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Remembering the Dark Years (1964–1975) in Contemporary Zanzibar

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In the islands of Zanzibar (Unguja and Pemba), the memories of violence and repression perpetrated by revolutionaries and the state from 1964 to 1975 have long been banished from the public space. The official narrative of the 1964 Revolution and the first phase of the post-revolutionary periodⁱ developed and propagated by the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, through a control over the production, transmission, and circulation of ideas, combined with repressive measures against dissenting voices, led people to keep their memories private. The official injunction calling for silence did not bring about a forgetting of the past, but rather contributed to the clandestine transmission and reconstruction of fragments of individual, familial, and community memories within private circles. These alternative memories, built upon the direct remembering of violence directed against a large portion of the population of Zanzibar between 1964 and 1975, have been reconfigured in relation to contemporary socio-political tensions and economic hardships.

Unlike many places in the world in which the politics of memory has become commonplace, Zanzibar has not yet witnessed any upheavals of memories that have radically and publicly contested the official version imposed by the state. However, as this article will show, several recent initiatives attest to the fact that a new era has begun, characterized by the publicization of collective memories that were formerly transmitted privately. These initiatives have been made possible by an expansion of the freedom of speech, the recognition of a political opposition, and the proliferation of places and modes of expression, notably the media, since

the democratization process of the mid-1990s. The memory narratives that are publicly expressed today, and conflated with the rewriting of the history of the Isles, show that there is no single and homogeneous memory of the past. On the contrary, there are multifaceted yet intertwined collective memories of the murky decade that relate to the position of individuals and communities in the past and in the present. Different claims interlace to justify the contemporary return of the past in the present, such as expressions of public repentance, call for moral reparations, demands for financial compensation, and attempts to disqualify the political elite in a context of intense collective dissatisfaction with the regime and the absence of a shift in power. Politically committed groups have taken the lead in encouraging and making use of the re-emergence of the traumatic past of the Isles as a critique of power in contemporary Zanzibar.

This article asserts that instead of leading to a pacified memory and to social reconciliation, the remembering of the 1964 violence and the subsequent years of repression triggers memory disputes that are expressed along political and community lines. The political subjectivities that are being built through the presentification of this contested past have the particularity of reappropriating, transposing, and symbolically reinvesting former identity referents that are rooted in the history of the Isles, but that are ineluctably the bearers of polarizing divisions, most notably between "Arabs" and "Africans." The past, with its confrontational racial divisions and its controversial heritage of slavery, lingers on behind the resurfacing and politicization of underground collective memories in contemporary Zanzibar.

The Dark Years in Zanzibar (1964–1975)

In the middle of the night of January 11–12, 1964, about 300 armed men attacked the police headquarters of Ziwani and the police station of Mtoni in Zanzibar Town to seize

firearms. A second group of men was in charge of occupying Radio Zanzibar station with a view to cutting communication between the islands and the rest of the world.ⁱⁱ This is how the insurrection (called a coup d'état by its opponents and a revolution by its organizers and supporters) started. Within only a few hours, it overthrew the Sultanate of Zanzibar and its first independent government only one month after Zanzibar gained its independence from British rule on December 10, 1963. Sultan Seyyid Jamshed Abdulla managed to escape with his family. But all the members of the government were arrested, among them the Prime Minister, Mohammed Shamte, and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Muhsin al-Barwani. On January 12, 1964, the Popular Republic of Zanzibar was established under the leadership of Abeid Amani Karume. In the course of the following weeks, firearms circulated and violence broke out as the leaders of this "armed putsch" (Prunier 1998: 95) lost control of the situation. The overthrow of the government and the arrest of its members as well as of other political opponents marked the beginning of a period of bloody and brutal repression.ⁱⁱⁱ People of Arab origin and other groups considered foreign (Asians and Comorians) were targeted.^{iv} Shops were looted, houses burnt, women raped, and men beaten and humiliated, in Zanzibar Town, and even more so in the villages of the countryside in Unguja and Pemba (Okello 1967). Thousands of people lost their lives, fled or were forced into exile in the following months. Civil order was restored only after neighboring Tanganyika sent in troops.

On April 22, 1964, a hundred days after the overthrow of the first independent government of the Isles, the President of the Republic of Tanganyika, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, and the President of the Popular Republic of Zanzibar, Abeid Amani Karume, signed a treaty of Union, which established the United Republic of Tanzania. The islands kept their own government, led by the Revolutionary Council. The Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) was declared the only legal party. Most internecine violence ended, but the authoritarian regime led by President Karume and the "Committee of 14"^v did not spare their opponents or the

uncooperative. Many former members of the first government of the Isles were jailed, killed, or condemned to exile. The small circle of Marxist “comrades” (*makomredi*) of the Umma Party was sidelined. Yet even claiming allegiance to ASP did not guarantee one's safety. Karume greatly feared the founding members and stalwarts of the ASP, as well as educated administrative officers who had deep political convictions and who were able to articulate a soundly argued political critique, mobilize the population, and oppose his personal power. As Issa Shivji asserts, “Karume had an intense hatred for and suspicion of the educated” (2008: 112) who he perceived as his political rivals. Arbitrary power prevailed in a regime that tried to exercise its monopoly not only by repressing the Zanzibar intelligentsia but also by controlling potential civil contestation.^{vi} In this “terror regime of the highest order” (Bakari 2001: 106), public freedoms were limited and associations banned, the press muzzled, and public gatherings forbidden except for parades and marches of the youth to foster national mobilization, citizenship, and discipline (Burgess 2005c). The channels of circulation of narratives of the past, and their potential uses in the arena of political contestation, were definitely obstructed. Allegations of a plot against Karume in 1969 were used as an excuse to organize mass arrests and to detain and eliminate real, potential, or alleged opponents. Three years later, the assassination of Karume on April 7, 1972 sparked off a second wave of arrests of former members of the Umma Party who organized or supported the plot. Among all the men imprisoned in the period from 1964 to 1975, many are still missing today.

The politicization of identities in Zanzibar

Present-day memories of the period from the overthrow of the first independent government of Zanzibar in 1964 to the relative relaxing of the authoritarian regime's grip in the mid-1970s, which draw from lived experience, are directly connected to the interpretation of

the bloody insurrection of the Revolution. If heated debates about the identity of the planners of the insurrection are commonplace,^{vii} these questions are not central to an identification of the nature of the political imaginaries that constituted the ideological foundation of the Revolution, and these debates were re-conducted through the dark post-revolutionary years to the present day. As Garth Myers puts it, “how the story [of the Revolution] is told has become as interesting and enlightening as a recounting of what actually happened” (2000: 430).

The intricate history of identity construction in Zanzibar and of the politicization of ethnic and racial identities during the period of intense political competition that preceded independence between 1957 and 1963 is well known (Sheriff 1987; Sheriff and Ferguson 1991; Burgess 2005a, 2005b; Glassman 2004, 2011), and will be sketched out here only briefly. On the eve of the Revolution, the cosmopolitan Zanzibari culture—built upon cultural markers referring to Islam, the Arab culture of the Arabian Peninsula, the Swahili language, and the well-delimited island territory (Middleton and Campbell 1965; Fair 2001)—started to split along ethnic and racial lines. Two competing conceptions of national identity, citizenship, and sovereignty, built upon a polarizing racial paradigm, were promoted by intellectuals and propagandists whose words were propagated in newspapers. These propagandists were at the head of the most virulent community associations, **which later became** political parties,(Glassman 2000, 2011). The Arab elite developed a local nationalism rooted in the cosmopolitan and Muslim culture of Zanzibar, but were reluctant to recognize the citizenship and political rights of Africans from the Mainland. As for the political activists proclaiming themselves as “Africans,” they promoted a black African nationalism espousing and propagating the idea that the islands had been invaded by alien Arabs and should revert to their true indigenous owners, black Africans.

After 1964, the argument was put forward by the new regime in power that the armed uprising of January had precipitated the overthrow of the tyrannical power of an alien Arab minority, represented by the Omani sultanate and the landed aristocracy, by an African majority of genuine autochthones who had been deprived of their natural right to sovereignty for centuries. The uprising was seen as the first “African revolution” of eastern Africa. This reading of the event has underpinned the nationalist meta-narrative of the former single party [meaning not clear. Do you mean that there was only one single party allowed to function in the country? Or do you mean that there was one party in the beginning and that it divided into two or more parties?] and the revolutionary government since 1964. A strong control of the public space and of the places of intellectual production contributed to the propagation of this nationalist imaginary of liberation as a form of revenge. In the controversial book, *Zanzibar: The 1964 Revolution* by Omar Mapuri, a high-ranking politician in the government, the Revolution is described as “the logical outcome of centuries of oppression and subjugation of the African people” (1996: 1). State-mandated or sanctioned history and literature also contributed to the dissemination of this version of the past. Garth Myers (2000) shows the extent to which Swahili novels used in high school curricula depict socioeconomic inequalities based on a radical division between Arabs and Africans. These “dominant scripts” of the Revolution are the tools of state propaganda.

Today, the government of Zanzibar still calls itself “revolutionary.” The children of the leaders of the 1964–1975 period are amongst the major political figures in power today. Every January 12, the state organizes the mise-en-scène of the past in commemoration of the Revolution and in celebration of the father of the nation, Abeid Amani Karume. It thus creates and diffuses images of its power with a view to silencing alternative representations. However, alternative national imaginaries of a Muslim and cosmopolitan Zanzibar continued to

circulate within close social circles (families, friends, groups in exile) that the state could not control easily. Moreover, besides the official historiography of the state, a renewed reading of the Revolution is elaborated and defended by highly respected Tanzanian academics (Sheriff 2008; Shivji 2008). The presence and diffusion of these “oppositional scripts” (Myers 2000), which have a variable public visibility, show that there is no univocal version of history in today’s memory landscape. The conceptions of identity, citizenship, and sovereignty that are linked to the nationalist narratives upon which representations of Zanzibari society were built still polarize the population forty-five years after the Revolution.

Fragments of survivors’ narratives

The victims and the authors of the crimes committed during the Revolution and the years that followed are today in their sixties, or older.^{viii} Many of them speak of their memories with those within their own social circles only. Memories of the dark years, during which any recollections of the traumas suffered were suppressed and when denunciations were commonplace, frequently leading to arrest and interrogation, instilled a self-reflex of caution and self-preservation.^{ix} Salum*,^x an informant who was more than seventy years old at the time of the interview, stated that, even today, he kept nothing at home that could possibly compromise him in the eyes of the ruling regime. He has systematically eliminated all traces of the past and also removed contemporary objects that could betray his activities or his political beliefs.

From the perspective of those targeted by the revolutionaries, that is, Arab families considered foreign, the revolutionary days of mid-January 1964 in Zanzibar Town speak of fear, violence, and death. Othman*, a man of Arab origin approaching the age of seventy, tells how he fled from his home, on the evening of January 11, accompanied by his young children

but leaving behind his terrified wife. They sought refuge with his parents, close to Stone Town, in the neighborhood of Shangani. Othman* recalls the corpse-strewn streets and the mutilated he met on the way. The little family remained hidden the entire week of the curfew, stomachs knotted with fear and eating little. When he finally returned home, he learned that his wife had been killed. In his own words, the images will remain forever engraved in his memory.

Salma*, a woman in her fifties whose Omani grandfather and Iranian grandmother had settled in Zanzibar during the sultanate, tells how her family, warned of the impending danger by her father's Swahili mistress, sought refuge in the house of close friends. She remembers seeing, through the window, people being massacred and pregnant women being disembowelled.

Most biographical narratives collected during fieldwork repeat the same themes: people fled, hid, were terrified. If the memories of the revolutionary daysevoke narratives of personal experiences, often considered by the informants as a collection of images engraved upon the individual memory, the remembering of the years that followed the Revolution depicts a general atmosphere of repression, when each individual remained alert to the possibility of reprisals. Othman* remembers well how the arbitrariness of violence was part of one's daily life: "If someone hates you, he just picks up a gun, that's it!" An atmosphere of generalized mistrust pervaded daily life, seriously undermining peaceful socio-racial relations.

Among former prisoners, the traumas of detention and torture have left their scars. Ngwali Usi, an escapee imprisoned in 1972 for ten years for having assisted another prisoner in escaping, described the terrible conditions during detention: "People came out in very bad shape. We were like animals. When a meal arrived, you ate like an animal." According to

Hussein*, who had been imprisoned from 1972 to 1978 between the ages of 23 and 29, the watchword was: “Little food, a lot of salt, no medicine.” The poor treatment and the torture finished off prisoners weakened by a lack of food and suffering from health problems induced by an over-consumption of salt. Some prisoners were tortured until they lost consciousness. Prisoners considered to be enemies of the state were treated with a particular cruelty. Hussein* tells how a former member of the Umma Party who survived his ordeals, was imprisoned after the assassination of Karume in 1972, and was chained hand and foot, day and night. He was repeatedly tortured. Hussein* recounts with admiration how the man never cried out or asked for mercy: “He never said, ‘Mother, my God, mercy!’ Not once.” And while Hussein* also recounted a scatological anecdote as proof that the prisoners nevertheless maintained a certain sense of humor during their ordeals,^{xi} the general impression communicated is that the years of detention were years of physical and moral suffering. The self-imposed exile endured by many prisoners freed under a presidential pardon in 1978 was perceived as a double trauma. Some left their families behind in Zanzibar, seeing them only during clandestine visits to the islands. Those claiming to be innocent of the crime with which they were charged are filled with bitterness. As Ngwali Usi testifies, his political involvement never bore the hoped-for fruits: “Why did they arrest me? I was so devoted! I regret this time because I didn’t receive the rewards I had hoped for.”

These fragmentary narratives of lived experiences bear witness to the fact that these memories are vivid and painful even today because the actors and witnesses of the Revolution and the authoritarian post-revolutionary years are still alive. The temporal proximity of these lived events and the traumatic nature of the violence suffered give rise to memories that are clandestine, individual, familial or collective, but that are nevertheless generally restricted to fellow victims when it comes to sharing them; these memories are not publicly declaimed. It is well known that rejection is a normal phase in the evolution of traumatic memories

(Ricoeur 2000). Victims tend to internalize their memories of traumatic events and thus block the possible pathways of their transmission. In this respect, the statements presented here agree with the claim that if memories of past events are narrated or shared between and among individuals of the same generation, they are rarely related to the children of the survivors. As for the oppressors, they are ageing peacefully, untroubled by any calls for repentance. However, in the case discussed here, this phase of rejection that is common to memories of violence worldwide must be understood in the specific context of an official injunction to silence by the Zanzibari state. The wall of silence erected against the production of either individual or collective narratives explains that, with few exceptions, it is not so much the survivors of the dark years who are the new producers of memories, but rather their children, who are today in their forties. The emergence from a phase of amnesia relating to the Revolution and the Karume years is the result of attempts by those who consider themselves the heirs of the victims of the repressive past of the Isles. Despite the fears and the silences, some fragments of a “truncated” (Rossi 2009) or “confused” memory (Deslaurier and Roger 2006: 9) have circulated from one generation to another and, in the contemporary context of greater freedom of political expression, have called up the traumatic past of the islands.

Aboud Nadhif Abdallah, arrested and disappeared since 1969

The weekly *Dira*, in its issue of July 18–24, 2003, published an article on the demands for compensation made by Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif regarding the disappearance of his father, Aboud Nadhif Abdallah, in 1969. The latter, who was arrested by the security forces that year, is still missing as neither his body nor the death certificate has been returned to the family. The article reprinted the letter, sent on January 14, 1982 by Aboud’s younger brother

to the then prosecuting attorney Augustino Ramadhani, requesting that the death of Aboud Nadhif Abdallah be officially recognized. The letter mentions two prior written requests to the Ministry of Home Affairs made by the family, one in February 1975, requesting that he be pardoned, the other in August 1981, requesting information on Aboud's whereabouts; neither received a reply. The response to the letter of 1982, received a year later on January 17, 1983, officially recognized the death and requested that the relevant authorities issue a death certificate to the family of the deceased. However, the certificate was never issued and Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif now intends to take legal action with a view to receiving financial compensation.

The *Dira* article presents Aboud Nadhif Abdallah's short biography and the story of his arrest. Aboud, originally from Makunduchi in the southeast of the island of Unguja, was Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Trade and Industry from 1964 to 1969. He was initially trained as a teacher at Beit el Ras, the only teacher-training college in Zanzibar at that time, and thereafter pursued his studies in Canada, Great Britain, the United States, and Yugoslavia. In January 1969, after serving five years in the Ministry, he was told to resign without any explanation. In March 1969, he received instructions to return to his post but he refused to comply until such time as he received an explanation for his dismissal. He was arrested at his property of Cheju, in the countryside, on April 30, 1969, and imprisoned without trial, leaving behind a wife and nine children.

When we met, his widow provided further details of his arrest. On April 30, 1969, she was in the fields with her husband. The children had been left in the care of their grandmother in Makunduchi, except the last-born who was still being breastfed. Aboud, needing some supplies, left his wife to go and get them in the neighboring village where he discovered that

Hassan Manderu himself, the head of state security was waiting for him. The latter asked Aboud to follow him, saying the order came directly from Karume. Manderu and Aboud knew each other, being neighbors in the quarter of Jang'ombe in Zanzibar Town where Aboud had his house. Manderu allowed Aboud to go and inform his wife. Aboud was aware that it was useless to attempt to flee or hide, so he cooperated and left in a car with Manderu. He was never seen again, and his family never had any further news of him. On several occasions, his wife went to the ASP headquarters in Kisiwandui to meet Karume on the days he received ordinary citizens to ask for mercy, but she was never received. Since the arrest, she claims not to have received her husband's pension and her children's rights to inheritance have not been recognized. She declares that Karume's assassination in 1972 was, for her, a sort of justice. She said she cried the day she read the article about her husband in *Dira* in 2003. When I asked if she talked about her missing husband, she replied without hesitation that she often spoke of him to her children and grandchildren. Her grandchildren's curiosity about the past was, according to her, the reason for the recounting of these family stories because, she told me, they unceasingly ask her why they have a grandmother but no grandfather.

On August 22, 2003, only one month after the publication of the article about Aboud Nadhif Abdallah in *Dira*, Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif sent a letter to the Attorney General of Zanzibar requesting information on the fate of his father. The reply, dated August 26, 2003, was definitive: "We are sorry to inform you that the Attorney General's office does not (i) deal with matters related to the security of the nation (ii) keep records of the disappeared." Although he was not surprised by this response, Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif was full of bitterness. As he underlined, his requests to the government were motivated by three reasons. Firstly, he explained, all Muslims wish to bury their dead and pay their respects. Secondly, he added that

he wished Zanzibaris to remember all the evil of the revolutionary years. Finally, it is obvious that the question of inheritance is a thorn in the side of the family, who, while not excessively poor, nevertheless wish to claim what is rightfully theirs.

Repentance and reparations

The detailed presentation of the story of Aboud Nadhif Abdallah and his family is important as it permits us to understand the various rationales that underlie the introduction into the public space of a family memory perpetuated by the principal witness to the event, in this case Aboud's wife. While he is strongly supported in his endeavors by his family, Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif is the main actor of this displacement of memory. On numerous occasions during the interview, he insisted that he dared to speak out, for he does not fear the state authorities. The imagined or real reprisals that the majority of the population has feared for years cannot silence him. To understand Ibrahim's determination, it must be pointed out that Aboud's family is known and respected among the old Zanzibari families of the city. Ibrahim, an active member of the opposition party, Civic United Front, ever since the introduction of political pluralism in 1992, twice stood for elections in 1995 and 2000. He has clearly taken a stand in opposition against the party in power. Furthermore, Ibrahim was well acquainted with Ali Nabwa, the late Chief Editor of *Dira*, and part of the team of journalists who had set up the newspaper at the end of 2002. Subsequently, he became an avid reader of *Dira* because of the issues it addressed, the political stances taken by the journalists, and the freedom of expression that the newspaper represented. When the newspaper began to publish articles that revisited the history of the Isles before and shortly after the Revolution, Ibrahim decided to ask *Dira* to publicize the story of his father and his family.

It is noteworthy that Ibrahim drew upon international precedents of this sort to justify his claims. He thus evokes, in the *Dira* article, the financial compensation paid to Jews in respect of the Nazis' crimes fifty years earlier, and the demands lodged by the actors, and their descendants, of the Mau-Mau uprising against the British colonial power in Kenya. He also refers to the claims of black Africans of South Africa for compensation or reparation for the injustice they suffered under apartheid and the apology offered by Japan to Korea for the atrocities committed during the period of Japanese occupation in the first half of the twentieth century. As such, in Zanzibar, the significance of the memories that emerged and that were maintained in, and transmitted through, close social networks can only be understood in the global context of the politics of memory and the claims for moral reparations. The various forms of private memory are made to flow consciously and deliberately into the globalized mold of demands for compensation and repentance in order to gain legitimacy. If the historical contexts of the examples mentioned by Aboud Nadhif to support his request are substantially different from the historical context of the case under consideration here, they nevertheless have in common the fact that "the present is seized as the moment to redress the injustices of the past" (Jewsiewicki 2004: 7). In other words, the requested compensation is aimed at reinstating the descendants of the disappeared or the murdered in the social and economic positions that they would not have lost had they not suffered prejudice.

However, such prosaic claims for financial compensation are, for Ibrahim, marked by a more general ethical perspective, one that goes beyond the scope of personal material compensation. Indeed, Ibrahim recalls that the ordeals suffered by his family constitute just one case among many. He insists that the publicization of his own case should be a way of reviving a collective memory that the elders tended to bury or that was transmitted only partially to the younger generations. Through the mediatization of the painful memories of his family,

Ibrahim, therefore, intends to act as the spokesperson of all Zanzibari families affected by the revolutionary and post-revolutionary violence in a country where there has yet to be a collective mobilization of memories. Ibrahim also insists that the state should publicly acknowledge its wrongs. It is, nevertheless, important to underline that Ibrahim's demand for public repentance does not seem to entail a demand for reconciliation at the national level. Ibrahim's assertion that it is essential to preserve the memories of the atrocities committed in the past rests upon prospects of vengeance. As we shall see now, demands for public recognition and repentance are non-dissociable from the deep tensions of the political life of the Isles, themselves inscribed in the conflicting representations of identity and of the nation that have beset Zanzibari society for decades.

The victims of the Karume years

In the article in *Dira*, a simple sentence reveals a major political gamble underlying the demands for repentance and reparations that Ibrahim has voiced: "If Aboud Nadhif's family succeeded in claiming their rights, this would open the door to numerous similar claims." In other words, if the government were to recognize the legitimacy of the demands made by Aboud's family, every family in Zanzibar who had suffered similarly might wish to bring forward their own cases. Beyond the swamping of the judicial system that such an initiative might imply, these claims would also disclose to the public sphere the truths of the past that successive Zanzibari governments have attempted to conceal or deny. In order to understand how such a move could destabilize the state, it is important to look at the identities and activities of other individuals who disappeared in the aftermath of the Revolution. In this respect, the names listed at the end of the *Dira* article are revealing: Muhammed Salum Barwani (alias Salum Jinja), Muhammed Humoud Barwani, Hamza Muhammed, Abdallah

Kassim Hanga, Mdungi Usi, Abdulaziz A.K. Twala, Idrissa Abdalla Majura, or Othman Shariff. All, including Aboud Nadhif Abdallah, were members of the intellectual elite who had been educated in the island's best schools (Dole, Euan Smith Madrassa, Saida Matuka, Saint Joseph, Beit el Ras). Most of them had pursued their studies abroad, some at Makerere University in Uganda, others in Great Britain, or in the communist countries in Europe, or in Egypt or Cuba, having benefited from the scholarships programme between Zanzibar and Marxist countries (Burgess 2005a). Upon their return to Zanzibar, they were granted posts in the government or in the public administration, holding positions of responsibility. All those who were judged dangerous by Karume and his clique because they had criticized a failed revolution that had changed into an authoritarian state, and who could have attempted to overthrow the men in power, were eliminated. Among them, the names of Abdallah Kassim Hanga, Othman Shariff, and Abdulaziz Twala stand out. Abdallah Kassim Hanga, who was educated in the UK and then in Moscow, became the Deputy General Secretary of the ASP and was appointed Vice-President of the Popular Republic of Zanzibar. Othman Shariff, an agricultural engineer by training who was a long-standing ASP member, became Minister of Education and Culture. Abdulaziz Twala, a member of the Revolutionary Council, was at the head of the Ministry of Finance. Karume managed to sideline these men by repeatedly shuffling them from one post to another within the Zanzibari government or by sending them to work for the Union government (Kassim Hanga held a number of different Union ministerial positions), or abroad (Othman Shariff served as Ambassador of Tanzania to Washington).

The first three names mentioned in the list printed in *Dira* are those of middle-ranking politicians arrested and put in jail in the months following the Revolution, and who therefore did not participate in Karume's government. According to some of their surviving cellmates,

these three men were killed and buried in a mass grave in the northern part of Unguja, today a military camp closed to civilians. The other missing individuals on the list were arrested and imprisoned in 1969 following accusations of plotting against Karume. The two alleged ringleaders^{xiii} of the plot, Kassim Hanga and Othman Shariff, who had finally left for exile a few years after the Revolution and sought refuge, the former in Guinea and the latter in the Iringa region in mainland Tanzania, were arrested, returned to Zanzibar, and executed: “There are gruesome stories of how Hanga was killed, some say by drowning, other by beheading. Whatever the truth, there can be little doubt of Karume’s tactics of physically eliminating his opponents while terrorising potential ones” (Shivji 2008: 113). Mdungi Usi, a founder and leader of the ASP, was arrested at home one evening in 1969. He was a former teacher and head of Zanzibar’s national radio station before being posted as a regional officer, and, finally, was employed at the municipality of Zanzibar, all in the space of three years. One of his sons recalls having twice visited him in prison before the family lost all contact with him. Mdungi Usi’s brother, Ngwali Usi, was arrested the same year. Although, in his words, he was less involved in politics than his brother, Ngwali thinks that he was accused of having helped Idrissa Abdalla Majura (the seventh name on *Dira’s* list) to flee, driving him to Kizimbazi in the south of the island, where he took a dhow to the Mainland. He ended up in prison along with his brother, Mdungi, and Aboud Abdalla Nadhif. One night, the three men and several other prisoners were removed from their cells by the guards. According to the rumors then circulating among the prisoners, they were all accused of having plotted against Karume after a cache of arms was discovered on Tumbatu Island. Ngwali Usi never saw his brother, Mdungi, or Aboud Abdalla Nadhif again. As for Idrissa Abdalla Majura, who had fled to the Mainland, he was eventually arrested and returned to Zanzibar to serve his sentence. He was imprisoned along with the former Minister of Finance, Abdulaziz Twala, who was said to have fallen from grace for having tried to limit the private use of public

funds.^{xiii} According to Ngwali Usi, the two men finally escaped from prison but were denounced by a friend whose help they had requested in their attempt to organize their secret departure. According to others, Majura and Twala were killed in 1971 in the notorious Ba Mkwe prison, where interrogations were carried out under torture.

The final wave of arrests and imprisonments is linked to Karume's assassination on April 7, 1972 at the ASP headquarters. The plot was planned and executed by former members of the Umma Party.^{xiv} Karume was shot dead by Lieutenant Hamoud, an army officer and a member of the Umma Party, who was also Ali Muhsin's nephew, and whose father had been killed in detention. All the former leaders of the Umma Party were arrested: Ali Sultan Issa, Abdulrahman Babu, Ahmed Badawi Quallatein, Khamis Abdulla Ameir, and Ali Mahfoudh (Chase 1976: 19–20). Even those who had been close to Karume, such as Ali Mahfoudh, were arrested (Shivji 2008: 105, 122). Sympathizers of the cause of the *makomredi*, such as Ali Nabwa, the late chief editor of *Dira*, and all those accused of being involved in Karume's assassination in one way or another were imprisoned. Although many suspects were released a few months later, those who remained in prison were accused of conspiracy and high treason during a show trial that lasted more than a year. They were sentenced to death or to various prison terms. Whether in 1964, 1969 or 1972, only leaders of international renown, such as Mohamed Shamte, Ali Muhsin, and Abdulrahman Babu, were not executed, although they were not spared prison and torture. Mohamed Shamte and Ali Muhsin spent ten years in prison. Abdulrahman Babu and Ali Mahfoudh, both initially sentenced to death, spent five years in prison before being forced into exile (Chase 1976: 30). The others were eliminated or remain mysteriously “missing.”^{xv}

Politicians were not the only victims of the repressive excesses of the Karume years, but ordinary people in the thousands were also affected. During the turbulent days of January 1964, and in the following weeks, arms circulated freely. Witnesses claim that many took advantage of the turmoil to settle old scores with neighbors or employers. Far from being based on a systematic and organized selection of those whom the revolutionaries considered to be foreigners (Arabs, Asians, and Comorians), the Revolution degenerated into uncontrollable forms of violence whose victims were of diverse origins and of all political persuasions. Rare is the family that claims no victims among its members, whether they were close relatives or members of the extended family. During the subsequent years, the nationalization of private property and the redistribution of land impoverished a large number of families, who saw only injustice. Consequently, membership of the category of “victim” of the Revolution and of the Karume regime is not restricted to political prisoners alone, but extends to a much wider group of people (al-Barwani et al. 2003). Zanzibari society itself could demand justice in the form of official apologies or material compensation. It is, therefore, hardly surprising to hear Ali Haji Pandu, the former Chief Magistrate of Zanzibar, who is remembered for having presided the treason trial that followed Karume’s assassination, say in our interview that the demands for compensation brought before the courts by the descendants of the disappeared of the Karume regime have, for the moment at least, little chance of success because a contemporary revival of the past in the present would stir the muddied waters of the post-revolutionary years.

The responses to the claims made for justice highlight the fact that the political victims of the Revolution and the Karume years are all members of a closely knit social network. Victims and oppressors, the survivors and the dead, both belong to the same social milieu. Their destinies do not simply intersect in the specific encounter between victim and oppressor,

whether it be episodic (arrest and torture) or ongoing (years of detention), but, on the contrary, have always been linked. At the moment of the Revolution, the population of Zanzibar Town was scarcely 50,000, composed of a number of extended families that maintained close social relations through networks of patronage and marriage. Professional activities and religious orientation overlaid these networks to delimit enclaves of mutual familiarity. The majority of testimonies underline how the Revolution divided and finally split these people who, as children and young adults, had played together in the different quarters of the town, studied in the same schools, and worked in the same spaces. Ngwali Usi recalls that Abeid Amani Karume and Mdungi Usi were neighbors who had grown up together in the Mwembetanga quarter. Salum* tells us that he went to school with Abdulaziz Twala. Most members of the Umma Party, such as Ali Sultan Issa and Ali Nabwa, met when they were involved in the Youth Own Union **that gathered the politically engaged Marxist vanguard youths** who saw themselves as a quite distinct historical group (Burgess 2005a, 2005b). If the silence about the events of the past has taken precedence over vocal accusations and calls for vengeance, it is as much a product of these close-knit networks of sociability linking individuals, families, and communities that constituted a socializing space occupied by the generation that lived through the Revolution and the Karume years.

Memories, political competition, and the media

The publicization of memories of the recent past is non-dissociable from the socio-political configuration that has taken place in Zanzibar since the early 1990s. The new context, characterized by the adoption of multi-partyism and increased efforts to democratize public debate, paved the way for a growing public dissemination of alternative representations of the past by the leaders of the new political parties. As a result of the reluctance of the

authorities in Zanzibar to adopt political pluralism, and of the strategies that they deployed to impede any change in power (Cameron 2002), the political disputes between the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), and the principal opposition party, the Civic United Front (CUF), provoked impassioned debates on the concepts of identity and citizenship, which were inevitably dependent upon previous nationalist imaginaries (Bakari 2001; Crozon 1991; Rawlence 2005). Ethnicity and race were the key points of reference. For the CCM, the binary pair of “African” and “Arab” that had structured the official racist discourse since the pre-independence period is repeatedly reactivated as a condition of access to power. Slavery, which constitutes a trope of the submission of the black African population on which the Arab edifice of the sultanate was founded, is in the firing line of these polarizing discourses. For the CUF the principal boundaries of belonging lie between Zanzibaris (*Wazanzibari*), without ethnic or racial distinction, and mainlanders, pejoratively called Tanganyikans (*Watanganyika*) or *Wazanzibara*, a play on the word *bara*, meaning “mainland.” The imaginaries of Zanzibari identity adopted by this party appeal to the island’s age-old culture, but are somewhat closed to the incorporation of new populations into the nation. The confrontation between these different conceptions of legitimate sovereignty is based on different interpretations of the socioeconomic and political organization of the sultanate, the overthrow of the first government of the islands in January 1964, and the violence of the Revolution and the Karume years. It also draws upon the motives for the Union between Zanzibar and Tanganyika and its impact, considered negative, upon the economic and social development of the islands (Peter and Othman 2006; Shivji 1990, 2008). In these disputes over representations of the islands’ past engaged in by the leading political actors, history and memory are resources to be exploited in the struggle for power.

Heirs to a confused memory marked by silences and by the unspoken, but interspersed with the

voices from the past and the experiences of their elders, the post-revolutionary generation in Zanzibar is not content with the official version of history that underpins state nationalism. The more educated of the descendants of the victims of the Revolution, today in their forties or fifties, attempt to tease out the true from the false in order to take an effective stance in public debates. This search for knowledge draws from critical historical works that reject state orthodoxy. Hence, the most recent publication from Professor Emeritus in Law, Issa Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism?* (2008), is cited in almost all conversations as an essential reference. Its publication was the occasion for a public launch in Zanzibar, at which the educated elite were present *en masse*. The critical literature, which proposes an alternative version to the official historiography, speaks to a widespread desire to know who the actors were and what the consequences of the Revolution and the subsequent years were. Copies of a volume by historian Thomas Burgess (2009), containing the biographies of the former revolutionary Ali Sultan Issa and the current First Vice-President of Zanzibar, Seif Sharif Hamad, were circulated and read widely. This book, which revisits the episodes of post-revolutionary violence through the life stories of these two men, was publicly launched in Stone Town in early July 2009 in the presence of the author. This was the occasion for the audience to discuss once again the significance of the events of the past and to identify the divisions that characterized contemporary Zanzibari society. The recent book by Harith Ghassany (2010), *Kwaheri Ukoloni Kwaheri Uhuru!* (Goodbye Freedom, Goodbye Colonialism!), has become a book of reference within nationalist circles. It is based on the personal testimonies of witnesses and actors of the Revolution, and is intended to reveal hidden facets of the event in order to assert the illegitimacy of the uprising, considered an illegitimate invasion of Mainland foreigners and the beginning of the colonization of the Isles by the Union state. Non-academic historical works (Kharusi 1967, 1969; Shahbal 2002), biographical narratives (Muhsin 1997; al-Barwani et al. 2003; Fairoz 1995), and politically

committed texts are also regularly cited in order to penetrate the significance of the multitude of historically obscure facts. Such texts, whether produced by amateurs or professionals, all contribute to the reinforcement of a historical and political consciousness.

However, among the generation born after the revolution, it is visibly the opposition, whether its members are tacit supporters or politically active, who are not simply interested in the pasts of their elders, but who also seek actively to resurrect and publicize a memory hitherto marginalized. In this respect, it is essential to appreciate the role played by the journalists of the weekly *Dira*, and to simultaneously understand the processes of reappropriation of this newspaper by the educated as well as by the less educated sections of the islands (Fouéré, forthcoming). *Dira* was edited by a small group of intellectuals, who were educated for the most part abroad, and who had already cut their teeth in journalism as well as, for some, in politics. The driving force of this newspaper was the Chief Editor, Ali Nabwa, a veteran of the Karume years and an outspoken supporter of the Umma Party. As he explained in his unpublished biography (Nabwa 2003), Ali Nabwa was a professional journalist of the official state newspaper in the 1970s and became the speechwriter for Omar Ali Juma, Chief Minister and later Vice-President of Zanzibar, at the end of the 1990s, after a brief sojourn in the Comoros, from where his family originated, and where he appears to have been implicated in a plot. All of *Dira's* journalists were free-speaking personalities, proclaiming loudly their Zanzibari nationalism. The weekly specialized in the publication of historical narratives dealing with the Revolution and the post-revolutionary years, revealing incidents that had hitherto remained absent from the public gaze. The journalists did not hesitate to criticize the government, also revealing recent corruption scandals among the political classes, lambasting the decline of public services and protesting against the seizure of property, private or public, by politicians. The articles that dealt with questions of Zanzibari identity clearly appealed to

the nationalist cultural imaginaries of a cosmopolitan and formerly sovereign nation.

This political imaginary is precisely that to which the opposition party, CUF, has long appealed in its effort to mobilize the population. This explains not only the popularity of *Dira* but also its portrayal as an instrument of the opposition. Although all former journalists underlined that the newspaper was not aligned with any specific political party, insisting that they only aimed to speak the truth, the government saw it as an instrument created to discredit politicians and to destabilize society. The publicization of memories long suppressed and the effort to rewrite national history ran against the official national narrative underpinning the legitimacy of the CCM and the state. Different ministers wrote to *Dira* requesting explanations for the stories published in its pages. It was barely a year before the paper was banned, in December 2003; the approaching 2005 election was undoubtedly one of the reasons behind this decision. For many CCM stalwarts, the name *Dira* conjures up demons of the past. Clearly identified as an opposition mouthpiece, *Dira* is, above all, criticized for having deliberately sought to reopen the wounds of the past, instead of letting the departed rest in peace and allowing Zanzibari society to look forward rather than to the past.

As was the case during the colonial period, today's Zanzibari intellectuals play a central role in the formulation and dissemination of concepts of identity, citizenship, and sovereignty (Glassman 2000, 2011). Learned individuals who have benefited from a certain quality of education and an environment favorable to critical reflection use the media to disseminate interpretations of the past that are aimed at contesting state nationalism. Taking advantage of the democratization of public discourse, and wishing to make their voices heard in the debates that have long been monopolized by members of the political parties, this critical

intelligentsia was a major force in the resurgence of anonymous memories of the 1964 Revolution and of the Karume period, and in the articulation of these memories within the imaginaries of the nation in Zanzibar.

The individual memories of the dark years of Zanzibar's history, undeniably linked to lived personal traumas, draw their references from the collective ideological discourses that articulate different conceptions of identity, citizenship, and sovereignty in Zanzibar. Far from being a spontaneous process, the surfacing of the traumatic past of the Isles and its growing diffusion through the public space are rendered possible by a new national historical configuration characterized by political freedom and an international context of claims to the right to memories of the past. The descendants of the victims of Zanzibar's authoritarian years constitute themselves as memory entrepreneurs by articulating fragments of memories transmitted by their parents, the available literature on the years 1964–1975, and their own interpretations of the contemporary political, social, and economic context of the Isles. Although recent attempts to introduce memories of the past in the public arena have temporarily been controlled by the state, there is every reason to believe that the international context of the reclaiming of memories has opened a breach for similar new initiatives to emerge and assert themselves.

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ⁱ The period from 1964 to 1975 corresponds to the years of authoritarian rule under President Abeid Amani Karume, until his assassination in 1972, and the first years under President Aboud Jumbe, which are still characterized by repression.

ⁱⁱ For detailed accounts of the Revolution and post-Revolution years, see the much-referred-to studies by Lofchie (1963, 1965), Martin (1978), and Clayton (1981).

ⁱⁱⁱ Earlier pogroms of people of Arab origins took place in June 1961, after tense elections during which the competing political parties engaged in a politics of racial hatred (Burgess 2010; Glassman 2011).

^{iv} The 1948 census indicates that 75.7 percent of the total population of Zanzibar were Africans (indigenous or from the Mainland), 16.9 percent Arabs, 6.1 percent Asians, 1.1 percent Comorians, and 0.1 percent Europeans (Lofchie 1965: 71). Such identity referents were administrative categories which did not reflect identity positioning by groups and individuals.

^v The “Committee of 14,” composed of the instigators and leaders of the Revolution, was the decision-making cell of the revolutionary council, created on January 31, 1964.

^{vi} The Preventive Detention Decree of 1964 gave Karume powers to detain any person who was suspected of putting the social order or the security of the state in danger (Shivji 2008: 60).

^{vii} Among many essays exploring this issue, see Lofchie (1965), Clayton (1981), Babu (1991), Sheriff and Ferguson (1991), Shivji (2008), and Sheriff (2008). For sound studies of the main interpretations of the Revolution, see Myers (2000), Loimeier (2006) and Burgess (2010).

^{viii} The original material presented in this article was collected during fieldwork carried out in 2008 and 2009. Given that speaking openly of the massacres, arrests, and disappearances that occurred during the dark years still raises suspicions, I initially focused my ethnography on several accounts of disappearances during the post-revolutionary period that appeared in 2003 in a now-banned weekly publication called *Dira*. Not only did I meet the former journalists of this polemical journal, but I also traced individuals who had engaged in a process of public evocation of their family histories in the pages of the newspaper. The journalists also introduced me to other witnesses, victims, or perpetrators of violence. As a result of the political sympathies of the former journalists of *Dira*, many of those with whom I spoke were supporters of, or members of, the opposition party, the *Civil United Front*. I also drew upon networks previously created not only with other actors from this period, but also with supporters or members of the party in power, the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi*. Finally, the present work is underpinned by informal relations, often of friendship, established over many months with different informants.

^{ix} The authoritarian nature of power has declined significantly since democratization in 1992. In informal discussions among family and friends, people speak more easily of a past that was formerly the object of silence and secrecy. In public places, talk of the coup d'état and the post-revolutionary period has become commonplace.

^x Names that have been anonymized are marked by an asterisk (*).

^{xi} One day, the prisoner in charge of slops for the dozen prisoners in the cell forgot the bucket in the prison courtyard. The prisoners asked the guard to bring it, or to let a prisoner go and fetch it, but he refused. Hussein* had no choice but to relieve himself in his plate. Thereafter, at each mealtime, the prisoners eyed their plates of cassava with disgust, each fearing that he had the soiled one. Hussein* was much amused by these fears, for he had, in fact, thrown the plate in question out of the cell's single small window.

^{xii} Historians agree that the accusations against Kassim Hanga and Othman Shariff were a strategy to get rid of Karume's two main political opponents (Prunier 1998: 110; Shivji 2008: 113; Crozon 1992).

^{xiii} According to Shivji (2008: 114, footnote 39): "Rumour has it that Twala fell out of favour with Karume because he resisted Karume's tendency to use funds from the state kitty. The lavish use of the state funds on the marriage festivities of Karume's first son was the last straw that broke the camel's back (sic)."

^{xiv} Shivji (2008: 121, footnote 62) states that Nyerere was informed of the preparation of the assassination attempt on Karume, and that Nyerere would have supported, if not planned, the assassination attempt in order to put an end to Karume's authoritarian regime. In the course of the treason trial, Nyerere was called "Mr. X."

^{xv} However, according to Bakari (2001: 109, footnote 29), President Aboud Jumbe acknowledged for the first time in 1975, in an interview, that politicians who mysteriously disappeared under Karume were dead: "They [Hanga, Othman Shariff, Twala, Muhammed Humud, Juma Maringo, Mdungi Ussi, Saleh Sadallah, Abdul Madhifu (sic)] have not vanished . . . They have paid the price of the revolution. They are dead, yes."