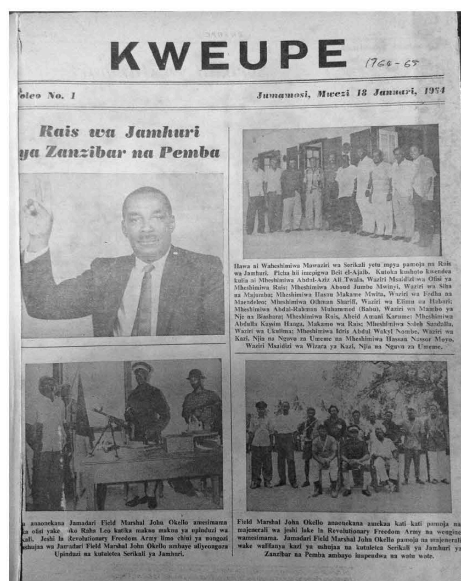


ZANZIBAR: THE NINE-HOUR REVOLUTION

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I conducted field research in Zanzibar and Uganda from June 2013 through February 2014. My dissertation is a microhistory of the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution, using both archival sources and interviews with revolutionaries to dissect what have become iconic moments in the few hours it took to overthrow the government. The first post-colonial revolution in East Africa, this revolution has fostered many conflicting accounts, and no single coherent tactical analysis of what transpired. It remains so politically sensitive that, at first, many Zanzibaris said it would be difficult to get people to talk. Having visited Zanzibar countless times over the last twenty plus years, I was fortunate to tap into long-standing networks in order to connect with relevant historical figures, many of whom have not previously told their stories. Even my location tied in to my topic, as my rooftop flat overlooked the Malindi Police Post, the site of the last skirmish of the revolution.

A former policeman who researched and wrote a report on the revolution in 1980 for Aboud Jumbe, the second President of Zanzibar, explained what

he had uncovered and introduced me to other knowledgeable sources. I spoke with both of the last living members of the “Committee of 14”, the group of mostly *vibarua* (day laborers) who have been credited with leading the revolution. Equally ground-breaking are conversations with several of the Comrades of the Umma Party who had received military training in Cuba in 1962, and who formed the beret-wearing group of rebels saying “*Vanceremos!*” in the early days of the revolution. They were mistaken for Cubans, adding to the inaccurate Western fear that the revolution was a Communist plot. Finally, I was part of a local *baraza* with an unusual political mixture of people, including a former member of the Police Mobile Force whose armory was attacked as the first target of the Revolution, as well as a Principle Secretary in the current government.

Additionally, through an archival newspaper article and contacts in Uganda, I located a previously unknown wife of Ugandan Field Marshall John Okello, who was the instigator of the government overthrow. In a remote village in northern Uganda, I interviewed this woman and other family and friends of Okello’s who provided me with insights into his childhood as well as his life after the Zanzibar Revolution. Far too Fanonian in his expression of retributive violence for Zanzibari sensibilities, this

revolutionary leader’s desire for power got him unceremoniously deported from Zanzibar only two months after the revolution. Finding himself *persona non grata* all over East Africa, he was ultimately killed by soldiers of another Ugandan Field Marshal, Idi Amin.

The opposing narratives of the Revolution that are regularly debated in blogs and *barazas* each entail factual details as well as conspiratorial imaginings. In my dissertation, I deconstruct the narratives, situating and analyzing both the actualities and the roots of the conspiracies.

In late 1963 and early 1964, various groups of Zanzibaris were talking about revolution. In a climate of rampant political gossip, one Assistant Superintendent of Police admitted he “learned to ignore these rumors”. With roadblocks down at night, unarmed police sleeping in the barracks, rebels killed the sentry and took the guns from the armories. Within hours, control over weapons had far-reaching political ramifications, as other groups of people joined in when it began to appear that the government was actually toppled with much more speed and ease than almost anyone imagined was possible.

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