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► **To cite this version:**

Marie-Aude Fouéré. Recasting Julius Nyerere in Zanzibar: The Revolution, the Union and the Enemy of the Nation. Marie-Aude Fouéré. Remembering Julius Nyerere in Tanzania: History, Memory, Legacy, Mkuki Na Nyota Publishers, 2016, 9789987753260. halshs-01493032

HAL Id: halshs-01493032

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01493032>

Submitted on 12 Apr 2017

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VERSION BROUILLON PREFINAL

Recasting Julius Nyerere in Zanzibar: The Revolution, the Union and the Enemy of the Nation

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In Zanzibar, the figure of Julius Nyerere is being recast in debates over sovereignty, belonging and nationhood. Unlike mainland Tanzania, where he is upheld as the Father of the Nation, the first President of Tanganyika and Tanzania is increasingly portrayed in Zanzibar as the Enemy of the Nation responsible for the Isles' predicament. The article gives insight into the terms, actors and circulation of this pejorative narrative in relation to two central historical events: the 1964 Revolution and the Union. It also shows how such anti-Nyererism mediates anxious concerns over cultural distinctiveness and Islam.

Keywords: Nyerere, Nation, Zanzibar, Revolution, Union, Islam.

In present-day Zanzibar, the figure of the first president of Tanganyika (1961-1963) and Tanzania (1964-1985), Julius Kambarage Nyerere, is being recast in collective debates over sovereignty, belonging and nationhood.¹ Fiery discussions about Zanzibar's self-rule with their array of legalistic arguments about the Union, work migration and borders control, or Zanzibari cultural distinctiveness and civility increasingly conjure up the figure of Nyerere. His political role in the major events that have shaped the history of the archipelago since 1964, as well as his intentions and personal sentiments are being explored to speculate about the past and make sense of the present.

If there is no single historical narrative about Nyerere, but on the contrary intertwined stories which local historical debates passionately tangle and disentangle, the opinion that Nyerere is at the origin of Zanzibar's present-day predicament is a constant theme.² Unlike mainland Tanzania, where he is upheld as the Father of the Nation and made to embody political morality, Nyerere is in Zanzibar increasingly vilified for impoverishing and dividing the population along racial and religious lines through the control of its political elite. As one interlocutor put it during an informal discussion in a café of the capital city Stone Town, "Nyerere is by no means the Father of the Nation (*baba wa taifa*): he is the Enemy of the Nation (*adui wa taifa*)". Such negative rhetoric about the Enemy of the Nation has become increasingly widespread since democratization in the mid-1990s.³

This article aims to explain the production, dissemination and contemporary uses of this derogatory narrative of Nyerere in Zanzibari. In so doing, it will strive to entwine, in a single argumentation, the terms and tropes of this narrative, its actors and places of production, and its reception and appropriation. Concerning the terms and tropes of this narrative, critical views about Nyerere are especially expressed in relation to two central episodes in the history of the islands through which imaginings of the Zanzibari polity are being articulated today: the Revolution and the Union. Nyerere would have abetted if not masterminded the Revolution of January 1964; he would have engineered the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, which gave birth to the United Republic of Tanzania on 26 April 1964. Both events are cast as strategic means to deprive Zanzibar of its sovereignty, and destroy the economy, social fabric, cultural specificity, and religious integrity of the Isles.

As for the production and reception of this critical narrative, these categories should not be seen as reflecting impermeable moments or discrete constituencies of people but are partly entangled. Certainly, an array of materials through which such a narrative is being disseminated have been produced by individual authors since 1964 whose political convictions are known by their readership. Yet, the founding writings of these “homespun intellectuals”⁴ to borrow from Derek Peterson, or “amateur historians”, who each aimed at editing a single story of the role of Nyerere are themselves strongly multi-vocal and characterized by intertextuality. They are re-appropriated by their readers orally through countless mundane street-corner discussions, formal debates in public forums or fickle rumours, but also through the written with excerpts reprinted in newspapers or tracts, new publications, and Internet posting. New homegrown intellectuals concerned with their past, whether people of authority in the community or anonymous citizens, therefore enter the stage of this continuous debate over Nyerere, and from readers become producers. Using the language of everyday political discourses, they do not simply pass on this narrative in its original form, but reshape it, select certain aspects while ignoring others, and add to it other sources of knowledge such as family recounts, popular memories or street stories.

These local architects and brokers of history and memory operate a “compositional work”⁵ or assemblage of motifs to create a new product – a process which echoes the “work of narrative configuration” depicted by Paul Ricoeur when, discussing memory narrative, he asserts that “one can always narrate differently, by deleting, by shifting focuses of importance, by re-featuring differently the protagonists of the action at the same time as the contours of the action”⁶. In view of this ongoing “creative writing”,⁷ it is an illusion to pretend to fully disentangle production and reception. The researcher has to work with a composite or hybrid narrative made of multiple intertwined strands of collective memories, rumours, individual remembrance, memoirs and autobiographies, conspiracy theories, political and historical amateur essays, and academic works of history. These materials, both oral and print, sometimes visual, are not to be explored as mere “literary topoi”, but must be “anchored in the process of their production, in the orbits of connection that give them life and force” if one aims at producing a heuristic analysis⁸.

Such growing anti-Nyerere views must be explained by taking into account the specificity of the history of the Isles and their relation to mainland Tanzania. Although it will hint at some aspects of political economy and demographic history, this study situates within the framework of the history of ideas in contemporary Zanzibar. It therefore focuses on the circulation of vernacular historical knowledge and how such knowledge mirrors preoccupations typical of the time of its composition. Moreover, the objective of this article is not to assess the adequacy between critical discourses on Nyerere and historical reality, or to measure the veracity of the rewriting of history; it explores how such discourses operate in the present, or to put it differently, how they conceptualize the political space and aim to act upon it by opening a dialogue between the past and the present. How the negative narrative of Nyerere is deployed, in what circumstances is it used, what claims people make of it and how it contributes to defining certain conceptions of Zanzibariness consequently matters more than drawing the line between the historically veridical and the fictional.

It will be shown that the figure of Nyerere works as a negative “place of memory”⁹ mostly pioneered by the patriotic homegrown literati of the Isles and relayed through various political and cultural brokers. This is why we can define this negative narrative of Nyerere as a “politicized historical memory”:¹⁰ deployed in the political arena when its promoters seek to influence competition for power, it relates *in fine* to a sense of collective belonging, whether shared or contested, deeply anchored in specific representations of the past.

The Zanzibari exception in Tanzania

Unlike many African countries where fathers of the nation have been challenged or debunked, Tanzania still holds in high esteem its former President. In mainland Tanzania, *Mwalimu* (the teacher), as Nyerere was affectionately called, is upheld as a genuinely wise and well-intentioned political leader. Since he died on 14 October 1999, he has been set up on a pedestal, embodying an array of moral principles – humility, integrity and incorruptibility – variously mobilized by the state, politicians and ordinary citizens in contemporary political and social struggles. The repertoire of values which Tanzania's "Titan"¹¹ now symbolizes is appropriated to define and construct conceptions of political morality and Tanzanianness.¹² The prominent presence of the idealized figure of Nyerere in the public space does not entail, however, that there is no alternative perspective. Among such alternative narratives, one can find the derogatory rhetoric about Nyerere expressed in Zanzibar, which makes him a central figure albeit in a negative way.

Certainly, the full pervasiveness of this pejorative discourse of Nyerere should not be taken for granted. A brief sociological overview attests to the fact that several factors must be considered in order to understand in which specific circles or networks such derogatory statements are more likely to be heard, as well as variations in the tropes used to express it. Three main factors are underlined here: political affiliations, identity positioning, and religion. Firstly, party affiliations strongly matter, with a strong division between members of the former single party still in power under the name of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution, CCM), and the main opposition party in the islands, Civic United Front (CUF). Secondly, identity positioning, primarily cast along ethnic or racial lines, but also between people from Unguja and people from Pemba, also informs reception of the derogatory narrative about Nyerere. Such identity positioning only partly superimposes political loyalties. Thirdly, religious fervour can prompt adherence to this narrative, notably among Muslim activists committed to the propagation of Islam.

However, ethnographic materials derived from fieldwork conducted in different periods between 2008 and 2013 and within a large array of social groups testify that the mainland's iconic image of Nyerere is strongly opposed today not only among the urban Zanzibari activists of the opposition parties and their ordinary sympathizers but are increasingly heard among the many disappointed supporters of the ruling party, whether they continue to vote for this party or not. These opinions are widespread not only among the CUF intelligentsia but also within CCM, from the educated to the common man, and are expressed by journalists and independent intellectuals who claim their free speech and independence from any political party. In spite of the limitation of the research that targeted more town-dwellers than villagers, more CUF hard-line supporters than CCM partisans, more men than women, more educated than illiterate, we contend that the negative version originally pioneered by nationalist or separatist patriots has become if not fully ubiquitous, at least increasingly visible in the public space in contemporary Zanzibari society, thus leaving little room for the public expression of more positive statements. This construction has become a tool for political mobilization. Consequently, the figure of Nyerere is set in a discursive configuration whose understanding is inseparable from a political and social strategy. The politically committed Zanzibari community in diaspora, the educated of the opposition in Zanzibar and Muslim activists play a fundamental role in disseminating it.

It is notable that, in the portrayal of Nyerere as an Enemy of the Nation, the term 'nation' does not refer to Tanzania as a whole but to Zanzibar only, though the Isles are not sovereign. Since 26 April 1964, the date of the passing of the Treaty of the Union between the Republic of Tanganyika and the People's Republic of Zanzibar, Zanzibar has only had a semi-autonomous¹³ status within the United Republic of Tanzania. Yet such institutional

status has been highly controversial since the establishment of the Union on the ground of entangled arguments. These controversies refer to the two main conceptions of the nation, or nationalisms, in the islands: African nationalism and Zanzibari nationalism.¹⁴ By nationalism, we do not just mean state ideology or political mobilization by the state, but any dynamics, be they organized or spontaneous, elitist or popular, ordinary or extraordinary, which asserts the existence of a national entity imbued with a sense of collective belonging.¹⁵

Such nationalisms, expressed along political, cultural and racial lines, are strongly rooted in the long-term history of Zanzibar. In the 19th century, this island world was the centre a powerful commercial empire, under a Sultan, whose economy was mainly based on trade (spices, ivory, and slaves) throughout the Western Indian Ocean, and its creolized population the result of incessant migration from Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, India and the Indian Ocean islands. Today's grievances against the mainland, which the angry rhetoric against Nyerere mediates, owe to the present situation characterized by growing disenchantment in the face of unfulfilled promises of self-rule and economic development within the Union – a reality that appears even bitterer in the face of this revisited past golden age.¹⁶ The well-known and oft-repeated saying that “when the pipes are played on Zanzibar, all Africa east of the Lakes must dance” was heard again and again during fieldwork.¹⁷

Last, although Nyerere-bashing is mostly expressed in the realm of politics, it is backed up with arguments of a cultural order that, among others, target Nyerere's use of Swahili language. Supporters of the representation of Nyerere as an enemy of the Zanzibari nation often assert that Nyerere tortured Swahili because he did not speak Zanzibari Swahili, characterized by its Arab borrowings, but mainland Swahili.¹⁸ For instance, one interlocutor mentioned that Nyerere introduced words taken up from ethnic languages of the mainland. He declared that nobody had ever heard the term *kung'atuka* before Nyerere used it in 1985 to announce his withdrawal from office, saying “I am leaving (*ninang'atuka*) power but I still believe that without a strong CCM, our country will falter”.¹⁹ Because language is a marker of identity mobilized to define national belonging and citizenship, anti-Nyererism serves representations of coastal chauvinism and cultural distinctiveness promoted by the Isles' educated patriots, which resonates with “the geography of ethnic difference” built upon a religious and cultural paradigm that distinguishes between the civilized Muslim nobility of the Coast (*wastaarabu*) and the barbarian unbelievers of the mainland (*washenzi*).²⁰

Revisiting the 1964 Revolution

The historical episode recorded in state history and official discourses as the 1964 Revolution refers to the overthrow, on the night of 11-12 January 1964, of the constitutional monarchy of Zanzibar, just one month after it gained independence from the authorities of the British protectorate on 10 December 1963.²¹ During that night and in the following days, the insurgents committed significant violence against members of the ousted government, people of Arab origin and other groups considered alien and close to the political power, namely Indians and Comorians.²² The actual facts of this armed take-over are still an “enigma”²³ because of the authoritarian nature of the revolutionary regime.²⁴ Opponents and those recalcitrant to the new men in power, under the presidency of Abeid Amani Karume, were imprisoned or assassinated. Public freedom was harshly restricted, popular social spaces controlled, the flourishing pre-revolutionary press disappeared, and history as a subject banned in school. In other words, public channels of memory and history transmission were blocked. In this context of memories that were publicly silenced and therefore driven underground, making of the Revolution an open secret muted yet still privately discussed, the state imposed its own single historical version of events through pro-government publications or Swahili novels made required readings in secondary schools.²⁵

Firstly, according to this account, the said Revolution would have been sustained by a deep ideological conviction articulated by the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), the political party formed in the late 1950s that advocated for narrowly defined African nationalism imbued with racialism. Secondly, the Revolution was cast as a popular uprising supported by the Afro-Shirazi 'autochthones' of the Isles, demographically the majority.²⁶ Finally, the Revolution would have precipitated the overthrow of a tyrannical power supposedly in the hands of 'alien' Omani Arabs by Afro-Shirazis who would have been denied their right to sovereignty for centuries – hence its definition as “the logical outcome of centuries of oppression and subjection of the African people”²⁷. In this view, the 1963 monarchy was not a legitimate regime but the continuation of Omani power under the guise of legality. In this historical master-narrative, the independence of the islands is canonically referred to as “false independence” (*uhuru bandia*). The revolutionary regime built its legitimacy to rule on the Revolution credentials. Today, in CCM public meetings, the historical reference to the ‘Glorious’, ‘Sacred’ or ‘Great’ Revolution is still chanted as a slogan (*Mapinduzi! Revolution!*) to which the crowd responds in unison: *Daima!* (Forever!).

It is as a founding Zanzibari myth of the nation, however, that the Revolution is increasingly contested today. Although the CUF decries the decay of the post-revolution period and its corrupt politicians rather than the Revolution as a founding event, other minor political currents fully contest the legitimacy of the Revolution. Their contest is sustained by the selection of other significant historical moments attached to the past of the Isles.²⁸ Rather than the armed take-over of 1964, access to full sovereignty through independence from British rule and the establishment of an elected government in December 1963 is made the event of foundation of the Zanzibari nation. The adoption of a national flag bearing the image of a clove and the granting of a UN seat are held up as symbols of this internationally recognized sovereignty – whose visual archives are notably put online or on Facebook by activists.²⁹ Today's political commitment of separatist groups in Zanzibar is grounded on the idea that the Isles' independence is the product of a century of slow maturation, throughout the 19th century, of a body politic rooted in a clearly delimited island territory.

The nature of the authority of the pre-independence Sultanate is redefined accordingly. Far from being a foreign and colonizing power, the pre-revolutionary regime is granted the status of a legitimate autochthonous power. Culturally, Zanzibar, seen as the cradle of Swahili culture,³⁰ is defined as a cosmopolitan and mixed-blood society united by a single language, Swahili, and the practice of Islam.³¹ In short, Zanzibari nationalism is deployed in the face of African nationalism that animated the revolutionaries and whose traces still permeates today's official ideology. Such Zanzibari nationalism asserts itself on the basis of historical, political, cultural and religious references associated with a real or imagined Arabness from which today's Zanzibariness would be derived, and which is strongly permeated with the local deep-rooted “racial thought” developed on the Isles.³²

Nyerere, mastermind of the Revolution?

Contestation of the official history of the Revolution also resorts to the rereading of the role Nyerere played during the revolutionary event. Whether Nyerere knew about the armed coup d'état before it occurred remains debated in academic historiography. According to Issa Shivji, “it was not clear if the Tanganyikan leadership knew or was involved in any way. It is conceivable though that by Friday [one day before the overthrow] Hanga or Babu could have informed Kambona or Nyerere or both.”³³ However, individual testimonies on the actual involvement of Nyerere in the Revolution and consequent role in the Isles' loss of autonomy have circulated in a clandestine way in Zanzibar since 1964, which some academic publications make reference to.³⁴ The gradual diffusion of these testimonies in society was

operated through the many biographies, memoirs, political essays and rewriting of history produced by exiles of the Revolution settled in Europe or in the Arabian Peninsula, and circulated among the educated politicized Zanzibaris, notably among the opposition³⁵.

The latest work in this array of rewriting of history is a book by a Zanzibari scholar living abroad, Harith Ghassany, entitled *Kwaheri ukoloni, Kwaheri uhuru!* (Goodbye colonization, Goodbye independence!).³⁶ It supports the theory of the organisation of the Revolution by Nyerere and his right-hand man, Oscar Kambona. Written in Swahili, the book undeniably targeted a local audience and aimed at intervening in popular political debates.³⁷ It succeeded well in its objectives, being mentioned in most interviews conducted during fieldwork since its publication in July 2010, most specifically among CUF activists or sympathisers but also among the CCM elite – it was said that the then President, son of Abeid Amani Karume, had it by his bedside – whether to praise or decry it.³⁸ Presenting a collection of personal testimonies never put in print before, it made waves though its core argument is not fundamentally new, being in line with earlier nationalist writings mentioned above.³⁹ The author reveals, through the voice of eyewitnesses or actors of the insurrection, that Nyerere plotted the Revolution, sending his loyal henchmen to organize the mobilisation of sisal workers in Tanganyika, in Tanga region, for armed combat, with the help of some mainland immigrants settled in Zanzibar.⁴⁰ The book boldly makes a stand in the local historical battle: its title ironically suggests that the departure of the British rulers made way to a new colonizer, Tanganyika, reducing hopes for sovereignty to nothing.⁴¹

More recently, independent media also contributed to resurfacing silenced testimonies and disseminating this patriotic version of history. Among them, the first independent Zanzibari weekly newspaper since 1964, *Dira* (“vision” in Kiswahili), published in 2002-2003, was a key player.⁴² The article “Nyerere is not an angel” published in the first edition and written by the newspaper’s Chief Editor, Ali Mohamed Nabwa, was clearly intended to dismantle the idealised image of Nyerere upheld in mainland Tanzania (picture 1). The author depicts Nyerere as a condescending and disloyal politician who would have resorted to all sorts of intrigues to get to the top of the state. He would have regarded the Arabs of Zanzibar as a colonizing and enslaving power, hence as a power to be hunt down. According to the article, Nyerere masterminded the Revolution in order to impose, on the islands, the Black African culture of the mainland. In this version of history, the Revolution is nothing more than an “invasion”, at times even an “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide”. This echoes a terminology increasingly in use within nationalist circles in Zanzibar or abroad through which Nyerere is cast as the wily imperialist who extended his empire on Zanzibar, making it a colony to be exploited for the benefit of the mainland.

Nyerere, Colonizer of Zanzibar?

In the nationalist version of the history of Zanzibar that the anti-Nyerere rhetoric mediates, the first step of the control of the islands, the Revolution, was followed by a second step aimed at ensuring the total submission of Zanzibar: the establishment of the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar one hundred days after the Revolution. At that time, however, the Union was welcome by politicians and the population, for it was seen as a constitutional arrangement⁴³ that could ensure economic and social development in the Isles, as well as a symbol of pan-Africanist endeavours to foster regional unity. As reminded by Jonathon Glassman, “champions of the union in its current form like to depict it as a singular triumph of pan-African solidarity”. Yet, over the years, the island populations and the political elite have become increasingly angered by the encroachment of the Union in the internal affairs of Zanzibar, and its critics now “deny the significance of pan-African ideals and instead regard (the union) as the product of a cynical power play imposed by mainland

politicians”.⁴⁴ Today’s opponents of the Union or common people dissatisfied with its current state⁴⁵ harshly denunciate the political and economic marginalization of Zanzibar within the United Republic, often resorting to the terms “colonization” or “imperialism” to adamantly describe what they consider as the annexation of the Isles by ex-Tanganyika.

More than any other books, Ali Muhsin’s memoirs, *Conflict and Harmony in Zanzibar*, was repeatedly mentioned during interviews with the literati of the opposition. This author, who was the “de facto leader”⁴⁶ of the 1963 December government, condemns the appalling destruction of Zanzibar both by the revolutionary leaders who “stooped lowest to rob their subject”, making Zanzibar “the laughing stock of the world”,⁴⁷ and by mainland politicians. Nyerere is made responsible for most evils, being even compared to the dictator Hitler: “Nyerere has destroyed everything that he has ever handled. Hitler built then destroyed everything by his mania. But this man [Nyerere] is worse. (...) He has destroyed Zanzibar and all its fine orchards and plantation of clove trees and coconut palms (...)”.⁴⁸ Nyerere’s famous statement about Zanzibar, “If I could tow that island out into the middle of the Indian Ocean, I’ll do it”⁴⁹ came up again and again during my research to support the argument that Ali Muhsin’s opinion was undeniably right.⁵⁰

In this perspective, the history of the Union is again re-read in the light of the role played by its main protagonists, the President of Tanganyika and the President of Zanzibar. Nyerere and Karume, being featured through their relational but opposed positioning, respectively embody Tanganyikan imperialism and Zanzibari nationalism. The wrongs of Nyerere would have been to impose the Union onto Karume by force and by guile. The latter, who had established his power through force and fear until his assassination in 1972, is described as a politician who, though he was a charismatic public speaker, was poorly competent on institutional, legal and administrative issues. A former rugged seaman who had travelled a lot, he was indeed barely educated and ill at ease with English. He feared the local educated employed in his government and public administration, considered capable of formulating well-argued critiques or organizing his overthrow.⁵¹ Seen as political rivals, many among the Zanzibari intelligentsia were eliminated or forced into exile between 1964 and 1972, for he had “no mercy for his enemies”.⁵²

However, because of his supposedly reluctance to sign the Union Treaty⁵³ and efforts to increase the autonomy of Zanzibar during the entire period of his reign, Karume is increasingly upheld as symbol of resistance to what is presented as the insidious annexation of the Isles, as well as for his grand vision for Zanzibar’s social and economic development. As Issa Shivji asserts, “official historiography repeats ad nauseam that Karume was a Union enthusiast. Nothing could be further from the truth. If there is one thing that Zanzibaris venerate Karume for, in spite of his despotic rule, it is Karume’s Zanzibariness and his dogged resistance to get integrated into the Union and loose Zanzibari autonomy.”⁵⁴ My interlocutors repeated at will the phrase attributed to Karume that “the Union is like a coat, if it’s too tight you can take it off” in order to underscore Karume’s contempt for the Union. The other oft-repeated famous line by Karume that “the Arusha Declaration stops at Chumbe”, an island at the entry of Zanzibar Town, also points to Karume’s resistance to adopt the path of socialist development followed in the mainland.⁵⁵ (picture 2)

Interestingly, Karume’s foreign origin, his defence of parochial Africanness as opposed to Zanzibar’s cosmopolitan dhow culture, his absence in the night of the Revolution, his authoritarianism and arbitrary power, the deprivation caused by the ban on food imports into the Isles from the late 1960s, the racist invectives that he held against so-called foreigners such as the Asians and Comorians, and finally his lifestyle in conflict with Muslim precepts⁵⁶ – in short, a whole set of elements that are summoned in today’s popular discussions – are glossed over when the passing of the Union is debated. Karume is then portrayed as Nyerere’s helpless victim. When the assassination of Karume is recalled,⁵⁷ it is

much less to remind that it hastened the end of a regime in which “political thuggery was a virtue”⁵⁸ than to assert that Nyerere was the one who had armed Karume’s murderers. It is said that Karume was, at that time, on the point of severing the Union.⁵⁹ Karume’s violence and lawlessness, denounced internationally, also constituted a real burden on Nyerere, as such attitudes were detrimental to the image of Tanzania on the international scene⁶⁰. Last, it is often recalled, in the talks and debates of the patriotic intellectuals, that Nyerere was mentioned under the nickname of “Mister X” in the trial of the alleged conspirators of the assassination of Karume.⁶¹ Undeniably, Nyerere is castigated as the ultimate instigator of this crime and once again portrayed as a shrewd manipulator.

Ending “Nyerere’s dictatorship”

Current public discussions on the revision of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania – a process launched after the last general elections of October 2010 – illustrates the pervasiveness of these negative tropes about Nyerere and their use in the political realm. This recent phase of political turmoil actually started in the lead-up to last election, when, in August 2010, the House of Representatives amended the Constitution of Zanzibar and adopted the principle of power sharing between the elected party and the opposition, which was to be applied after the elections.⁶² This coalition government was expected to end fifteen years of tensions between CCM and CUF.⁶³ The amendment was also a first symbolic step towards greater autonomy for the Isles because it included the principle that the Isles were a *nchi*, a Swahili word meaning ‘country’ but also ‘homeland’ or ‘nation.’

The outraged reactions from the mainland revealed that these constitutional changes were seen as a major threat to the integrity of Tanzania. Several political or legal organizations of the mainland as well as independent lawyers spoke out, saying that such amendments needed to be in accordance to the Constitution of Tanzania. They feared that this thinly veiled claim to sovereignty might lead to the dismantling of Tanzania. In this mainland outcry, the demand for increased autonomy by Zanzibar was vilified as an attack on the memory of the Father of the Nation and a betrayal of the legacy of unity and peace he had left to the country. Nyerere’s well-known political speeches on unity and against parochialism, especially with regards to Zanzibar, were again quoted, reprinted and broadcast to champion the respect of the Union.

Public debates organized in Zanzibar since 2011 also resonated with deep-rooted anti-Nyererism. Various Zanzibari institutions gathered to launch such public gatherings with the declared aim of countervailing the usual technocratic monopoly on legal and institutional issues. During the months of February and March 2011, the research institute ZIORI (Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute) in partnership with legal organisations (ZLSC, Zanzibar and ZLS Law Services Centre, Zanzibar Law Society) and Muslim organisations such as JUMIKI, commonly referred as Uamsho (*Jumuiya ya Uamsho na Mihadhara ya Kiislamu*, the Association for the Awakening and Propagation of Islam) and JUMAZA (*Jumuiya ya Maimamu Zanzibar*, the Association of Imams in Zanzibar) held several meetings, under the umbrella of BAKAZA (Baraza la Katiba Zanzibar, the Zanzibar Constitution Council). Started with speeches by well-known professionals and academics who discussed the legal dimension of the revision of the constitution, they were an opportunity for the public to make their voice heard. The audience was largely made up of active homespun patriotic intellectuals, readers of the nationalist texts discussed above. Legalistic arguments were relentlessly summoned to remind that the original document of the Union Treaty, which needed to be signed by both parties to be valid, does not exist or that Karume did not sign it. It was also recalled that the agreement was validated neither by members of the government nor by the then Attorney General Wolfgang Dourado. Most of

the views expressed revisited the history of the formation of the Union by putting a significant emphasis on the manipulation of Karume by Nyerere and Nyerere's animus towards Zanzibar.

During a meeting held on 5 March 2011, a journalist, former sympathizer of the Marxist party Umma Party and also a former team member of the weekly newspaper *Dira*, took the mike saying how the Union was the result of a secret agreement between two men only, Presidents Nyerere and Karume, which was held against the great political figures of the Zanzibar Government of 1964, even less approved by the people of Zanzibar: "What I would like to say here is that, that day [of the Union] I was with the late Abdallah Kassim Hanga. And for your information, that day, the Vice President of Zanzibar, Kassim Abdallah Hanga, was not aware of this Union. (...) I spoke with Abdulrahman Babu more than a dozen times, and he said that in all the recommendations on the making of the Union, he and other ministers were not involved".⁶⁴ The presumption of a conspiracy organised by Nyerere and assertions that Karume was an incompetent leader clearly sustained claims for a popular debate over the revision of the Union Treaty and the Constitution.

In another meeting, held on 9 April 2011 by the government of the islands and intended to collect citizens' views on an initial version of a draft text of the new Constitution, the atmosphere was charged and the crowd chanted in unison "We do not want the Union", before the leader of JUMAZA ripped the draft stating that the "dictatorship of Nyerere" (*udikteta wa Nyerere*) was over. Stone Town's *sbaraza*⁶⁵ echoed these heated constitutional debates, especially among CUF sympathizers. As a middle-aged Zanzibari employed in an educational NGO declared to me a few days later while we were sipping a coffee in the CUF stronghold of Jaws Corner, "that is exactly what was needed to be said: this is the end of Nyerere's dictatorship, which has deprived us of our rights since 1964". Zanzibari nationalism, even separatism, unquestionably feeds into the disrepute of Nyerere, the latter being turned into a scapegoat in the long series of social, political and religious ills faced by the islands since independence.

Since the beginning of 2012, not only the radicalization of JUMIKI/Uamsho's political stand with regard to the Union, but its increasing visibility and popularity among both the urban and rural populations clearly revealed how much the association between Nyerere, as a negative political figure, and the fight for sovereignty in the Isles has become part of Zanzibari common sense. In one of their earliest public sermons of 2012 in the suburbs of Zanzibar Town, Uamsho's leaders declared their political agenda, saying: "The path is very long to claim for the independence of our country. We need patience and cooperation so as to ensure that our islands will be free. The decision is ours, Muslims."⁶⁶ The "colonization" which they claim to be fighting for the sake of sovereignty both resonates, in their political discourses, with what they see as the destructive politics of Nyerere and his heirs, and the subsequent increasing presence of mainlanders, accused of "invading" the islands.⁶⁷ Today's use of anti-Nyererism in the realm of patriotic activism clearly mediates anxious concerns about cultural distinctiveness and religious integrity in Zanzibar.

Nyerere's Crusade against Islam?

Strict political determinants are undeniably discussed by Zanzibaris when they explore the role that Nyerere played during the year 1964. The context of the Cold War, during which Americans feared that Zanzibar might become the "Cuba of Africa,"⁶⁸ is thus often recalled to highlight how the influence of the international superpowers was central in Nyerere's decision to establish the Union. However, it is striking that, in the anti-Nyerere rhetoric, the decisions taken at that time by the Head of the State are not simply regarded as political tactics aimed at, for instance, controlling political opposition, muzzling collective

protest or retaining power, but are said to be rooted in prejudices and feelings deeply anchored in Nyerere's heart.

Such accounts assert that as a devout Catholic,⁶⁹ Nyerere would have hated Islam; as a native of mainland Africa, he is castigated for his Arab-bashing related to Arabs' participation in the slave trade and slavery. Nyerere's objective in pushing the Union is said to be to impose a mainland African regime in the Isles but, even more, to fully destroy an economy of transnational trading networks and a culture too Arabicized for his liking based on endless discrimination against the Africans. Thus, Nyerere's role in the history of the islands is, today, questioned along the lines of his supposed hostility to Arabs and, in extension, to Islam. It does so by drawing upon personal anecdotes, putting the emphasis on some of Nyerere's words that might raise suspicion, and resorting to the scientific backing of academic literature on religious preference and discrimination during Nyerere regime. A book by the Catholic father John Sivalo about Christian-Muslims relations and the Tanzanian state is recurrently used as a reference to support this angry Muslim rhetoric⁷⁰. As reminded by Frederick Ludwig, this publication "has often been referred to as supporting the thesis of the suppressors of Islam (in Tanzania), though this was probably not the intention of the author and publisher".⁷¹

The idea that Nyerere was animated by his hostility to Islam gained momentum in 1998 with the publication *The Life and Times of Abdulwahid Sykes: The Untold Story of the Muslim Struggle against British Colonialism in Tanganyika* by Mohamed Said.⁷² In this polemical essay, the author revisits the history of nationalism in Tanganyika to capture the essential contribution, yet erased from official history, of a circle of educated Muslims in Dar es Salaam led by the Sykes family.⁷³ He brings to light how these Muslim townsmen, who were founders of the first nationalist organisation, took Nyerere to the summit of power, for he was then perceived as "a highly educated person with admirable debating skills".⁷⁴ The book depicts how a conspiracy against Islam was set in motion after Nyerere turned against those who co-opted him to favour his fellow Christian politicians.

The theme of Nyerere's animus towards Islam also gained visibility following the growing expression of politicized Islam in the media.⁷⁵ The press has been a key player in such politically active Islam. Excerpts of Mohamed Said's and Harith Ghassany's works are often reprinted in the pages of the weekly newspaper *An-Nuur*, thus giving increased visibility to the Muslim question in the public space (picture 3). During and after the 2010 election, *An-Nuur* provided wide coverage of a set of declarations by Muslims of the mainland against what is referred to as the "Christian system" (*mfumo wa Ukristo*), accused of dominating Tanzania and discriminating the country's Muslims. It recurrently resorted to terms such as contempt (*dharau, uonevu*), discrimination (*ubaguzi*), humiliation (*dhulma*), hatred (*chuki*) or religious bias (*udini*) to describe this Christian system. In such politicized Islam, Nyerere embodies anti-Islam almost single-handedly. Given that in Muslim activism, religious affiliation is equated with national identity, Nyerere is portrayed simultaneously as an enemy of Islam and of the Zanzibari nation.

True, there were times when *An-Nuur* quoted Nyerere's words in positive terms, for example, when it recalled his discourses on the necessity of the struggle against colonial oppression. In its edition of 18-20 January 2011, for instance, an article cited Nyerere's "words of wisdom" according to which "the oppressed, if he does not fight his oppressor, will continue to suffer while his oppressor lives comfortably and peacefully"⁷⁶ to justify that Muslims, identified with the figure of the humiliated and the oppressed, may fight their Christian oppressors. But more than often, it is as a destroyer of Islam and the main actor, with the support of the Catholic Church of Tanzania, of the establishment of "strategies to ensure the preferential treatment of Christians and discrimination of Muslims"⁷⁷ that Nyerere is vilified in such anti-Christian rhetoric of conspiracy. In this politicized Islamic discourse,

the canonization process of Nyerere launched by the Catholic Church of Tanzania since 2006 is interpreted as the reward of the advantages Nyerere granted to the Church in his lifetime and his fight against the power and spread of Islam.⁷⁸ Today's canonization process is therefore perceived as proof of the existence of the said Christian preferential system.

The 1964 Revolution, which constitutes for the power in place the founding myth of the Zanzibari nation but rather embodies, for various nationalist movements, the beginning of a new era of colonization of the Isles, has fuelled polarized imaginaries of national identity that no collective consensus has yet pacified. Together with the Union, remembered as the final step in Zanzibar's loss of sovereignty, it constitutes a collective "chosen trauma"⁷⁹ incessantly placed at the basis of conceptions of identity, citizenship and nationhood. Among patriotic homegrown intellectuals committed to the Isles' increased autonomy, if not independence, Nyerere-bashing is increasingly mediating local conceptions of Zanzibariness. Although grievances against Nyerere's destructive politics are varied and can be expressed in different ways according to the people, moments and objectives of their mobilisation, the views that Nyerere was the Enemy of the Nation have become a widespread political discourse which is used to negatively define who is a Zanzibari, and to claim for change in the institutional status of the Isles.

From the partisan vantage point of these patriotic homespun historians, Nyerere is broadly cast in the reversed traits of the idealized Zanzibari: he is the invader who came from mainland Africa as opposed to a maritime civilization open to distant horizons; the Christian hateful of Arabs and Muslims in a society that celebrates Arabness and Islam; the ignorant from the African bush as opposed to the island Swahili and Arab highly educated scholars. In this highly pejorative narrative deployed within nationalist circles, victimisation is a manifest and operates at different levels: naïve Karume is the victim of cunning Nyerere; the Muslims are the victims of a Christian conspiracy hatched against them; the Arabs are the victims of the bloodthirsty passions of African assassins; and finally the islands of Zanzibar are the victims of the neo-colonial appetites of mainland Tanzania. Given the memory trajectory of Nyerere in mainland Tanzania, characterised by a constant increase in official deference, Zanzibari growing anti-Nyererism variously fuelled by patriotic discourses therefore stands as an exception.

Certainly, one can still hear respondents admit that Nyerere's influence was beneficial to mainland Tanzania, evoking the formation of a sense of collective belonging on which the cohesion and unity of the people of the mainland would be built today. This sense of belonging is seen as the product of the spread of Swahili and the weakening of ethnic distinctions in former Tanganyika. In other words, the major themes underlying the official public memory of Nyerere as disseminated in mainland Tanzania are acknowledged by some Zanzibari critics of Nyerere. Yet they do so only when these themes are applied to the population of mainland Tanzania, not of Zanzibar. In other words, in Zanzibar, the figure of Nyerere can combine the attributes of a *baba wa taifa* with those of an *adui wa taifa* because the term *taifa* refers, in each phrase, to two separate entities: mainland Tanzania on the one hand; Zanzibar in the other.⁸⁰ On islands where the official narrative of the nation is not fully shared, the figure of Nyerere works as a negative "place of memory" from which the patriotic literati can pioneer contemporary conceptions of belonging and nationhood.

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¹ I presented a first version of this paper at the conference "Citizenship, Belonging & Political Community in Africa" organized on 11-12 July 2012 at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA), Nairobi, Kenya by Emma Hunter from the Centre of African Studies of the University of Cambridge. Many comments and questions made that day have been useful when revising this paper. My deep thanks also go to the two reviewers of the journal for their challenging comments. Last, I am indebted to the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) for its continuous support since 2010.

² Harding, "Nyerere in Neuem Licht".

³ Popular perceptions of Nyerere and the Union have varied over the years. Rather positive in the 1960s, a shift occurred in the 1970s when promises of social and economic development failed to materialize. See for instance Glassman, *War of Words*, 292-293.

⁴ Peterson, *Creative Writing*.

⁵ Peterson, *Creative Writing*.

⁶ Ricoeur, *La mémoire*, 579 (my translation).

⁷ Peterson, *Creative Writing*.

⁸ Comaroff & Comaroff, "Ethnography", 34.

⁹ Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*.

¹⁰ Werbner, "Beyond Oblivion."

¹¹ Mazrui, "The Titan" of Tanzania.

¹² Askew, "Sung and Unsung", Becker, "Remembering Nyerere", Chachage & Cassam, "Africa's Liberation", Fouéré "Julius Nyerere" and Fouéré, "Tanzanie."

¹³ The islands have a government and a House of Representatives in charge of internal affairs.

¹⁴ See Glassman, *War of Words*. Today's nationalisms however only partially meet past trends described by Glassman, which he refers to as "African nationalism" and "civilizational nationalism".

¹⁵ The idea of the nation as understood in Zanzibar since at least the 1950s combines a territory of defined boundaries, a sovereign polity and a common culture. This resonates with the definition of nationalism by authors such as Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*.

¹⁶ Bissell, “Engaging Colonial Nostalgia.”

¹⁷ Quoted in Smith, *Nyerere of Tanzania*, 90. A simplified version is more commonly in use: “When the pipes play at Zanzibar, they dance at the lakes.”

¹⁸ Contrary to this view, many publications present Nyerere as a promoter of Swahili for the purpose of nation building but also because he was himself a lover of this language. For instance, Nyerere translated two plays of Shakespeare into Swahili, *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*. He also worked on the translation of the Gospels. He wrote his political writings and gave all his public political discourse in Swahili.

¹⁹ ‘*Ninang ’atuka lakini ninaendelea kuamini bila CCM imara nchi yetu itayumba*’. The term *kung’atuka* made a lasting impression because it is constantly used by the CCM when asserting that it should remain the political keystone of Tanzania.

²⁰ Glassman, *War of Words*, 34-39.

²¹ In this constitutional monarchy, inspired by the British system, the Sultan was the head of State but his powers were mostly honorific and advisory.

²² The last census before the Revolution, in 1948, gives the racial distribution of the population, counting 264,059 inhabitants: 16.9% Arabs, 5.8% Indians, 1.1% Comorians, and 75.7% Africans (24% from the mainland; 74% native). See Lofchie, *Zanzibar*, 71.

²³ Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*, 62. As stated by the historian Jonathon Glassman, “the full story of the revolution has still to be written” (*War of Words*, 284).

²⁴ Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution*; Martin, *Zanzibar*.

²⁵ Myers, “Narrative Representations”.

²⁶ Populations identified as ‘Shirazi’ claim their ancestors came from the city of Shiraz in Iran. They were the targets of attacks by Karume who did not regard them as “African”. In the early 1970s, they were required to publicly reject their identity. See Amory, “The Politics of Identity.”

²⁷ Mapuri, *The 1964 Revolution*, 1.

²⁸ As stated earlier, the political proponents of a contested version of the great national narrative are numerous. This explains why only certain elements of this version are highlighted according to the interlocutors interviewed.

²⁹ These visual archives are, among others, footage of the ceremony of independence on 10th December 1963, the Zanzibari delegation to the UN, photographs of the national flag, etc.

³⁰ On the varying definitions of Swahili identity, see Caplan, “But the Coast.”

³¹ The possession of these linguistic and religious attributes defines the entry into civilisation (*ustaarabu*), and distinguishes the civilised/educated (*waungwana*) from the unbelieving and illiterate savages (*washenzi*). Former strategies of reclassification, with regard to these cultural, linguistic and religious markers, reflect the influence of this high culture on the definition of Zanzibari-ness. See Fair, *Pastimes*.

³² Glassman, *War of Words*. On the different narratives about the Revolution, see also Myers, “Narrative Representations” and Loimeier, “Memories of Revolution”.

³³ Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*, 46. Kassim Abdallah Hanga, an ASP uncompromising leftist intellectual, became the Vice President of Zanzibar after the Revolution. Mohamed Abdulrahman Babu, leader of the Marxist Umma Party, was made Zanzibar Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Oscar Kambona was, in 1964, the Tanganyika Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defence and the confidant of Nyerere.

³⁴ See for instance Bakari, *The Democratization Process*, 104, 105: “a group of plotters was apparently working with the support of Tanganyika”; “some unconfirmed sources suspected that the uprising had been well planned from the mainland”.

³⁵ See Babakerim, *The Aftermath*; Fairouz, *Ukweli ni huu*; Muhsin, *Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar*.

³⁶ Ghassany, *Kwaheri Ukoloni*.

³⁷ Ghassany, *Kwaheri Ukoloni*, xiv: “(...) *kitabu hichi kimeandikwa kwa lugha ya Kiswahili ili watumiaji wa lugha hiyo waweze kufahamu namna gani historia ya Zanzibar ilivyopotoshwa na wachangiye kujenga harakati mpya (...)*” (this book is written in Swahili language so that the users of this language may understand how much the history of Zanzibar was distorted, and contribute to building a new movement).

³⁸ The few books that were put on sale in Zanzibar were sold out in a few days in July 2010. They circulated from hand to hand (personal communication).

³⁹ If the book presents itself as academic historiography, the veracity of the collected testimonies is disputed within academia but also among the educated population of the Isles.

⁴⁰ Ghassany, *Kwaheri Ukoloni*. See for instance p.65: “*Nyerere ndie alokuwa akifanya organisation (mipango) yote na kuweza kuwafanya watu wapinduwe serikali ya Zanzibar. Yeye Nyerere*” (It was Nyerere who did all the organisation and made it possible for people to overthrow the government of Zanzibar. Nyerere himself”). See also testimonies in chapters 5 and 6.

⁴¹ In a similar vein, see also the book by Nasser Abdulla Al Riyami, an Omani of Zanzibar origin, recently translated into English (2012), that cast the Revolution as an “invasion”, notably p. 147-148.

⁴²*Dirawas* banned by the state in 2003, one year only after it was launched, because the newspaper was resurfacing alternative memories of the Revolution and produced counter-narratives of state history considered a threat to civil order. For more details, see Fouéré, “Reinterpreting revolutionary Zanzibar”.

⁴³Zanzibar retains an independent government but cedes to the Union sovereign affairs such as the police, the defence, the interior, foreign affairs and customs.

⁴⁴Glassman, *War of Words*, 292-294.

⁴⁵Othman & Peter, *Zanzibar and the Union Question*; Rawlence, “Briefing.”

⁴⁶Glassman, *War of Words*, 6.

⁴⁷Muhsin, *Conflicts and Harmony*, 282.

⁴⁸Muhsin, *Conflicts and Harmony*, 162.

⁴⁹Smith, *Nyerere of Tanzania*.

⁵⁰In this regard, another biography in mainland Tanzania is also frequently mentioned, *The Dark Side of Nyerere* by Ludovick Mwijage. This text about the author’s persecution and imprisonment is often cited to support the theory that Nyerere schemed and assassinated to get rid of any form of protest, whether in Zanzibar or on the mainland.

⁵¹See Martin, *Zanzibar*.

⁵²Quoted in Myers, *Verandah*, 117.

⁵³However, Haroub Othman (“The Union”, 173) says that “according to Nyerere, Karume immediately agreed to the idea (of a union) and suggested that Nyerere should be the president of such a nation”.

⁵⁴Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*, 123–124.

⁵⁵The Arusha Declaration of 1967 established African socialism, or Ujamaa, as a development path for Tanzania based on the communitarianisation of the labour force, collectivisation of the means of production, nationalisation of enterprises and establishment of free public services. Zanzibar followed a somehow different path: the left-leaning social and economic grand vision embraced by Karume was implemented in agriculture, education, housing and health but was only partially accomplished and suffered from authoritarian power.

⁵⁶For a depiction of Karume lifestyle and personality, see notably Burgess, “Karume the Terrible.”

⁵⁷Karume was assassinated at the ASP headquarters on 7 April 1972.

⁵⁸Othman “The Union”, 175.

⁵⁹See Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*, 123 and Chachage, *Environment, Aid and Politics*.

⁶⁰The case of forced marriages between members of the government and young Arab girls was highly publicised internationally (Martin, *Zanzibar*, 69–71 and Burgess, *Race, Revolution*, 205). Amnesty International also mobilised to demand the release of political prisoners and to protest against the use of torture in prisons.

⁶¹Chase, “The Zanzibar Treason Trial.”

⁶²Bakari & Makulilo, “Beyond polarity”; Matheson, “Maridhiano”; Fouéré, “Chronique”.

⁶³Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992, all elections took place in a deleterious environment. Electoral fraud culminated in police and military violence, which, in 2001 and 2005, caused between 30 and 60 deaths and hundreds of injured. See Rawlence, “Briefing.”

⁶⁴05/03/2011, Ecrotanal building, my translation from my recording of the meeting.

⁶⁵*Baraza* are stone benches built along the outside walls of houses, where people like to sit and chat. The term metonymically refers to places of daily sociability. See Loimeier, “Sit Local”.

⁶⁶04/03/2012, Kibanda Maiti, my translation from my recording of the public sermon.

⁶⁷See their recent pamphlet, *Mipango ya Kuritadisha Zanzibar*, distributed during their 2012 public sermons. Fears of uncontrolled immigration and mainland secret agenda of invasion feature in Uamsho’s discourse since the early 2000s, see Loimeier, “The Geography of Evil”.

⁶⁸Wilson, *US Foreign Policy*; Hunter, *Zanzibar*; Kharusi, *Zanzibar*.

⁶⁹It is said that, when he was a student at Makerere University, Nyerere considered becoming a priest but he was dissuaded to do so by his friend, the White Fathers’ priest Richard Walsh. See Ludwig (*Church and State*, 78, 80 note 5) and Civile & Duggan (*Tanzania and Nyerere*, 43).

⁷⁰Sivalon, *Kanisa Katoliki*.

⁷¹Ludwig, “After Ujamaa”, 230.

⁷²Said, *The Life and Times*.

⁷³Kleist Sykes is the founder of the African Association, a political movement engaged in the struggle against colonialism. He was the Mayor of Dar es Salaam. His son, Abdulwahid Sykes, Secretary General of the Dockers Union, took over from him and founded TANU.

⁷⁴Said, *The Life and Times*, 111.

⁷⁵Internet also contributes strongly to this dissemination. See “Nyerere against Islam” (04/06/2011) or “Suppressing Dissent” (04/06/2011).

⁷⁶*Anayedhulimiwa asipopambana na huyo dhalimu, yeye ataendelea kuteseka wakati dhalimu atastarehe kwa amani*, *An-Nuur*, “Mfumo Mkristo”, 5.

⁷⁷ *An-Nuur*, “Mfumo Mkristo”, 1.

⁷⁸ “Utakatifu”, *An-Nuur*. On the canonization process, see notably Mesaki & Malipula, “Julius Nyerere’s Influence.”

⁷⁹ Glassman, *War of Words*.

⁸⁰ In this regard, the designation of the territorial entities that make up the Union posits the speakers on the political spectrum: officially, these two entities are referred to as “Mainland Tanzania” (*Tanzania bara*) and “Island Tanzania” (*Tanzania visiwani*), but in Zanzibar, the mainland is often called “Tanganyika”. The use of colonial names symbolically erases the establishment of the Union.