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Reinterpreting revolutionary Zanzibar in the media today: the case of *Dira* newspaper

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For years, the official narrative of the Zanzibari nation imposed a specific conception of identity and citizenship built on a racial understanding of the Isles' history and the silencing of collective memories of violence perpetrated by the 1964-1975 regime. The democratization process of the mid-1990s allowed for the emergence of a critical public sphere which contributed to the public circulation of alternative national imaginaries and the resurfacing of clandestine collective memories. This paper explores the role of the press in the production and circulation of alternative narratives of the 1964 Revolution and its aftermath by focusing on the Zanzibari newspaper *Dira*. It shows how issues raised in the newspaper's memory entrepreneurs engage with collective representations of belonging and the nation in Zanzibar.

Zanzibar; Revolution; national imagination; memory; *Dira*; media.

The Revolution of 1964 and its aftermath (1964-1975) constitute a central episode in the history of Zanzibar which shapes contemporary representations of belonging and the nation.¹ In today's society, there is not a single memory, but on the contrary multifaceted memories of this historical event and the following murky period. The 1964 Revolution² and the 1964-1975 years are recalled and given meaning in ways which reflect social status, ethnic identities, generation and political affiliations. Also depending on situations of remembrance and recalling (family discussions, social occasions, political gatherings, etc.) and larger socioeconomic configurations, narratives of the 1964 Revolution and the following decade of authoritarianism are characterized by plurality, transformation and intertwining over time and in the present.³ Among the many existing narratives, the official version developed by the state holds a dominant position. Until the mid-1990s, the control over the production, transmission and circulation of ideas combined with the use of repressive measures aimed to impose silence on alternative or competing memory narratives produced within the Zanzibar society made it possible for the regime to gain monopoly on representations of the past, but in parallel, contributed to the clandestine production and transmission of unofficial competing

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² The violent overthrow of the constitutional monarchy of Zanzibar led by Prime Minister Mohammed Shante and the Sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Jamshed Abdulla on 11-12 January 1964, one month only after independence from the British protectorate powers and the first democratic elections, is referred to as a "Revolution" in state terminology and in academic historiography. This article will show and explain why this qualification is contested today.

³ Burgess, "Memories, Myth and Meanings"; Fouéré, "Sortie de clandestinité"; Loimeier, "Memories of Revolution"; Myers, "Narrative representations".

memories. This official discourse was characterized by recurring racial binary tropes adopted and spread to present a clear-cut and unambiguous version of the past and its meaning for the present, with the explicit aim to foster unity in the frame of the nation-building project, and with the implicit strategy to enhance the legitimacy of the men in power.

Yet, as the mid-1990s democratization process and the rise of the media opened new avenues for political competition and the constitution of a critical public sphere, the position of the regime to produce overwhelming versions of the past came to be questioned. The present article focuses on one such competing narrative⁴ produced and publicised with the obvious intention to challenge the dominant official historical version of the 1964 Revolution and its aftermath, and . Published from 2002 to 2003 in the pages of a Zanzibari newspaper in Swahili called *Dira*, this challenging representation of the past significantly contributed to have clandestine memories of the 1964 Revolution and the following years resurface publicly and be (re-)introduced as a politicized resource. This article presents the newspaper's journalists and their objectives, explores what is said about the past and how this departs from the stances of the official narrative, and gives insight into its audience and reception. It shows that the memoryscape drawn by *Dira*'s educated memory entrepreneurs engages with representations of belonging and citizenship which are infused by pre-revolutionary nostalgia and the search for cultural authenticity. As elsewhere in Africa, not only "the boom for colonial nostalgia" and claims for autochthony and authenticity are striking,⁵ but they shape political imaginaries of the nation and are used as a powerful tool in political competition.

A. *Dira* newspaper and its team

The weekly newspaper *Dira* ("vision" in Swahili) was started at the end of 2002 by the Zanzibar International Media Company (ZIMCO). The publication project slowly matured out of informal discussions held at Masomo bookshop, the then meeting point of intellectuals and personalities of the media scene and political life who informally met there on Sunday mornings and exchanged their ideas over the state of affairs in the Isles. It actually came to birth under the impulse of journalists from the Mainland who handed its concrete realisation to Zanzibaris intellectuals and journalists. The original team gathered an experienced journalist, the late Ali Mohamed Nabwa; an emerging politician of the Civic United Front (CUF) opposition party, Ismail Jussa Ladhu; a civil servant versed in newspaper editing, Hamza Zuber Rijal; renown professional Zanzibari journalists, notably Ally Saleh and Salim

⁴ As shown by Garth A. Myers, there are many different but intersecting narratives of revolutionary Zanzibar. It is not the aim of the present article to assert that the *Dira* narrative would be more significant, original or authentic than others. Its specificities, however, lie in that it reached a large audience and gained popularity in a period, the early 2000s, marked by the increasing public expression of political opposition and diverging interpretations of the Isles' past. See Myers, "Narrative representations", 430-431.

⁵ For the quotation, see Werbner, "Beyond oblivion", 1. With regards to autochthony and authenticity, see Geschiere, *The perils of belonging*.

Said Salim; and emerging young journalists such as Mohammed Ghassany, Jabir Suleiman and Salma Said.

The most experienced journalist Ali Nabwa – a veteran of the 1964 Revolution – was appointed Chief Editor of the newspaper. In the pre-revolution time, this man of Comorian origin used to work for the national daily news in English, *the Nationalist*. He was also the manager of the East African Publishing House. Known to have many close acquaintances among members of the *Umma* Party⁶, he always publicly denied he was a true partisan or took any active role in the party's activities. As a university student in Romania, he was absent of the country when the Revolution took place on the night of 11-12 January 1964—he returned to the Isles five days after only and refused to play any visible political role.⁷ In 1972, being among the accused of President Abeid Amani Karume's assassination in the month of April⁸, he fled the country to escape the treason trial and took asylum in Comoro islands. He worked there from 1972-1975 as the director of the national radio and it is said that he took part in the 1975 coup d'état fomented by former Comorian President Ali Soilih. After coming back to Tanzania, he was employed by the government daily newspaper *Daily News* then the private but pro-government newspaper *The Guardian*. He later became the press secretary and speech writer of Dr. Ali Juma Omar, Chief Minister of Zanzibar from 1988–1995, later appointed Vice President of Tanzania from 1995–2001. Nabwa was dismissed when Zanzibari CCM politician Ali Mohamed Shein⁹ replaced Ali Juma Omar in 2001. This event is depicted as a turning point in his life. Some of his close acquaintances say that resentment for not being rewarded for his commitment to support the government triggered off his involvement in *Dira* newspaper. Others assert that the knowledge he acquired and the political secrets he got access to by being close to the political centre of decision, as well as his own involvement in the political machinery, eventually incited him, towards the end of his life, to speak out.

As far as Ismail Jussa is concerned, this then emerging politician with a background in law from the UK has been the CUF director of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for years.¹⁰ When studying abroad, he participated actively in debates channelled on the Zanzinet website.¹¹ In one of our interviews, he denied that *Dira* had any affiliation with CUF or was bound to it by any secret agenda. He insisted that he was the one who provided most funds to launch the newspaper. Yet, as journalist Ally Saleh indicated, several other Zanzibaris from the Isles and from the diaspora also contributed financially. It is said that

⁶ The *Umma* Party was formed in 1963 by dissidents of the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP). This bunch of dissidents was composed of Marxist intellectuals, most of them educated in the UK or Eastern Europe, and/or trained in Communist Cuba or Egypt.

⁷ See his biography (Nabwa, *From the Gallows*, unpublished) which was published in different parts in *Dira* under the title “Siku moja itakuwa kweli” (One day it will be true).

⁸ *Umma* party members were the main suspects of the assassination of President Karume in April 1972.

⁹ Ali Mohamed Shein became President of Zanzibar in October 2010.

¹⁰ Ismail Jussa was elected member of the House of Representatives for the Stone Town constituency in the last October 2010 general elections.

¹¹ www.zanzinet.org

enough funds were gathered to finance 12 newspaper issues in a row. Ismail Jussa also insisted that he was the one who convinced Ali Nabwa to become *Dira's* leader.

Other members of *Dira* gathered experienced journalists who were discontent with the control of expression in the local press in Zanzibar and wanted to challenge the conformity of the media landscape. Salim Said Salim, an experienced Zanzibari journalist of the same generation as Ali Nabwa who was trained in China, has been writing for various Mainland newspapers and has always proved a defender of the Isles' specific political life. He was appointed Sub-editor before becoming Sales Manager of *Dira*. Ally Saleh, well known in Zanzibar for his outspoken stand, has been the BBC Swahili correspondent in Zanzibar for years as well as a regular correspondent in Zanzibar for various Mainland newspapers and a book translator. He replaced Salim Said Salim as *Dira* Sub-editor. Hamza Rijal, a civil servant working in the field of environment, has never been a professional journalist but used to own a Muslim newspaper called *Maarifa* ("knowledge", in Swahili) dealing with Muslim history and Muslim religious issues and involved in promoting Swahili language correctness and Zanzibar cultural uniqueness, before the lack of funds led the newspaper to bankruptcy.

As for the younger journalists who joined the newspaper shortly after its launching, they were emerging fierce writers who did not fear to express critical opinions of various political issues relating both to Zanzibar and the Mainland, and to exhibit their pride in Zanzibari cultural uniqueness. Mohammed Ghassany, educated in Germany, used to write for the former weekly Mainland-based *Rai*, a newspaper that was owned by renowned journalist Jenerali Ulimwengu and was highly estimated by the educated upper-middle class. Until today, Jabir Suleiman is known for not mincing his words against the wheeling and dealing of both the Zanzibari and the Mainland political elite. Finally, Salma Said, now correspondent for various important Mainland newspapers such as the *The Citizen* and *Mwananchi*, and a reporter for the Deutsche Welle Germany-based radio and other Western media, took her first steps in journalism with *Dira*. Although most journalists were not members of any political party, they were known for their critical stand against the party in power and the government, and for their sympathy for CUF and its leader Seif Sharif Hamad¹².

Although most articles were composed by *Dira*, the newspaper accepted anonymous or non-anonymous articles which were sent to the Editor's desk by common citizens, sometimes from abroad, or by politicians of various statuses. Ibrahim Hussein, a former *Umma* Party sympathizer who spent 8 years in prison after the treason trial which followed the assassination of President Abeid Karume, and who later left the Isles to work on the Mainland for many years before he returned and settled in Unguja, greatly contributed with articles about the Union. Biographies of significant Muslim figures of the previous centuries

¹² Mohamed Ghassany openly joined CUF in late 2009. He actively contributed to the party's activities since the rapprochement (*maridhiano*) between President Karume and opposition leader Seif Shariff Hamad in November 2009, most notably during the referendum campaign for the formation of a government of national unity (*serikali ya umoja wa kitaifa*) in July 2010. He suspended his partisan activities when he started working for Deutsche Welle in Germany in September 2010.

as well as the histories of the educated elite of the Isles were written by well-known Muslim *sheikhs* such as Maalim Idris Saleh. Some CCM politicians, anonymously or not, published articles denouncing the party's internal affairs. *Dira's* journalists indicated that the ever-increasing popular participation of citizens kept the newspaper alive given that the team was reduced and, as Ally Saleh insisted in an interview, could not have carried forward the newspaper single-handedly.

B. The troublemaker

Different generations of outspoken personalities of the media scene in Zanzibar were represented in the team of *Dira*. Ali Nabwa and Salim Said Salim were grown men at the time of the Revolution and followed step by step the history of Zanzibar in the making. They belong to a generation of enthusiastic educated Zanzibaris whose understanding of history and expectations for change were shaped by a cosmopolitan, pan-Africanist, nationalist and Marxist identity, but who attended the decay of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist ideologies of liberation in the face of the rise of authoritarianism¹³. Nabwa personally knew most prominent and internationally-known figures of the political scene in Tanganyika and Zanzibar as well as all main actors of the 1964-1975 period, such as: members of the *Umma* Party—in the first place Abdulrahman Babu, the founder and leader of the party—he would hang around with; members of the first post-Revolution government, in the first place President Abeid Amani Karume; and politicians of the Mainland, among them President Julius Nyerere. These are the leaders his articles are about for they embody both nationalist hopes and the failure of genuine independence.

Journalist Ally Saleh and civil servant Hamza Rijal, who are today in their fifties, were young kids when the Revolution took place but still have vivid memories of the pre-Revolution atmosphere.¹⁴ They matured in the early post-Revolution time, a period marked by socialist-borrowed rhetoric of nation-building (the *kujenga taifa* Swahili watchword), the promotion of a revolutionary ethos and discipline which supposed that each and every citizen should mobilize for the construction of a new society, and the deployment of concrete modernizing endeavours intended to bring development for all.¹⁵ Yet, as the authoritarian character of the Karume decade revealed itself, and that economic deterioration affected each and every Zanzibari, the post-Revolution period soon buried popular hopes for change. People in their fifties today bear the deception, disillusion and frustration of a generation deluded with false and unrealized promises of modernity and development.

¹³ See Burgess, "An Imagined Generation".

¹⁴ During an interview, one journalist recalled writing the name of the ZPPP/ZNP party – at that time perceived by a majority of Zanzibaris as the anti-African party of the Arab elite – in the sand in his schoolyard when he was a child—because of this, he was beaten by his schoolmates. ZPPP means Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party, and ZNP Zanzibar Nationalist Party.

¹⁵ Burgess, "Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts"; Burgess, "The Young Pioneers".

As for the younger journalists, who are today in their late thirties and early forties, they were born shortly after the Revolution. Their childhood and adolescence took place in an economically prostrate Zanzibar. They reached their twenties at the end of the 1980s or early 1990s, at a time when structural adjustment programmes introduced the liberalization of the economy, offering a new modernizing rhetoric which appealed to a youth aspiring to social and economic upward mobility and success but lead, again, to disillusion for reasons of increased socioeconomic disparities. If multiparty competition was reintroduced in 1992 and raised hopes for political change, it was never given the means to be implemented adequately: the first-past-the-post system and repeated electoral frauds, not to mention cases of intimidation and violence, have prevented adequate expression and representation of the opposition, let alone a change in power¹⁶. Instead of enhancing democracy and fostering social unity, multipartyism has exacerbated tensions and divisions in the Zanzibari society as well as between Zanzibar and the Mainland.

Although *Dira* members were variously informed by their times¹⁷ in the sense that they developed representations of the past based on their own personal past and memories of it but also on a generational experience of the local socioeconomic and political situation, they share a common disillusion and frustration which, from 1964 on, has accompanied every new generation eager for change. Their conception of the Revolution and the post-Revolution era, considered as the origin of the endless hardship which has unfolded until today in the Isles, reflects this shared embittered disenchantment, and their will to remedy it by speaking out openly against the political elite in power and its wrongdoing. This explains why in interviews, former members of *Dira* justified the need to create a newspaper on the ground that, at the beginning of the 2000s and contrary to what happened in Tanzania Mainland where the inception of political democratization in 1992 led to the rise of a vibrant private press,¹⁸ the Zanzibari media landscape was still characterized by the absence of freedom of expression and the tight control of the state. The newspaper clearly aimed to be an avenue for plural and alternative opinions which could not be expressed elsewhere, and tackle sensitive issues specific to the political, social and economic situation in the islands of Zanzibar. As Ismail Jussa explained in an interview, it was well known that Ali Nabwa was a “troublemaker” (*mchokozi*), and this is exactly why the latter was chosen to lead *Dira*. The intention of the coming newspaper to be provocative and make waves was obvious.

¹⁶ Cameron, “Narratives of Democracy”; Bakari, *The democratization process*.

¹⁷ For the significance of historical experience – or *times* – more than race or ethnic identity in shaping generational identities and political positions, see Burgess, “An Imagined Generation”.

¹⁸ Hunter, “Enzi za Mwalimu”; Stürmer, *The Media History of Tanzania*.

C. Producing alternative history

To produce a historical narrative which would compete with the national official history and ideology was, from the start, one of the main objectives of the newspaper. Two main topics were given new lights and new interpretations throughout the year when *Dira* was published: the 1964 Revolution and its aftermath¹⁹; the Union between Zanzibar and Tanganyika within the United Republic of Tanzania. The very first issue of the newspaper set the tone. It opened with an article by Ali Nabwa entitled “Nyerere si Malaika” (Nyerere is not an Angel) which, based on the latter’s personal memories and his re-readings of words and actions of the first President of Tanganyika in 1961 and first President of the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964, Julius Nyerere, was aimed to dismantle Nyerere’s contemporary eulogistic official image. Departing from the state-built imagery in which Nyerere is presented as a national hero who placed morality and justice above pragmatic considerations and political strategies, and sacrificed his personal interest for the common good²⁰, the article depicts Nyerere as a condescending, disloyal and self-interested man who resorted to backroom deals, intrigues and machinations to reach and keep power, manoeuvred to get rid off popular politicians who got in his light, and stabbed even faithful companions in the back²¹. Nabwa’s piece of work notably explains in great detail what he presents as Nyerere’s biased perceptions of the history and culture of the islands which, according to him, had extremely severe long-term consequences on the future of the country. Nyerere is said to have conceived Zanzibar as a place reminiscent of a past marked by all-Arab inhumane slave trade and slavery, and social, economic and political domination over black Africans which, following the watchword of African nationalism and pan-africanism he advocated for, should be buried; he also considered Zanzibar an area where the Arab-Islamic-referenced cosmopolitan Swahili cultural specificities which took shape and flourished over the centuries contributed to develop²², among Zanzibaris, collective attitudes of distinction and dissociation from the African continent – and for Nyerere, such separate Zanzibari identity needed to give way to a black African- and Mainland-centred culture.

Depicting Nyerere’s biased understanding of the history and culture of the Isles and the many inappropriate and harmful political decisions which resulted from it did not only equate with attacking symbolically the one-and-only icon of the Mainland, but also constituted, for *Dira*’s Chief Editor, a pretext to challenge the hegemonic state narrative of the 1964 Revolution and its aftermath. Indeed, it is the very same racial conception of nationalism, intensified by British colonialism and re-appropriated by the three main political

¹⁹ See among others Clayton, *The Zanzibar Revolution*; Lofchie, *Background to a Revolution*; Martin, *Zanzibar–Tradition and Revolution*.

²⁰ About the production of Nyerere as a political icon since his death in 1999, see Askew, “Sung and Unsung”; Fouéré, “Entre mythe et histoire”.

²¹ For a similar perspective, see also Mwijage, *The Dark side of Nyerere’s Legacy*.

²² See Caplan and Topan, *Swahili Modernities*.

parties contesting for the first post-independence power from 1957, which infused the heirs of the *zama za siasa* period who led the Revolution and seized power in 1964²³. They justified their action on the grounds that a foreign minority of Arab oligarchy assisted with privileged minority groups such as Comorians and Indians, had ruled the true Black African owners of the Isles without legitimacy, and had exploited and oppressed them²⁴. In the state rhetoric, the term “African” therefore refers to both the Shirazis indigenous populations of Unguja and Pemba and the later-arrived black populations from the Mainland—hence the name of the political party which claimed to represent Africans in general and became the single party in 1964, Afro-Shirazy Party (ASP). Race, which the colour of the skin and physical features would reveal, was used as the criterion of identity and citizenship. The overthrow of the first post-independent government of Zanzibar in 11-12 February 1964 was labelled an ‘African Revolution’, for it was said to be carried out by the African majority²⁵ and for its benefits, and to be the result of a popular mass movement which expelled an alien illegitimate power – violence being a revolutionary necessity to root out undesirables hanging on to Zanzibar Africans’ homeland. Combined with a radical socialist leaning, racial revenge and justice constituted the trope upon which the state rhetorically built its legitimacy and introduced institutional and economic measures from 1964. When ASP merged with TANU (*Tanganyika African National Union*, the single party in the Mainland) in 1977, a ‘tanzanianization’ of the 1964 Revolution or, as Garth Myers puts it, the intensification of the “African-ness of the revolutionary script, conceiving the revolution as African liberation and blocking out non-black understandings of identity on the islands” took place.²⁶ Former more ambiguous conceptions of African-ness displayed by the ASP elite and Karume himself who both and sometimes contradictorily defended the superiority of blackness while recognizing the historical specificities of blood-mixing in Zanzibar totally disappeared from official discourses. From 1977, a true Zanzibari was to be a black Zanzibari.

The provocative “Nyerere is Malaika” paved the way for a radical revision of this hegemonic racially-grounded revolutionary ideology. Feuilletons articles unrolled over a year of newspaper issues, such as Nabwa’s not yet published biography “Siku moja itakuwa kweli”

²³ In this paragraph presenting the racial nationalism which emerged during the period called the “time of politics” (*zama za siasa*) from 1957-1963 and was reproduced after 1964, I use the recent historiography on revolutionary Zanzibar (see, among others, Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*; Glassman, “Sorting out the Tribes”; Glassman, “Slower than a massacre”; Myers, “Revolutionary Zanzibar”), some of which which Nabwa explicitly uses – he quotes his references – and conflate with his own personal memory. I do not present in detail the extensively studied and well-known 1957-1963 period.

²⁴ Sheriff, “Race and Class”.

²⁵ Insurgents were led by leaders who prided themselves on their black African and Mainland-based origin. Speculations as to who actually masterminded the revolution have filled past reports and newspaper articles, post-revolution memoirs of victims and scholar history books. A recent book by Harith Ghassany (Ghassany, *Kwa heri ukoloni*) compiling personal accounts of the planning of the Revolution asserts that the Revolution was neither a popular uprising nor a state overthrow led by Zanzibaris but a coup organized by the Mainland elite, in the first hand Nyerere, and implemented by sisal plantations workers.

²⁶ Myers, “Narrative representations”, 438. Mapuri’s book, *The 1964 Revolution*, published in 1996, is said to exemplify this new trend that articulates autochthony, blackness, African-ness and political legitimacy.

(One day it will be true), “Mapinduzi ni matokeo ya ubinafsi” (The Revolution is the product of individualism) and “Siku 100 za kuundwa Muungano wa Tanzania” (The hundred days that made the Union of Tanzania), to cite only a few of Nabwa’s pieces. Most articles of the team, notably those by Ally Saleh and Mohammed Ghassany, developed a competing narrative aimed to contest the hegemonic ideology upon which the political elite legitimized its exercise of power for decades. In this competing version, simple dichotomies between the exploitative rich Stone Town-based Arabs and the wretched ex-slaves plantation Africans are questioned. Quoting recognized academic historiography, articles give way to increased subtleties in depicting the sociological components of the revolutionary society. The nature and scope of slavery, of Arab rule, and of the Revolution is radically revised. The responsibility of Arab and Swahili merchants in the slave trade and slavery is put into perspective by referring to the fact that the former were a link among others in the chain of the wide-scale international economic system based on human exploitation which existed at that time; and its oppressive and humiliating aspects are counterbalanced by arguments which emphasize the significant proportion of inter-marriages and the continuous social integration of slaves in the Zanzibar society. The Omani Arab Sultanate of the 19th century is not regarded as a colonial oppressor but equated with an era of true independence characterised by social harmony, economic prosperity and political prestige—this pre-revolutionary nostalgia often relating to the 19th c. urban development of Stone Town²⁷. Last, the 1964 Revolution is not associated with liberation but is considered an illegitimate “invasion” (*mavamizi*) of Mainland foreigners.

Rather than race or ethnicity, it is culture which is promoted as a legitimate marker of Zanzibari identity and political sovereignty in *Dira*’s imaginaries of the Zanzibari nation. Culture is seen as a set of ways of doing and ways of thinking developed over the centuries and rooted in religious practices (Islam), norms of sociability (from hospitality and friendliness to politeness and etiquette), island-based yet urban and cosmopolitan way of life, and language correctness. However, in this cultural nationalism which promotes *ustaarabu*, cosmopolitanism and blood-mixing, culture is used as a criterion for belonging and citizenship, and consequently for political legitimacy. If the Zanzibari community “imagined”²⁸ by *Dira*’s writers seems to break away from racialist and racist definitions of national identity which have prevailed in official discourses, it nevertheless resorts to a substantiated notion – culture – as a basis for inclusion and exclusion. *Wazanzibara*, as black Mainlanders are commonly called today (*bara* meaning Mainland Tanzania) in an evident dichotomy with *Wazanzibari*, are targeted as the alien community deprived of adequate Zanzibari culture, and therefore of the right to have a say in the political future of the Isles. Pre-revolutionary nostalgia displayed in *Dira* is not simply a “phantasmagoria of loss generated by modernity”²⁹, but is a symbolic resource used in political struggle.

²⁷ Blissell, “Engaging Colonial Nostalgia”.

²⁸ Anderson, *Imagined community*.

²⁹ Hyussen, “Present Pasts”.

Finally, the article intends to reveal the role Nyerere played in manoeuvring for the April 1964 Union between the two sovereign nations of Zanzibar and Tanganyika. Under the pressure of the anti-Communist United States who feared that Zanzibar might become their ‘Cuba of Africa’³⁰ and for fear of the increasing popularity and potential political victory of Abdulrahman Babu, the pro-Communist ex-*Umma* Party leader, Nyerere is said to have prepared in great secrecy the constitutional framework of the Union. He intrigued to impose it without seeking any popular mandate from the people of the Isles or of Tanganyika, from the political elite and, on Zanzibar’s side, from Abeid Amani Karume³¹. The article defends the idea that the Union, which created the United Republic of Tanzania, was meant not only to control the political destiny of the Isles, but to destroy the economy and culture of a place that, not so long before, as Ali Nabwa reminds the reader, Nyerere wanted to “tow out into the middle of the Indian Ocean”.³² As for Karume, it is said that he disregarded the shaky legal and political foundations of the Union, even more its potential long-term consequences, to see it only as a means of getting rid off real or perceived threats to his power.³³

In revising both the Mainland and Zanzibari official narrative about the Union which states that bringing Tanganyika and Zanzibar together was aimed to benefit both parties, and asserts that it has managed to do so until today in spite of difficulties, *Dira* did not produce a radically new political interpretation. Many academic works questioned the validity of the treaty of Union and pointed to its endless dysfunction³⁴. It is also well known that even among the Zanzibari CCM political elite, the Union question is a source of tensions and a cause of divisions. However, what *Dira* did is that it used the Union question to publicly promote sovereignty and greater, if not full independence for the Isles. Doing so, it both echoed popular concerns about the current political and economic strains and shortcomings attributed to the Union, but also provided narrative tools to compete with official interpretation of the Union. Once again, CCM politicians in power in the Isles feared that the public circulation of alternative historical narratives of the Union might lead to a general state of confusion and opposition in the Zanzibari society, and to the questioning of their legitimacy to rule.

³⁰ About the fear of the growing influence of Communism in Zanzibar in the context of the Cold War, see Wilson, *US Foreign Policy*; Speller, “An African Cuba?”; Petterson, *An American’s cold war tale*; and the recently-opened CIA archives by Hunter, *The Hundred Days Revolution*.

³¹ For a detailed presentation of the various driving forces which led to the formation of the Union, and are only sketched out here, see Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism*, pp.69-99 and Ghassany, *Kwaheri Ukoloni*.

³² *Dira*, “Nyerere si Malaika (part III)”, 20-26 December 2002, p.4. This sentence by Nyerere is quoted in Smith, *We must run while they walk*; is also mentioned in Shivji, *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism*, 76, and in many publications which aim to emphasize how much the “Zanzibar question” was a sensitive issue for Nyerere.

³³ See Shivji who states that “official historiography repeats *ad nauseam* that Karume was a Union enthusiast. Nothing could be further from the truth. If there was 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 lose Zanzibar autonomy” (*Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism*, 123).

³⁴ Bailey, *The Union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar*; Shivji, *The Legal Foundations of the Union*; Othman & Peter, *Zanzibar and the Union Question*. Since the formation of the Government of National Unity in Zanzibar in October 2010, the Union issue has come to the front again and various political actors advocates for a complete revision of the Union treaty.

As Ismail Jussa asserted during an interview, Ali Nabwa's "Nyerere si Malaika" article was aimed to shake the Zanzibari society. Right from the start, it situated the newspaper as an emerging troublemaker in the Zanzibar media landscape led by mainstream consensual titles, be they state-owned or private. *Dira* kept on producing alternative historical narratives based on the re-reading of past events which left their mark on the history of the Isles or on the revealing of historical events and actions which the official history had kept aside. It also contributed, as will be shown now, to resurface and publicize individual and family memories of the Revolution and the following eight years of autocratic rule under the authority of Abeid Amani Karume and the Committee of 14³⁵.

D. Publicising clandestine memories

Dira happened to dig up personal and family remembrances in relation to the wave of arrests, imprisonments, tortures and assassinations which took place during the reign of Abeid Amani Karume until he was assassinated in April 1972. Using Myer's typology of memory narratives, it could be said that *Dira* strove to display "excluded scripts" of revolutionary Zanzibar, that is to say the hidden and silenced personal stories of thousand of ordinary citizens.³⁶ Although the independent academic historiography about this period generally devotes a few sentences to the dark side of the Karume regime, characterized by the arbitrary rule and personal power of the President and the members of the Committee of 14, there has not been any major and academically-recognized work which has yet focused on it only or depicted it in detail.³⁷ If the lack of archives and adequate figures partly explains the absence of a history of the authoritarian facet of the Karume regime, it is undeniable that, until today, the state has striven to control history-making and the circulation of narratives with regard to this period. Be it in his lifetime, at the time of his assassination or today, official biographies of Karume or political declarations, speeches and notes referring to him have always consisted in hagiographic and laudatory productions.³⁸ By evacuating dissenting comments, complaints or criticisms from the public sphere, the state monopoly of the production of what could be and could not openly be said of Karume has contributed to limit the recalling of the arbitrary power of the regime within the sphere of family, close friends and former prisoners.³⁹ With regard to the many arrests, imprisonments, tortures and assassinations which took place from 1964, very few initiatives have taken place to claim explanations, public

³⁵ The Committee of 14, gathering instigators and leaders of the 1964 Revolution, was the decisional power in the Revolutionary Council formed in 31 January 1964.

³⁶ Myers, "Revolutionary Zanzibar".

³⁷ However, a greater attention to the authoritarian rule under Karume is noticeable in recent works. See for example Shivji, *Pan-Africanism and Pragmatism*, 106-117.

³⁸ Mwanjisi, *Ndugu Abeid Karume*.

³⁹ An early exception is Kharusi, *Africa's first Cuba*, 41-44 which provides accounts of the massacres of Arabs perpetrated by black-mainlanders, but this account is partial in this partisan piece of work characterized by its pro-Arab and anti-mainlander racial stances.

repentance or compensations, be they symbolic or strictly financial, since the return of multipartyism and the democratisation of the political space from 1992. The call made in 1988 by Shaaban Mlozi, a CUF founder who became its first Principal Secretary from 1992 to 2000, to incite the government to break the wall of silence and open its archives remained unanswered⁴⁰. The state has remained stubbornly silent.⁴¹ Significant written productions have emerged from the diaspora, particularly from the Arab Peninsula (Oman and Dubai) where thousands of people of Arab origins took refuge after fleeing the 1964 Revolution and during the following years.⁴² Books and pamphlets use a harsher language than the Isles-based political opposition and, connecting with early oppositional anti-mainlander narratives such as Kharusi's 1967 book, present the Revolution as an illegitimate "invasion" (*mavamizi*) of Mainland foreigners – in the same way as *Dira* does, as mentioned above. Some even speak of "ethnic cleansing", if not "genocide", to highlight the deliberate and selective dimension of the massacres.⁴³

From the start, *Dira* made it clear that it would come back to the hidden side of revolutionary Zanzibar by digging up personal, family and group memories. In "Nyerere si Malaika", the above-mentioned three-part article, Ali Nabwa hints at the disappearing of important figures of the Zanzibari political and intellectual scene: "Until today, the fate of Saleh Sadalah and Hanga is not known, in the same as the fate of Othman Shariff, Mdungi Ussi, Jaha Ubwa, Jimmy Ringo... and the list continues".⁴⁴ These fates were to be depicted not in the words of professional historians or biographers, but through the eyes of common Zanzibar, in the first place actors, victims and witnesses of this period, or their descendants. Three family memories were given visibility in the pages of *Dira*: those of Aboud Nadhif Abdallah, Ali Mzee Mbalia and Muhammed Pandu Yussuf.

⁴⁰ Crozon, *Zanzibar en Tanzanie*, 226.

⁴¹ Only Bakari, *The democratisation process*, 109, mentions in endnote 29 that Karume's successor, President Aboud Jumbe, hinted at the fact that the people who had "disappeared" were no longer alive: "The first time the authorities confessed that those who had mysteriously disappeared had been killed was in 1975 when Sheikh Aboud Jumbe told the ITV's 'World Action', who had visited Zanzibar and interviewed him that: "They [Hanga, Othman Shariff, Twala, Muhammed Humud, Juma Maringo, Mdungi Ussi, Saleh Sadalah, Abdul Madhifu (sic)] have not vanished." "...they have paid the price of revolution". "They are dead, yes"."

⁴² Thousands of people of foreign origins (Arabs for most of them, but also Comorians and Indians) fled the island – or were expelled – to escape the planned killings and then uncontrolled massacre which took place during the first days of the Revolution in January, but also the arbitrary decisions, endless humiliations and repressive measures against the supposedly non-African populations of the following months and years. About the biographical or analytical productions from the diaspora in Oman and Dubai, see Shahbal, *Zanzibar, the rise and fall*; Fairouz, *Ukweli ni huu* (This is the truth); Muhsin, *Conflicts and harmony*. From the diaspora settled in the North, see Al-Barwani, *Unser Leben vor der Revolution*; Ghassany, *Kwaheri Ukoloni*.

⁴³ See one sequence of the video circulating on YouTube (also published as a book, see Cohen, *Africa Addio*) called "Africa Addio" by Orion Vision which presents itself as the live video footage by helicopter of massacres of Arabs which took place in Zanzibar between 18 and 20 January 1964, together with mass graves and escapes in dhows on the beach. Written comments inserted speak of an "ethnic cleansing" against Muslims and Arabs. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lpY8_mKvjk&feature=email

⁴⁴ Nabwa, "Nyerere si Malaika-III", 4: "Hadi leo khatima ya Saleh Sadalah na Hanga haijulikani, kama isivyojulikana khatima ya Othman Shariff, Mdungi Ussi, Jaha Ubwa, Jimmy Ringo... na orodha inaendelea".

The first family memory to be published (18-24 July 2003) concerns Aboud Nadhif Abdallah, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Trade and Industry from 1964 to 1969. Aboud Nadhif Abdallah belonged to the educated elite of the Isles who frequented the best schools of the Isles before he was trained abroad. His son, Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif, recalls the conditions of arrest of his father which his mother passed on to him and his siblings, but also to her grand-children.⁴⁵ The head of the national security (or Central Intelligence Directorate) today remembered for his unflinching loyalty to the cruel rulers in power, Hassan Manderu in person, came to arrest Aboud for the apparent reason that he had refused to be reinstated into the post he had been dismissed from just some months before. Aboud was imprisoned and never seen again. Interestingly, Aboud Nadhif Abdallah's son, Ibrahim, was not only a regular and enthusiastic reader of *Dira* but knew Ali Nabwa personally and some other journalists of the team. He asserted that he was the one who approached Nabwa with a draft of the article he wanted to have published, knowing that *Dira* was the only media that would accept it. The second memory story, published in the 3-9 October 2003 issue in an article entitled "Alijiuwa kuepuka mateso" (He committed suicide to escape pains/torture"), was taken from a precedent but not widely circulated publication of 1994. The article tells how Ali Mzee Mbalia, a young man in his mid-twenties, committed suicide after he was arrested and tortured simply because he refused to help a female friend of his to abort, on the grounds that the one responsible for the pregnancy should be the one to sort out the issue. Ali's plight was that it was no one else than Brigadier Yusuf Himid – a member of the Committee of 14 who took part in the first Cabinet of the Revolutionary Government in 1964 before being commander of a brigade of the Tanzania's People's Defense Forces – who had made her pregnant. This personal story of an anonymous young man illustrates how arbitrary and extremely violent power could crash down on anyone who would not comply with the cruel rulers of the country, even for what could be seen as a peccadillo. The last personal story came in the 31 October-6 November issue. Entitled "Yuko wapi Muhammad Pandu Yussuf?" ("Where is Muhammad Pandu Yussuf?"), the article tells about the arrest and disappearance of a Customs Officer through the eyes of his second son, Talib. Today a fisherman in his forties but only aged four at the time of the event, Talib remembers the men who came to his village one night to cart off his father Muhammad at home, only half-dressed with a T-Shirt and a *kikoi* loincloth. According to what Talib told me in the interview, the family has never known the reason which led to the arrest of this respected ASP member and civil servant.

The publication of these three family stories constituted an act of subversion in contemporary Zanzibar. Indeed, they unveil various facets of the autocratic power which was in place in Zanzibar from 1964-1972. It was a power which would silence well-educated Zanzibaris by kidnapping them and imprisoning them for years until they died, for fear they

⁴⁵ Interview with Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif and his mother, 14/07/2009. For a detailed presentation of the life history of Nadhif, see Fouéré, "Sortie de clandestinité".

might raise their voice and foster a radical opposition against the state. It was a power which operated in secret and on an individual basis so as to avoid open and massive rebellion and resistance. It was, finally, a power which leading political and military actors would confiscate for their personal benefit, not hesitating to use it for trivial matters and against politically neutral anonymous common people. Moreover, as sad or scandalous as they might be in themselves, these stories embody the thousands similar events which occurred during this period, targeting people of various backgrounds and origins. In other words, they represented the murky past of the Isles as a whole. It was how *Dira's* journalists and the families which came to them to recall the stories of their fathers, brothers and sons gave sense to their actions. In an interview, Ibrahim Aboud Nadhif, son of Aboud Nadhif Abdallah, hoped that the publication of his family history would make other families speak and similar tragic histories resurface, with the objective that it would lead, in the end, to a large-scale public debate on the first revolutionary decade in Zanzibar. Public repentance, if not individual financial compensations, were on the horizon of this man who mentioned the work of Truth and Reconciliation commissions in various countries to assert his claims. *Dira's* readers and the political elite were aware of the potential disruption which could ensue from the emergence of competing narratives of a dark past in a society in which there is not any family that does not bear the marks of this turbulent period, either as victims or as perpetrators, and in some cases as both.

One can note that *Dira* did not publish in detail stories of high-rank politicians who also had a tragic fate, such as the renowned Kassim Hanga, Othman Shariff or Abdulaziz Twala, all ex-members of the ASP who occupied various major positions in the government: Kassim Hanga was the deputy general secretary of the ASP party before becoming the vice-president of the People's Republic of Zanzibar, and then occupying different posts in the Union ministries; Othman Shariff was made Minister of Education and Culture in the first Revolutionary Council of the People's Republic of Zanzibar, then ambassador of the United Republic of Tanzania in Washington after April 1964; last, Abdulaziz Twala was Minister of Finance. The three men were considered dangerous by the new state, first of all by Karume himself who feared well-educated politicians and civil servants able to articulate critical views of the outcome of the Revolution and the Union, and gather together the population for alternative government options. They "disappeared" during Karume years and informed rumours keep on circulating about how Hanga, Sheriff and Twala were murdered in 1971.⁴⁶ Yet, by the end of 2003, *Dira* published photos of the three men together with about 10 photos of other prominent political figures who had disappeared from 1964 to 1972. The article briefly retold the histories of these men and denounced the silence of the government about what happened to them. Touching upon the fate of these renowned political figures in

⁴⁶ See Fouéré, "Sortie de clandestinité", 109-110 ; Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*, 118 ; Crozon, *Zanzibar en Tanzanie*, 232-235.

the Isles could not pass unnoticed: undoubtedly, *Dira* not only went too far in its accusation against the authoritarian nature of first President Karume's regime, but also in pointing to what they see as the cowardice of the men currently in power to look back to the Isles' past – therefore questioning their legitimacy to represent the people and act for the general interest – and in unveiling the hidden facets of the national narrative upon which the fragile social and political unity in the Isles has been built until today.

E. The life and death of *Dira*

The popular success of the newspaper is depicted as tremendous. The assertion that the pages of *Dira* would never be used to pack doughnuts (“*Dira halitafungiwa maandazi*”) – a common practice among street food sellers – has been mentioned several times over the course of the research. Many common people interviewed indeed insisted that they had stored issues of *Dira*, pointing with their finger to the place in the house, a room or an attic, where the newspapers were said to be kept. Journalists confirmed that *Dira* started with only about 1,400 issues for Zanzibar (among them about 1,000 sold) at the end of 2002 but reached peaks of 10,000 sold copies in Zanzibar and 2,000 on the Mainland in 2003.⁴⁷ The following anecdote was recalled several times to emphasize the newspaper great popularity: one Friday, the boat transporting newspapers from Dar es-Salaam to Zanzibar arrived late.⁴⁸ At Masomo bookshop situated in Empire area, right behind Darajani market, where until today newspapers are delivered in the late morning then directly sold or dispatched to other bookshops and to street-sellers, a crowd of people gathered impatiently waiting for the newspaper to be delivered. They almost stormed the shop when *Dira* arrived in the late afternoon that day. Groups of people were seen sitting together at coffee stands or other popular gathering points, reading and commenting a copy of the newspaper.⁴⁹ Although collective reading is a common practice in all Sub-Saharan countries, it had never been seen before at such a level in Zanzibar, and was never seen again after the ban on *Dira*.

The success of *Dira* was explained in the pages of the newspaper on the ground that it was the first Zanzibari post-Revolution newspaper that expressed and left room for the voices of the common people. As a journalist put it, “*Dira* is the voice of the people and not the Master's voice”.⁵⁰ *Zanzibar Leo*, the state-owned newspaper, is considered to be the master's

⁴⁷ Figures vary according to interlocutors.

⁴⁸ The newspaper was edited and laid-out in the tiny *Dira* office in Stone Town but sent to Dar es-Salaam for printing – one member of the team, usually the Sales Manager Salim Said Salim, being in charge of bringing a burned CD of the coming issue by plane. Printed issues reached the Isles every Friday.

⁴⁹ Personal communication, Prof. Abdul Sheriff, 27/07/2010.

⁵⁰ « *Dira* ni sauti ya watu badala ya kuwa sauti ya bwana (Master's voice) », *Dira*, 31 Oct.-06 Nov. 2003 (by Hasnul N.A. Riyamy, p.2). He goes on: “*Kuja kwa Dira* kumeleta muamko mpya (...). Muamko huo umeletwa na ukweli kwamba *Dira* husema kile ambacho jamii inataka kisemwe; kile ambacho jamii ilikifutika moyoni mwao; kile ambacho watawala hawakutaka kiwekwe bayana” (“*The coming of Dira brought a new awakening (...). This awakening has come from the truth that Dira says this that the people want to be said; this that the people have buried in their hearts; this that the leaders do not want to be said openly*”).

voice. All CUF sympathizers and many non-partisan Zanzibari interviewed expressed a similar idea, saying that *Dira* was a “popular platform” (*jukwaa la jamii*) or a “breathing space”, and asserted that they now miss the newspaper as there has not been any comparable newspaper since 2003. *Dira* was also perceived by many as an informative gazette which taught and gave access to a history that had been kept secret or distorted for more than 40 years. Many interlocutors, from literate people to less educated people, insisted that the newspaper contributed to enlighten citizens and give them the means to think by themselves with adequate information in hands.

Yet, among many grassroots members or sympathizers of the leading *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) party, *Dira* is not remembered with nostalgia at all. For example, the CCM stalwarts sitting at the *maskani* called Kizota in Darajani area recall the newspaper as a sheer rag that published wrong and calumnious news with the intention to foster division between political parties and among the population. In their words, *uchokozi* (troublemaking, provocation) is not positively connoted nor associated to freedom of speech, legitimate opposition, even less expression of truth as it was the case in *Dira*'s vocabulary. On the contrary, when explaining to me *Dira*'s objectives, the term *uchokozi* was made part of a lexical field about divisions and discord which included terms recurrently used in the Isles to depict the endless political battlefield in Zanzibar, such as *chokochoko* (provocation), *migogoro* (dispute), *mgongano* (dispute), *kugawa* (to divide) and, encompassing all others and widely used, *fitna* (dissension, intrigue). *Dira* was not only said to have fuelled existing tensions, if not violence, instead of bringing people together, but also to present a biased and distorted version of history. As an active Kizota CCM supporter said, people should leave the past with the past, as painful as it might be; and considering that it is the role of a state to maintain stability and security, the banning of *Dira* was said to be the only means to prevent the politics of hatred that the newspaper was fuelling from badly impacting on the society.

The team of *Dira* did not have to wait long for the state reaction. The first significant attack against the trouble-making newspaper personally targeted the Chief Editor Ali Nabwa. Of Comorian origins, Nabwa was suddenly and arbitrarily declared a non-citizen, a few years only after he was officially granted the Zanzibari citizenship.⁵¹ The second attack was radical: it consisted in banning the newspaper. Only one year after its birth, in December 2003, *Dira* was closed by the Government on the allegation that it violated “professional ethics” by publishing slanders and false assertions against the government⁵², therefore fomenting hatred within society. On 3rd December 2003, the Media Council of Tanzania circulated a brief to counter accusations that this national body for the surveillance of the national media would be

⁵¹ Not only has much ink been spilled over the issue of Ali Nabwa's citizenship in the pages of *Dira*, but the attack against Nabwa was reminiscent of the endless persecution of the Comorian community since 1964. See Mohamed, “Les Comoriens de Zanzibar”.

⁵² In its last issue, *Dira* published the letter from the Department of Information which stated that the newspaper would be banned on the ground that its articles used to published “*taarifa potofu, masengenya na kejeli*” (distorted news, slander and calumnies), *Dira*, November 21-27, 2003, p.9, issue 51.

involved in a conspiracy with the Government of Zanzibar in order to ban *Dira*. The brief quoted the official complaints of the Government of Zanzibar: “*Dira* was carrying out a campaign of incitement by publishing stories aimed at undermining peace and security by selectively digging up parts of the Zanzibar history, notably the 1964 Revolution; *Dira* was unethical in that it omitted to balance controversial stories; *Dira* was engaging in incitement by challenging the legality of the Government and President Amani Karume”.⁵³ Whether or not the intention of *Dira* was to undermine social stability in the islands, it was undeniably perceived as such by the national authorities. The newspaper challenged the state monopoly on national history and, doing so, contested the legitimacy of today’s members of the government whose fathers were stalwarts of the post-Revolution period.⁵⁴ According to the Zanzibar Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Information, Culture and Sports, Ali Juma Shamhuna, the newspaper was dead and buried in December 2003: “*Gazeti la Dira siyo tu kwamba limefungiwa. Kwa hakika hili limezikwa kabisa*” (It is not as if *Dira* newspaper had just been closed. With certainty it is completely buried”). However, if the page of *Dira* was turned, the page of the post-revolution history of the Isles is still well alive, if not increasingly significant in the current political debates and discussions at all levels of society.

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⁵³ MCT (by its Executive Secretary Anthony Ngaiza), “A brief on the position of the Media Council of Tanzania”, 03/12/2003, 2.

⁵⁴ For example, former President Amani Karume is the son of the late President Abeid Amani Karume; Mansoor Yussuf Himid, son of Brigadier Yusuf Himid; or Mahmoud Thabit Kombo, son of Thabit Kombo Jecha, the former secretary general of ASP

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