

## Friction or Closure: Heritage as Loss

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### Abstract

Heritage is a discourse that aims at closure. It fixates the narrative of the past through the celebration of specific material (or sometimes immaterial non-) objects. It organizes temporality and construct events and freezes time. How does this unfold in the case of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Stone Town, Zanzibar? It is a place of beauty and violence, of trade, slavery and tourism, and the World Heritage narrative does not accommodate all its significant historical facts and lived memories. In this article I will discuss some of these conflicting or competing historical facts.

The anthropologist Anna Tsing has developed the concept-metaphor *friction* as a way to discuss the energy created when various actors narrate “the same” event(s) in different ways, and see the other participants’ accounts as fantasies or even fabrications. I will use my position as researcher and my relations to different sources: informants, authorities and texts, and discuss how different accounts relate to and partly construct each other; and how I, in my own process as an analyst and listener, negotiate these conflicting stories, what I identify as valid and non valid accounts. The case in this article is Stone Town in Zanzibar and the development and dissolution going on under the shadow of the UNESCO World Heritage flag; a growing tourism; a global and local increase in islamisation; and the political tension within the Tanzanian union. My main focus is narratives of the identity of Zanzibar since heritagization constructs identity.

**Keywords:** Identity, Zanzibar, cosmopolitanism, friction, history, heritage, memory

It is always the past that remembers (Mudge 2013)

## Tanzania in Our Hearts

Tanzania is a favourite among African countries by many western governments, famous for its relative peaceful and harmonious postcolonial history. It is not by accident that when President Barack Obama travelled to Africa in 2013 he included Tanzania (the other two visited states were Senegal and South Africa) in the tour. Scandinavian countries have strong relations to Tanzania and many Scandinavian individuals have personal experience from shorter or longer stays in different capacities: as missionaries, aid workers, scholars, volunteers, or just as travellers/tourists (Eriksson Baaz 2005). One reason for the Scandinavian interest is that Tanzania was a relatively unimportant colony for its former colonizer, United Kingdom, and therefore “open” to neo-colonial engagement from other parties. Tanganyika, the mainland part of the union Tanzania, became a British colony quite late, after the First World War, when Germany lost all its colonies in the Versailles Treaty. Kenya and Uganda were always more important colonies in the region for the British Empire, and still are as post-colonies. The independence era’s moderate socialist leader Julius Nyerere and his leadership is another reason, since he was seen as an excellent example of how Scandinavian social democrats imagined the new postcolonial Africa. A Tanzania ruled by African socialism, and the principles of *Uhuru na Ujamaa* (Nyerere 1968), appealed to Scandinavian benevolence. These circumstances have shaped my own image of Tanzania, both Tanganyika and Zanzibar alike, even if their histories, their identities, their place within the Tanzanian union, differ substantially.<sup>1</sup> One token of the outstanding place Tanzania has in Scandinavia is the fact that both Swedish and Danish aid agencies have kept Tanzania as one of their main target countries for third world aid in times of austere politics.<sup>2</sup>

But there are many reasons why this image needs an update: The image of the peaceful and equal country becomes distorted once you look beyond the majority of the population. Anthropologists have shown that even if the model of *ujamaa* might have done some good for the vast majority that was either farmers or urbanised, it did not suit nomadic minorities at all – especially the smaller and lesser well-known groups: the strong focus on farming and land was counterproductive and unsupportive of their way of living and making their livelihood (Holmqvist & Talle 2005).

Another conflict regarding majority and minority is the one between the mainland Tanganyika, and the other part of the union, Zanzibar. Often Tanzania is in fact referring rather to mainland Tanganyika and the Zanzibari archipelago is more or less forgotten. For example in a recent Swedish thesis on democratisation in Tanzania, the author (whose expertise on Tanganyika is indisputable) states in the opening that “Tanzania has been independent in 2011 for 50 years.” (Ewald

2011: 7) *Tanganyika* had been independent 50 years in 2011 but *Tanzania* did not exist in 1961, and its other part, Zanzibar, became independent in December 1963. This mistake is very common, and usually not taken very seriously. Even Zanzibaris talk about “Tanzania” as something external, referring to “mainland” or Tanganyika, not really including themselves in it. The name Tanganyika does not have the same status as Zanzibar anymore, the latter still being the main referent to Unguja – the name of the main island of the Zanzibari archipelago, as well as to the second island, Pemba.<sup>3</sup> Tanganyika is the old and official name of the mainland, which is rarely used nowadays. Naming is, as we know, not innocent; in this case these usages of names is complicit in marginalising Zanzibar in relation to the “mainland”, in confirming the fiction that Tanzania is more or less identical with Tanganyika.

### **Zanzibar, the Oriental Pearl of Africa**

When I first arrived in Zanzibar in 2011, I thought I had come to this pearl of Tanzania – a part of Africa, but with a mystic touch of the Orient. That is how the tourist industry sells Zanzibar to the world, and the narrative consists of a mixture of western imageries and projections including pristine beaches and oriental delight. And it is of course “true” in one sense. The beaches *are* long, white and fringed by palm trees. Many of the hotels all over the island enact beautifully the western idea of the orient, and evoke fantasies about the kind of pleasure that scholars (Said 1978; Campbell 2001) have described as essential to western narratives about the orient. The references are subtle, since “[i]magination must take the strain when facts are few” and the goal is “to seed fantasies about sex, submission, jealousy, power and violence” (Campbell 2001: 37) without being too blunt about what it is that attracts tourist to the exotic faraway, as well as not disturbing the actual oriental part of Zanzibar, the highly religious Muslim community. Both urban and rural Zanzibar bears signs of that Muslim community, but in most cases reality does not live up to the commercialised orient that attract the tourist gaze (Urry 2002).

But it is Stone Town – Mji Kongwe –, the old part of the capital, Zanzibar City, which has attracted the world’s interest and which became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000. Stone Town is situated on a cape on the east coast, facing mainland and the old port of Bagamoyo.<sup>4</sup> The town consists of a number of outstanding buildings along the waterfront such as the House of Wonder, the Palace Museum, and the Old Fort etcetera. Beyond these, more anonymous houses together constitutes the famous labyrinth inner part of Stone Town, one-family townhouses mixed with bigger apartment houses. There are two churches (one Catholic and one Anglican), two Hindu temples, and around 50 mosques. The estimated habitants are 20.000 but many more spend their days there coming from the outskirts, or the surrounding Zanzibar city, home to some 200.000 people.

Most of the buildings in Stone Town are built in the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however some are significantly older, at least partially. These houses were usually homes to Arabic and Indian traders and their families and employees or slaves. In 1832 the sultan of Oman decided to make Stone Town of Zanzibar the capital of the sultanate to which Zanzibar belonged already since 1698. In 1890 the British Empire made Zanzibar a protectorate with the sultan as the official leader but under the British governor, an arrangement that lasted until Zanzibar became independent in December 1963. Only a month later a revolution overthrew the Arab-dominated order that was installed by the Britons as they left governance, and in April 1964 the union with Tanganyika was established. During the pre-independence years Zanzibar was a flourishing cultural and intellectual hub for East Africa, which withered away during the 60s and 70s, as more focus and resources in Tanzania were channelled to mainland and Dar es Salaam. Many of the intellectuals were either killed during the revolution or exiled in its aftermath. In the late 80s and early 90s, the until then the quite sleepy island became a hotspot for backpacking tourists and a growing fascination for the historical and decaying place begun that eventually led up till the nomination and listing of Zanzibar Stone Town on UNESCO's World Heritage list in 2000.

This is what UNESCO agreed on as *Outstanding Universal Values* (OUV) in Stone Town:

- *Criterion ii*: The Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization.
- *Criterion iii*: For many centuries there was intense seaborne trading activity between Asia and Africa, and this is illustrated in an exceptional manner by the architecture and urban structure of the Stone Town.
- *Criterion vi*: Zanzibar has great symbolic importance in the suppression of slavery, since it was one of the main slave-trading ports in East Africa and also the base from which its opponents such as David Livingstone conducted their campaign.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously “history” is everywhere in Stone Town since it is a heritage site. But it is not only the aspects of history that is acknowledged in the UNESCO criteria for the site, and was considered significant for the World Heritage nomination, but other aspects of history, as well as other epochs are present in the town. What interests me is the relation between the international/global discourse and governance and the local effects/affects that became significant in and through conversations. Utterances and expressed feelings that I was confronted with in Stone Town during fieldwork and interviews is my point of departure. The fieldwork took place mostly during two visits, one in November to January 2012–2013, and one in June and July 2013, but also during a follow up in July 2014. My informants are members of Reclaim women's heritage – a quite diverse group, but dominating are well educated middle aged women who run the centre but there are also some newly recruited women who are the “target group”: women who could benefit

from their activities. Other informants are mostly men who live in my neighbourhoods and who I know as neighbours, or as workers or managers at, or owners of the cafés or restaurants that I frequently visit. Their backgrounds are very diverse, some have been abroad for years and has returned to run a business or take positions in public administration, or they are mainlanders who came to Zanzibar to find a work in or close the tourist industry, or they are locals who struggle everyday to get some small money in relation to tourism, as drivers, boatmen, sellers of curiosa etcetera. Their age differ from late teens to middle age. I also talked both formally and informally to staff at Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority (STCDA).

### **History, Heritage, Memory**

The historical events I did expect to encounter and that would matter to Stone Towners were related to the above listed criterions: the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when most of Stone Town was constructed as a result of the “cultural fusion” between the Arabic, Indian, Portuguese and African influence. Many significant buildings originated in this era, and they are what one encounter everyday in Stone Town. This structure that emanates from many centuries of “seaborne trading activity between Asia and Africa” and that led up to this cultural fusion is also possible to get a sense of strolling around in Mji Mkongwe (“old town”). The heydays of slave trade have been made visible through a questioned installation named “the slave market”.<sup>6</sup> But that was not what was on most peoples’ mind once I begun to engage with what most Zanzibaris talk and are passionate about. In the beginning of most conversations where I usually told them that I was in Stone Town to investigate what the World Heritage nomination had led to for the inhabitants, the informants politely would answer my questions and serve me brief comments or maybe become a bit upset about what it didn’t give them (like no possibilities to buy everyday necessities in their neighbourhood because all the former shops had been turned to tourist shops run by foreigners, or to develop their properties to fulfil their current needs). However, it usually didn’t take long until the conversation turned to other topics, usually leading to passionate micro lectures about the Tanzanian union, which I soon learned was intensively discussed at public spaces as the famous Jaw’s Corner where mostly men gather to exchange news and gossip. That topic quickly led to conversations about events some 50 years ago that engaged most of my informants – most of them not born or old enough to have their own memories – and the present consequences of these events. The historical period that keeps coming up in conversations – and also in literature once my gaze was turned in that direction – is the era of independence and the unresolved events of that period, such as the revolution and the constitution and the conditions of the Tanzanian union. In daily conversations on the street, at cafés and tourist shops, as well as with professionals in different capacities in the heritage site, topics related

to this turmoil were touched upon, one way or another. This era is not a part of the UNESCO documentation and therefore insignificant for the *actual* heritagization of Zanzibar.<sup>7</sup> Both the era in itself but also the widespread assumption that something was lost in that process is absent from the official narrative. What actually was lost does not form a coherent narrative, and maybe it is just loss in itself that is the main content in these narratives: a shared experience of loss. Much of this experienced loss can be related to what in Islands Studies is referred to as “to island”: which among other things refers to the change of identity once the island becomes a part of a bigger mainland. Marginalisation and the experience of being an extension to this bigger unity rather than to something in itself becomes central the new identity built upon *islandness*. The experience of loss is a part of becoming an island, as a consequence of the decline of oceanic community and the rise of continental, and the feeling of marginalisation or difference emerged as one of its core traces in how it relates to the world and to its mainland.<sup>8</sup>

### Friction as a Thicket Path

My focus in this study was planned to focus on the present and near history: what the UNESCO World Heritage nomination had brought to Zanzibar during its little more than one decade of existence. However it turned out that it was impossible to stay in the present and recent past. Or at least in the sense I was expecting, and that the world heritagization directs our gaze towards. As Sharon Macdonald writes in *Memorylands. Heritage and Identity in Europe today* about field methodology: it

goes beyond simply recording “native voices” but entails a rigorous commitment to trying to grasp the patterns of relations of which utterances, practices, feelings and so forth, are part; and what they may be linked with. This frequently involves or leads to reflexivity about categories of analysis and forms of knowledge production – including the role of scholarship itself. (Macdonald 2013: 9)

I set out asking whether (world) heritagization, with its highly directed and designed version of history, aiming to fit in the UNESCO format, were benefitting the people living in the site, or whom it fit/unfit. Does the heritagization silence other stories, more relevant and locally important? Who has the power over historiography? This is not only a matter of concern for these people, but also a prerequisite to maintain the qualities of the World Heritage site if it shall remain a living site and not a museum. My preconceptions of which other stories could hide behind the World Heritage narratives were vague. With the anthropologist Anna Tsing’s concept of friction, developed to study “the productive friction of global connections” (Tsing 2005: 3), I was offered a tool to resist temptations of simplified confirmation and closure (White 1979). This is how she came up with the concept:

The metaphor of friction suggested itself because of the popularity of stories of a new era of global motion in the 1990s. The flow of gods, ideas, money, and people would henceforth be pervasive and unimpeded. In this imagined global era, motion would proceed entirely without friction. [---] In fact, motion does not proceed this way at all. [...] These kinds of “friction” inflect motion, offering it different meanings. (Tsing 2005: 5f)

The notion of, as well as the factual, Tanzania, that mostly includes Zanzibar as an exotic appendix, creates *friction* whenever Zanzibaris interact with non-zanzibaris, westerners or others. With the help of the concept I could see that the preconceptions of Tanzania I brought to this study was not only a problem. Obviously they obscured my gaze to some degree, but they also turned out to be productive and challenging due to the friction that occurred when met with contradictory ideas, and hence challenged. If ideas and conceptions from the field hadn't been put in relation to my preconceptions, I might have ignored them since they didn't fit into my research design. Or I might have accepted them too readily, whereas friction pushed me to dwell, to stay in these uncomfortable places, to deepen my understandings, and also took me to new places, places that I did not plan or expect to go. As Tsing writes:

Roads are a good image for conceptualizing how friction works: Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement. Friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing. (Tsing 2005: 6)

As a Scandinavian researcher, with the background I sketched above, the narratives that questioned the legitimacy of the Tanzanian union, appeared provocative and disturbing and my immediate impulse was to resist them. I produced all sorts of counter narratives to make sense of these statements. Some of the narratives I categorised as expressions of a feeling of declassification from (former) privileged people, where the context and legitimating framework of the privileged classes got lost in the transformation brought by independence, the revolution, and the unionisation. Or the loss of a time when class differences were not questioned or challenged, when their privileges were not challenged by socialist notions of equality and *ujamaa* (nor integrated in the new postcolonial power structures). Others could be understood as statements coming from uninformed poor people who are either declassified or who don't feel that they have benefitted from the socialist Tanzanian union and believes they would have been better off in an independent nation-state of Zanzibar than in the union with Tanganyika. They seem to be oblivious of the fact that the wealth and cultural richness that is attributed to pre-independence Zanzibar was not equally distributed, and they would most likely have been as poor as they are now with or without the union. These arguments, my “explanations”, probably hold some truth. However I acknowledged my resistance and begun to consider its power, and how it was distorting the narratives. When I instead looked at the friction they caused, sometimes visible in my replies

(even if I tried to not “talk back”), I could hear and understand these notions differently.

### **Stone Town as World Heritage. The Tale of a Heritagized Town**

To be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site is to be identified as something extraordinary, and the international community has agreed that the site has *outstanding universal values*, which are of relevance for all humanity and shall be protected for an indeterminate future (Rao 2010; Frey & Steiner 2011). Obviously it is an important event for that locality and for the nation-state, who is the official stakeholder, and the nomination will eventually (at least that is what most actors aim for) bring status and more visitors, tourists, and money, to the site and to the region. More interesting from the perspective of this study, however, is that a UNESCO World Heritage nomination has performative powers: the site (or rather its agents) has agreed to perform as it self – a self constructed by the nominators based on what they saw as possible to transform to a world heritage – in the future. A self that has been defined in the nomination procedure by a small group of professionals whose most important competence is benchmarking in accordance with UNESCO’s values (Ronström 2008). In this particular case that means to perform as “an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization”. Even if it is the built heritage that this refers to, it still affects the inhabitants who are expected to live and reproduce that very environment. As the anthropologist Rosabelle Boswell writes, with the example from another island in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius, which has a UNESCO World Heritage site:

This obviously required residents of Le Morne (ethnically and socially diverse) to be cast as cultural subjects and to Perform a version of Creole identity, as well as to draw upon publicly articulated memories to inform their identity. (Boswell 2011a: 172)

One question this raises is how to manage *culture* at a World Heritage site? So far what has been done in Stone Town is efforts to preserve the material structure. But what about “the cultural fusion”? How do you manage that? Many professionals argue that it is solely the built environment that is a concern for the nomination, and that the question about managing culture therefore is of minor interest. That might formally be right. But is it possible to separate the two? Can we imagine material structures where actual people live that are conceptually and practically separated from each other? Is not the latter a prerequisite for the former? How can one expect people who live in a site, maybe unaware or uninterested in UNESCO policies, to be a part of the preservation of the town? Somehow this boils down to if materiality constitutes culture or the other way around, or what is more valuable than the other. This is of course a rhetorical question. We know that actual people rarely can compete when money, income, “bigger issues”, are at stake. But if we forget that, and assume that the cultural fusion that UNESCO has

defined as an OUV is produced and reproduced by the people living it, rather than by engineers, architects, managers, etcetera, would not a focus on this *lived* cultural fusion be a priority, if only as means to preserve the built material? It seems as many actors in the field assume that the causality goes the other way around, how else can one understand the fact that for example the Swedish Aid Agency would engage in heritage preservation at all: the expectation must be that the effort to preserve the built environment in Stone Town will bring tourists, money and development to the region, and therefore minimize poverty. As the anthropologist Tania Li has shown, there is a strong tendency to focus on materiality, on engineers, on some kind of technical support, when it is actually social and cultural support that was the aim for the project from the start. The latter being so much more unpredictable, uncontrollable, more difficult: better, as in easier, to put the money and time in yet another machine, infrastructure, that is somewhat measurable within the given project time – what happens after the project is finished the funder is not accountable for (Li 2007).

There is awareness among the staff at STCDA about the need to work with culture as well and their lack of competence in that area.<sup>9</sup> So far there is not much available knowledge on how to work on cultural resilience, and it was not really considered when the institution of World Heritage was outlined. Even if it still is the built environment that is protected, the maintainers are the inhabitants.

## Stone Town as a Site of “Cultural Fusion”

There is not one single narrative of the cultural fusion Stone Town is characterised by, but many competing and sometimes even conflicting stories, depending on who is telling it and for what reason, and in which context and time. There is no certainty on exactly when and how different groups of people first came to the zanzibarian archipelago – which shares its history with the so-called Swahili coast, or the Swahili corridor. In some accounts Zanzibar belongs to the Indian Ocean culture, or the Dhow culture – that widespread area where the traditional sailing boat named dhow sailed, from the east African coast all the way to the Philippines – rather than to continental Africa. In one obvious sense, which we soon shall return to, Zanzibar is of course a part of Tanzania and Africa.

Those who inhabit the islands today are descending from many different groups: Africans from the mainland began to come more than 2000 years ago, mostly as fishermen, and later they were brought as slaves. During the 800<sup>th</sup> century Asians started to come, the first commonly believed to have come from Persia – and their heritage is referred to as Shiraz, even though there are no available hard facts to support that there actually came people from that part of Asia. The groups have intermarried and merged during the centuries, and the descendants are referred to and identifies as Afro-Shiraz. This group is quite diverse since there has been a constant flow between the mainland and the islands and new

waves of Arabic and Indian migrants have been absorbed. Sometimes the Afro-Shiraz is referred to as Swahilis – as in contrast to people identifying and identified as Arabs or Indian. Arabs mainly from Oman have frequented and settled the islands and the coast for many centuries as traders, and Indians from the Indian subcontinent came as workforce and traders mainly during British rule. Since Vasco da Gama rounded Cape of Good Hope in 1498, Portuguese, Britons, Germans and other Europeans, have traded and settled along the coast.

This hybrid society, in “these coastal and island communities”, is often described as “cosmopolitan in flavor” due to its extensive trade relations both with the interior of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.<sup>10</sup> The “cultural fusion” that the UNESCO nomination refers to is often understood as “cosmopolitan” – which is an interesting label, given that many scholars consider cosmopolitanism being a privileged western state of being (Cheah 2006). The cosmopolitanism that is ascribed to Stone Town, in and through UNESCO, can partly be understood as a result of the touristic gaze and as a projection. Yet, it can be relevant to describe Stone Town as a cosmopolitan place in the sense that a small elite – which of course is not unique for this place since cosmopolitanism is most often used to describe different elite lifestyles – of varied background has dominated the town and its culture during its whole existence. The story of the Zanzibari Princess Salme is a good example of that, which might partly explain why it is used in many contexts: one exhibition is devoted to her in the Palace Museum in Stone Town, and her autobiography, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*, is for sale all over Stone Town. Also the House of Wonder has an exhibition space about her, which in Boswell’s phrasing “appear to have obliterated the role of Arabs in the persecution and enslavement of Africans” and she argues that its “[n]ostalgic and romanticized accounts of the Arab descendant princess Salme blur the memory of slavery.” (Boswell 2011a: 173) The story about her is also used as a way to promote hotels and give an orientalist air to them.<sup>11</sup> But there are other ways to understand cosmopolitanism. Stuart Hall described the Caribbean identity in terms of a history of uprooting and violent unsettling which has created diverse and mixed societies, with no grand narratives of the nation-state giving meaning to their existence, but still with a of unity, that can be described as “‘becoming’ as well as [...] ‘being’” (Hall 1994: 394). The uprooting in itself, and the forced coexistence with strangers in an alien place became another “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) that Caribbean societies share in spite of other differences. Robbie Shilliam develops that idea further when he appropriates the term cosmopolitanism, that used to point at privileged peoples lifestyles transcending the nation-state, and describes Caribbeans as truly cosmopolitan in how they have come to live together and negotiate differences (Shilliam 2011). In his writings about creolity Tomas Hylland Eriksen has shown that the concept is not only valid for the West Indies, but also for the Indian Ocean, which since many hundred, if not thousands of years, has been a very creolised part of the world (Eriksen 2007).

A recurring claim is that the town pre-revolution was divided in ethnic/racial enclaves. This narrative is stressed by the Women's heritage group, both in conversations and in their documentation, and the underlying assumption is one of a lost imagined harmony, almost in opposition to the idea of "cultural fusion" – or maybe the prerequisite for the cultural fusion.<sup>12</sup> (2009) A claim contested by William Cunningham Bissell who argues that the idea of the division is oblivious of the fact that even if houses were owned and mainly inhabited by Arabs (a quite unstable category in itself since ethnic lines did not exactly follow racial) they usually had Afro-Shiraz people working and living in their households, or earlier on, descendants of African slaves. And there were also poor people of Indian and Arab descent who lived in the poorer parts of the town according to Cunningham Bissell, so the urban geography was more blurred than these nostalgic narratives acknowledge. It is a part of the colonial nostalgia to stress the assumed harmony in the colonial society (Bissell 2011: 66f). This "nostalgia" can also be a cover for more strategic narratives supported or even created by the British colonial administration that here as elsewhere used ethnic divisions as a means to split and govern. According to Sharae Deckard it was a part of British colonial politics to project an image of an ethnified town, a projection that had performative powers:

The British colonial regime saw Zanzibar in racial categories expressed directly in spatial terms. Zanzibaris came to use those categories to their own ends. The decade Zanzibaris call the *Time of Politics* (1954–64) that came at the end of colonialism, in particular, was a time of politics orchestrated explicitly around race and racial geography in the city. (Myers 2011: 173)

The influence went in many directions and the ethnic identities were manifold and opposing each other in intricate patterns, and "[...] Arab-Islamic dominance was not totalizing." Even if colonial European historians tended to see "direct Arab influence in every aspect of the East African urban culture" (Deckard 2010: 100) the reality is that they were much more hybridized and diverse. Further, the

relationship of the Swahili to the people of the coasts and the interior was not one of the unmitigated exploitation, but rather a more fluid negotiation of ethnicity and social positioning. Most Arabs who settled on the coasts gradually adopted Swahili culture and speech. A vertiginous array of markers characterized the social hierarchy of nineteenth-century Swahili culture, where ethnicity became a vehicle for distinguishing between the different groups that composed coastal towns. Established residents, recently settled immigrants, and new arrivals were ranked in terms of how indigenous (*wenyeji*) or how foreign (*wageni*) they were perceived to be [...] The fluidity of these ethnic categories, whose boundaries were continually in the process of negotiation, sharply contrasts the rigidity of the racial hierarchies constructed by Germans and British in their "divide and rule" policies. (Deckard 2010: 100)

The Zanzibari/Swahili identity has been in constant flux, and political and economical changes are important factors in regulating this fluidity.<sup>13</sup> Regional power structures, growing and declining nation-states, empires, have had great impact. The union and the semi-autonomous status of Zanzibar has been questioned since

the birth of the union, and now in 2014, 50 years later, there are serious political processes to renegotiate the conditions for the union to grant more independence to the two parties of the union. But what is it in all this diversity that UNESCO refers to when they use the term “cultural fusion”? As stated above “culture” for UNESCO refers rather to the built heritage where different styles and elements have merged, in one building or in how houses next to each other “in harmony” reflects “cultural differences”, but the relation to the actual people and their culture that produced this is not really considered.

## **Unresolved Memories of a Revolution**

The fact that 1832 Stone Town became the capital of the sultanate of Oman and one of the leading towns of the Arab world is still a strong narrative. Even if already in 1890 that changed, since Zanzibar became a full British protectorate, the Sultan kept ruling the country but now under British “supervision”, the infamous indirect rule of British colonisation, a construction that remained until independence 1963. Even if that meant big changes there is a tendency to see continuity from at least 1832 (and before) until the union, and to place the big discontinuity to the years following independence.<sup>14</sup> During British rule racial segregation in Zanzibar went from an informal to a more formal condition, and Whites, Indians and Arabs in that particular order were favoured. Swahilis with African descent were attributed a stronger connection to mainland Africa and were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, under the Afro-Shirazi. The years heading up to independence therefore formed a political landscape of

two camps: the anti-Sultanate, Africa-oriented, and secular Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) with a stronghold in the densely populated areas of Unguja; and the pro-Sultanate, Arab World-oriented, and explicitly Islamic Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) [...] At independence, the British handed power to the two parties friendliest to the Sultanate and the status quo: the ZNP and [its ally the] ZPPP.<sup>15</sup>

When Zanzibar became independent the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1963, the British transferred the power to a party supported by the Sultan. This transfer was provoking to the majority of the Afro-Shirazi, who identified it as a strategy to maintain as much of the stability and continuity as possible into the post-independent era (Burgess 1999). Only one month later, the Sultan was overthrown in a bloody revolution led by the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), and the People’s Republic of Zanzibar was proclaimed. The autonomous republic lasted less than four months, and in April 1964 the union of Tanzania, Zanzibar together with Tanganyika, was born. These are the events that keep occurring in conversations on the island.

The Afro-Shirazi Party staged their revolution only one month after the independence of December 10<sup>th</sup>, the 12<sup>th</sup> of January, as a reaction to the British effort to make a smooth transition from protectorate to independence, with the goal to maintain good relations to the ruler – who was the same sultan (or his successor)

who had been “leading” the country under British “protection” since 1890, and in succession since 1832. The ambition was to secure continuity, and that must be understood as a part of the making of the new *Eurafrica* that European leaders had come to realise was the only possible (and desired) way forward, since it had become obvious that colonisation as we knew it had become obsolete (Hansen & Jonsson 2014). The 1964 revolution had stirred worries that Zanzibar should become the (revolutionary) Cuba of Eastern Africa, in Europe as well as in the United States. Zanzibar could become that spark that would ignite the radical fire that would turn the whole African continent communist. Understood in this way the objective with the union was to domesticate the revolutionary Zanzibar and to save Africa from the communist flare which was a substantial (real or imagined) fear of the 1950s and 1960s, and which would have brought an end to the strong bonds between Europe and its former colonies, and therefore undermining the intention to keep up the trade between Africa and Europe (Burgess et al. 2009). During the revolution, in January 1964, ethnical cleansings, as well as political, took place, and many non-blacks, of Arabic and/or Indian descent, fled or were killed (between 5.000–10.000). And again, when the union became a fact, many of the revolutionary leaders and intellectuals were also killed, or forced away, to exile in Europe and elsewhere. In spite of colonial ideas about the “white man’s burden”, it is obvious in this case that the British were more interested in securing power than looking out for the poorest in the colony, or in this case, the protectorate. Zanzibar was ruled in a classical divide and rule style, and it was the Arabs that according to the British had the potential to be leaders.

The independence and the turbulent years that followed changed the whole archipelago, but perhaps particularly Stone Town, since it had until then been a place dominated by wealthy Arabs, of whom many were killed or forced into exile. Many of their townhouses were left empty, and little by little they became inhabited by Afro-Shirazis coming from the suburbs, the countryside, or by migrating mainlanders. As late as in the 1990s there were still abandoned empty houses, before heritagization and tourism boomed. Those transitory years in the 1960s are a strong heritage and a strong memory, which is retold by Zanzibaris in many different versions and contexts, and are used as an explanation to many of the experienced changes and shortcomings since then. This is the era referred to when experiences of loss are expressed. In the Women’s heritage group there has been a focus on collecting childhood stories, and of memories of public spaces.<sup>16</sup> These stories contain nostalgic memories that reflects moments that refers to a lost happiness that is told as belonging not only to “childhood” but to a specific childhood where the sultan played the role as the patriarch. For example during one of the meetings I participated in (January 2013), playgrounds as a public space and scene from childhood were discussed, as childhood and public space is one of the topics that they have used when collecting memories among women from Stone Town. The women talked about memories of swinging and the Sultan is under-

stood to have been supplying and maintaining the swings and the playgrounds – in contrast to the current republic government – where no swings are available in public spaces (Boswell 2011b; Boswell 2011a). In anecdotes like these, seemingly without reason, the conversation touches upon the transition from colonial to postcolonial times. More often than I would have thought, colonial times are privileged, and again my preconceptions are provoked, and my ideas on what should and should not be privileged. Postcolonial time ought in my mind be privileged before colonial since it meant independence; republic rule over royal since it meant peoples' rule instead of monarchy. I cannot say that I really can reconsider that from a general point of view, but I have to accept the fact that independence and the union is not experienced as a success story, and that it has failed in making itself meaningful and relevant to many Zanzibaris, and many Zanzibaris that I spoke to, expressed a wish that the sultan – who is still alive, in exile in UK – should return.

Another example of this ultra modernity in nostalgic dress, relates to the (lack of) infrastructure in the town. Stone Town was once considered among the most modern African cities, the installation of the first elevator in the House of Wonder, being one often referred to example. Typically however, the elevator has not been in use in decades. The streets of Stone Town had electric lighting before the streets of London. Another more crucial thing is water distribution: there are a number of big water distributors in Stone Town, that every household – if they do not have a private well on their property or common backyard – has to connect to, with their own pipes to the street. This creates a chaotic system of pipes (mixed with electric lines) some three meters above the ground all over Stone Town. That is neither practical, nor aesthetically in accordance with what one would expect from a World Heritage site, where the regulations on how one can repair or rebuild one's house is quite detailed and restricted. But there was a functional water distribution system "before independence", before the assumed mismanagement of the town, that is described as beginning with the revolution/unionisation and lasting at least until the heritagization process begun in the early 1990s. This fact, that there used to be a more developed water system is integrated in the narratives of loss, and is also typical in the process of *islanding*. Islands tend to create narratives of a glorious prehistory *before* the integration into/with the nearest mainland.

Those examples show that the pro-independence years are idealized, and since it is also the time of the sultanate, with its stronger political, cultural and economic bonds to the Arabic peninsula than to the "mainland", these narratives contribute to the on-going orientalisation of Zanzibar. The independence and the revolutionary years serve as point of nostalgia, both for those generations who remember life in town during the sultanate, and for those who experience the revolution as loss (Bissell 2005; Lowenthal 2013). This loss also entailed losing a radical well-educated elite, with influences from all over the Indian Ocean Area and East

Africa, and Zanzibar as the intellectual, political, and cultural metropolis of Eastern Africa (Burgess et al. 2009).

## Shifting Frontiers

There are many contradictions in the political landscape and its uses of identity and belonging, since nowadays it is the “mainland” in itself, as well as the “mainlanders” presence on the island, that is questioned, and work as an agent in the reinvention of Zanzibari identity. During the time of revolution and the fight for independence the antagonisms between Africans and Arabs grew strong as citizenship during the years before full independence was a crucial question, and became quite politicised. As Thomas Burgess argues there was an interest among many of the Arabs, whom mostly belonged to the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) to consider their marginal position in terms of numbers. They argued that more “recent African migrants from the mainland” should be excluded from the electoral rolls, whereas the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) wanted to include “mainlanders”. Both positions must be related to the fact that “only 17 percent of the total population identifying themselves as ‘Arabs’ in the 1948 census”, and that the question on how to construct the zanzibarian identity was a hugely political one (Burgess 1999: 32). ASP on their part meant that ZNP was put into power maintain Arabic economic and political domination, which could be traced back to the enslavement of Africans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ZNP argued that they were “the only genuinely anti-colonial, multi-racial, Muslim party”. What was at stake according to Burgess (1999: 32) was the “the very identity of Zanzibar”. ASP claimed the ties to Africa and the continent, whereas ZNP imagined Zanzibar’s future as a “multiracial Muslim state with its strongest cultural and political ties with the Arab Middle East” (Burgess 1999: 32). Translated to the current political landscape the distancing from the mainland has become naturalised, and seem to be shared by most Zanzibaris, and to claim Zanzibari identity as a non-mainland, and even non-African identity, has become mainstream. This opposing identity is explained in cultural as well as in historical terms. As one of my informants stated while discussing the eventuality of a future separation between Tanganyika and Zanzibar:

We were always mixed, and we are therefore more developed. [...] We overthrew the Britons ourselves, we *took* our freedom, but on the mainland it was given to them.

The statement was uttered as a part of a discussion about the difference between the Zanzibaris and the mainlanders. In it he, a man from Stone Town, in his thirties, who spent almost a decade in Europe, is expressing a similar idea of what is typical for Zanzibar as the one formulated in UNESCOs criteria about the cultural fusion, and he attributes to it a worldliness, an understanding of how to deal with the complexities of the modern and globalised world. Further he implies that Zan-

zibaris has agency (enough to overthrow their oppressors), and knowledge, and contrasts that to mainlanders who are assumed to be backwards, simpleminded, and passive victims, of history and globalisation, due to their lack of long-term interaction with many different modes of thoughts and lifestyles. But the statement also shows discrepancy with historical facts: the independence was “given” equally to both the countries, and a couple of years earlier to Tanganyika than to Zanzibar. Nonetheless it is a revealing utterance of how Zanzibaris/Stone Town inhabitants use history and the past to tell a story about cosmopolitan heritage.

Questions surrounding who the Zanzibaris are and where they came from are deeply problematic. Although the questions originate in a very distant past, it is a past dredged up daily in Zanzibar, articulated with the rise of mass tourism as the mainstay of the city’s, and the island’s, economy, and the consequent commodification of history. It is a past reconstructed regularly across the diaspora as well, across many forms of media and in everyday conversations. (Myers 2011: 172)

Identity and the question of whom is Zanzibari and who is not, is on the table everyday. Yet there seems to be an agreement that a “real” Zanzibari can come in many colours, ranging from very dark to almost white, and can belong to different ethnicities: Afro-Shirazi, Swahili, Indian, or Arabic, as well as of mixes of these. That said, one should not be tempted to believe that there are no frictions to the coexistence of these different identities. But they are all accepted as Zanzibari in contrast to mainlanders or expats. As Myers frames it, Zanzibar is “a fractured homeland and a fractured diaspora.” (2011: 173) And Zanzibar

is particularly politicized in its complications. There is a Zanzibar that belongs to the United Republic of Tanzania, and a Zanzibar that belongs to history as many different things. [...] Zanzibar is claimed by pan-Africanists and African nationalists and communist revolutionaries and Arab nationalists and Islamists and Pempanists and human rights activists and hip-hop artist. [...] What unites Zanzibar, what is held in common as Zanzibar, or who belongs to *what* Zanzibar, and who gets to decide which Zanzibar is which? (Myers 2011: 173f)

The UNESCO statement “The Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization” might be true when it comes to “cultural fusion”, but the “harmonization” is not obvious from all corners – if we are not restricting our conversation only to how “Indian” balconies are harmoniously attached to “Arabic” houses.

Identity is a burning issue almost everywhere, which takes different forms and is used to different ends. The last couple of decades “identity politics” have been widely questioned by many scholars. Yet, identity matters for people, politics, culture, life, and resistance. In most societies politics is mediated through identities, and it is often through identity one is interpellated and affected by social or religious movements, political parties etcetera. From the case of Stone Town, and its “cultural fusion” it is obvious that “ethnic identities [...] represent only ‘a small fraction’ of the many identities mobilized in postcolonial Africa” and that

time, and political, social change plays in to how identities develop, or are developed (Myers 2011: 30).

In Zanzibar the concept of indigeneity is not often used, but when it is, it refers to the Afro-Shirazi, who are understood to have been first on the islands, and that is in the political context of the ASP – Afro-Shirazi Party. It seems as if different ideas of mixed or parallel identities is more fitting to understand and describe how Zanzibaris understand identity: *creolity*, *hybridity* (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1994; Eriksen 1995). But it might be that ideas of *cosmopolitanism* is a better way to describe the way people live “side by side” – as Homi Bhabha formulated it recently, also asking for new ways to think urbanity as a cosmopolitanism that is based not in elites, but in all migrants over the world:

What does it mean to be at home in globalization? What forms of solidarity and alliance are made possible by living side by side with difference and alterity? Must we live in the shadow of sovereignty, or can we surpass it, or are we caught in its ambivalence? (Bhabha 2013)

Also Robbie Shilliam suggest that we redefine the concept of cosmopolitanism and bring it out of its Eurocentric worldview that makes us understand it as an impulse emerging from the west, when it can be argued that cosmopolitanism has been growing in many hybridized, creolised societies, far from the western metropolis (Shilliam 2011). This shall not be understood as if cosmopolitanism is the norm elsewhere, but a possible future that is not necessarily Eurocentric. As Burgess argues “Zanzibari revolution [...] was a violent rejection of Zanzibar’s cosmopolitan heritage” (Burgess et al. 2009: 1) and that it broke with 150 years of Arabic and south Indian economical and cultural hegemony and aimed at bringing Zanzibar “back” to a more monocultural “African” community. Many hoped for the revolution to heal the wounds and tensions caused by the slave trade and colonisation, which it didn’t. Instead it can be argued that it overshadowed it, and created new tensions and fractures, and the union that followed became another example of how the problems with identity politics, can not be solved either through the installation of a new identity – African instead of Arabic – or by unifying ideas as that of the Tanzanian unions: *ujamaa*, if the inherent conflicts are not dealt with, and given its proper space in the collective memory. But the Swahili identity shows its resilience, and its capacity to, as all creolised cultures, survive in new circumstances, as itself, but different.

## Epilogue

As I do the final editing on this article I am back in Zanzibar, and Stone Town is, in July 2014, getting closer to be put on the list of danger, due mainly to two interventions, one that has been a concern since I came here for the first time in 2011, and one new: the first being the big new hotel at the seafront on a former public space. The second threat is the planning of a new or extended harbour that

will eat into the northern part of the seafront (as well as of the mangrove forest north of town). Is that something spoken of? Not really. When I try to ask about it, people are unaware of the significance and when I explain they agree that it is not a good thing... but still, development is more important. The on-going discussions about changing the constitution for the union stirs up much stronger sentiments, than any threat against the World Heritage status. To not getting more autonomy in the union is considered a definite threat.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I want to thank Dr Anna Bohlin at School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, and the seminar at Centre for Africa Studies, University of Cape Town, for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this article.
- <sup>2</sup> Tanzania is the Swedish Aid Agency's (SIDA) biggest receiving country with ca. 800 million SEK, <http://www.sida.se/Svenska/Har-arbetar-vi/Afrika/Tanzania/Samarbetet-i-siffror/> (retrieved 24 July 2014), almost the same amount, 640 DKK, is Denmark's development cooperation (DANIDA) contribution to Tanzania: <http://um.dk/da/danida/det-goer-vi/aarsberetning2012/danmarks-udviklingssamarbejde-i-tal/danmarks-bilaterale-bistand-til-afrika-2012/> (retrieved 24 July 2014).
- <sup>3</sup> When I in this article refer to Zanzibar it is Unguja that is implied.
- <sup>4</sup> Bagamoyo used to be the capital but when the harbour of Dar es Salaam grew Bagamoyo declined, but now Chinese investors is building a new harbour. In the old days it used to ship out slaves and ivory, whereas the future goods will be crops, petrol, gas and minerals.
- <sup>5</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/173> (retrieved 24 July 2014).
- <sup>6</sup> Many locals and scholars dismiss this as an authentic slave market, and the caves that are narrated by guides as spaces to accommodate slaves, probably contained food and other supplies, rather than people. The actual slave market was held in the open, close to the waterfront in the area of Shangani.
- <sup>7</sup> World heritage is as much a national business as it is international. The original intention was to protect objects that were of universal interest, but it has become a way to promote national status and it is the nation-state that nominates and who is responsible for the world heritage sites. In this case it is important that the nation-state is not Zanzibar but Tanzania, and that there is no public interest to highlight the memories that people are most occupied with. I cannot go further into this political aspect of the heritagization of Zanzibar here but I think it is relevant for anyone who wants to understand the heritagization, that there are many layers in every site and what is possible or desirable to heritage might not be what actually matters to people. One must also take into account that (intangible) memories are often considered as of lesser political as well as scholarly value than (tangible) heritage.

- <sup>8</sup> In the first issue of *Island Studies Journal* it is stated that “Islands are platforms for the emergence of national identity and for the affirmation of cultural specificity: critical resources, especially in a context of sweeping globalization and the death of cultures and languages. As prototypical ethno-scapes, islands have spearheaded the study of the production of locality”. Baldacchino, Godfrey (2006): “Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal”, *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 3–18.
- <sup>9</sup> In interviews with two engineers employed at STCDA that was conducted in July 2013.
- <sup>10</sup> <http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/tanzania/history> (retrieved 24 July 2014).
- <sup>11</sup> One example is how the story of the 19th century Omani Princess Salme is exploited, in the advertisement by one boutique hotel: <http://www.thezhotel.com/on-the-footsteps-of-princess-salme-of-zanzibar/> (retrieved 24 July 2014). Recently also the famous Emerson on Hurumzi exhibit a Princess Salme show.
- <sup>12</sup> Reclaim women’s heritage space is an NGO founded in cooperation with former Swedish Gender Studies of the university college of Gotland, and earlier funded by SIDA but nowadays on their own, trying to survive both as a supporting group for women’s business, and as a stakeholder of the world heritage. <http://reclaimzanzibar.blogspot.com/>
- <sup>13</sup> Compare the discussion Jean-Loup Amselle has in *Mestizo Logics*, where he claims that people in West Africa before colonisation tended to use the “tribal” belongings quite fluidly, depending on which belonging was most beneficial at a certain time and place. Amselle, Jean-Loup (1998): *Mestizo logics: anthropology of identity in Africa and elsewhere*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- <sup>14</sup> Erik Gilbert makes an argument in the same line, in his investigation of the colonial economy: “If there was a fundamental continuity between Zanzibar of 1860 and the Zanzibar of 1960, Zanzibar in 1970 was a totally different place” Gilbert, Erik (2004): *Dhows & the colonial economy in Zanzibar, 1860–1970*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- <sup>15</sup> <http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/tanzania/history> (retrieved 24 July 2014).
- <sup>16</sup> See Reclaim (2009): *Reclaim Journal. (Re)claim Women’s Space in World Heritage 2004–2009*. Genderinstitut Gotland, Reclaim Women’s Space in World Heritage Association, p 65–86. But it was also something they told me about at one of their Saturday meetings that I attended, and they showed me some samples of drawings that were produced during these memory workshops.

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