i> (GQ225710)	97 (278/284)	Group C:10s
3g	MK906043	5* <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B.elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	Group A: 1s
3g	MK906043	1 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B.elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	Group A: 4s
3g	MK906045	1 * <i>M. natalensis</i>	<i>B.elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	Group B: 6s
3g	MK906043	1 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B.elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	None

Data on the % similarity to reference *Bartonella* species sequences, and the number of base pair identities are indicated. The Genbank accession numbers for each genotype identified in the study are indicated.* the closest reference sequences to the study sequences were selected from fully characterized sequences in Genbank obtained from cultures.

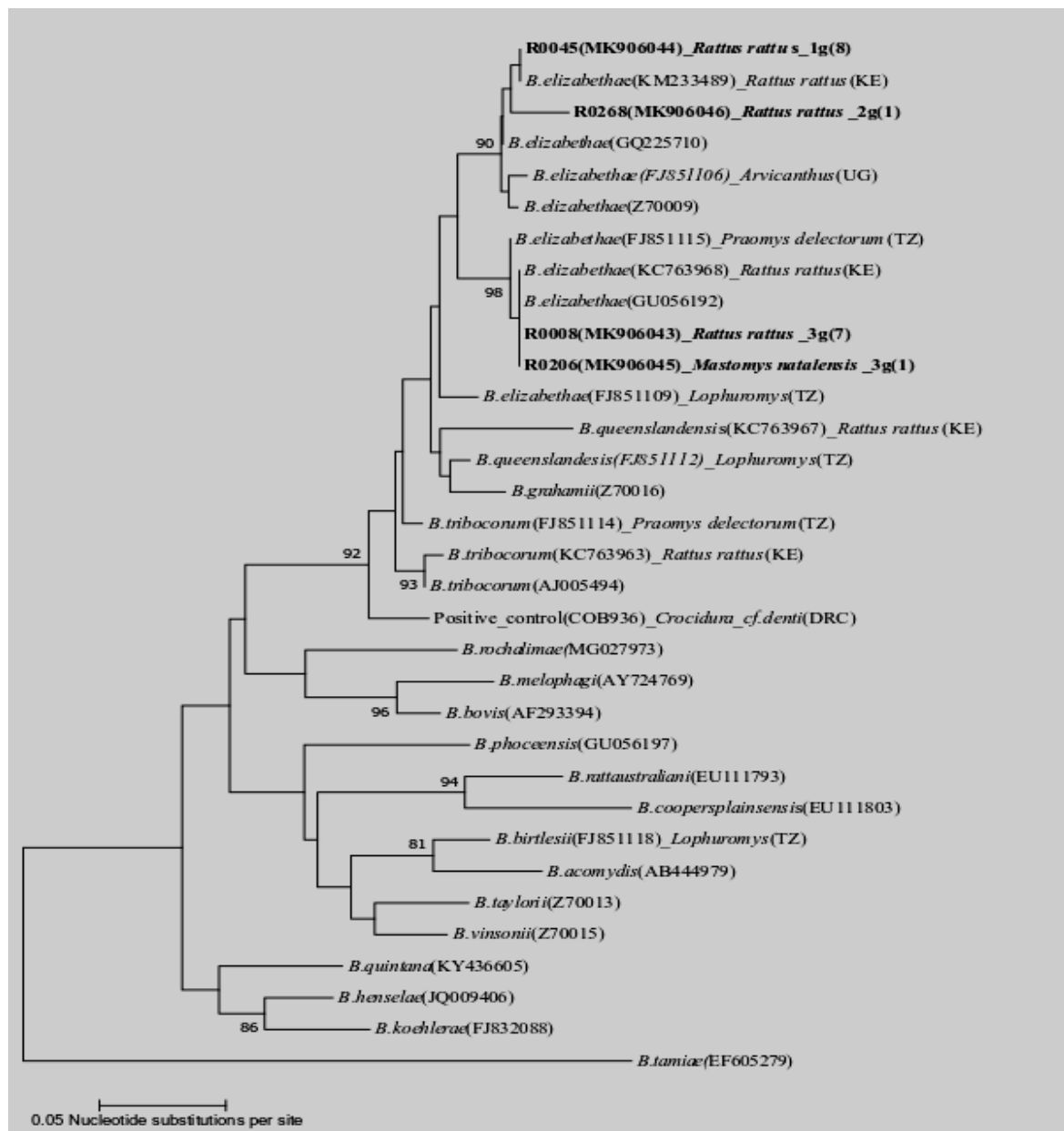


Figure 6: Phylogenetic tree showing the relatedness of the *Bartonella gltA* gene sequences (283bp fragments) derived from 17 spleen tissue samples from small mammals (16 *R. rattus* and 1 *Mastomys natalensis*) trapped in northern Tanzania

A single representative sample sequence is included for each genotype identified in this study, with the exception of genotype 3 g to illustrate the identical sequences obtained from *R. rattus* and *M. natalensis*. Sequences from this study are labelled with unique identifiers, with prefix “R” followed by sample identifier numbers, Genbank accession number, the small mammal or flea host species, the genotype code and the number of samples yielding each genotype (in parentheses). Reference *Bartonella* sequences from small mammal trapped elsewhere in East Africa obtained from GenBank are indicated by GenBank accession numbers in parentheses, small mammal species and country code (Kenya (KE) (Halliday *et al.*, 2015), Uganda (UG) (Billeter *et al.*, 2014) Tanzania (TZ) (Gundi *et al.*, 2012), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Gundi *et al.*, 2012). The sequence obtained for the known *Bartonella* positive control sample provided by a colleague from a previous study is included and indicated with a unique identification number (COB936) (Gundi *et al.*, 2012).

4.1.6 IS1111 detection and prevalence of *C. burnetii* in spleen samples from small mammal

Quantitative real time PCR for detection of *C. burnetii* IS1111, with 100% reproducibility was estimated at approximately 10 genome copies per µl. *Coxiella burnetii* DNA was detected by IS1111 qPCR in a total of 12 (3.1%) of 382 (95% CI: 1.6-5.4) spleen samples screened and in five (71.4%) of seven (95% CI: 29.0-96.3) individual small mammal species tested; *Rattus rattus* (n=7), *Mus musculus* (n=1), *Acomys wilsonii* (n=2), *Paraxerus flavovottis* (n=1) and *Atelerix albiventris* (n=1). Eleven (91.7%) of twelve (95% CI: 61.5-99.8) *C. burnetii* positive small mammals were trapped within Moshi Urban District. Five (2.3%) of 219 females (95% CI: 0.7-5.4) and seven (4.3%) of 163 males (95% CI: 1.7-8.6) were positive for *C. burnetii*. Nine (3.4%) of 266 (95% CI: 1.6- 6.3) small mammal sampled during the wet season were *C. burnetii* positive and three (2.6%) of 116 (95% CI: 0.5-7.4) tested positive from the batch of small mammal trapped during dry season (Table 8).

Table 8: Distribution and abundance of trapped small mammals per village and their *C. burnetii* IS1111 qPCR test outcome

Variable		Number of rodents tested for <i>C. burnetii</i>	<i>C. burnetii</i> positive n (%)	95% CI
Village Code	A	12	0 (0.0)	0.0-26.5
	B	13	1 (7.7)	0.2-36
	C	31	0 (0.0)	0.0-11.2
	D	26	7 (26.9)	11.6-47.8
	E	39	0 (0.0)	0.0-9.0
	F	109	2 (1.8)	0.2-6.5
	G	15	0 (0.0)	0.0-21.8
	H	35	0 (0.0)	0.0-10.0
	J	19	0 (0.0)	0.0-17.6
	K	23	0 (0.0)	0.0-14.8
	L	22	0 (0.0)	0.0-15.4
	M	38	2 (5.3)	0.6-17.7
District	Rural	155	1 (0.6)	0.02-3.5
	Urban	227	11 (4.8)	2.4-8.5
Sex	Male	163	7 (4.3)	1.7-8.6
	Female	219	5 (2.3)	0.7-5.2
Age	Mature	225	10 (4.4)	2.2-8.0
	Immature	157	2 (1.3)	0.2-4.5
Season	Wet	266	9 (3.4)	1.6-6.3
	Dry	116	3 (2.6)	0.5-7.4
Overall	NA	382	12 (3.1)	1.6-5.4

4.2 Discussion

The detection of these pathogens in small mammal population sampled in northern Tanzania indicated that small mammals could be playing yet unknown role in transmission of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp to humans and other animals. Small mammals especially rodents are well known for centuries to be host and reservoir of several zoonotic pathogens. Recently several studies have demonstrated that rodents may be important hosts or reservoir of emerging and re-emerging pathogens including *Coxiella* and *Bartonella* spp. *Coxiella burnetii* is zoonotic pathogen that is known to cause a substantial proportion of cases of human febrile illness in northern Tanzania and *Bartonella* spp. are likely to contribute to the burden of human febrile illness, but have not yet been investigated in this part of Africa. Below I provide the discussion for each of the two pathogens separately.

4.2.1 *Bartonella* species

This study revealed substantial variation in *Bartonella* genotypes among small mammals and their fleas in a previously unstudied region of northern Tanzania (the Moshi Municipal and Moshi Rural Districts). *Rattus rattus* was the most common small mammal species trapped and showed a high *Bartonella* prevalence defined by *ssrA* qPCR, which is consistent with the global distribution of *Bartonella* species in *Rattus* (Buffet *et al.*, 2013). Within *R. rattus*, the probability of qPCR positivity was higher in reproductively mature species as compared to immature species, consistent with other studies (performed in the USA) that have found an association with age (Firth *et al.*, 2014; Peterson *et al.*, 2017). Sequencing of *ssrA* and *gltA* gene fragments revealed a variety of genotypes and the majority of sequences obtained showed greatest similarity to *B. tribocorum* and *B. elizabethae* reference sequences, both of which have been isolated in humans with febrile illness (Kosoy *et al.*, 2010). Sequences similar to *B. rochalimae* and *B. quintana* were also identified based on *ssrA* sequencing. These species were not detected by sequencing of the *gltA*, indicating reduced sensitivity of the *gltA* conventional PCR for detection of *Bartonella* species. This is consistent with the findings of a previous study (Diaz *et al.*, 2012).

The *ssrA* qPCR was used to estimate prevalence in small mammals and fleas, and the sequencing of *ssrA* and *gltA* PCR products to assess genetic variation and characterize the *Bartonella* detected. The overall prevalence of *Bartonella* (15%) detected in small mammals using the *ssrA* qPCR was lower than that has been detected in many comparable studies of global small mammal populations (Gundi *et al.*, 2010; Meheretu *et al.*, 2013), including studies that have used a less sensitive *gltA* assay for prevalence determination (Kamani *et al.*, 2013; Lipatova *et al.*, 2015). In a previous Tanzanian study on small mammal species (*Grammomys* sp, *Lophuromys* sp, *Mus minutoides* and *Praomys detectorum*) an overall *gltA* prevalence of 41% was detected (Gundi *et al.*, 2012). A Ugandan survey using *gltA* to test invasive and indigenous small mammal populations found variable prevalence across species, with higher prevalence in indigenous species (60% in *Arvicanthis niloticus* and 61% in *Cricetomys gambianus*), but low prevalence (1.4%) was recorded in invasive *R. rattus* (Billeter *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, in Kenya the *Bartonella* prevalence determined by culture varied by species of small mammal (Halliday *et al.*, 2015). Considering the data from *R. rattus* only, the prevalence seen in this study and previous African studies reveals consistently lower prevalence in comparison to *R. rattus* sampled in Asia and tested using *ssrA* qPCR

methods (e.g. 32.5% (R Development Core Team, 2018). The prevalence of *Bartonella* detection in *X. cheopis* fleas in this study using the *ssrA* qPCR was also lower than what has been recorded in this species in the USA, where 190 of 200 (95%) *X. cheopis* tested were positive for *Bartonella* DNA (Billeter *et al.*, 2011). The low prevalence of *Bartonella* in *R. rattus* and *X. cheopis* observed in this study are consistent with several other studies conducted in Africa. It has been argued that this pattern of lower *Bartonella* prevalence in African *R. rattus* populations could be attributed to host escape during colonization (Torchin *et al.*, 2003). Further investigation of native and invasive small mammal (rodent) populations across Africa would be needed to investigate this further, and also evaluate the possible implications for human disease risk on the continent.

Phylogenetic analysis of sequences from small mammal and their fleas revealed high concordance of sequences between hosts and ectoparasites. Overall, 10 distinct *ssrA* genotypes were identified that were most similar to reference sequences of *B. tribocorum* and *B. elizabethae* (Groups As to Cs), with only one genotype (10s) showing an identical match to a published *B. tribocorum* sequence in GenBank. However, since all of the reference sequences that were most similar were from a single study in China (Ying *et al.*, 2002) it is important to recognize the limited reference data available currently and need for future comparison to datasets from other geographic areas to further evaluate these data on the diversity and types of *Bartonella* found in Tanzania. Moreover, *B. elizabethae* and *B. tribocorum* share identical published *ssrA* sequences in Genbank and our results showed clustering in the phylogenetic tree (Fig. 5), so the two species cannot be distinguished by this *ssrA* fragment. The other two *Bartonella* species identified were: a) a single sequence (11s) with greatest similarity (98%) to *B. quintana* obtained from a sample from a *P. flavovittis* host; and b) a sequence obtained from multiple samples of *R. rattus* and *X. cheopis* that showed an identical match to *B. rochalimae*, emphasizing the diversity of *Bartonella* present in rodents in Tanzania. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first report of molecular detection and characterization of *Bartonella* species in small mammals and their associated ectoparasite in Africa using the *ssrA* gene target. The scope for comparison with other sequences is thus limited, as there is currently little reference material on *ssrA* sequences from *Bartonella* sampled elsewhere, particularly in Africa.

In contrast, the *gltA* gene has been widely used to study *Bartonella* globally. Phylogenetic analysis of sequences from 17 *gltA* PCR products from this Tanzanian small mammal

population (16 *R. rattus* and 1 *M. natalensis*) showed the highest similarity to reference sequences of *B. elizabethae*, which has multiple published sequences in Genbank, including many from east Africa. The association of sequences similar to *B. elizabethae* with *Rattus* spp. in this study is consistent with similar findings from Malaysia (Tay *et al.*, 2014) and Thailand (Klangthong *et al.*, 2015). *Bartonella elizabethae* has also been identified in different small mammal species in Africa (Billeter *et al.*, 2014; Gundi *et al.*, 2012). Identical *gltA* sequences were amplified from *R. rattus* and *M. natalensis* in my study, suggesting possible transmission between different small mammal species in the Tanzania site or a shared common source of infection. Identical sequences were also identified previously in *R. rattus* sampled at both rural (strain B28297, accession number KM233489, from Asembo, Kenya) and urban (strain B28391, accession number KC763968, from Kibera, Nairobi Kenya) sites in Kenya (Halliday *et al.*, 2015). This suggests that similar *Bartonella* could be found in rodents in Kenya and Tanzania. However, these comparisons are based on short sequences of a single gene target only. Longer sequences from multiple genes and greater sampling effort across the region would be required to robustly confirm sharing of genotypes to trace source populations or determine patterns of host connectivity.

Several studies of zoonotic disease have shown that a variety of pathogens account for high proportions of febrile illness in northern Tanzania but that considerable proportions remain unexplained (Chipwaza *et al.*, 2015; Crump *et al.*, 2013). *Bartonella* species have been identified as important causes of human febrile illness in several global settings but there has been little investigation of the impact of bartonellosis upon human health, in Africa particularly. The finding of *Bartonella* genotypes that are most similar to *B. elizabethae*, *B. rochalimae* and *B. quintana* reference sequences in rodents trapped in and around households in Moshi, Tanzania, and the fleas collected from these rodents, indicates the possibility that *Bartonella* infection may be responsible for an as yet unknown proportion of febrile illnesses in this region. Efforts are needed to determine the clinical impact of bartonellosis in this region and increase awareness about *Bartonella* and other zoonotic pathogens among physicians and health care workers, especially where the cause of large proportions of febrile illness remains unknown. These results also demonstrate that molecular detection tools can be effectively used for surveillance and diagnostic of zoonotic pathogens in resource limited settings especially in Africa where the application of molecular approaches has remaining low.

4.2.2 *Coxiella burnetii*

Coxiella burnetii DNA was detected in 3.1% of small mammal trapped from Moshi Rural and Urban Districts in northern Tanzania between May 2013 and September 2014. To the best of my knowledge this is the first study to demonstrate the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* in small mammals from Tanzania. Infected small mammals may act as a source of *C. burnetii* infection for both humans and other animals. This detection of *C. burnetii* infection in small mammals and the known clinical impact of *C. burnetii* infections in humans indicate that further studies into the contribution of small mammals to the transmission of *C. burnetii* to livestock and humans are warranted. The outcome of such studies would be beneficial by generating data on the epidemiology of *C. burnetii* and providing evidence to inform Q fever and Coxiellosis control programs. Genetical comparison of data generated with data obtained from GeneBank would enable understanding of source of pathogens.

There is significant variation in the prevalence of *C. burnetii* reported in different small mammal populations sampled within Africa. A study done in Zambia, a country bordering Tanzania to the Southwest *C. burnetii* DNA was detected by conventional PCR on 16SrRNA gene target in 9 out of 20 (45%) of overall small mammals trapped in urban and peri-urban (Chitanga *et al.*, 2018). *Coxiella burnetii* detection within individual small mammal species varied as well: *Saccostomus campestris* (2/2), *Gerbillinae* sp. (4/7) and *Mastomys natalensis* (3/11). Another study done in Nigeria, *C. burnetii* DNA was detected by conventional PCR on IS1111 gene target in 4 out of 194 (2.1%) of overall rodents trapped in peri-urban (Kamani *et al.*, 2018). Considering specie prevalence; 3 out of 121 (2.5%) were *Rattus norvegicus* and 1 out of 48 (2.1%) was *Rattus rattus* (Kamani *et al.*, 2018). In Egypt *C. burnetii* DNA was found in 2 out of 55 (3.6%) *R. norvegicus* and 3 out of 20 (15%) *R. rattus*, with overall prevalence of 6.7% (Abdel-Moein & Hamza, 2018). Knowledge of the prevalence of *C. burnetii* in different small mammal populations and improved understanding of the factors that drive this variation could be taken into consideration during designing for *C. burnetii* control programs.

In this study there are indications of variation in the proportion of small mammal that are *C. burnetii* positive across different small mammal species, season of sampling, age, species, sex and location of sampling (rural vs urban districts and villages) (Table 7). The small number of positive individuals identified in this study limits the scope for statistical analyses of these patterns but the factors that determine *C. burnetii* prevalence in small mammal

populations should be investigated further. In this study the majority of *C. burnetii* positive small mammals were trapped from Moshi Urban District. It has been documented that emerging and re-emerging zoonotic diseases and pathogens are linked with increasing globalization and urbanization (Amitai *et al.*, 2010; Buzan *et al.*, 2017; Comer *et al.*, 2001; Liu *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, the number of rodent-borne diseases in urban areas have been reported to be higher than those in rural areas (Bordes *et al.*, 2015; Gratz, 1999) this could as well be possible explanations to the findings for this study. Since the small mammals sampled were from in or around household, the risk of *C. burnetii* infection could potentially extend to a wider community due to close proximity of houses in urban areas.

Observations from this study indicate that specific small mammal species are more likely to carry *C. burnetii* bacteria than others. But due to the low number of positive cases it was not powered for statistical analyses of these findings. However, findings from other studies have also shown that some small mammals species are responsible for maintenance of endemic circulating *Coxiella* species in the environment in comparison to others species (Burgdorfer *et al.*, 1963; Reusken *et al.*, 2011; Rozental *et al.*, 2017) indicating that similar trend could be happening in northern Tanzania.

From this study it was also observed that there were more *C. burnetii* positive in mature small mammals as compared to immature. In a laboratory based experimental model study on mice (Leone *et al.*, 2007) revealed that mature mice at 14 months had increased *C. burnetii* load and granuloma in the spleens than younger mice at 1 month after intraperitoneal injection of *C. burnetii* organisms indicating that findings from the present study are in concordance with other studies. In this study we observed more *C. burnetii* positive male small mammals as compared to females. Also other studies have reported similar trend. A study done in Canada found that woodland jumping mice, adult males had higher rates of *C. burnetii* infection than adult females ($\chi^2 = 13.588$, $P < 0.001$). The possible explanations are that males tend to move around in search for females mates. *Coxiella burnetii* can also be transmitted sexually through sperm cells transferred to females (Kruszewska & Tylewska-Wierzbanska, 1993). Thus, species with more promiscuous mating systems could have higher a prevalence of infection, as infected individuals are more likely to come into contact with and infect previously uninfected individuals under this scenario (Lockhart *et al.*, 1996).

In Tanzania febrile illnesses caused by zoonotic pathogens, including *C. burnetii* are of public health importance but often underappreciated or misdiagnosed (Crump *et al.*, 2013). The

detection of *C. burnetii* in small mammals trapped in and around household premises from the same area where the previous study (Crump *et al.*, 2013) has reported high prevalence of Q fever in humans provides a clear rationale for further investigation of the epidemiology of *C. burnetii* in this setting and role of small mammals. In the Netherlands, small mammal (rodents) were found to be responsible for maintaining the cycle of *C. burnetii* infection between wildlife and domestic animals, and consequently transmission to humans (Reusken *et al.*, 2011). Related or similar *C. burnetii* transmission scenario may be happening in Tanzania, where the main source for human *C. burnetii* infection is poorly known. In other region *C. burnetii* have been detected in small mammal especially in rodent species trapped in forest and natural environments, where human activities such as livestock keeping do not occur, and therefore suggesting that small mammals could be a reservoir of *C. burnetii* (Burgdorfer *et al.*, 1963; Thompson *et al.*, 2012)

Additional work is needed to understand the role of small mammals in the maintenance and transmission of *C. burnetii* infection in this region and to examine linkages between human, livestock and small mammal infections. *Coxiella burnetii* strains circulating in small mammals should be typed and compared with isolates from human, other animals and environmental sources. This will provide information on the role of small mammals in *C. burnetii* transmission through analysis of phylogenetic tree and assessment of evolutionary relationship of animal source of sequences.

4.2.3 Limitations of the study

This study had some limitations, firstly detection of *Bartonella* species and *C. burnetii* was performed using DNA extracted from tissues where the host DNA would likely become PCR inhibiting factor. However, efforts were made to minimize the effect of host DNA by diluting the DNA concentration to approximately 10-50 ng/μl.

Secondly, while there are many hosts of *Bartonella* species and *C. burnetii*, this study was performed in rodents only. Detection of these pathogens in other possible hosts/reservoirs such as cats, dogs, goats, sheep and others would have strengthened analysis and interpretation of findings, making it possible to assess the best possible likely route of human infection with these pathogens.

Thirdly, due to low number of positive samples for *C. burnetii* and high threshold cycle (>33Ct), analysis and interpretation could not be performed to give power of statistical

significance. This also limited other downstream molecular analysis such as genotyping using multilocus sequence typing which is necessary for identification circulating *C. burnetii* strains.

Finally, molecular detection of these pathogens is not 100% accurate; therefore there is possibility of false positive or false negative detections. For instance *Coxiella*-like organisms have been reported because false positive test when IS1111 is used for *C. burnetii* detection. Although I used highly specific primers and probes and optimized the assay, I cannot infer by 100% that the detection was specifically limited to the targeted pathogens only (*Bartonella* spp and *C. burnetii*) and exclude possibilities of missing or testing wrong pathogens.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The *ssrA* and *gltA* sequences obtained from rodent spleens and *ssrA* sequences obtained from fleas reveal the presence of a diverse set of *Bartonella* genotypes and increase our understanding of the bartonellae present in Tanzanian. Further studies are needed to fully characterise the prevalence, genotypes and diversity of *Bartonella* in different host populations and their potential impacts on human health.

On the other hand, the detection of *C. burnetii* in different species of small mammal from Moshi, northern Tanzania demonstrates the relative importance of small mammals as host of *C. burnetii* in the region. Infected small mammals may act as a source of *C. burnetii* infection to humans and other animals in the study area. This detection of *C. burnetii* infections in small mammals should motivate further studies into the contribution of small mammals in transmission of *C. burnetii* to humans and other animals and to assess risk factors for small mammal *C. burnetii* infection.

5.2 Recommendations

Efforts are needed to determine the clinical impact of bartonellosis and coxiellosis in this region and increase awareness about *Bartonella* and *C. burnetii* and other zoonotic pathogens among physicians and health care workers, especially where the cause of large proportions of febrile illness remains unknown.

Further studies are needed to fully characterize the prevalence, genotypes and diversity of *Bartonella* spp and *C. burnetii* in different host populations and their potential impacts on human health.

Sustainable surveillance of several other zoonotic pathogens using molecular methods in humans and animal population should do. Phylogenetic and genotyping of pathogens identifies should be performed in future in order to improve assessment of likely source of these pathogens to humans. Since zoonotic pathogens including the one studied under this PhD work continue to pose substantial risk to humans, their livestock and economic a more

holistic dealing and surveyance should be considered which implements one health concept should be strengthened in Tanzanian health systems.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Standard operation procedure (SOP) for laboratory handling of animal samples and detection of Zoonotic bacterial pathogens (*Bartonella* spp)

 KCRI Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY		Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06	
	SOP TITLE: DNA Extraction from animal tissues samples		Copy No: 0	Version No: BZ-1
			SOP #: 3	
	AREA: Zoonoses Lab		Page: 1 of 6	Effective Date: April 2016
AUTHOR: Theonest Ndyetabura, Kathryn Allan			Revision Date: April 2016	

I. SCOPE

- The purpose of this standard operating procedure is to describe procedure for handling and extraction DNA from tissues using Qiagen's DNeasy Blood and Tissue kit (cat # 69506, 69504, or 69582). This extraction procedure is used in the detection of diverse range of pathogens from animal samples, the range of pathogens includes but not limited to:

- Coxiella burnetii*
- Leptospira* spp
- Brucella* spp
- Rickettsia* spp
- Toxoplasma gondii*
- Bartonella* spp
- etc

NB: The Quality Control samples should be treated in the exact same manner as the test samples and are used to validate the test run.

II. Procedure

Following the guidelines described in the general laboratory good practice and KCRI Laboratory safety and equipment operation procedure. Procedure for Aseptic Techniques in the zoonotic Laboratory" proceed to perform the SOP described here.

Verify that you have all the materials and equipment necessary to perform this procedure.

III. Equipment

- Micropipettes calibrated to the following volumes: 0.5-10 µl, 2-20 µl, 20- 200 µl, and 100-1000 µl
- Microcentrifuge
- Balance
- Refrigerator (2 to 8 °C)
- Freezer (-10 to -25 °C)
- Freezer (-75 to -85 °C)
- Biological Safety Cabinet
- Mini Vortexer
- Heat block or water bath (56-70°C)

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	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY		Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06	
	SOP TITLE: DNA Extraction from animal tissues samples		Copy No: 0	Version No: BZ-1 SOP #: 3
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IV. Materials

- o Disposable gloves (VWR cat # 32918-502 or equivalent)
- o DNase- and RNase-free 1.5 ml microcentrifuge tubes (VWR 53550-898) or equivalent
- o Aerosol resistant micropipette tips, 0.5-10 µl, 20-200 µl, and 100-1000 µl (USA Scientific 1121-3810, 1120-8810, 1126-7810 respectively) or equivalent
- o Biohazard Bags (Lilly stores cat # 44-003360) or equivalent
- o DNeasy Kit (Qiagen 69508) or equivalent
- o DNase- and RNase-free water (Invitrogen cat # 10977-015) or equivalent
- o 100% Ethanol (Sigma cat # E 7023) or equivalent
- o Razor Blades or scalpel blade
- o Nunc Petri Dishes, Polystyrene with lid, 100x 15mm (Fisher Scientific cat # 08-757-099) or equivalent
- o Sterile Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS)
- o Disposable HSW FINE-JECT® needles (suitable for Luer and Luer Lock)

I. SAFETY CONSIDERATION

- A. This process shall be performed in the zoonoses lab unit, wearing lab coat and disposable gloves.
- B. Clean the work area within the biosafety cabinet, DNA hood, and table tops, using 70% ethanol or 5-10 % bleach (NaOCl) (refer KCRI safety SOP/Manual).
- C. Turn on the UV light in the biosafety cabinet/hood for a minimum of 20 minutes before starting work in the hood.
- D. Remove gloves and lab coat before leaving the room
- E. All steps involving open tubes should be performed in the biosafety cabinet/hood
- F. Take extra precaution when handling and using sharps

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	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY		Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06	
	SOP TITLE: DNA Extraction from animal tissues samples		Copy No: 0	Version No: BZ-1 SOP #: 3
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3. Protocol for DNA extraction heat inactivated tissues

- Pipette 180 µl buffer ATL into pre-labeled 1.5ml or 2ml microcentrifuge tube.
- Transfer heat inactivated tissue samples to the laminar flow cabinet (BSL2). Using a sterile petridish and sterile scalpel blade, cut up to 10mg of tissues into small pieces.
- Using sterile needle place diced tissue into the 1.5 ml or 2ml microcentrifuge tube containing 180µl buffer ATL and add 20µl proteinase K to each sample.
- Mix by pulse-vortexing for 15 seconds and incubate at 56°C in a heat block or water bath until the tissue has completely lysed at the solution is clear (1-3 hours; additional vortexing will accelerate tissue lysis).
- Briefly centrifuge to remove drops from the lid of the tube.

NB: After proteinase K digestion, tissue samples can also be stored in Buffer ATL for up to 6 months at ambient temperature without any reduction in DNA quality

- Add 200µl Buffer AL. Pulse-vortex to mix for 15 seconds then incubate at 70°C for 10 minutes. Briefly centrifuge again.
- Add 200µl ethanol (96-100%) and mix by pulse vortexing for 15s and briefly centrifuge.

- Add the mixture to the DNeasy spin column without wetting the rim. Close the lid and centrifuge at 8000 rpm for 1 minute.
- Place the spin column in a clean 2 ml collecting tube and discard the tube containing the filtrate into standard laboratory biohazardous waste.
- Add 500 µl buffer AW1 without wetting the rim and centrifuge at 8000 rpm for 1 minute.
- Place the spin column into a clean 2 ml collection tube and discard the tube containing the filtrate.
- Add 500 µl buffer AW2 without wetting the rim and centrifuge at 13000 rpm for 1 minute.
- Place the spin column in a 1.5 ml microcentrifuge tube from which the cap has been cut off and discard the tube containing the filtrate.
- Repeat step 8 by applying the remaining mixture to the DNeasy spin column.
- Centrifuge at 13000rpm for 4 minutes to eliminate buffer AW2 carry over. Make sure the spin column is dry. If not, open the lid and leave for at least 5 minutes to air-dry.
- Place the spin column into a new 1.5 ml microcentrifuge tube from which the cap has been cut off and discard the tube containing the filtrate.
- Add 100 µl DNase free water and incubate at room temperature (RT) for 3 minutes; then centrifuge for 1 minute at 13000rpm.
- Using the same collecting tube, add again 100µl DNase free water and incubate at RT for 1 minute; then centrifuge again for 1 minute at 13000rpm.
- Transfer the DNA product from **steps 16 & 17** to a new 1.5 ml microcentrifuge tube with cap, and briefly vortex and spin down.
- DNA is ready to be used for PCR or can be stored at -20°C.

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	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY		Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06	
	SOP TITLE: DNA Extraction from animal tissues samples		Copy No: 0	Version No: BZ-1 SOP #: 3
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Name	Signature and Date
Revised by: Jo Halliday (BZ study coordinator)	Date: _____, _____, _____
Quality manager: BZ lab co-coordinator (Kate Thomas)	Date: _____, _____, _____

Declaration

I have read & understand the Bacterial Zoonoses – Laboratory Preparations for Field Sample Collection, and I agree to abide by the procedures described

Name	Signature and Date
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Appendix 2: Standard operation procedure (SOP) for real time qPCR quantification of *Coxiella burnetii*

	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY		Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06	
	SOP TITLE: IS1111 qPCR To Detect <i>Coxiella spp.</i> DNA (Qiagen Rotor-Gene Platform)		Copy No: 0	Version No: BZ-4 SOP #: 4
	AREA: Zoonoses Lab		Page: 1 of 7	Effective Date: Sept 2016
	AUTHOR: Theonest Ndyetabura, Ryan Carter			Revision Date: Sept 2017

1. Summary/Aim

This SOP concerns the process of conducting diagnostic quantitative PCR (qPCR) on DNA extracts for the purpose of detecting the presence of DNA deriving from *Coxiella* species. The procedure detailed here uses the Qiagen Rotor-Gene Q/6000 qPCR platform and associated Rotor-Gene Q Series Software for analysis. The document describes the laboratory procedure to be followed to arrive at a decision as to whether *Coxiella* organisms were present in the animal from which the samples were taken, at the time of sampling.

2. Safety

Standard laboratory safety practices should be adhered to throughout the procedure detailed below. All appropriate safety SOPs should be read and signed before commencing work. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – lab coat and gloves - should be worn when conducting any procedures in the laboratory.

3. Samples

The DNA extraction process is described in an accompanying SOP. DNA samples should be eluted in either nuclease-free H₂O or a suitable elution buffer (e.g. Buffer AE). Ideally, the concentration of DNA extracts being analysed should be approximately 10ng/ul prior to adding to qPCR mastermix – samples of greater concentration should be diluted to meet this requirement where possible.

4. Equipment/Consumables/Reagents

- Rotor-Gene Q/6000 qPCR machine
- 72-Well Rotor or 36-Well Rotor plus locking ring
- PCR laminar flow cabinet
- Vortex
- Micro-centrifuge
- 10ul, 20ul, 200ul and 1,000ul pipettes
- 10ul, 20ul, 200ul and 1,000ul sterile, filter pipette tips
- 1.5ml sterile microcentrifuge tubes
- Strip tubes (4-tube strips) and caps 0.1ml; x250 (Cat. No. 981103, Qiagen)
- QuantiNova Probe PCR Kit; x500 (Cat. No. 208254, Qiagen)
- Nuclease-free water

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KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY

Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06

SOP TITLE: IS1111 qPCR To Detect *Coxiella spp.* DNA (Qiagen Rotor-Gene Platform)

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- Primers and dual-labelled probe (for IS1111 target sequence); (IDT – Integrated DNA Technologies). Sequences detailed below:

Primer/Probe Name	Sequence (5' – 3')
Forward Primer (IS1111 For)	CAT CAC ATT GCC GCG TTT AC
Reverse Primer (IS1111 Rev)	GGT TGG TCC CTC GAC AAC AT
Probe (IS1111 Probe)	<i>FAM</i> - AA TCC CCA ACA ACA CCT CCT TAT TCC CAC - <i>BHQ1</i>

5. qPCR Mastermix

The qPCR mastermix should be prepared in a designated DNA-free room. Any items posing a high risk of contaminating the mastermix with foreign DNA (such as unprocessed samples and/or DNA extracts to be used as a positive control) should not be handled immediately prior to preparing the mastermix. Any such tasks should be conducted either after preparing the mastermix or, preferably, on a different day. *Note that no reference dye (e.g. ROX) is required on this platform.*

Reagent	Concentration	ul per reaction	Final concentration	Mix for 72 (36 in duplicate) reactions (ul)
QuantiNova Mastermix	2x	10	1x	720
Primer IS1111 For	10uM	0.8	0.4uM	57.6
Primer IS1111 Rev	10uM	0.8	0.4uM	57.6
IS1111 Probe	5uM	0.8	0.2uM	57.6
H ₂ O	-	2.6	-	187.2
Total volume mix before DNA	-	15	-	1080
DNA	~10ng/ul	5	~50ng/reaction	-
Total/ reaction	-	20	-	-

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	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY				Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06			
	SOP TITLE: IS1111 qPCR To Detect <i>Coxiella</i> spp. DNA (Qiagen Rotor-Gene Platform)				Copy No: 0		Version No: BZ-4	
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To minimise risk of contaminating stock reagents, create aliquots of appropriate volumes, storing working aliquots at ~3°C, and freeze the stock reagents at -20°C until further aliquots are required. Homogenise reagents before preparing mastermix by briefly pulse-vortexing and centrifuging.

6. (a) Set-Up – qPCR Reagents and Samples

Remove DNA from freezer and thaw at room temperature, then briefly pulse-vortex and centrifuge to homogenise. Similarly, ensure the mastermix is homogenised by briefly pulse-vortexing then centrifuging. Transfer 15ul of the mastermix into each of the strip-tube wells using sterile filter pipette tips, while inside the laminar flow hood. The solution may remain near the top of the tube - this is not a cause for concern due to the centrifugal force the samples will experience in the Rotor-Gene; simply ensure that the full 15ul is inside the tube. Subsequently transfer 5ul of DNA to each well to obtain a final reaction volume of 20ul, using a new filter tip for every reaction. As the set-up of each four-tube strip is completed, firmly secure strip caps in place to minimise the opportunity for contamination of reaction mixtures. Finally, load the negative extraction control well (if not determined in a previous run), the negative PCR (NTC) well, and then positive control well. Ensure all caps are secure before proceeding.

All available spaces in the Rotor-Gene rotor must be occupied before starting a run to ensure the rotor is balanced - use empty tubes to fill vacant spaces if necessary.

The template below can be used to record the samples being subjected to qPCR (in duplicate) and the resulting Ct values of each reaction. *(See page 6 for 4 copies per page - easier printing).*

ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct
1.		5.		9.		13.		17.		21.		25.		29.		33.	
2.		6.		10.		14.		18.		22.		26.		30.		34./-ve ext.	
3.		7.		11.		15.		19.		23.		27.		31.		+ve	
4.		8.		12.		16.		20.		24.		28.		32.		NTC	

(b) Set-up – Standardised Sample and File Naming Formats

For ease of subsequent interpretation and analysis of results, it would be best ensure that the name of all samples being screened are recorded in a standard format, as follows:

- 'Project or owner of sample_sample type_sample ID number.'

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	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY		Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06	
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- For example: BZA_MI_1351. This indicates that the sample is from the BacZoo project, has been extracted from milk, and is sample number 1351 in the series.

For the same reasons noted above, it would also be sensible to ensure that the name of all RotorGene run files (.rex) and output files (.csv, .docx etc.) follow a standard naming format, as follows:

- 'Target Locus / type of assay / project or owner of sample_sample type_sample ID range / Date.'

- For example: IS1111 qPCR BZA_MI_0007-0133 23May16. This indicates that the run file is from a qPCR reaction targetting the IS1111 locus, that the samples being screened originate from the BacZoo project and are milk samples with IDs ranging from 0007 to 0133, and that the run was carried out on the 23rd May 2016.
- NB When generating a results output file, use the same file name as that used for the Run file (above), with the addition of the word "report" preceding the date.

7. Cycling Conditions

The reactions should be conducted using a Rotor-Gene Q/6000.

Place strip-tubes into slots of appropriate rotor, being careful to insert the tubes in the correct order and orientation, ensuring the order matches the slot numbers on the rotor itself. Attach the locking disc to secure the tubes in place, and insert into the Rotor-Gene machine; the rotor will click into place. Close the lid.

For a standard run, the following procedure may be followed. Choose the two-step cycle, then select the appropriate size of rotor and check the 'Locking Ring Attached' box before continuing. Choose appropriate sample volume and layout. Choose appropriate channel for detection purposes ('Green' channel chosen in this case due to FAM labelled probe). Opt to Edit Profile and choose the following settings:

Cycle Profile:

Stage	Temperature (°C)	Time	
Initial Heat	95	2 minutes	
Activation	95	5 seconds	X45 cycles
Denaturation	60	5 seconds	

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	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY		Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06	
	SOP TITLE: IS1111 qPCR To Detect <i>Coxiella</i> spp. DNA (Qiagen Rotor-Gene Platform)		Copy No: 0	Version No: BZ-4 SOP #: 4
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Ensure the fluorescence will be acquired via the appropriate channel (here, 'Green'), at the Annealing/Extension phase, then click OK to return to the previous window. Highlight the Green fluorescence option then open the Gain Optimisation window. Choose 'Optimise Acquiring' and select OK before checking the box to 'Perform Optimisation at 60 Degrees at Beginning of Run', then close. Start run.

Once run has started, use Edit Samples to input the sample information, choosing a colour to represent the curve produced for each sample, then a sample name, type and concentration if known. Lastly, select whether the sample is to be analysed ('selected') or not, which units the measurements should be taken in and the format for the concentrations provided. When the run is complete, sample analysis can be conducted using the tab of same name and a report of the results can be generated.

8. Diagnostic criteria

First, ascertain whether all negative control wells (NTC and negative extraction control if included) are negative and do not show a Ct reading. Then progress to checking that both positive control wells are positive and exhibit a Ct value within the expected range. If these requirements are satisfied, proceed.

Before reading the Ct values, the following steps may be followed: choose to view the curves produced in 'linear scale', choose 'slope correct' if necessary and choose whether it is beneficial to ignore a certain number of early steps (up to 5). Now adjust the threshold to the most appropriate level. Read the Ct values reported for samples that show amplification, and make a decision as to whether sufficient evidence exists to determine whether there was or was not *Coxiella* in the sample. Use the following table to inform diagnosis and subsequent steps:

Result	Interpretation	Next step?
1. Duplicate samples Ct < 40	1. Sample is positive for <i>Coxiella</i> spp. infection	1. Record as positive (1) - > select samples with Ct < 36
2. Single sample Ct < 40	2. Inconclusive result	2. Repeat reaction in triplicate (see 4 a-c)
3. Both samples Ct > 40 (or no reading)	3. Negative	3. Record as negative (0)
4. Repeat testing in triplicate a. 2-3 tests Ct < 40 b. 1 test Ct < 40	a. Sample is positive for <i>Coxiella</i> spp. infection (Total = 3-4/5 Ct < 40) b. Sample is probable for <i>Coxiella</i> spp. infection (Total = 2/5 Ct < 40)	See 1. Above Record as probable (3)

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 KCRI Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY										Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06			
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c. 0 test Ct < 40	c. Sample is negative for <i>Coxiella</i> spp. infection (Total = 1/5 Ct < 40)	See 3. Above
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Save results before exiting the programme.

Assay Target Locus:
Sample types:
Date:

ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct
1.		5.		9.		13.		17.		21.		25.		29.		33.	
2.		6.		10.		14.		18.		22.		26.		30.		34.	
3.		7.		11.		15.		19.		23.		27.		31.		+ve	
4.		8.		12.		16.		20.		24.		28.		32.		NTC	

Assay Target Locus:
Sample types:
Date:

ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct
1.		5.		9.		13.		17.		21.		25.		29.		33.	
2.		6.		10.		14.		18.		22.		26.		30.		34.	
3.		7.		11.		15.		19.		23.		27.		31.		+ve	
4.		8.		12.		16.		20.		24.		28.		32.		NTC	

Assay Target Locus:
Sample types:
Date:

ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct	ID	Ct
1.		5.		9.		13.		17.		21.		25.		29.		33.	
2.		6.		10.		14.		18.		22.		26.		30.		34./-	

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	KCRI BIOTECHNOLOGY LABORATORY										Document No: KCRI /SOP/5.4-06						
	SOP TITLE: IS1111 qPCR To Detect <i>Coxiella</i> spp. DNA (Qiagen Rotor-Gene Platform)										Copy No: 0		Version No: BZ-4				
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																ve	
																ext.	
3.		7.		11.		15.		19.		23.		27.		31.		+ve	
4.		8.		12.		16.		20.		24.		28.		32.		NTC	

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RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Journal papers

Theonest, N. O., Carter, R. W., Amani, N., Doherty, S. L., Hugho, E., Keyyu, J. D., Mable, B. K., Shirima, G. M., Tarimo, R., Thomas, K. M., Haydon, D. T., Buza, J. J., Allan, K. J., & Halliday, J. E. B. (2019). Molecular detection and genetic characterization of *Bartonella* species from rodents and their associated ectoparasites from northern Tanzania. *PLoS ONE*, 14(10), e0223667. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0223667>

Theonest, N. O., Carter, R. W., Elizabeth, K., Keyyu, J. D., Shirima, G. M., Tarimo, R., Thomas, K. M., Wheelhouse, N., Maro, P. V., Hydon, T. D., Buza, J. J., Allan J. K., & Halliday B. E. J. (2019). Molecular detection of *Coxiella burnetii* infection in small mammals from Moshi Rural and Urban Districts, northern Tanzania. *Veterinary Medicine and Science*, 2020 (00), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/vms3.401>

Poster presentation

Ndyetabura, T., Allan, K., Keyyu, J., Hugo, E., Buza, J., Shirima, G., Haydon, D., & Halliday, J. (2020). Molecular detection of rodent borne zoonoses in the Northern zone of Tanzania: *A one health approach towards understanding of zoonotic cause of febrile illness. In the 38th TVA Scientific Conference at Arusha International Conference Centre.*

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Molecular detection and genetic characterization of *Bartonella* species from rodents and their associated ectoparasites from northern Tanzania

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Data Availability Statement: Datasets supporting this manuscript are available through: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5525/gla.research.data.859>. Unique sequences generated through this study are available through GenBank (accession numbers MK906043 to MK906046 and MN256472 to MN256489).

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Abstract

Background

Bartonellae are intracellular bacteria, which can cause persistent bacteraemia in humans and a variety of animals. Several rodent-associated *Bartonella* species are human pathogens but data on their global distribution and epidemiology are limited. The aims of the study were to: 1) determine the prevalence of *Bartonella* infection in rodents and fleas; 2) identify risk factors for *Bartonella* infection in rodents; and 3) characterize the *Bartonella* genotypes present in these rodent and flea populations.

Methods and results

Spleen samples collected from 381 rodents representing six different species were tested for the presence of *Bartonella* DNA, which was detected in 57 individuals (15.0%; 95% CI 11.3–18.5), of three rodent species (*Rattus rattus* n = 54, *Mastomys natalensis* n = 2 and *Paraxerus flavovittatus* n = 1) using a qPCR targeting the *ssrA* gene. Considering *R. rattus* individuals only, risk factor analysis indicated that *Bartonella* infection was more likely in reproductively mature as compared to immature individuals (OR = 3.42, *p* < 0.001). *Bartonella* DNA was also detected in 53 of 193 *Xenopsylla cheopis* fleas (27.5%; 95% CI 21.3–34.3) collected from *R. rattus* individuals. Analysis of *ssrA* and *gltA* sequences from rodent spleens and *ssrA* sequences from fleas identified multiple genotypes closely related ($\geq 97\%$ similar) to several known or suspected zoonotic *Bartonella* species, including *B. tribocorum*, *B. rochalimae*, *B. elizabethae* and *B. quintana*.

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Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Conclusions

The *ssrA* and *gltA* sequences obtained from rodent spleens and *ssrA* sequences obtained from fleas reveal the presence of a diverse set of *Bartonella* genotypes and increase our understanding of the bartonellae present in Tanzania. Further studies are needed to fully characterise the prevalence, genotypes and diversity of *Bartonella* in different host populations and their potential impacts on human health.

Introduction

Bartonella are fastidious, Gram-negative, vector-borne bacteria with world wide distribution. *Bartonella* species are known to infect mainly erythrocytes and endothelial cells of various mammals, such as humans, cats, dogs, ruminants, wild rabbits and rodents [1]. Epidemiological studies have demonstrated that rodents and other small mammals are important hosts of *Bartonella* species and that ectoparasites such as fleas, ticks, sand flies, and lice are key vectors of *Bartonella* infection [2,3].

In recent years, an increasing number of *Bartonella* species have been identified as zoonotic pathogens. To date there are roughly 45 *Bartonella* species and subspecies that have been designated [4], of which at least 20 are rodent-associated [1]. Several studies indicate that rodent-associated *Bartonella* are the cause of human infections in various regions of the world, particularly in areas where humans are in close contact with rodents [5–10]. However, knowledge of the distribution and epidemiology of *Bartonella* in rodents and of the role of *Bartonella* species in human disease in Tanzania is limited.

Clinical manifestations of *Bartonella* infection in humans can range from mild [7] to life threatening disease and can present as acute or chronic [5,11]. Known sequelae attributed to *Bartonella* species include endocarditis [8], myocarditis [12], fever and neurologic disorders [13], intraocular neuroretinitis [14], meningitis, splenomegaly and lymphadenopathy [15]. This range of non-specific and variable symptoms makes *Bartonella* infections hard to diagnose clinically. This contributes to a poor understanding of the current distribution and relative importance of infections caused by this pathogen. The challenges of identifying the causes of non-specific febrile illness are demonstrated by previous research conducted in Moshi, northern Tanzania, where a study of patients admitted to hospital with febrile illness revealed that a range of zoonotic pathogens were responsible for roughly a quarter of the hospital admissions [16]. However, no zoonotic infections were included in the admission differential diagnosis for any patient in that study, indicating lack of awareness and diagnostic capacity for many zoonotic pathogens. Over the past few decades, numerous reports of bartonellosis in febrile humans have been made globally [6,8–10,17,18]. However, in developing countries bartonellosis is often not considered as a potential diagnosis.

Molecular detection and typing methods for *Bartonella* are widely used due to their greater sensitivity and ease of use in comparison to culture and serology based approaches. Real-time PCR assays are recommended for primary screening of *Bartonella* species followed by confirmatory assays, using either conventional or real-time PCR and sequencing [19,20]. In Africa, studies conducted in Ethiopia [21], Kenya [22], South Africa [23], the Democratic Republic of Congo [24,25] and Uganda [26] have previously confirmed detection of *Bartonella* species in rodents using conventional PCR detection methods for multiple gene targets. In northern Tanzania, a study performed in Mbulu, a rural district in northern Tanzania, detected *Bartonella* in 41% of indigenous rodents using *gltA* and *rpoB* PCR targets [25]. Analyses of *gltA*

sequences from these samples revealed the presence of multiple genotypes similar to known *Bartonella* species, including *B. elizabethae*, *B. tribocorum*, *B. birtlesii* and *B. queenslandensis* [25].

Bartonella species are present in Tanzania and may contribute to the burden of human febrile illness in northern Tanzania. However, the distribution and epidemiology of *Bartonella* in Tanzania is largely unknown. The aims of this study were to use molecular diagnostic tools to estimate the prevalence of *Bartonella* infection in rodents and their fleas sampled in northern Tanzania. Specifically, we aimed to: 1) determine the prevalence of *Bartonella* infection in rodents and fleas using quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR); 2) identify risk factors for *Bartonella* infection in rodents; and 3) use sequencing of the *gltA* and *ssrA* genes to characterize the *Bartonella* genotypes present in these rodent and flea populations.

Methods

Ethics statement

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH 2012-471-ER-2005-141 & 2015-71-NA-2011-199); Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre (KCMC) Ethics Committee (535 & 537); National Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), Tanzania (NIMR/HQ/R.8a/Vol.IX/1499 & NIMR/HQ/R.8a/Vol.IX/1522); Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI); University of Glasgow College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences Ethics Committee (200120020), and University of Glasgow Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Ethics and Welfare Committee (01a/13 & 02a/13). Written consent for study participation was obtained for each participating household, using forms translated into Swahili. Rodent sampling was performed in accordance with the UK Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals [27,28].

Rodent trapping and sampling

Rodent spleen samples and ectoparasites were obtained from a cross-sectional study conducted to explore the role of rodents in the epidemiology of leptospirosis and other zoonoses in the Kilimanjaro region of northern Tanzania [29]. Rodents were trapped in five villages within Moshi Municipal District and seven villages within Moshi Rural District, as previously described [29] (Fig 1). The target sample size was 50 rodents per village to give sufficient power ($\alpha = 0.95$, $\beta = 0.8$) to detect a minimum infection prevalence of 10% [29]. Villages for sampling were randomly selected from a list, home to people that had sought care, and had been enrolled in previous febrile illness surveillance studies at local hospitals [16]. Rodent trapping was performed in three sessions: 1) May–June 2013 (wet season); 2) May–June 2014 (wet season); and 3) August–September 2014 (dry season). Rodents were trapped in households in a total of 12 villages through cross-sectional visits, with one additional round of repeat sampling conducted in one village (based on high trap success in the initial visit) [29]. Trapped rodents were euthanized by terminal halothane anaesthesia and cervical dislocation. Data gathered for every trapped rodent included: species (determined by observation of phenotypic characteristics and measurement of morphometric features), sex and reproductive maturity status (mature or immature determined based on external sexual characteristics [30]). A full necropsy and tissue sampling were performed for each rodent sampled. A fresh sterile scalpel blade was used for each rodent and all other necropsy equipment was washed using 5% Virkon and dried between usages to avoid cross-contamination. Spleen tissue samples were collected into sterile Eppendorf tubes and stored at -80°C prior to DNA extraction. Ectoparasites

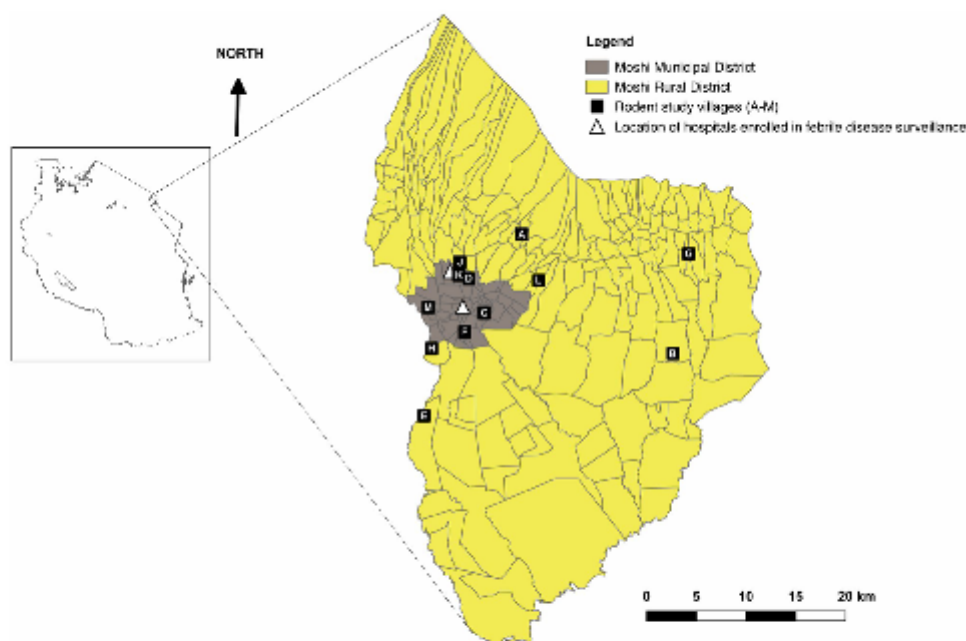


Fig 1. Map of Moshi Municipal and Moshi Rural Districts, showing representative locations of rodent study villages in relation to the two hospitals (Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre and Mawenzi Regional Referral Hospital) at which febrile illness surveillance has been conducted in previous studies. Letters indicate the different villages in which rodent trapping was conducted. Polygons in the main image show local administrative boundaries. Inset map on left shows outline of Tanzania and location of study districts within the country. This figure is adapted from a version published previously [25].

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0223667.g001>

observed on trapped rodents were collected and stored in 70–96% ethanol; all ectoparasites from the same rodent were stored together. Collected fleas were identified to species level using a dissecting microscope and a pictorial flea identification guide [31]. *Xenopsylla cheopis* fleas were selected for DNA extraction and *Bartonella* testing based on their known contribution to *Bartonella* transmission [32]. For each rodent with at least one *X. cheopis* collected, DNA was extracted from one (if only one *X. cheopis* present on that host) or two (if more than one *X. cheopis* present on that host). Where multiple *X. cheopis* were collected from the same rodent, selection of individual fleas for DNA extraction was opportunistic.

DNA extraction

DNA was extracted from approximately 10 milligrams (mg) of spleen tissue using the DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit spin-column protocol for DNA purification from tissues (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). DNA from spleen tissues was eluted in 100 µl of AE buffer and quantified using a Nano-Drop spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA). DNA from individual whole fleas was also extracted using the DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit, following the protocol for purification of total DNA from ticks and eluted in a final volume of 65 µl AE buffer. For all extractions, a no-template extraction control (PCR-grade water) was included.

for every 20 samples and DNA extracts were stored at -20°C prior to testing. DNA extracts from spleens were diluted in 20 µl of AE buffer to a standard DNA concentration of 10–50 ng/µl for PCR testing, to minimize the potential for PCR inhibition due to the high concentration of host DNA in the rodent spleen extracts. Due to the lower concentration of DNA in extracts from fleas, these were tested directly from extraction concentrations.

Quantitative real-time PCR for detection of *Bartonella* species *ssrA* gene

DNA extracts from rodent spleens and fleas were screened using a *Bartonella* genus-specific real-time PCR assay (qPCR) targeting the transfer-mRNA *ssrA* gene, using a previously published protocol [20]. The original paper describing this assay reports a lower limit of detection of < 5 fg of *Bartonella* DNA, equivalent to < 3 genomic copies per reaction when tested against four *Bartonella* species (*B. quintana*, *B. henselae*, *B. bovis*, and *B. elizabethae*) [20]. The primers *ssrA*-F (5'-GCTATGGTAATAATGGACAAATGAAATAA-3'), *ssrA*-R (5'-GCTTCTGTTGCCAGGTG-3') and 6-carboxyfluorescein FAM-labelled probe (5'-ACCCCGCTTAAACCTGCGACG-3'-BHQ1) were used to amplify an *ssrA* gene fragment of approximately 300bp. qPCR reactions were carried out in 20 µl volumes comprised of 10 µl QuantiNova Probe PCR mix (Qiagen), 0.8 µl of each primer (10 µM) and probe (5 µM), 2.6 µl nuclease-free water and 5 µl DNA template. Positive control (rodent tissue DNA extract obtained from a previous study [24] positive for *Bartonella* with closest similarity to *B. tribo-corum*), extraction controls and no-template controls were included in each qPCR run. Assays were performed on a Rotor-Gene Q/6000 (Qiagen) with manufacturer recommended thermocycling conditions as follows: 95 °C for 2 minutes, followed by 45 cycles of 95 °C for 5 seconds and 60 °C for 5 seconds. A qPCR run was considered valid when all negative controls showed no evidence of amplification and the positive controls amplified with a Ct value of < 40. Extracts were tested in duplicate and considered positive when amplification was recorded in one or more test wells with a Ct value ≤ 40.

PCR amplification and sequencing of *Bartonella* *ssrA* gene products

For sequencing, conventional PCR amplification of the *ssrA* gene was performed on all DNA extracts from both rodent spleens and fleas that were positive in the *ssrA* qPCR, based on a previously published protocol [20]. Each PCR reaction (25 µl) comprised 2.5 µl of PCR 10X buffer, 0.1 µl Platinum Taq polymerase, 0.75 µl MgCl₂, 0.5 µl dNTPs (10 µM) (Invitrogen, USA) and 0.5 µl of each primer *ssrA*-F and *ssrA*-R at 10 µM [20]. Template DNA volume varied from 5–10 µl depending on *ssrA* assay Ct value. Nuclease-free water was used to make up the total reaction volumes as needed. Amplifications were performed with the following conditions: 94 °C for 2 minutes, followed by 40 cycles of 94 °C for 15 seconds, 60 °C for 60 seconds, and 72 °C for 30 seconds, and then a final extension step of 72 °C for 3 minutes. Positive and negative controls were included in each PCR run. PCR products were visualized by electrophoresis in a 1.5% agarose gel stained with GelRed (Cambridge Bioscience, Cambridge, UK). A sample was considered positive if a clearly defined DNA band of approximately 300 bp was visible in the gel and confirmed as *Bartonella* by sequencing of the product. To confirm and characterize the genotypes of *Bartonella* detected, amplicons with the expected size were purified using either a QIAquick PCR or Gel Extraction Purification Kit (Qiagen). Sequencing was performed at Source Biosciences (Nottingham, UK) using the same primers as for the detection PCR [33]. Sequence identity was confirmed using BLASTn, as implemented in the National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) web portal.

PCR amplification and sequencing of *Bartonella* *gltA* gene products

Conventional PCR amplification of the *glta* gene was performed on all rodent spleen DNA extracts, based on a previously published protocol [34]. Each PCR reaction (25 μ l) comprised 12.5 μ l of PCR 2X master mix (Promega, Madison, WI, USA), 1.25 μ l 5% dimethyl sulphoxide (DMSO) (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, USA), 1.25 μ l molecular grade water (Qiagen), 2.5 μ l of each oligonucleotide primer (10 μ M), BbCS781.p (5'-GGGGACCAGCTCATGGTGG-3') and BbCS1137.n (5'-AATGCAAAAAGAACAGTAAACA-3') [34], and 5 μ l DNA template. Amplifications were performed on a PTC-240 DNA-Engine (MJ Research/BioRad Technologies, USA) with the following conditions: 94 °C for 2 minutes, followed by 40 cycles of 94 °C for 30 seconds, 54.3 °C for 30 seconds, and 72 °C for 2 minutes, then a final step of 72 °C for 7 minutes. Positive and negative controls were included in each PCR run. PCR products were visualized by electrophoresis in a 1.5% agarose gel stained with ethidium bromide (Invitrogen, USA). A sample was considered positive if a clearly defined DNA band of approximately 379 bp was visible in the gel and confirmed as *Bartonella* by sequencing of the product. Purification, sequencing and BLAST analyses were conducted as for the *ssrA* gene.

Phylogenetic analyses for *ssrA* and *glta* gene products

Incomplete and poor quality sequences (e.g. with ambiguous peaks) were excluded from phylogenetic analysis for both *ssrA* and *glta* gene fragments. For each gene, sequences were aligned using the ClustalW algorithm, implemented in MEGA 7.0 [35]. The model test function in MEGA 7.0 was used to select the best-fitting nucleotide substitution models, which were then incorporated into a phylogenetic analysis based on a maximum likelihood optimality criterion for tree reconstruction, with 1000 bootstrap pseudo-replicates. For the *ssrA* analysis, rodent spleen and flea sequences from this study were aligned with reference *ssrA* sequences from cultured *Bartonella* species downloaded from GenBank (see GenBank accession numbers in Fig 2). A *Brucella melitensis* sequence was used as the outgroup [36]. For analysis of the *glta* data, sequences from study rodent spleens were aligned with those from *Bartonella* reference strains obtained from GenBank and also with representative sequences from previous studies conducted in East Africa (see GenBank accession numbers in Fig 3). Reference sequences in the alignment included *glta* sequences from previous studies of *Bartonella* in rodents from Tanzania [25], Kenya [22], the Democratic Republic of Congo [24,25] and Uganda [26] that included either similar rodent species or *Bartonella glta* sequences similar to those obtained in this study. A *B. tami* *glta* sequence obtained from an African bat was used as the outgroup [37].

Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were performed in R [38]. Exact binomial proportions and confidence intervals for prevalence estimates were calculated using the package 'binom' [39]. Generalized linear mixed models (GLMM), with binomial family and logit link function, were used to examine variables associated with rodent and flea *ssrA* qPCR test status (qPCR positive vs negative) and implemented using the package 'lme4' [40]. For rodents, the dataset for these analyses was limited to *R. rattus* only, given the dominance of this species. Explanatory variables considered in the GLMM for rodent *ssrA* qPCR status included host sex and reproductive maturity (mature or immature), which were determined based on external sexual characteristics [30]. Trapping season (wet or dry), trapping district (Moshi Municipal or Moshi Rural) and rodent abundance were also included as explanatory variables for analysis. Adjusted trap



Fig 2. Phylogenetic tree showing the relatedness of the *Bartonella* ssrA gene sequences (237bp gene fragments) derived from 45 rodent spleen tissue samples (43 *R. rattus*, 1 *M. natalensis* and 1 *P. flavovittis*) and 39 *X. cheopis* fleas collected in northern Tanzania. A single representative sample sequence is included for each combination of *Bartonella* genotype identified in this study and host of origin. Genotypes (1a–12a) and groups (Aa–Ei) are indicated by lettering. Groups A, C and E are shaded grey, with groups B and D in pink. The phylogenetic tree was constructed using the maximum likelihood method based on a Kimura 2-parameter substitution model [41], as determined by Modeltest as implemented in MEGA 7.0 [35]. The tree with the highest log likelihood is shown and drawn to scale, with branch lengths shown in terms of the number of substitutions per site. Vertical branches indicate identical sequences. The numbers at the nodes correspond to bootstrap values higher than 70% after 1000 replicates. Sequences from this study are labelled with unique identifiers, with prefix “R” followed by sample identifier numbers, Genbank accession number, the

rodent or flea host species, the genotype code and the number of samples yielding each genotype (in parentheses). Sequences from reference strains of *Bartonella* are included with the *Bartonella* species name and GenBank accession numbers given in parentheses. *Brucella melitensis* was included as an outgroup.

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success data were calculated by dividing the total number (n) of rodents caught per village by the corrected number of trap nights, which is calculated as: total number of trap nights (number of traps x number of nights) minus lost trap nights (sum of number of closed, damaged or lost traps / 2) and expressed as a percentage [29]. The village identification variable was included as a random effect to account for the clustered sampling strategy. For fleas, rodent *ssrA* qPCR test status was the only explanatory variable evaluated in the GLMM and the village identification variable was included as a random effect. Initial maximal multivariable models were created including all candidate explanatory variables and likelihood ratio tests were used to compare candidate models and guide model selection.

Results

Sample characteristics

Spleen samples from a total of 381 rodents were available for testing. The majority (n = 317, 83.2%), were from black rats (*R. rattus*) (Table 1). Other rodent species tested included: house mice (*Mus musculus*, n = 44, 11.5%); African pygmy mice (*Mus minutoides*, n = 3, 0.8%); multimammate mice (*Mastomys natalensis*, n = 8, 2.1%), spiny mice (*Acomys wilsonii*, n = 6, 1.6%) and striped bush squirrels (*Paraxerus flavovittis*, n = 3, 0.8%). Of the rodents tested, 219 individuals (57.5%) were female. The majority of all sampled rodents (n = 224, 58.8%) were classified as sexually mature based on external sexual characteristics. A total of 265 of the 381 rodents (69.6%) were trapped during wet season sampling. A total of 513 fleas were collected from 153 of the 381 (40.2%) rodents included in the study. Flea species identified were *Xenopsylla cheopis* (n = 306), *Echidnophaga gallinacea* (n = 204) and *Ctenocephalides felis* (n = 3). DNA extracts from a total of 193 *Xenopsylla cheopis* collected from 124 rodents (*Rattus rattus* n = 118, *Mus musculus* n = 4 and *Mastomys natalensis* n = 2) were available for *Bartonella* testing using *ssrA*.

Bartonella detection in rodent spleens and risk factors for rodent infection

Bartonella DNA was detected by *ssrA* qPCR in a total of 57 of 381 (15.0%, 95% CI 11.5–18.9%) rodents screened (Table 1). Samples derived from *Mastomys natalensis*, *Paraxerus flavovittis* and *R. rattus* (Table 1) were all classified as *Bartonella* positive by this test. The positive control used in *ssrA* qPCR runs to test rodent spleen extracts had a mean Ct value of 32. The assay showed a 100% lower limit of detection of 1.8 fg of *Bartonella quintana* DNA control. For the logistic regression analysis considering data from *R. rattus* only, rodent reproductive maturity status was the only significant risk factor (LRT: $\chi^2 = 13.30$, df = 1, $p < 0.0003$), with reproductively mature individuals more likely to be *ssrA* qPCR positive (OR 3.42, 95% CI 1.69–6.89, $p < 0.001$). None of the other candidate variables evaluated (rodent sex, trapping season, trapping district or rodent abundance at trapping village) were significantly associated with *R. rattus* *ssrA* qPCR test status. The breakdown of rodents trapped by village is given in Table 2.

Bartonella detection in fleas

Bartonella DNA was detected by *ssrA* qPCR in 53 of 193 (27.5%, 95% CI 21.3–34.3%) *X. cheopis* flea extracts. All *ssrA* qPCR positive flea extracts were collected from *R. rattus* individuals. The positive control used in *ssrA* qPCR runs to test flea extracts had a mean Ct value of 32.

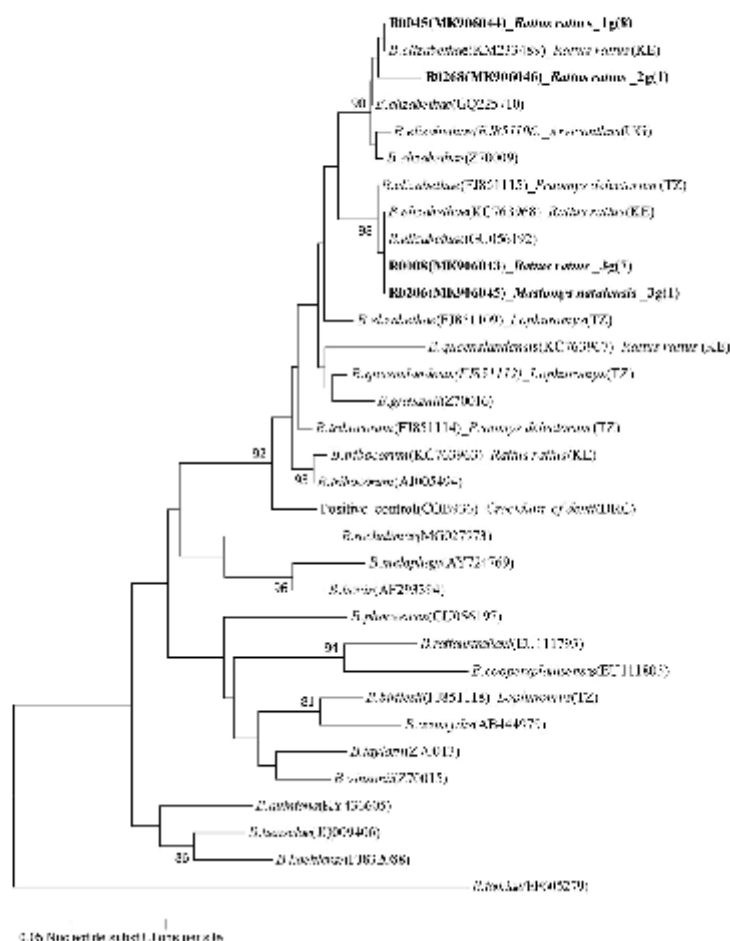


Fig 3. Phylogenetic tree showing the relatedness of the *Bartonella gltA* gene sequences (283bp fragments) derived from 17 spleen tissue samples from rodents (16 *R. rattus* and 1 *Mastomys natalensis*) trapped in northern Tanzania. A single representative sample sequence is included for each genotype identified in this study, with the exception of genotype 3g to illustrate the identical sequences obtained from *R. rattus* and *M. natalensis*. Sequences from this study are labelled with unique identifiers, with prefix "R" followed by sample identifier numbers, GenBank accession number, the rodent or flea host species, the genotype code and the number of samples yielding each genotype (in parentheses). Reference *Bartonella* sequences from rodents trapped elsewhere in East Africa obtained from GenBank are indicated by GenBank accession numbers in parentheses, rodent species and country code (Kenya (KE) [22], Uganda (UG) [26], Tanzania (TZ) [25], Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) [25]). The sequence obtained for the known *Bartonella* positive control sample provided by a colleague from a previous study is included and indicated with a unique identification number (COB936) [24].

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Table 1. Summary of rodent species and their *Bartonella* detection status defined by *ssrA* qPCR and sequence confirmed by *gltA* PCR testing of spleen samples.

Rodent species	Number of spleen samples tested	<i>Bartonella ssrA</i> qPCR Positive n (%)	<i>Bartonella ssrA</i> qPCR Ct values of Positives	<i>Bartonella gltA</i> Product Sequence Positive n (%)
<i>Acomys wilsonii</i>	6	0 (0)	NA	0 (0)
<i>Mastomys natalensis</i>	8	2 (25.0)	33.23 & 33.54	1 (12.5)
<i>Mus minutoides</i>	3	0 (0)	NA	0 (0)
<i>Mus musculus</i>	44	0 (0)	NA	0 (0)
<i>Paraxerus flavovittis</i>	3	1 (33.3)	36.49	0 (0)
<i>Rattus rattus</i>	317	54 (17.0)	median value of 33.07, range 24.25–39.56	16 (5.0)
Total	381	57 (15.0)		17 (4.4)

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Logistic regression analysis identified a relationship between flea *ssrA* qPCR test status and the *ssrA* qPCR test status of the rodent that each flea was collected from (LRT: $\chi^2 = 20.73$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). *X. cheopis* fleas collected from *ssrA* qPCR positive rodents were more likely to themselves be *ssrA* qPCR positive (OR 7.23, 95% CI 2.90–17.97, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Summary of rodent trapping data and the *Bartonella ssrA* and *gltA* genotypes detected in trapped rodents by village around Moshi, Tanzania.

Village code	District	Total number of rodents tested for <i>Bartonella</i>	Adjusted trap success [29]	Bartonella genotypes identified, with data on the number of individuals and rodent species each genotype was detected in	
				<i>ssrA</i> genotypes	<i>gltA</i> genotypes
A	Rural	12	9.79	1s-2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	3g-2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
B	Rural	13	4.28	7s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 10s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	-
C	Municipal	31	4.77	10s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
D	Municipal	25	2.68	10s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 2s-1 * <i>Paraxerus flavovittis</i>	1g-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
E	Rural	39	5.28	4s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 10s-2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 3g-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
F	Municipal	76	10.8	1s-5 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 9s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 10s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 11s-5 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 3g-3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
F (visit 2)	Municipal	33	4.42	1s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 11s-3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	
G	Rural	15	1.94	6s-1 * <i>M. natalensis</i>	3g-1 * <i>M. natalensis</i>
H	Rural	35	4.69	1s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 5s-5 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 8s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 10s-3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g-2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 3g-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
I	Rural	19	2.70	10s-4 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	2g-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
K	Municipal	23	3.19	10s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	-
L	Rural	22	2.93	1s-2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i> 10s-3 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	1g-2 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>
M	Municipal	38	5.06	3s-1 * <i>Rattus rattus</i>	

Village codes correspond to village locations indicated in Fig 1. Distinct *ssrA* and *gltA* genotypes are identified by a sequential number and "s" or "g" respectively. Data on trap success are as reported in [29].

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Table 3. Summary of *Bartonella* *ssrA* genotypes identified in rodent spleens and fleas from Moshi, Tanzania.

<i>ssrA</i> genotypes	<i>ssrA</i> Group	Rodent species and number of positive samples	Flea species and number of positive samples	Closest <i>Bartonella</i> species (GenBank ID) ^a	% similarity to closest <i>Bartonella</i> spp. (number of base pair identities/ total base pair length)
1s	As	11 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25672)	11 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25673)	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (240/244)
2s	As	-	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25674)	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (217/222)
3s	As	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25675)	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25676)	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (228/233)
4s	As	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25677)	-	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	99 (239/244)
5s	As	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25678)	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25679)	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765681)	98 (237/244)
6s	Bs	1 * <i>M. natalensis</i> (MN25680)	-	<i>B. elizabethae</i> (MF765617)	99 (222/224)
7s	Cs	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25681)	1 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25682)	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	99 (242/244)
8s	Cs	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25683)	-	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	99 (239/244)
9s	Cs	1 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25684)	-	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	99 (236/237)
10s	Cs	18 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25685)	9 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25686)	<i>B. tribocorum</i> (MF765675)	100 (244/244)
11s	Ds	8 * <i>R. rattus</i> (MN25687)	15 * <i>X. cheopis</i> (MN25688)	<i>B. rochalimae</i> (MF765651)	100 (246/246)
12s	Es	1 * <i>P. flavovittis</i> (MN25689)	-	<i>B. quintana</i> (HG518998)	98 (233/239)

The number of individuals of each rodents ($n = 45$) and fleas ($n = 39$) species from which each genotype was obtained are shown, as well as data on % similarity to reference *Bartonella* species sequences, with the number of base pair identities indicated in parentheses. The Genbank accession numbers for each genotype are also indicated in parentheses in columns 2 and 3.

^a The closest reference sequences to the study sequences were selected from fully characterized sequences in Genbank obtained from cultures.

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Characterisation of *Bartonella* in Tanzanian rodents and fleas by *ssrA* sequencing

Full length sequences of the *ssrA* gene target were obtained from 45 of 57 rodents spleen samples (*Rattus rattus* $n = 43$, *Mastomys natalensis* $n = 1$ and *Paraxerus flavovittis* $n = 1$) and 39 of 53 *ssrA* positive *X. cheopis* fleas. From the 237bp *ssrA* sequences amplified, 12 unique genotypes (1s to 12s) were identified in the sequences from rodent and flea populations combined (Table 3; Fig 2). The 12 genotypes were grouped into monophyletic groups with $\geq 97\%$ similarity within the group. The following groupings were identified: 1) group As: Genotypes 1s to 5s clustering with a *B. tribocorum* reference sequence from strain GDHL73 (GenBank accession number MF765681); 2) group Bs: genotype 6s was unique but clustered with a *B. elizabethae* reference sequence (GenBank accession number MF765617); 3) group Cs: genotypes 7s to 10s clustering with a sequence from *B. tribocorum* strain GDHL25 (GenBank accession number MF765675); 4) group Ds: genotype 11s clustering with a *B. rochalimae* reference sequence (GenBank accession number MF765651); and 5) group Es: genotype 12s from *P. flavovittis*, which was mostly closely related to a *B. quintana* reference sequence (GenBank accession number HG518998). The distribution of *ssrA* genotypes between trapping villages (Table 2) show that more frequently detected *ssrA* genotypes (1s, 10s and 11s) were present in rodents

Table 4. Summary of *gltA* genotypes identified in rodent spleens ($n = 17$) from Moshi, Tanzania and the correspondence with *ssrA* genotypes identified in the same species and individuals. Data on the % similarity to reference *Bartonella* species sequences, and the number of base pair identities are indicated. The GenBank accession numbers for each genotype identified in the study are indicated. * The closest reference sequences to the study sequences were selected from fully characterized sequences in GenBank obtained from cultures.

<i>gltA</i> Genotype	GenBank accession number	Rodent species and number of positive samples	Closest <i>Bartonella</i> species (GenBank ID)*	% similarity to closest <i>Bartonella</i> spp. (number of base pair identities/ total base pair length)	<i>ssrA</i> group and genotype
1g	MK906044	8 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B. elizabethae</i> (GQ225710)	99.65 (282/283)	Group C:10a
2g	MK906046	1 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B. elizabethae</i> (GQ225710)	97 (278/284)	Group C:10a
3g	MK906043	5 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B. elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	Group A: 1a
3g	MK906043	1 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B. elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	Group A: 4a
3g	MK906045	1 * <i>M. natalensis</i>	<i>B. elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	Group B: 6a
3g	MK906043	1 * <i>R. rattus</i>	<i>B. elizabethae</i> (GU056192)	100 (283/283)	No <i>ssrA</i> typing obtained

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trapped at multiple villages and provides no evidence of spatial segregation of the genotypes in this rodent population. Data on *ssrA* genotypes were available for fourteen pairs of *X. cheopis* fleas and *R. rattus* hosts ($n = 11$ *R. rattus* including three from which two *X. cheopis* were collected and tested). For seven pairs the *ssrA* genotype detected in fleas and rodent hosts were identical, but in the other seven pairs the genotypes differed. At the group level, 11 flea and host pairs had sequences from the same *ssrA* group and three pairs differed.

Characterisation of *Bartonella* in Tanzanian rodents by *gltA* sequencing

Full length sequences of the *gltA* gene were obtained from 17 rodent spleen DNA extracts (*R. rattus* $n = 16$ and *M. natalensis* $n = 1$). To be conservative, the alignment was pruned to the length of the shortest sequence (283 bp) and three unique genotypes were identified in this fragment (Fig 3). The correspondence between *gltA* and *ssrA* genotypes and groups is shown in Table 4. Only one *R. rattus* individual had a *gltA* sequence without a corresponding *ssrA* sequence. For the 16 remaining *gltA* genotypes, the same individuals all yielded *ssrA* sequences falling into groups As to Cs (Table 4). Eight sequences (genotype 1g, GenBank accession number MK906044) collected from *R. rattus* were identical to a *B. elizabethae* sequence obtained from a *R. rattus* sampled previously at a rural site in Kenya (strain B29297 [22], GenBank accession number KM233489). A second genotype (2g, GenBank accession number MK906046) was identified in one *R. rattus* and showed and 97% similarity (278 of 284 base pair matches) to a *B. elizabethae* sequence (GQ225710). Eight sequences (genotype 3g) collected from *M. natalensis* (GenBank accession number MK906045) and from *R. rattus* (GenBank accession number MK906043) were identical to a sample identified in a *R. rattus* from an urban site in Kenya (strain B28391 [22], GenBank accession number: KC763968) and to a cultured reference strain of *B. elizabethae* (strain BR02, GenBank accession number: GU056192).

Discussion

This study reveals substantial variation in *Bartonella* genotypes among rodents and their fleas in a previously uncharacterised region of northern Tanzania (the Moshi Municipal and Moshi Rural Districts). *Rattus rattus* was the most common rodent species trapped and showed a high *Bartonella* prevalence defined by *ssrA* qPCR, which is consistent with the global distribution of *Bartonella* species in *Rattus* [42]. Within *R. rattus*, the probability of qPCR positivity was higher in reproductively mature individuals as compared to immature individuals, consistent with other studies (performed in the USA) that have found an association with age

[43,44]. Sequencing of *ssrA* and *gltA* gene fragments revealed a variety of genotypes and the majority of sequences obtained showed greatest similarity to *B. tribocorum* and *B. elizabethae* reference sequences, both of which have been isolated in humans with febrile illness [6]. Sequences similar to *B. rochalimae* and *B. quintana* were also identified based on *ssrA* sequencing. These species were not detected by sequencing of the *gltA*, indicating reduced sensitivity of the *gltA* conventional PCR for detection of *Bartonella* species as compared to the *ssrA* qPCR. This is consistent with the findings of a previous study [20].

The *ssrA* qPCR was used to estimate prevalence in rodents and fleas, and the sequencing of *ssrA* and *gltA* PCR products to assess genetic variation and characterise the *Bartonella* detected. The overall prevalence of *Bartonella* (15%) detected in rodents using the *ssrA* qPCR was lower than has been detected in many comparable studies of global rodent populations [21,45], including studies that have used a less sensitive *gltA* assay for prevalence determination [46,47]. In a previous Tanzanian study of indigenous rodent species an overall *gltA* prevalence of 41% was detected [25]. A Ugandan survey using *gltA* to test invasive and indigenous rodent populations found variable prevalence across species, with higher prevalence in indigenous species (60% in *Arvicanthus niloticus* and 61% in *Cricetomys gambianus*), but low prevalence (1.4%) was recorded in invasive *R. rattus* [26]. Similarly, in Kenya the *Bartonella* prevalence determined by culture varied by rodent species [22]. Considering the data from *R. rattus* only, the prevalence seen in this study and previous African studies reveals consistently lower prevalence in comparison to *R. rattus* sampled in Asia and tested using *ssrA* qPCR methods (e.g. 32.5% [48]). The prevalence of *Bartonella* detection in *X. cheopis* fleas in this study using the *ssrA* qPCR was also lower than has been recorded in this species in the USA, where 190 of 200 (95%) *X. cheopis* tested were positive for *Bartonella* DNA [32]. The low prevalence of *Bartonella* in *R. rattus* and *X. cheopis* observed in this study are consistent with several other studies conducted in Africa. It has been argued that this pattern of lower *Bartonella* prevalence in African *R. rattus* populations could be attributed to host escape during colonization [49]. Further investigation of native and invasive rodent populations across Africa would be needed to investigate this further, and also evaluate the possible implications for human disease risk on the continent.

Phylogenetic analysis of sequences from rodents and their fleas revealed high concordance of sequences between hosts and ectoparasites. Overall, 10 distinct *ssrA* genotypes were identified that were most similar to reference sequences of *B. tribocorum* and *B. elizabethae* (Groups As to Cs), with only one genotype (10s) showing an identical match to a published *B. tribocorum* sequence in GenBank. However, since all of the reference sequences that were most similar were from a single study in China [50] it is important to recognise the limited reference data available currently and need for future comparison to datasets from other geographic areas to further evaluate these data on the diversity and types of *Bartonella* found in Tanzania. Moreover, *B. elizabethae* and *B. tribocorum* share identical published *ssrA* sequences in GenBank and our results show clustering in the phylogenetic tree (Fig 2), so the two species cannot be distinguished by this *ssrA* fragment. The other two *Bartonella* species identified were: 1) a single sequence (11s) with greatest similarity (98%) to *B. quintana* obtained from a sample from a *P. flavovittis* host; and 2) a sequence obtained from multiple samples of *R. rattus* and *X. cheopis* that showed an identical match to *B. rochalimae*, emphasising the diversity of *Bartonella* present in rodents in Tanzania. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report of molecular detection and characterization of *Bartonella* species in rodents and their associated ectoparasites in Africa using the *ssrA* gene target. The scope for comparison with other sequences is thus limited, as there is currently little reference material on *ssrA* sequences from *Bartonella* sampled elsewhere, particularly in Africa.

In contrast, the *gltA* gene has been widely used to study *Bartonella* globally. Phylogenetic analysis of sequences from 17 *gltA* PCR products from this Tanzanian rodent population (16 *R. rattus* and 1 *M. natalensis*) showed the highest similarity to reference sequences of *B. elizabethae*, which has multiple published sequences in Genbank, including many from east Africa. The association of sequences similar to *B. elizabethae* with *Rattus* spp. in this study is consistent with similar findings from Malaysia [51] and Thailand [48]. *B. elizabethae* has also been identified in different rodent species in Africa [25,26]. Identical *gltA* sequences were amplified from *R. rattus* and *M. natalensis* in our study, suggesting possible transmission between different rodent species in the Tanzania site or a shared common source of infection. Identical sequences were also identified previously in *R. rattus* sampled at both rural (strain B28297, accession number KM233489, from Asembo, Kenya) and urban (strain B28391, accession number KC763968, from Kibera, Nairobi Kenya) sites in Kenya [22]. This suggests that similar *Bartonella* could be found in rodents in Kenya and Tanzania. However, these comparisons are based on short sequences of a single gene target only. Longer sequences from multiple genes and greater sampling effort across the region would be required to robustly confirm sharing of genotypes to trace source populations or determine patterns of host connectivity.

Several studies of zoonotic disease have shown that a variety of pathogens account for high proportions of febrile illness in northern Tanzania but that considerable proportions remain unexplained [16,52]. *Bartonella* species have been identified as important causes of human febrile illness in several global settings but there has been little investigation of the impact of bartonellosis upon human health, in Africa particularly. The finding of *Bartonella* genotypes that are most similar to *B. elizabethae*, *B. rochalimae* and *B. quintana* reference sequences in rodents trapped in and around households in Moshi, Tanzania, and the fleas collected from these rodents, indicates the possibility that *Bartonella* infection may be responsible for an as yet unknown proportion of febrile illnesses in this region. Efforts are needed to determine the clinical impact of bartonellosis in this region and increase awareness about *Bartonella* and other zoonotic pathogens among physicians and health care workers, especially where the cause of large proportions of febrile illness remains unknown. Our results also demonstrate that molecular detection tools can be effectively used for surveillance and diagnostic of zoonotic pathogens in resource limited settings.

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Molecular detection of *Coxiella burnetii* infection in small mammals from Moshi Rural and Urban Districts, northern Tanzania

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Abstract

Coxiella burnetii is an obligate intracellular bacterium that causes Q fever, a zoonotic disease of public health importance. In northern Tanzania, Q fever is a known cause of human febrile illness, but little is known about its distribution in animal hosts. We used a quantitative real-time PCR (qPCR) targeting the insertion element IS1111 to determine the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* infections in small mammals trapped in 12 villages around Moshi Rural and Moshi Urban Districts, northern Tanzania. A total of 382 trapped small mammals of seven species were included in the study; *Rattus rattus* ($n = 317$), *Mus musculus* ($n = 44$), *Mastomys natalensis* ($n = 8$), *Acomys wilson* ($n = 6$), *Mus minutoides* ($n = 3$), *Paraxerus flavovittis* ($n = 3$) and *Atelerix albiventris* ($n = 1$). Overall, 12 (3.1%) of 382 (95% CI: 1.6–5.4) small mammal spleens were positive for *C. burnetii* DNA. *Coxiella burnetii* DNA was detected in five of seven of the small mammal species trapped; *R. rattus* ($n = 7$), *M. musculus* ($n = 1$), *A. wilson* ($n = 2$), *P. flavovittis* ($n = 1$) and *A. albiventris* ($n = 1$). Eleven (91.7%) of twelve (95% CI: 61.5–99.8) *C. burnetii* DNA positive small mammals were trapped within Moshi Urban District. These findings demonstrate that small mammals in Moshi, northern Tanzania are hosts of *C. burnetii* and may act as a source of *C. burnetii* infection to humans and other animals. This detection of *C. burnetii* infections in small mammals

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should motivate further studies into the contribution of small mammals to the transmission of *C. burnetii* to humans and animals in this region.

KEYWORDS

Coxiella burnetii, detection, prevalence, small mammal, Tanzania, zoonoses

1 | INTRODUCTION

Coxiella burnetii is an obligate intracellular bacterium, the causative agent of Q fever, a zoonotic disease of public health importance worldwide except in New Zealand (Marrie et al., 2015; Schimmer et al., 2014; Toman et al., 2009). *C. burnetii* can infect a wide range of vertebrate and invertebrate hosts. Domestic ruminants (sheep, goats and cattle) are considered the main reservoirs of *C. burnetii* (Duron et al., 2015; Van den Brom & Vellema, 2009).

In recent years, an increasing number of studies have reported the detection of *C. burnetii* in small mammals. Investigation of patients in the Netherlands indicated an association between small mammal sightings and Q fever case occurred during the 2007 outbreak (Karagiannis et al., 2009). Similarly, wild rodents, marsupials, bats and other wild mammals captured around the houses of Q fever case patients in French Guiana were more likely to test *C. burnetii* positive as compared to animals trapped at greater distance from residential houses, and sighting of these animals especially rodents was identified as a risk factor for human *C. burnetii* infection (Gardon et al., 2001).

Data on the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* in small mammals and their epidemiology in Tanzania are limited. Globally, studies on the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* in small mammals and other animals have demonstrated significant variation in the prevalence of *C. burnetii* depending on factors such as species, sex, age, season of sampling (wet or dry) and sampling location (Foronda et al., 2015; Gardon et al., 2001; Webster et al., 1995; Yadav et al., 2019). In many African countries, there are few studies on *C. burnetii* presence and data on prevalence in both animal and humans are scarce (Salifu et al., 2019). Based on conventional PCR detection methods targeting *C. burnetii* 16S rRNA and IS1111 genes, the overall prevalence of *C. burnetii* in African small mammal populations has been found to range from 2.1% (4/194) in peridomestic rodents in Nigeria (Kamani et al., 2018) to 45% (9/20) in Zambia (Chitanga et al., 2018).

Zoonotic infections are of great importance to public health in many parts of the world but their clinical importance is typically under-appreciated (Angelakis et al., 2014; Crump et al., 2013). *C. burnetii* infection was diagnosed in 5.0% of 482 febrile patients tested in a retrospective study performed in Moshi, northern Tanzania (the same area as this study) (Crump et al., 2013). This finding together with several recent outbreaks of Q fever highlights the importance of *C. burnetii* as a public health problem and need for continued efforts to identify reservoirs of *C. burnetii* to achieve better control and prevention.

Several PCR-based diagnostic methods have been successfully applied for the direct detection of *C. burnetii* (Herrin et al., 2011;

Kersh et al., 2010; Klee et al., 2006; Piflero et al., 2014; Schneeberger et al., 2010). The use of quantitative real-time PCR (qPCR), targeting the IS1111 insertion element which is present in multiple copies, has been reported to be highly sensitive for the detection of *C. burnetii* DNA (Bruin et al., 2011). In this study, we aimed to use a qPCR assay targeting the transposase gene of insertion element IS1111 to determine the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* DNA in spleen tissue samples of small mammals from Moshi Rural and Urban Districts, northern Tanzania.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 | Study site

The study was conducted in the Kilimanjaro Region of northern Tanzania. Trapping of the small mammals was conducted in two of seven districts of Kilimanjaro Region in a previous study (Allan et al., 2018). The two districts, Moshi Municipal (Urban) and Moshi Rural (Figure 1), were chosen as the study site due to the previous finding of a high prevalence of Q fever in febrile patients from this area (Crump et al., 2013). The climate in the study area is tropical with an average temperature for the year of 74.2°F (23.4°C) and two patterns of rains; long rains from March to May and short rains from October to December. The coolest months coinciding with the long dry season from June to September. The warmest month, on average, is February with an average temperature of 77.9°F (25.5°C). The coolest month on average is July, with an average temperature of 69.3°F (20.7°C) (Climate-data.org, 2020). Subsistence farming is common. Agriculture, which is mainly mixed cropping and livestock farming, is the main economic activity in the study area.

2.2 | Small mammal sampling and data collection

Small mammal spleen samples for this study were obtained from a previous cross-sectional study (Allan et al., 2018) for which small mammal sampling was conducted within Moshi Rural and Urban Districts. Small mammals were trapped from a total of seven villages within Moshi Rural District and five villages within Moshi Urban District (Table 1 and Figure 1). The villages were randomly selected from a list of villages that were home to people that had sought care, and had been enrolled in previous febrile illness surveillance studies at local hospitals (Crump et al., 2013). As in the previous study,

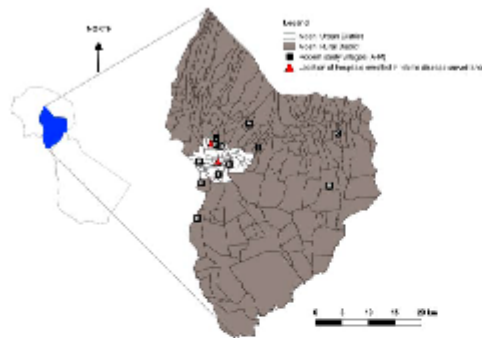


FIGURE 1 Map of Moshi Urban and Moshi Rural Districts, showing representative locations of small mammal study villages. Letters indicate the different villages in which small mammal trapping was conducted. Polygons in the main image show local administrative boundaries. Insert map on left shows outline of the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania and the location of study districts within the region. This figure is adapted from a version published previously (Allan et al., 2018)

the target sample size was 50 small mammals per sub-village to give power ($\alpha = 0.95$, $\beta = 0.8$) to estimate *Leptospira* (Allan et al., 2018) and *C. burnetii* infection prevalence of 10%.

Small mammal trapping, identification and sampling are as previously described in another study (Allan et al., 2018). Data gathered for every trapped small mammal included: species (determined by observation of phenotypic characteristics and measurement of morphometric features), sex and reproductive maturity status (mature or immature determined based on external sexual characteristics) (Allan et al., 2018). Spleen tissues previously stored at -80°C were retrieved for the extraction of DNA used in this study.

2.3 | DNA extraction

DNA was extracted from approximately 10 milligrams (mg) of spleen tissue (previously heat treated in PBS at 67°C for 1 hr) using the DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit spin-column protocol for DNA purification from tissues (Qiagen) performed in a biological safety cabinet (NuAire) at Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute Biotechnology Laboratory in Moshi, Tanzania. DNA was eluted in 100 μl of AE buffer and quantified using a Nano-Drop spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific). A no-template extraction control (PCR-grade water) was included for every 20 samples. DNA extracts were stored at -20°C prior to testing. To minimize the potential for qPCR inhibition due to the high concentration of host DNA, extracts were diluted in 20 μl of AE buffer to a standard DNA concentration of 10–50 ng/ μl for qPCR testing.

TABLE 1 Categorical variable summaries and *C. burnetii* qPCR IS1111 for small mammals trapped from Moshi, Tanzania ($n = 382$)

Variable		Number of small mammals tested for <i>C. burnetii</i>	<i>C. burnetii</i> positive n (%)	95% CI
Village Code	A	12	0 (0.0)	0.0–26.5
	B	13	1 (7.7)	0.2–36
	C	31	0 (0.0)	0.0–11.2
	D	26	7 (26.9)	11.6–47.8
	E	39	0 (0.0)	0.0–9.0
	F	109	2 (1.8)	0.2–6.5
	G	15	0 (0.0)	0.0–21.8
	H	35	0 (0.0)	0.0–10.0
	J	19	0 (0.0)	0.0–17.6
	K	23	0 (0.0)	0.0–14.8
	L	22	0 (0.0)	0.0–15.4
	M	38	2 (5.3)	0.6–17.7
District	Rural	155	1 (0.6)	0.02–3.5
	Urban	227	11 (4.8)	2.4–8.5
Sex	Male	163	7 (4.3)	1.7–8.6
	Female	219	5 (2.3)	0.7–5.2
Age	Mature	225	10 (4.4)	2.2–8.0
	Immature	157	2 (1.3)	0.2–4.5
Season	Wet	266	9 (3.4)	1.6–6.3
	Dry	116	3 (2.6)	0.5–7.4
Overall	NA	382	12 (3.1)	1.6–5.4

2.4 | Determination of sensitivity and limit of detection of the IS1111 qPCR assay

Initial set-up and verification of the assay was performed on the Rotor-Gene Q/6000 System (Qiagen). The approximate sensitivity and limit of detection (LoD) of the IS1111 qPCR assay for this study (295 bp target) was determined using a 10-fold dilution series of DNA from *C. burnetii* Nine Mile RSA493 reference strain. The primers and probe were as follows: Forward primer (5'-CATCACATTGCCGCGTTTAC-3'), Reverse primer (5'-GGTTGGTCCCTCGACAACAT-3'), and 6-carboxyfluorescein FAM-labelled probe (5'-AATCCCCAACACCTCCTTATCCAC-BHQ1-3') as described in previous study (Roest et al., 2011).

2.5 | IS1111 qPCR for detection of *C. burnetii* DNA in small mammal spleens

DNA extracts from small mammal spleens were screened for the presence of *C. burnetii* by qPCR using the same primers and probe as described above. The qPCR reactions were carried out in total volumes of 20 µl comprising of 10 µl QuantiNova qPCR mix (Qiagen), 0.8 µl of each primer (10 µM) and probe (5 µM), 2.6 µl nuclease-free water and 5 µl DNA template. Positive controls (Nine Mile RSA493 strain), extraction controls (AE buffer) and no template controls (PCR-grade water) were included in each qPCR run. Assays were performed on a Rotor-Gene Q/6000 with thermocycling conditions as follows: 1 cycle of 95°C for 2 min followed by 45 cycles of 95°C for 5 s then 60°C for 5 s. Fluorescence readings were acquired via the green (510 nm) detection channel at the end of each annealing/extension phase. A qPCR run was considered valid when the negative controls showed no amplification and the positive controls amplified with Ct value < 40. Samples were tested in duplicate initially and then in an additional three wells if amplification (Ct < 40) was seen in one of two initial duplicate wells. A sample was considered positive for *C. burnetii* if at least two test wells, out of the maximum five, produced amplification with Ct < 40 and all other assay conditions were fulfilled.

2.6 | Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were performed in R (R Development Core Team, 2018). Binomial proportions and 95% confidence intervals for prevalence estimates were calculated using the package "binom" version 1.0-5 for selected variables (Dorai-Raj, 2014).

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Sample characteristics

A total of 382 spleen samples from small mammals were available for testing. The majority ($n = 317$, 83.0%) were from indigenous black

rats (*Rattus rattus*). Other small mammal species tested included: house mice (*Mus musculus*, $n = 44$, 11.5%); multimammate mice (*Mastomys natalensis*, $n = 8$, 2.1%); spiny mice (*Acomys wilsoni*, $n = 6$, 1.6%); African pygmy mice (*Mus minutoides*, $n = 3$, 0.8%); striped bush squirrels (*Paraxerus flavovittis*, $n = 3$, 0.8%) and the four-toed hedgehog (*Atelerix albiventris*, $n = 1$, 0.2%). Of the tested small mammal population, 219 individuals (57.3%) were female. Based on examination of external sexual characteristics, 224 (58.6%) were classified as sexually mature. The majority of small mammals ($n = 266$, 69.6%) were trapped during the wet season. Of the tested small mammal population, 227 (59.4%) were trapped from Moshi Urban District.

3.2 | IS1111 limit of detection and prevalence of *C. burnetii* in spleen samples from small mammals

The assay limit of detection, with 100% reproducibility was estimated at approximately 10 genome copies per µl. *C. burnetii* DNA was detected by IS1111 qPCR in a total of 12 (3.1%) of 382 (95% CI: 1.6–5.4) spleen samples from small mammals. This included positive individuals from five of seven of the species tested; *Rattus rattus* ($n = 7$), *Mus musculus* ($n = 1$), *Acomys wilsoni* ($n = 2$), *Paraxerus flavovittis* ($n = 1$) and *Atelerix albiventris* ($n = 1$). Eleven (91.7%) of twelve (95% CI: 61.5–99.8) *C. burnetii* positive small mammals were trapped within Moshi Urban District. Five (2.3%) of 219 females (95% CI: 0.7–5.4) and seven (4.3%) of 163 males (95% CI: 1.7–8.6) were positive for *C. burnetii*. Nine (3.4%) of 266 (95% CI: 1.6–6.3) small mammals sampled during the wet season were *C. burnetii* positive and three (2.6%) of 116 (95% CI: 0.5–7.4) small mammals sampled during the dry season were *C. burnetii* positive (Table 1).

4 | DISCUSSION

C. burnetii DNA was detected in 3.1% of small mammals trapped from Moshi Rural and Moshi Urban Districts in northern Tanzania between May 2013 and September 2014. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to demonstrate the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* in small mammals from Tanzania. Infected small mammals may act as a source of *C. burnetii* infection for both humans and other animals in the study area. The findings of this study provide evidence to inform Q fever control programs.

There is a significant variation in the prevalence of *C. burnetii* reported in different small mammal populations and at different locations within Africa (Abdel-Moein & Hamza, 2018; Chitanga et al., 2018; Kamani et al., 2018). Knowledge of the prevalence of *C. burnetii* in different small mammal populations and an improved understanding of the factors that drive this variation will be important to inform the design of *C. burnetii* control programs.

In this study, there are indications of variation in the proportion of small mammals that are *C. burnetii* positive across different small mammal species, season of sampling, age, species, sex and location of sampling (rural vs. urban districts and villages) (Table 1 and 2). The small

TABLE 2 *Coxiella burnetii* IS1111 qPCR-positive samples and the characteristics of positive small mammal trapped from Moshi Urban and Rural districts, Tanzania (n = 12)

Small mammal sample ID	Sex	Species	Locations	Season	Age	Ct Values		
						Ct1	Ct2	Av.Ct
R0024	Male	<i>R. rattus</i>	Rural	Wet	Mature	32.22	31.78	32.00
R0062	Male	<i>A. wilson</i>	Urban	Wet	Mature	30.56	30.87	30.72
R0063	Female	<i>A. wilson</i>	Urban	Wet	Mature	27.16	32.35	29.76
R0065	Female	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Wet	Mature	32.59	32.84	32.72
R0067	Male	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Wet	Immature	33.65	34.86	34.26
R0078	Male	<i>A. albiventris</i>	Urban	Wet	Mature	36.99	34.27	35.63
R0083	Male	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Wet	Mature	31.32	32.11	31.72
R0084	Female	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Wet	Mature	35.17	35.09	35.13
R0168	Male	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Wet	Mature	27.90	27.76	27.83
R0330	Female	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Dry	Mature	20.01	20.06	20.04
R0339	Female	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Dry	Mature	27.40	28.54	27.97
R0393	Male	<i>R. rattus</i>	Urban	Dry	Immature	27.40	27.54	27.47

number of positive individuals identified in this study limits the scope for statistical analyses of these patterns, but the factors that determine prevalence in these populations should be investigated further. In this study, the majority of *C. burnetii* positive small mammals were trapped from Moshi Urban District. Previous studies have suggested that emerging and re-emerging zoonotic diseases and pathogens are linked with increasing globalization and urbanization (Amitai et al., 2010; Buzan et al., 2017; Comer et al., 2001) and there is a clear rationale for further investigation of the links between urbanization and *C. burnetii* prevalence. In this study, the small mammals sampled were trapped in or around households, indicating a potential risk of *C. burnetii* transmission to humans, pets and livestock.

Observations from previous studies and the raw data from this one indicate that specific small mammal species appear more likely to carry and maintain *C. burnetii* bacteria than others in a given geographical area (Burgdorfer et al., 1963; Reusken et al., 2011; Rozental et al., 2017). A study to assess susceptibility of rodent species to *C. burnetii* and other rickettsiae species indicated that variation in host genetic factors that determine macrophage responses, the infecting strain of *C. burnetii* and the route of infection may explain variation in *C. burnetii* infection prevalence in small mammal (Reháček et al., 1992). Similarly, more *C. burnetii* positive individuals were classified as mature small mammals as compared to immature, consistent with previous findings of increased *C. burnetii* infection in mature mice (Leone et al., 2007). Q fever and a number of other bacterial infections are typically considered as diseases of mature adults due to age-associated physiological and anatomical changes, and dysfunction of the immune system (Gavazzi & Krause, 2002). More male small mammals trapped in this study were *C. burnetii* positive as compared to females, also consistent with previous findings (Thompson et al., 2012). Male small mammals have been demonstrated to exhibit frequent and long-distance movements in search of female mates or defence of their territory. This behaviour may increase their risk of acquiring *C. burnetii* infection from

the environment or from their multiple mates (Adler, 2011; Kozakiewicz et al., 2007; Nelson, 1995).

Studies conducted in the Netherlands, suggest a role for rodents in maintaining the cycle of *C. burnetii* infection between wildlife and domestic animals, and consequently transmission to humans (Reusken et al., 2011). Similar *C. burnetii* transmission scenarios may be happening in Tanzania, where the main source for human *C. burnetii* infection is poorly understood. In the USA and Canada *C. burnetii* has been detected in small mammal species trapped in the forest and pristine environments, where human activities such as livestock keeping do not occur, suggesting that small mammals in these livestock-free areas could be acting as a reservoir of *C. burnetii* (Burgdorfer et al., 1963; Thompson et al., 2012).

5 | CONCLUSIONS

In Tanzania febrile illnesses caused by zoonotic pathogens, including *C. burnetii*, are of public health importance but are often underappreciated or misdiagnosed. In this study, we demonstrate the detection of *C. burnetii* in small mammals trapped in and around household premises from the same area where a previous study has reported high prevalence of Q fever in humans. These data provide a clear rationale for further investigation of the epidemiology of *C. burnetii* in this setting and the role that small mammals play in this multi-host epidemiology. Additional work is needed to understand the role of small mammals in the maintenance and transmission of *C. burnetii* infection in this region of Tanzania and to examine linkages between human, livestock and small mammal infections. *C. burnetii* strains circulating in small mammals should be typed and compared with isolates from human, other animals and environmental sources. This will provide information on the role of small mammals in *C. burnetii* transmission.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Approval for the study was granted by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH 2012-471-ER-2005-141 & 2015-71-NA-2011-199); Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre (KCMC) Ethics Committee (535 & 537); National Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), Tanzania (NIMR/HQ/R.8a/Vol.IX/1499 & NIMR/HQ/R.8a/Vol.IX/1522); Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI); University of Glasgow College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences Ethics Committee (200,120,020), and University of Glasgow Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Ethics and Welfare Committee (01a/13 & 02a/13). Written consent for study participation was obtained for each participating household, using forms translated into Swahili (Allan et al., 2018). Small mammal sampling was performed in accordance with the UK Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals (Home Office, 2014; AVMA Panel on Euthanasia, 2013).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interests concerning the work reported in this manuscript.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

NDYETABURA O. THEONEST: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Writing-original draft; Writing-review & editing. **Ryan W Carter:** Data curation; Investigation; Methodology; Writing-review & editing. **Elizabeth Kasagama:** Investigation; Methodology; Writing-review & editing. **Julius D Keyyu:** Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Project administration; Supervision; Writing-review & editing. **Gabriel Mkilema Shirima:** Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Supervision; Writing-review & editing. **Rigobert Tarimo:** Investigation; Methodology; Writing-review & editing. **Kate M Thomas:** Data curation; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Writing-review & editing. **Nick Wheelhouse:** Data curation; Supervision; Validation; Writing-review & editing. **Venance P Maro:** Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Project administration; Supervision; Writing-review & editing. **Daniel T Haydon:** Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Project administration; Supervision; Writing-review & editing. **Joram J Buza:** Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Project administration; Supervision; Writing-review & editing. **Kathryn J Allan:** Conceptualization; Data curation; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources;

Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing-review & editing. **Jo E. B. Halliday:** Conceptualization; Data curation; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing-review & editing.

PEER REVIEW

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study will be openly available after publication through: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5525/gla.researchdata.948>.

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Poster presentation



Molecular detection of rodent borne zoonoses in the Northern zone of Tanzania: A one health approach towards understanding of zoonotic cause of febrile illness

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Background Introduction

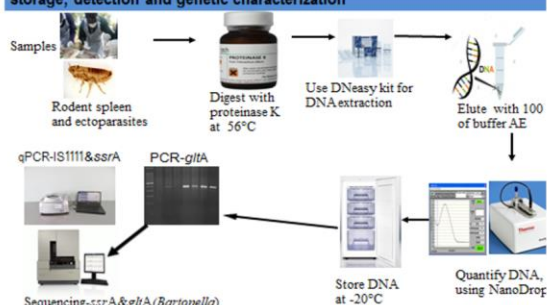
>Zoonotic diseases poses greater public health problem in the world we live in today than ever before. For centuries rodents or their associated ectoparasites have been linked with emergence of several zoonotic diseases of public health importance. In the Northern Tanzania zoonotic pathogens have been reported to cause large proportional of people admitted in hospital or seeking health care due to febrile illness. Little is known about animal source and hosts for these pathogens. Use of molecular methods for detection zoonotic pathogens could significant improve on informed patient care , management and policy plan or reforms

Problem statement

Febrile illness is the major clinical presentation among persons presenting complaint seeking healthcare in Moshi, northern Tanzania . Large proportional are zoonotic however animal hosts for several zoonotic pathogens are poorly known in this area thus limiting intervention programs.

Material and methods

Methodology: Flowchart of various steps for DNA extraction ,quantification, storage, detection and genetic characterization



Objectives

Main Objective

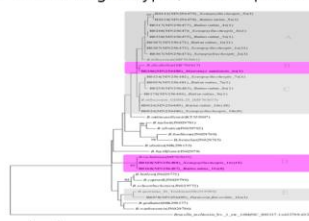
To determine the presence and the prevalence , genetic characteristics and risk factors for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp in smalls and their fleas from Moshi , Tanzania.

Specific Objectives

- > To determine the presence and prevalence of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp infections in rodents from Moshi, Northern Tanzania .
- > To determine the genetic characteristics of *Bartonella* spp in rodents and their ectoparasites in Moshi, Northern Tanzania.
- > To analyse the risk factors for *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* spp infections in rodents from Moshi, Northern Tanzania.

Results

A. *Bartonella* genotypes, rodent spleen& fleas as detected by ssrA qPCR



- Five clusters-A,B,C, & E
- Seq.within cluster are ≥97.0% to Genbank ref.seq
- Seq.within a cluster are 100% to each other
- Outgroup-B. melitensis
- Seq.deposited in Genbank: MN256472-89

- > Overall, 12 (3.1%) of 382 (95% CI: 1.6-5.4) spleens from small mammal tested were positive for *C. burnetii* DNA.
- > *Coxiella burnetii* DNA was detected in five (71.4%) of seven (95% CI: 29.0-96.3) small mammal species; *Rattus rattus* (n=7), *Mus musculus* (n=1), *Acomys wilsoni* (n=2), *Paraxerus flavovottis* (n=1) and *Atelerix albiventris* (n=1).
- > Eleven (91.7%) of twelve (95% CI: 61.5-99.8) *C. burnetii* DNA positive were trapped within Moshi Urban District.
- > Overall, 57 (15.0%) of 381 (95% CI: 11.3-18.5) small mammal spleens tested positive for *Bartonella* DNA.
- > *Bartonella* DNA was detected in three species (*R. rattus* n=54, *M. natalensis* n=2 and *P. flavovottis* n = 1) using qPCR targeting the *ssrA* gene.
- > Analysis of *R. rattus* species only for risk of *Bartonella* infection indicated that *Bartonella* infection was more likely in reproductively mature as compared to immature small mammal (OR = 3.42, p<0.001)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- > These findings demonstrate that rodents in Moshi are hosts of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* species and may act as a source of these pathogens to humans and animals
- > Further studies covering broad range of potential hosts should be considered in order to understand the distribution of these in other animals
- > Efforts are needed to determine the clinical impact of *C. burnetii* and *Bartonella* infections in humans

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