African Cuba, Comic Opera, a Miracle: 

The Iterability of Sovereignty in the Cold War Archive*

By Paul Bjerk

Texas Tech University (paul.bjerk@ttu.edu)

In conjoining the postcolonial states of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964, the newly created state of Tanzania was able to fend off Cold War pressures through a legalistic act of union. At the time, the union shifted American policy discourse away from foreign intervention as a response to communist influence in East Africa. Today, however, very different tropes inhabit the memory of these events in Zanzibar, fueling demands for increased sovereignty. Sovereignty is a discursively constructed concept, and thereby subject to reiteration generating new meanings and new contexts. The Cold War context of the original Tanzanian union treaty has been nearly forgotten in recent debates about Zanzibari sovereignty, now reiterated in a new context of religious and ethnic identity politics animated by distrust of the government.¹

The origin and ongoing debates about the Tanzanian union demonstrate how sovereignty is maintained and manipulated as the basis of the modern international order through discursive struggle.² A full understanding of the union’s inception requires methods encompassed by the relatively undefined category of “new diplomatic history” that seeks both a global purview and a holistic understanding of the cultural, even psychological, forces shaping diplomacy and foreign policy.³ The somewhat dated tools of discursive analysis still draw our attention to turns of phrase that illuminate the cultural palimpsest of metropolitan Cold War archival materials, where we can recognize the constrained agency of both the observers and the observed.

Arguing against Amrit Wilson’s conspiratorial suggestion that the union resulted from an intervention by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the evidence

* I would like to thank Texas Tech colleagues Laura Calkins and Justin Hart for helpful comments in an early stage of this article.


² See the concept of the “UN World” in John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 9–29.


Copyright © 2017 by the Board of Trustees of Boston University
presented here demonstrates that the Tanzanian union was a local initiative, explicitly requested within a week of the revolution by Zanzibari representatives.\textsuperscript{4} Without doubt, however, the threat of external intervention was a decisive catalyst in the treaty’s final negotiation.\textsuperscript{5} Its hasty implementation in April 1964 not only left many loose legal ends, but also no room for a referendum by Zanzibaris. Ongoing debates about the union are rooted in the questionable basis of its legality as well as unresolved memories of earlier iterations of Zanzibar’s sovereignty.\textsuperscript{6}

Questions about the union’s legitimacy have helped drive a government-initiated process to ratify a new constitution. The first draft of a new constitution in 2013 envisioned two distinct governments, for the mainland and for Zanzibar, under an umbrella government of Tanzania. A revision to that draft, produced by a Constitutional Assembly dominated by the ruling party, proposed to continue the controversial status quo: of a semi-autonomous Zanzibari government under the government of the Tanzanian union, with no separate mainland government.\textsuperscript{7} The continuation of this awkward Cold War compromise proved so unpopular that a referendum scheduled for April 2015 was indefinitely postponed, ostensibly for technical reasons, while the constitutional debate emerged the key issue of the October 2015 national elections.\textsuperscript{8}

There is virtually no publicly available information in the Tanzanian National Archive about the origin of the union treaty in April 1964. Lacking local records, historians can gather insight into the issues and debates that led to the union from contentious oral history, but documentary evidence for the union’s birth is available mainly


in American and British diplomatic records laden with their own obsessions. Diplomats were self-consciously aware that discursive expertise was a vehicle for their own career ambitions and influence. A diplomat based in Dar es Salaam at the time explained that American decision-makers were inundated with cable traffic and that good writing was the way to get attention: “That means finding that particular point, that particular nuance of what might have been a long conversation with a minister, that is the kernel, what’s really important, and put that right up front and make it eye-catching. That takes a special skill.” He noted that American Ambassador to Tanzania William Leonhart “had it in spades.”

Tracing the diplomatic tropes describing the shifting status of Zanzibar’s sovereignty demonstrates the ongoing utility of “postmodern” theory for navigating new histories of the Cold War.

Historians have long traced policy debates through diplomatic paper trails and public speech, but close attention to idiomatic phrases constituting the connective tissue in these debates can reveal cultural dynamics undulating below the surface of the international system of sovereign states. Jacques Derrida’s concept of iterability, for example, provides a useful methodological tool, not only for reading diplomatic correspondence, but also local themes of popular discourse. In the reiteration of clichés signaling participation in a set of institutionally based assumptions, we can identify points of inflection, where actors shaped events by reorienting discourse.

Clichés that had surrounded the assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1961 found influential reiteration in the creation of Tanzania in 1964. Recycled phrases like “African Cuba” or “comic opera,” used by diplomats to show their intimacy with the policymaking class of American bureaucracies, also signal turning points within discursive contexts that become legible in archival documents. By the same token, when Tanzania’s president Julius Nyerere labeled the union as a “miracle,” the reiteration


of his phrasing in the American foreign policy establishment provided a powerful alternative sign for Zanzibar’s status. The “miracle” signaled that intervention was no longer necessary, in a manner supportive of Cynthia Weber’s proposal that sovereignty is simulated in its differential relationship to intervention in an international field of practice.\textsuperscript{14}

Scholars looking at the Cold War in its international context face a bewildering array of methodological challenges, not the least of which is the need to cast off the “Cold War lens.”\textsuperscript{15} Matthew Connelly is correct that the internationalization of Cold War studies requires exactly this: the ability to stand outside of our objectification of the post-war order as superpower politics. But we also need to grapple with the actual exercise of superpower influence and the strategies of agency among those confronted by their neocolonial impositions. Such an approach requires historians to articulate Third World perspectives in metropolitan archives reconstructed in a manner analogous to those of the colonial subaltern while also divining the cultural context of metropolitan diplomats.\textsuperscript{16} Because the “Third World” is an artifact of the Cold War, and the topic of this essay, I will use the term to refer to that set of non-European, postcolonial countries generally encompassed by this category, as opposed to “metropolitan” states, referring to both Cold War superpowers and former colonial metropoles.\textsuperscript{17} Evidence from oral histories and Third World archives is necessary, but inevitably incomplete.\textsuperscript{18}

Histories of this period entail the reading of archives composed under a Cold War aegis to reveal subjective strategies driven by priorities outside of Cold War parameters without falling into the analytical trap of Orientalism.\textsuperscript{19} This will require knowledge of the deeper cultural currents driving policies at every juncture, as well as critical analysis of


\textsuperscript{15} Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence,” \textit{American Historical Review} 105, 3 (2000), 739–69.

\textsuperscript{16} Ranajit Guha influentially proposed to recover the agency of otherwise undocumented lives by reconstructing their voices and actions from their appearances in colonial documents, in \textit{Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

\textsuperscript{17} Pointing to Third World solidarity as an asset, Julius Nyerere told a reporter, “I’ve declared that the Third World does exist, and it has a meaning, and can be used for the betterment of the masses of poor people in the world.” Cited in A24 Media Documentaries, “Mwalimu Julius Nyerere,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQ6h2FbOhYc (viewed on July 12, 2015). See also Christopher J. Lee, “Introduction,” in Christopher J. Lee, ed., \textit{Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives} (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 15; Peter L. Hahn and Mary Ann Heiss eds. \textit{Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World Since 1945} (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).


archives themselves, their texts, and their construction. Methodologically this essay aims mainly to illustrate the latter, while making a specific argument that the union with Zanzibar arose as a hasty attempt to prevent an American intervention and stabilize the islands in the wake of the January 1964 revolution.

Derrida’s concept of iterability identifies a key linguistic operation at work in fields of practice. In Derrida’s view, at the very heart of linguistic communication is the attempt to record a self-sufficient message in a manner that allows it to communicate even when its author is absent and its audience indeterminate. As a constituent part of a shared linguistic code, any phrase must be “iterable,” and available for reiteration by another author in a new context. Authors build messages on reiterated fragments, and communicate them into new contexts where the process starts again. Elizabeth Ermarth argues that attention to discourse is not a mere fad but a paradigmatic insight into human relations, and that language provides a model for how people encode their experiences into a perceived reality. The communal nature of the encoding process necessitates a reevaluation of individual agency, and with it, historical causation. At best a fractured agency exists in moments of “enunciation,” when an actor’s intervention shifts the discursive context. Methodologically, this accords with the diplomatic historian’s attention to institutional process, visible in the places historians normally look, in public and private discourse, governmental policy, and the rituals of statecraft.

Bureaucratic Clichés and the Assassination of Lumumba

To establish the archival context for Zanzibar, a limited look at the discourse surrounding the assassination of the Congo’s first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, provides a useful illustration of the reiterated clichés that shaped Cold War policy. The American government has long denied any direct link to Lumumba’s assassination even though many surmised its influence almost immediately. An otherwise remarkably candid supplemental volume of the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) still exhibits ambiguity on this point. Its publication in 2013 is partially attributable to a scholarly

---


trajectory that preceded and then built upon the United States Senate Select Committee of 1975 led by Senator Frank Church that looked into an encyclopedic range of American espionage and “dirty tricks.”

The Church Committee found evidence that two CIA officers were ordered to assassinate Lumumba in the fall of 1960, and heard testimony that when “President [Eisenhower] expressed his wish that Lumumba would fall into a river full of crocodiles, [British Foreign Minister] Lord Home said regretfully that we have lost many of the techniques of old-fashioned diplomacy.”

Maintaining a veil of “plausible deniability” American intelligence agencies working with Belgian counterparts pursued plans that led to the nighttime execution in Katanga of Lumumba and two colleagues. Ten days later, their bodies were dug up and dissolved in sulfuric acid. Specific documentation of American knowledge and involvement in Lumumba’s assassination was long held secret. So scholars were left to build a circumstantial case leading eventually to a public inquiry in Belgium that left little doubt as to the actual events and ultimate responsibility.

The irony, as Luise White perceptively noted, is that “secrets and lies tell a lot.” Lying, as with covert activity, is a means of taking a credible story and claiming it as experience, seeking to ratify a new reality. A secret, as opposed to a wholly internal thought or memory, is a piece of privileged information that binds those who share it to a rationale for its concealment. The long-maintained mystery surrounding Lumumba’s assassination will forever make it a compelling sign of Cold War intrigue, continually reiterated as a means to ratify the exact story of intervention and assassination that the United States government seeks to elide. Code-named “stinky” and “satan” in the months before his death, Lumumba remains an endlessly iterable lightning rod for the passions of African liberation, and a cynically reconstructed symbol of Congolese nationalism.


What the assassination and subsequent dissimulation illustrate instead is the need for a more incisive approach to the Cold War archive in its entirety: as a discursive presence stretching across the cultures of a global battleground. The “archive” here includes both the physical archives in various countries where documents from this period can be found, but also something akin to Michel Foucault’s metaphorical archive of the concepts and ways of speaking of things that people draw on as they perceive, construct, and articulate meaning in their present world.\textsuperscript{31}

Outgoing president Dwight Eisenhower briefed his successor John F. Kennedy extensively on foreign policy issues during the transition period. The Congo was a prominent piece in the Cold War puzzle, and officials there worried the new American administration would be friendlier towards Lumumba.\textsuperscript{32} Eisenhower’s people left a short policy brief that framed the political crisis in the Congo as a Cold War problem in which Patrice Lumumba’s re-emergence as a political force would initiate the “Sovietization of the Congo as a first move … and touch off a chain reaction of secession movements” that would break up the Congo into “independent tribal states.”\textsuperscript{33}

Tribalist separatism was a multifarious trope. Frank Carlucci, an American Foreign Service officer in Congo at the time described this thesis as “the standard paper that I used to write and rewrite. I’d just switch the paragraphs around saying just about that.”\textsuperscript{34} In the reiteration of this theme, Congolese separatism and regional loyalties took on a particular utility in American diplomacy, auguring secessionism should a pro-American government fail. Separatist politics served as a rationale for the forceful imposition of a pro-American central state or, conversely, as means of sabotaging anti-American trends in the capital by advocating secessionism as the natural outcome of deep-seated cultural trends. After all, the CIA’s most prominent analyst averred, “Communists could be thrown out and Westerners invited in. Quick change and sheer chaos are always just over the horizon.”\textsuperscript{35} The policy brief framed Lumumba’s political marginalization as the key to American hegemony because “all of the anti-Lumumba Congolese leaders have expressed pro-


\textsuperscript{32} Mahoney, \textit{JFK}, 54–75; Telegram, Leopoldville to CIA, January 26, 1961, FRUS XXIII, p. 116, doc. 64.


\textsuperscript{34} Frank C. Carlucci III, interview with Charles Stuart Kennedy, April 1, 1997, FAOHC-ADST, http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Carlucci,%20Frank%20Charles%20III%20_April%201,%201997.pdf (viewed on July 12, 2015).

Western feelings and a desire to attract capital and technicians from Western countries.” Perceiving post-colonial states as fragile gave license to ignore claims of sovereignty for the sake of ideological goals. In this case, the United States was willing to support a separatist movement in Katanga as a hedge in the unlikely event that a functional Soviet alliance with Lumumba’s faction materialized.⁴⁶

As Kennedy entered office, a State Department veteran in the African Affairs Bureau, Martin F. Herz, reviewed Congo policy in a seventy-five page, “Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis,” on January 25, 1961.⁴⁷ Herz’s chronology confirmed the Eisenhower administration’s Cold War assessment, narrating the entire crisis based on American diplomatic and intelligence reporting from the first six months of Congolese independence. The reader is warned to read the account “in its entirety, from the beginning and without skipping,” as “each event and development needs to be related to what preceded it.” These obsessive instructions may simply reflect authorial pride; but do they also imply a specific way of reading a document that fades from granular detail into ellipsis to deal with unspoken secrets? A Belgian military intelligence officer appointed consul to secessionist Katanga, who later commanded Katangan troops in 1964, wondered much the same thing. Reflecting on the death Lumumba and his colleagues in the official record, Frédéric Vandewalle wondered whether Belgian diplomats were “truly unaware of the reception of Lumumba, Okito, and Mpolo, or is it the habit of Foreign Affairs to load files with bland remarks in delicate affairs? One could assume the second hypothesis.”⁴⁸

Within two weeks of independence, the Congolese Force Publique had mutinied against its Belgian officers and attacked civilians, while Belgian troops used indiscriminate force to occupy key facilities and extricate European nationals. Lumumba demanded the withdrawal of all Belgian forces on July 15, and the Congo crisis escalated in an emotional clash between Lumumba and Belgian policymakers. The superpowers angled for advantage while a UN force under an uncertain mandate trickled into the country as a compromise.⁴⁹ Lumumba looked for help from both the United States and the Soviet Union in his quest to control the situation, which in Herz’s description, “took on elements of a comic opera,” a description that echoed widely in the American foreign policy establishment.⁵⁰

---


³⁸ Frédéric Vandewalle, Mille et Quatre Jours: Contes du Zaire et du Shaba (Bruxelles: Self-Published, 1974), 4: 56, 63. Thanks to Ben Poole for this translation. Also cited in de Witte, Assassination, 136.


The Eisenhower administration was initially predisposed to follow a Belgian lead as they felt the Congolese state would depend on Belgian administrators for the foreseeable future. Belgium was friendly towards the secessionist state of Katanga under Moïse Tshombe, which could be broken off from the country if an anti-Belgian government arose in the capital. Lumumba’s determination to obtain the resources necessary to govern the territory and push out the Belgians made him appear increasingly hostile to American analysts who argued that his political consolidation “would represent a Communist triumph.” With this reasoning, the U.S. National Security Council ordered preparations “to take appropriate military action to prevent or defeat Soviet military intervention in the Congo.” This was a policy statement, which led to “covert activities to bring about the overthrow of Lumumba and install a pro-Western government … gradually put into effect by CIA.” Over the next few months, Lumumba was forced from power, put under house arrest, detained, and finally, “flown to Elisabethville where he was turned over to the tender mercies of his arch-enemy, Moïse Tshombe.”

There can be little doubt what this euphemism meant for Lumumba. Tshombe’s Interior Minister, Godefroid Munongo, had been quoted in reference to Lumumba: “If he comes here, we will do what the Belgians couldn’t do, we will kill him.” The United States was aware that Lumumba and his fellow prisoners had been “severely beaten” during their transfer to Katanga on January 17, 1961, and it is unlikely Americans were not aware of their deaths in the weeks that followed. European press reports over the next few days quoted eyewitnesses saying the beating was “sickening,” and politically attuned residents of Katanga’s capital Elisabethville assumed Lumumba was dead, since some of his captors bragged about it in local bars. Madeleine Kalb studied “the Congo cables” made public in the late 1970s, and concluded that “there was no longer any point in surrounding [Lumumba’s] residence with [CIA] hired assassins armed with poisoned toothpaste; he could simply be left to the tender mercies of his enemies.” Kalb had read Herz’s analytical chronology, but she does not cite it here; the phrase “tender mercies” reappears of its own accord. It is a cliché to be sure, but it is precisely this sort of cliché that discursive analysis posits as a bearer of contextual knowledge.

In American diplomatic archives, we find not only evidence of misinterpretation, reiteration, and reinterpretation but also the deliberate use of ambiguities generated by this process for discursively strategic purposes. Here a cliché communicates any number of context-dependent messages, including its own silent presence as alibi. The deliberately ironic signifier (“tender mercies”) of the real-world referent (Lumumba’s murder at the hands of his enemy Moïse Tshombe) points toward multiple signified concepts deliberately

41 “An Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis,” #1a, NSF/CF 86-1, p. 73, LBJ.
42 de Witte, Assassination, 80–87; 129–44.
43 Gerard and Kuklick, Death in the Congo, 203–11.
communicated by the author (a killing, a secretly executed plan, African savagery in opposition to American jaundice, and the author’s own advertisement of professional discretion and emotional distance). With this approach, diplomatic archives spawn myriad new implications, open gateways to critical interpretation, and reveal the possibilities of human agency as understood within discursive constraints.46

The brutal irony of leaving Lumumba “to the tender mercies” of his enemies signals participation in a discursive environment established in American diplomatic practice, where the cliché was a deft means to reference atrocity.47 Among diplomatic peers, irony elevated an author as knowledgeable, skeptical, and professionally discreet. Its ambiguity served to maintain “plausible deniability” in regards to Lumumba’s murder, masking any breach of Congolese sovereignty.48 Irony provided a ready phrase consistent with the public portrayal of the transfer, torture, and execution as entirely the initiative of Tshombe. And here “tender mercies” served another purpose, drawing on a deeper discursive well of prejudice about Africa.49

American diplomats perceived the leading Congolese politicians as either savagely violent (Tshombe) or passively ineffectual (Kasavubu); and in the case of Lumumba, as “insane” and a “dope fiend.”50 In this dichotomy, Tshombe’s effectiveness signaled his capacity for violence; his “tender mercies” were thus unambiguous. The phrase, and its presumption of irony to communicate itself as euphemism for a violent death, depended on

---


48 Policy for covert operations entailed a variety of operational and communication techniques to mask direct links to American directives, even when the results were inevitably obvious. See Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 40.


The “Code of Sovereignty” in the Tanganyika Rifles Mutiny

In January 1964, soldiers in the Tanganyika Rifles mutinied to protest the ongoing presence of British officers over two years since independence.\footnote{Tanzania People’s Defence Forces, \textit{Tanganyika Rifles Mutiny January 1964} (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993); Timothy H. Parsons, \textit{The 1964 Army Mutinies and the Making of Modern East Africa} (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishers, 2003).} For Americans and Europeans, a comparison to the Congo hinted at Africa as a place of irrational violence. Echoing the “colonial knowledge” of “un-civilization, pre-history, and primitive knowledge,” that justified imperial control elsewhere, reiterations of the Congo crisis shaped reactions to the events of 1964 in East Africa.\footnote{See Gyanendra Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55.} “The old Congo flavour” became an iterable point of reference during the mutiny, not only for Europeans and Americans, but for Africans as well.\footnote{Robin Miller to David Owen, Microfilm, CSAS.MF.107-108, Ivan-Smith Papers, Borthwick Institute, York (hereafter BI); Elena to Marion Chesham, January 24, 1964, Papers of Marion Lady Chesham, File 25, BI.} Commenting on the mutiny, Tanzanian politician Bibi Titi Mohamed cited the “danger that now reigns in Congo” as “the goal of that day.”\footnote{Statement by Bibi Titi Mohamed, Hansard, Tanganyika Parliamentary Debates, 18th February 1964 to 21st February 1964, (Dar es Salaam: Government Printer, 1964), 122.} In the following months, the exiled “field marshall” of the Zanzibari revolution, John Okello, reported that a Zanzibari soldier told him that if he returned to Zanzibar he would “be killed and be hiden [sic] like Lumumba.”\footnote{Airgram A-96 from Chris Pappas, Dar es Salaam (hereafter DAR) to Department of State (hereafter DOS), “The Field Marshall John Okello Story,” October 3, 1964, POL 15-1 Head of State, Executive
recalled that an American diplomatic officer in Cairo threatened that if Zanzibari leaders were anything like Lumumba they would be killed in the same way.\textsuperscript{58}

In Africa, the political disasters accompanying Congolese independence demonstrated the dangers of the Cold War and its neo-colonial logic. The Congolese quagmire loomed as a fearful precedent for East African leaders.\textsuperscript{59} A close friend and colleague of Nyerere, Vedastus Kyaruzi, who served as foreign policy advisor and diplomat, recalled the seeds of self-doubt that the news coming in from the Congo planted in a new generation of leaders in Tanganyika. “It was terrifying … We feared what was going to happen in this country and if we were going to make a mess of things like they did in the Congo.”\textsuperscript{60} According to Kyaruzi, Nyerere likewise reacted emotionally to the destructive implications of Congo’s conflicts. Nyerere’s emotional reactions and occasional despondency during those tumultuous years were noted with diagnostic economy by the American ambassador, with whom Nyerere had a frank relationship.\textsuperscript{61} Cold War diplomats read much into emotional “atmospherics.”\textsuperscript{62} This diagnostic attention echoes Foucault’s insight into the imperceptible colonization of an entire societal worldview by a “panoptic” principle at an epistemic level.\textsuperscript{63} In the Congo, the confluence of Lumumba’s “insane” personality and the “comic opera” of the political system reinforced a panoptic diagnosis that the newly independent Congo was already in its “death throes as a modern nation.”\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{58} Ali Sultan Issa, interview with author, August 23, 2006, Zanzibar.


The Tanganyika Rifles mutiny of 1964, with copycat rebellions in Kenya and Uganda, happened on the heels of a violent populist revolution in Zanzibar, and thereby became another sign of the fragility and incompetence of postcolonial African governments. It represented a reiteration of the Force Publique mutiny in Congo that sparked that country’s crisis. When leaders in Kenya and Uganda immediately brought in British support to quell their mutinies, Nyerere’s hesitance to do the same appeared “timorous” to metropolitan observers. “Nyerere had waited for negotiated settlement as long as he could, longer than he should,” the American ambassador opined. “And his own hesitations and failure to take public lead must I think be regarded as contributing to crisis and collapse.”

The ambassador’s diagnosis proposed that a leadership failure led to the crisis, but Nyerere’s hesitation may have accomplished the opposite. His cautious approach enabled an institutional response on the part of his government that maintained its function and public presence even as the mutiny threatened its internal sovereignty. After several days of thin governmental control over the restless mutineers, Nyerere requested a British intervention. With the government’s continuity of moral authority achieved during a week of forbearance, the call on former colonial power became a disciplinary action against an unreconstructed leftover from the colonial period: the Tanganyika Rifles with its British officers still in place. The delayed British action allowed Nyerere and his cabinet to reclaim Tanganyika’s sovereignty: “Any Independent country is able to ask for the help of another Independent country.”

The tension here between sovereignty and intervention is supportive of Cynthia Weber’s discursive understanding of sovereignty as “simulated” in the performance of interstate relations constitutive of Foucault’s reading of panoptic discipline. In this view, sovereignty appears as a quality of statehood only in opposition to intervention. The justification for intervention arises from an international consensus that a member state has violated normative virtues, making it subject to intervention as a corrective. “What become important are the signs of sovereignty—the ability to access the code of sovereignty.”

Nyerere’s assiduous maintenance of the signs of national sovereignty—his public presence during the week of the mutiny, bureaucratic responses to military demands, diplomatic

---

65 Cable, DAR 959, William Leonhart, DAR to DOS, January 26, 1964, #31, “Tanganyika Cables Vol. 1 12/63-4/64,” NSF/CF 100-1, LBJ.


relations—meant that his request for external help could still be presented as the act of a sovereign, rather than an outside intervention.\(^69\)

Weber’s analysis reminds us that sovereignty is not raw power, but a negotiated system of ascribed status that gives order to global politics. Sovereignty is generated discursively, and is thereby subject to discursive agency and not just military or economic power.\(^70\) The United States and Soviet Union both exercised interventionist power during the Cold War, derived from their outsized military and economic capacities; but they also paid obeisance to sovereignty as a consensual norm. Lacking decisive military or economic capacity, the challenge for postcolonial politicians was to perform the code of sovereignty, which became a preeminently discursive effort. Where discourse failed, local conflict flared, usually exacerbated by foreign meddling.\(^71\) Weber’s thesis might be challenged by a crass materialist position that sovereignty can only be a function of military or economic potential, but that would be to misunderstand her proposal entirely, and mistake coercive capacity for the negotiated status of sovereignty.\(^72\) While a power relationship might be established with force, coercion is not the functional basis of power.\(^73\) Rather, discursive regimes emerging from the cessation of hostilities privilege certain actors (not necessarily those with the most coercive capacity) to wield power within a consensual structure.\(^74\) This is as true in domestic as international politics.

**The Politics of Reiteration in the Creation of the Tanzanian Union**

In the wake of the January 1964 mutiny, the most pressing concern for Tanganyika was the fate of the revolutionary regime established in Zanzibar under Abeid Karume.\(^75\) Within a week of the populist revolution, the American ambassador reported that Zanzibari leader Abeid Karume, together with Kassim Hanga and Abdulrahman Babu, met with the Tanganyikan foreign minister Oscar Kambona and mentioned interest in a “union or federal relationship with Tanganyika in the near future.”\(^76\) A union would be a step toward the sort of regional federation that Nyerere and Karume favored and provide the nascent

---


\(^71\) Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).


Zanzibari regime with a more robust layer of protection against counterrevolution or superpower domination. The United States and Britain were reluctant to recognize the new regime, which had overthrown a nominal parliamentary government put in place and given independence by the British less than a month before. So Karume and his communist supporters looked to the Soviet Union and China for support. Eastern Bloc aid arrived quickly in the company of East German advisers. More slowly China promised weaponry and training for a new Zanzibari army. After the United States finally recognized the new government in February, it became increasingly alarmed by the communist build-up, as Zanzibar began to fulfill predictions of becoming an “African Cuba.”

This discursive intervention generated an ominous trajectory. The same phrase had been cast about in the months preceding Lumumba’s assassination. Nyerere first deployed the Cuban comparison with reference to Zanzibar in February 1963. William Redman Duggan, then an embassy officer in Dar es Salaam, later claimed to have coined this description of Zanzibar in conversation with Nyerere in July 1963. Oscar Kambona, then Tanganyika’s Minister of Home Affairs, reinforced Zanzibar as “Tanganyika’s Cuba” in October 1963 when in the United States seeking support for East African Federation. The phrase was clearly a useful tool for seeking attention within the American foreign policy establishment, but its reiteration generated a new set of meanings detached from the intentions of those who spoke it.


79 “Note of a meeting between the Commonwealth Secretary and the President of Tanganyika,” February 27, 1963, DO 121/237, UK-TNA, cited in Harith Ghassany, Kwaheri Ukoloni, Kwaheri Uhuru! Zanzibar na Mapinduzi ya Afrabia (Dar es Salaam: Self-published, 2010), 32.


82 See Peter Mandaville and Andrew Williams, eds., Meaning and International Relations (London: Routledge, 2003).
Both American and British diplomats deployed the phrase to seek attention for their views and belonging in their bureaucracies.\textsuperscript{83} Kambona’s intent was similarly indirect. As the British prepared to turn over the islands to a government loyal to an Omani Sultan, he sought U.S. support for more localized ideological battles, “Tanganyika had several worries … about an independent Zanzibar,” Kambona explained during his Washington visit in October 1963. “He thought that Zanzibar was thinking more of forming an Islamic Federation with Somalia and Sudan rather than joining the East African Federation.”\textsuperscript{84} But with the populist revolution of January 1964, aided by a few Cuban-trained militants and Zanzibari communists, Cold War concerns emerged preeminent in diplomatic relations.\textsuperscript{85}

In response to the revolution, the United States transferred Frank Carlucci from the Congo to Zanzibar. Tanzanians suspected immediately that he was a CIA agent.\textsuperscript{86} As he had done in Congo, Carlucci quickly developed close relationships with the main players in Zanzibar, impressing Karume with his fluent Swahili, touring by day, drinking by night with the radical playboy Ali Sultan Issa, and meeting “clandestinely” with the apprehensive Attorney General, Wolfgang Dourado, “in hushed tones on a darkened roof.”\textsuperscript{87} Carlucci’s reporting was powerful because of his tireless engagement in the Zanzibari political scene, but also because he expressed his views in virile modes that resonated powerfully in Washington bureaucracies.\textsuperscript{88}

Carlucci’s emphatic reporting on “commie” activity and the “wild men” of the Revolutionary Council in Zanzibar earned high marks from his superiors in Washington.\textsuperscript{89} Many years later he still recalled the praise he received for his cables from Wayne Fredericks, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs: “Frank, your cables make the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Commonwealth Relations Office to High Commission DAR, January 25, 1964, DO 185/51, UK-TNA.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Memorandum of Conversation Part II of IV, October 16, 1963, 361.2-Kambona, Box 11, Entry 3266, RG 84, NARA.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ali Sultan Issa, interview with author August 23, 2006; Job Lusinde, interview with author, November 7, 2006.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Robert D. Dean’s \textit{Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy} (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); K.A. Cuordileone, \textit{Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War} (London: Routledge, 2005).
\item \textsuperscript{89} For example, Airgram A-125 from Frank Carlucci, Zanzibar to DOS, “Antics of the Revolutionary Council Continue,” November 10, 1964, POL 23-8, Demonstrations, Riots, TANZAN 1/1/64, SNF Box 2693, RG 59, NARA.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
best reading in the African bureau. Keep it up and you’ll never get promoted.”

Again the use of irony emerges as a sign of insider intimacy. In his recollection, Carlucci explained that “there were more than a few people who thought I was a bit frivolous.” But this is a false modesty; in the same interview he noted that when he was appointed as *chargé d’affaires* in Zanzibar at age thirty-five, he was the youngest officer of his rank in the American Foreign Service. In March that year, National Security Council (NSC) member, Peter Jessup, recommended Carlucci’s reporting to presidential aide McGeorge Bundy as “staccato, to the point, and highly useful.”

Carlucci likewise rose through the ranks in various hotspots. Carlucci always denied a CIA affiliation in the 1960s, however in the 1980s he became a prominent Washington insider as Deputy Director of the CIA, and served briefly as Secretary of Defense after the Iran-Contra scandal. But he still recalled Africa as the “crucible” of the Cold War.

By late March 1964, Zanzibar had begun to exhibit the requisite conditions for intervention. The American ambassador in London, summarizing a conversation about British Secretary of State Duncan Sandys’ trip to Zanzibar, described much of it as being “of a comic opera character.” As in the Congo a few years before, this characterization allowed policy makers to comfortably dismiss the Zanzibari government’s reason to exist. “Sandys believes the government as presently constituted is almost completely incompetent to administer its affairs.” The echo of the Congo’s “comic opera” of 1960 was not unique; the same phrase had described Indonesian politics in 1947 diplomatic reporting, and again in a well-informed *Time* magazine article in 1958 while the US contemplated an intervention that finally came in 1965. Another common cliché to be sure, but it had concrete function in American diplomatic discourse. Under such circumstances, Westerners could view intervention as a favor.

---


92 Carlucci dismissed Ruben de Carvalho’s identification of him as a CIA agent in “Dossier” *Carlucci/CIA* (Lisbon: Editorial Avante! 1978), published after his posting as ambassador in Lisbon, as it did not provide any hard evidence of a CIA affiliation. But he clearly fits the profile of an undercover CIA agent as described by Richard M. Bissell, Jr., *Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 212.


By mid-March, Carlucci had begun to doubt his ability to exploit ideological differences among the Zanzibari leadership, and proposed that with American support Karume could control communists in his government.\footnote{Report from GDR Ambassador in Zanzibar to Foreign Ministry in Berlin, March 1964, DY / IV A 2 / 20—1171, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Bundesarchiv, Berlin (SAPMO); Cable, Zanzibar 240, Frank Carlucci to DOS, March 31, 1964, #57, “Zanzibar Cables [1 of 3] Vol. II 2/64-4/64,” NSF/CF 103–3, LBJ.} “It [is] no longer useful to think in terms of precipitating immediate showdown between moderate and extreme elements. EA governments show little inclination to become further involved and it [is] highly improbable that [a] reasonable excuse could be found for UK intervention … we must now think in terms of a longer term operation in Zanzibar.”\footnote{Cable, Zanzibar 134, Frank Carlucci to DOS, March 17, 1964, #62, “Zanzibar Cables [1 of 3] Vol. II 2/64-4/64,” NSF/CF 103-3, LBJ.} But Carlucci’s moderating tone found little purchase in Washington, and he quickly returned to more alarmist reports. The US began developing two plans for covert action in Zanzibar, one assuming British support and another “for action through Tanganyika if the British hold back.”\footnote{Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Colonel Connell, March 28, 1964, #234, “Zanzibar Memos & Misc. Vol. II 2/64-4/64,” NSF/CF 103-6, LBJ.} Carlucci’s reporting on communist activity echoed in a State Department memorandum to Secretary Dean Rusk about the “rapidly deteriorating situation in Zanzibar.” The memo recommended that the “best bet appears to be a covert action program which is in process.” The aim of the action was to bend Karume towards the United States, but “if Karume proves to be a man with whom we are unable to work, explore alternatives and find someone else.”\footnote{Memorandum, J. Wayne Fredericks to DOS, “Rapidly Deteriorating Situation in Zanzibar,” March 25, 1964, POL 23-8, Demonstrations, Riots, TANZAN 1/1/64, SNF 2693, RG 59, NARA.}

It is possible that the “action through Tanganyika,” mentioned by McGeorge Bundy on March 28, 1964, referred to the union plan, but unlikely. While Leonhart may have come around to endorsing the union plan, it was not his initiative. The union idea had been in place since before the Revolution, and East African leaders pursued the actual union negotiations in secret without informing Leonhart until April. The African diplomats excluded from the negotiations the very people the US depended upon as informants, in particular Wolfgang Dourado and Othman Shariff. Additionally Carlucci’s reports express great anxiety about communist influence on the islands, as he was likewise unaware of any “concerted action” among the East African governments.\footnote{Cable, Zanzibar 212, Frank Carlucci to DOS, March 26, 1964, #237a, “Zanzibar Memos & Misc. Vol. II 2/64-4/64,” NSF/CF 103-6, LBJ.} Leonhart tended to look favorably upon Nyerere’s views, and he may have argued for the union plan after April 15 as a moderate solution to allay American fears while Carlucci continued to advocate armed intervention in cooperation with local agents.

Carlucci found support for more aggressive action among those concerned with the fates of minorities in Zanzibar. On April 12, he met with Wolfgang Dourado (of Goan descent) and the Indian High Commissioner to Zanzibar, R.K. Tandon, both of whom...
reinforced Carlucci’s opinion that the island was irreparably dominated by communists. “Tandon strongly urged US direct intervention as only feasible means of redressing situation,” while Dourado had already been preparing subversive “action groups.” With Indian support for intervention, Carlucci recommended “direct action,” arguing that “sufficient rationale could be found in GOZ [Government of Zanzibar] persecution of local Indians and Goans.”

With equal urgency, Nyerere spent most of early April traveling widely upcountry to consult with regional authorities and party members on the challenges of regional cooperation. In Nairobi, he arranged a meeting of the three East African heads of state, in hope that the pressure of superpower intervention might bring them on board for an East African Federation treaty that could include Zanzibar. Nyerere and Kenyan Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta voiced readiness to postpone negotiations about economic imbalances between their countries for the sake of immediate federation. However, Ugandan Prime Minister Milton Obote remained reticent to commit to the plan, caught between royalist intransigence and Ghanaian pressure opposing regional blocs. East African Federation remained out of Nyerere’s grasp, and Kenyatta refused to support a proposed Kenyan union with Zanzibar. So negotiations continued between Tanganyika and Zanzibar under Kambona’s guidance, and in mid-April Kambona informed the American ambassador “of closely held talks … to revive possibility Tanganyika-Zanzibar Federation.”

Ambassador Leonhart rustled up support in Washington for the union initiative, even though it “would not be most aromatic situation conceivable.” On April 20 the U.S. State Department sent word for Leonhart to communicate to Nyerere and Kambona “its blessing and support to the Tanganyika initiative: Tanganyika-Zanzibar Federation or incorporation,” and promised aid upon Kambona’s request. The American envoy to Uganda, Olcott Deming discussed the developments with his British and Indian associates. Their observations signal the fundamental discursive shift achieved by the Union. From a

101 Telegram 348 from Frank Carlucci, Zanzibar to DOS, April 12, 1964, POL 23-9 TANGAN 1/1/64, SNF 2687, RG 59, NARA.

102 Telegram 1760 from William Leonhart, DAR to DOS, April 16, 1964, POL 15-4 TANGAN 1/1/64, SNF 2687, RG 59, NARA; Cable, DAR 1827, William Leonhart to DOS, April 22, 1964, #78, “Zanzibar Cables [1 of 3] Vol. II 2/64-4/64,” NSF/CF 103-3, LBJ.


105 Telegram 1771 from William Leonhart, DAR to DOS, April 17, 1964, POL TANZAN U-Z, 1/1/64, SNF 2694, RG 59, NARA.


107 Quoted in Amrit Wilson, US Foreign Policy, 73.
point where outside military action had been legitimately imaginable to diplomatic observers, it was now reported that “they regard intervention by outsiders entirely out of the question.”

Before the union plans were made public, the Cold War powers had discursively defined Karume’s government as an incompetent “comic opera” in order to justify interference. With intervention imminent, the East African leaders were able to subsume Zanzibari sovereignty under the more reputable sovereignty of Tanganyika and thereby retain local control and short-circuit the machinations of superpower agents. This shift accords with Cynthia Weber’s theory that, when confronted with a credible articulation of sovereignty, “intervention is prohibited and, when carried out, condemned by the supposed community of sovereign states.”

The recollection of Zanzibari politician Thabit Kombo suggests that Tanzanian leaders understood this dynamic at the time: “In America they weren’t happy, but the law does not give them permission to intervene with force, despite our smallness.” The British also gave the United States notice that “the likelihood of being asked to mount a full scale intervention operation in Zanzibar against organised armed opposition has receded with the ratification of the Act of Union by both Tanganyika and Zanzibar.”

After the successful conclusion of the Union treaty, Nyerere was elated, aware that he had forestalled outside intervention in Zanzibar, in what he called “the biggest gamble of my life.” More importantly he had taken a step towards his closely-held vision of progressively building an East African federation. He expressed his joy to the American ambassador in terms carefully phrased to shift American perceptions. In private talks with the American ambassador, Nyerere drew on his rhetorical skill and knowledge of audience to coin a phrase that worked its way up the information chain all the way to President Lyndon Johnson. Nyerere said the Union was a “miracle so good I can’t believe it,” but warned that the bond between Tanganyika and Zanzibar was still a fragile reality. “I’ve worked one miracle but I can’t go on working miracles alone. I didn’t create mess in Zanzibar; I inherited it. I’ve arrested the rot and we have another chance.”

Through the vehicle of Leonhart’s diplomatic reporting, Nyerere successfully shed a flattering light on himself and his country in marked contrast to the impression that held forth in the days after the mutiny of an institutionally fragile country under a frail leader.

108 Cable, Kampala 960, Olcott Deming to DOS, April 21, 1964, #3a, “Zanzibar Cables [1 of 3] Vol. II 2/64-4/64,” NSF/CF 103-3, LBJ.


111 Commonwealth Relations Office to High Commission DAR, May 3, 1964, DO 185/51, UK-TNA.

112 Letter, John Spencer to Richard Nolte, August 18, 1964, POL 15 Government TANZAN, SNF 2690, RG 59, NARA.

A few days later, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, Averell Harriman noted in a request to President Johnson seeking financial aid for Zanzibar that “the merger between Tanganyika and Zanzibar was a miracle … We really need a second miracle—to have Tanganyika absorb Zanzibar in fact.” Just as the gossip in Leopoldville about Patrice Lumumba’s insanity became a cipher in the White House for the whole of the Congo in 1960, the reiteration of Nyerere’s image of a “miracle,” became a reference point for the Union with Zanzibar, trumping the troubling echo of the Congolese “comic opera” that had been circulating in early 1964. This small discursive intervention was as much an act of sovereign initiative as a military stand-off; it served the same purpose, identifying the Union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar as a viable and independent actor in the international community. The reiterated “miracle” generated a new iteration of sovereignty identified with the United Republic of Tanzania.

**Postcolonial Sovereignty in the Cold War**

The panoptic tone of diplomatic communication, the psychological operations, and the cooperation with local actors in Zanzibar are strikingly similar to American intrigue in Iran, Guatemala, and Indonesia that brought about the overthrows Mohammad Mosaddeq, Jacobo Arbenz, and Sukarno, all leftist nationalists like Nyerere and Karume. Tellingly, restatements of the CIA perspective on both the Indonesian crisis and the Tanzanian union have been recently published in a way that seems to obfuscate more than reveal. While the overthrow of the revolutionary Zanzibari government in an American-sponsored coup by loyalists to the former Sultan’s regime may seem far-fetched today, at the time the Tanzanian leadership considered it a distinct possibility. Odd Arne Westad’s observation that interventions happened when “unviable states were condemned for…opening up for communism” confirms Tanzanian worries about superpower

---


interference.\textsuperscript{118} In the Union of Tanzania, East African leaders created a state that could be read as “viable” to the Cold War powers, and thus resistant to overt intervention.\textsuperscript{119}

A geostrategic periphery of deficient sovereignty was the product of the bipolar Cold War concept. The threat of nuclear war tended to obscure subjectivity and complexity, as the avoidance of catastrophic nuclear defeat presented itself as an existential necessity for the superpowers.\textsuperscript{120} Almost immediately peripheral conflict emerged as a means to divert superpower conflict into kaleidoscopic proxy wars across the globe.\textsuperscript{121} Indeed, one explicit intention of the initial atomic strikes on Japan was the preemption of Soviet entry into the Pacific theater.\textsuperscript{122} A proto-Cold War logic for preventing Russian entry into the Pacific theater was clearly articulated by General George Lincoln prior to the Potsdam Conference. Then, discussing the terms of peace immediately after the bombings, Secretary of War Henry Stimson argued “it was of great importance to get [Japan] into our hands before the Russians could put in any substantial claim to occupy and help rule it.”\textsuperscript{123} In this reading, Japan appears as peripheral as soon as its defeat seemed certain. Soviet containment emerged in practice two years before George Kennan’s “Long Telegram” prescribed it as a strategy in an essay laden with emotionally potent metaphors that were thus attractively iterable.\textsuperscript{124}

Containment and its premise of Soviet expansionism created a context allowing political contestants in peripheral countries to wrangle Cold War alliances toward more

\textsuperscript{118} Westad, Global Cold War, 130. This observation is supportive of Cythia Weber’s thesis in Simulating Sovereignty.

\textsuperscript{119} Tanzanian cabinet member, Job Lusinde confirmed this idea in an interview in Dodoma on January 4, 2015.


\textsuperscript{121} For example, Thomas G. Weiss and James G. Blight, eds., The Suffering Grass: Superpowers and Regional Conflicts in Southern Africa and the Caribbean (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992).


\textsuperscript{123} George A. Lincoln to General Hull, June 4, 1945, enclosing draft, Top Secret, ABC 387 (15 Feb. 45), Box 504, Japan RG 165; and Henry Stimson Diary, August 10, 1945, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Henry Lewis Stimson Papers, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/index.htm (both viewed on July 12, 2015).

self-defined interests. This unstable periphery was drawn in contrast to a theoretically stable nation-state system premised on a concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty is typically signifies both internal authority over the people of a defined territory and an external ability to maintain and represent that territory as an autonomous member in a community of mutually affirming states. Scholars dispute the simplistic dichotomy of internal and external, and events in Tanzania confirm their co-mingling, but the distinction provides a useful point of departure for imagining the task of a postcolonial government. Third World politicians constantly negotiated the internal and external implications of this concept in order to exercise political agency at home and abroad. Their pragmatic goal was to conform the new state to the expectations of an international system premised on the consolidation of domestic political control. Lest we minimize the importance of sovereignty as a goal, we should recall sovereignty’s negative image in the “failed state” of popular and scholarly discourse. In this prescriptive sense, we see sovereignty largely by identifying what it is not; sovereignty describes a spectrum of states that somehow escape the label of having “failed.”

Sovereignty is not synonymous with power, but is rather an ascribed status whose privileges in a historically contingent international system allowed the cultivation of various internal and external powers. Rob Walker has influentially argued that sovereignty exists as a “dense political practice” that appears as the product of a specific history, rather than a natural attribute of power. Yet Walker contends that the

---


artificiality of sovereignty does not negate its utility. Instead it is a pragmatic problem demanding continual resolution in the “authorization and delimitation of authority.”

Gary Wilder contributed to this theme of a deconstructed sovereignty by elaborating the exploratory ideas of Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor who both proposed visions of a post-imperial order, constituted by “translocal” authorities and “a type of integration that would reconstitute France itself [as a nation-state] by quietly exploding the existing nation-state from within.” Yet various pan-African and trans-regional visions for alternative global orders never displaced the nation-state, despite the more expansive possibilities offered by decolonization. As Elizabeth Schmidt and others have shown, African leaders, often driven by peasant constituencies, resisted the neo-colonial implications of regional federations and took recourse in nations-states. Nyerere’s hopes for a regional federation continually ran aground against local constituencies who believed their interests would be better served in smaller polities, and sovereign states built upon colonial territories provided a familiar, if not optimal framework. Because of this pattern, the stubborn political issue of national identity within diverse societies became a preeminent issue of postcolonial politics.

Sovereignty remains a key analytical theme that, in its broadest conceptions, brings focus to discussions of the various political and cultural processes in postcolonial states pursuing the pragmatic goal of conforming internally and externally to a globally hegemonic practice. Although Nyerere espoused the union with Zanzibar as a pan-African accomplishment, it never represented a revision to the sovereign-state system. The


union left Zanzibar with a thin layer of internal sovereignty but was clearly structured as an annexation into an otherwise unchanged vision for a nation-state, now renamed Tanzania, executed for the sake of regional security. The unresolved question of Zanzibari sovereignty has remained a sore point for the Tanzanian state ever since.

**The Iterability of Sovereignty in Zanzibar**

James Brennan has observed that, in contrast to the modern nation-state system, sovereignty on the East African coast had historically conformed to the “layered and shared” idea of sovereignty that characterized most precolonial polities abutting the Indian Ocean.\(^{139}\) Here community leaders and regional rulers bound local identities to more global loyalties of religion, trade, and empire. After a long period of hegemony, the Sultan of Oman took up residence in Zanzibar in 1832, laying claim to two islands and a strip of the East African coast. In negotiation with the equally layered sovereignty of British colonial authority, coastal leaders sought to preserve this small sultanate in the face of protests by upcountry African nationalists. With decolonization, the advocates for coastal autonomy lost their claim as the emergence of nation-states based on colonial administrative borders took pragmatic precedence.\(^{140}\) In December 1963, the British transferred sovereignty over the Zanzibari islands to an elected parliamentary coalition allied with the Sultan. Within weeks the new government was overthrown by the revolution’s alliance of African populists, ambitious socialists, and pragmatic nationalists led by Karume whose party, representing an older variation of cultural heritage on the islands, opposed the land-holding class identified with the Arab sultan.\(^{141}\)

While Cold War discourses about Zanzibar held sway externally in 1964, internally Karume’s government xeno-phobically cast the former sultanate as an Arab regime that functionally still held the African working classes in slavery.\(^{142}\) Many loyalists of the sultanate were killed or sent into exile before Karume’s government gained control over the chaotic revolution and put a stop to the massacres. Over the next few years, Karume’s increasingly tyrannical rule redistributed land, enforced quasi-socialist rituals of collective work and regimented performance, and cynically proclaimed racial harmony by forcing

---


\(^{141}\) Giorgio Agamben’s critical elaboration of Carl Schmitt’s understanding of the sovereign as “he who decides the exception,” may be helpful in analyzing Zanzibar’s shifting sovereignty, as well as the nature of Nyerere’s relationship to Karume after the union. See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology, Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

daughters of Arab and Persian families to marry party loyalists. Such forced marriages reported in newspapers, were probably more rumored than enacted, but they exist in local memory and seem to represent an adaptation of (and an attempt to undermine) the upper class practice of kafa’ah, or hypergamy. Cold War discourses, under such circumstances, faded and gave way to more durable competitions for sovereignty that drew on long-standing ethnic and class distinctions, now reiterated in fragments during a new era of multiparty competition.

Racialized class distinctions still shape Zanzibari claims to autonomy, articulated today in an increasingly divisive global religious discourse. Transcribing oral histories of mixed credibility, Harith Ghassany recently built a case for an “Afrabian” perspective on the revolution and the union treaty that gives preeminence to their impact on Islamic cultural hegemony. Several of his interviewees point to the idea that outsiders were brought in to instigate the revolution. This thesis accords closely with long-standing habits of viewing mainlanders as “savages” who threatened to undermine the “civilized” elements of Zanzibari society, namely the Arab elite and its indigenous supporters most of whom also claimed ancestors in the Middle East. In the years before independence, Arab landholding interests tried to paint their opposition as uncivilized mainlanders who opposed Islam and the Sultan.

Among Ghassany’s informants, the trope of outsider savagery anchors arguments questioning the legitimacy of the revolution and the union. Mohamed Omar claimed to have worked with Oscar Kambona to smuggle people in to vote in the 1962 elections on the islands, and then brought in more people from all over the mainland during the revolution. He said they brought in young people with good accents that would be hard to pick out as outsiders. Zanzibari workers, Omar insisted, “by themselves can’t accomplish


147 Ghassany’s argument accords ideologically with Ali Muhsin’s memoir, which reconstructs a cosmopolitan vision of Zanzibar’s past as an ethnically and religiously mixed society at peace with itself. Ali Muhsin al Barwani, Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar (Memoirs) (Dubai: Self-Published, 1996).


149 Ghassany, Kwaheri Ukoloni, 296–97.
anything. Because they are timid. They aren’t used to action.”150 While some of Ghassany’s informants refute this, others confirm it. An official in the Tanganyika Federation of Labour corroborated the memory of imported fighters while seeking to minimize its importance: “There weren’t any that were brought in from the mainland except for those people, around two hundred, three hundred; we in Tanga brought about two hundred, in Dar es Salaam they brought about three hundred, but many of them were Zanzibaris themselves who were here to work.”151 The idea that mainland workers were brought over specifically to support the revolution remains dubious. Instead, the regular flow of workers between the mainland coast and the islands has been yoked to the narrative of mainland interventionism, which thus invokes an attack on a vulnerable Zanzibari sovereignty.152

The importance of this debate in Zanzibar today is not in ascertaining the number of mainlanders who participated in the revolution, but in portraying the uprising as a foreign initiative in a manner that accords with the rhetoric of the pre-revolutionary elite.153 Most radically, this line of thought seeks to portray the revolution and the subsequent union with Tanganyika as Nyerere’s “grand design … not for the benefit of the countries (Zanzibar and Tanganyika), but for the benefit of those who wished ill upon Muslims (together with the Arabs, as many of them are Muslim).”154 This perspective becomes so thoroughly intertwined with global religious politics that one of Ghassany’s informants ties the revolution to a Jewish businessman and a visit by Moshe Dayan in 1961.155 The Cold War context of American diplomatic records disappears completely as the revolution is reiterated in a twenty-first century context of global religious politics and

150 Mohammed Omar, quoted in Ghassany, Kwaheerii Ukoloni, 59.

151 Maulidi Shenzi, quoted in Ghassany, Kwaheerii Ukoloni, 84. Countering the foreign fighters thesis, Isa Kibwana told Ghassany, “I deny that mainlanders were dumped on us … all were people from here, although truthfully, their culture was from the mainland, they themselves were people from here. No one came from the mainland to overthrow the government.” Quoted in Ghassany, Kwaheerii Ukoloni, 254.


154 Mzee Faraji, quoted in Ghassany, Kwaheerii Ukoloni, 282; see also Mohammed Omar, in Ghassany, Kwaheerii Ukoloni, 65, and Sheikh Mohammed Abdulmuttalib (Mutta), in Ghassany, Kwaheerii Ukoloni, 214.

155 Glassman, in “Creole Nationalists,” notes that after the Suez Canal crisis, rumors of Zionist conspiracy circulated during colonial-era disturbances in Zanzibar as well (p. 245). Ahmed Ali Ghulam Hussein recalled that Dayan visited Zanzibar after the riots of June 1961, in Ghassany, Kwaheerii Ukoloni, 222. Dayan did visit Zanzibar around that time, after attending Tanganyika’s independence ceremony in December 1961. He visited again after the revolution, in July 1964. Moshe Dayan, “Moshe Dayan, From East Africa to Iran,” Jerusalem Post, September 6, 1964, 9; Steven Carol, From Jerusalem to the Lion of Judah and Beyond: Israel’s Foreign Policy in East Africa (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2012), 75.
Zanzibari frustration with the ruling party. Taboos around racial politics, and political pressure to silence advocates of Zanzibari independence, mean that these issues now find articulation in a set of narrowly legalistic arguments about the union treaty and related constitutional amendments.156

Karume’s successor as president of Zanzibar, Aboud Jumbe, took up the cause of Zanzibari autonomy in 1984. He was ousted from his position as a result, and went on to allege that the mainland government was a Christian conspiracy to crush Zanzibari autonomy and marginalize Muslims. He acknowledged, however, that in 1964 he supported the union, and that Karume was motivated by pan-Africanism and a strategy to “preempt any counter-revolution.”157 Such a counter-revolution was indeed imagined in 1964 by the exiled Sultan’s loyalists, who sought American financial and diplomatic support for the endeavor.158 They circulated pamphlets that amplified both Cold War fears of communism and local anxieties about a mainland takeover.159 But today, the Cold War circumstance of the union treaty is now mostly forgotten, and it is the thesis of religious oppression that continues to circulate widely.160 The most explicit claims to Zanzibari independence in recent years have come from the Association for Islamic Mobilisation and Propagation (popularly known as JUMIKI or Uamsho), who proclaim: “We want our country of Zanzibar and we want the full sovereignty of Zanzibar.”161

Sovereignty as an Archival Artifact

Current discourse about the Tanganyika-Zanzibar union has come full circle; the Cold War was only a minor distraction in the enduring construction of Zanzibari identity. In Frank Carlucci’s description of the “wild men” of the Revolutionary Council, we may

---

156 Former Zanzibari Attorney General Wolfgang Dourado made initial arguments about the weak legality of the union in a presentation to the Tanganyika Law Society in July 1983. A critical assessment of these issues can be found in Shivji, *Pan-Africanism*.


159 Enclosures to Airgram 477 Cairo to DOS, Zanzibar Liberation Front, “Zanzibar: A Lesson to Freedom Loving Peoples,” and “Zanzibar and Our Conscience,” November 9, 1964, POL 23 TANZAN 12/10/64, SNF 2693, RG 59, NARA.


now discover an echo of local discourses distinguishing “savage” from “civilized.” The description does not appear as a Cold War artifact after all, but an iteration of persistent subaltern agency in the metropolitan archive. Oscar Kambona’s pre-revolutionary concern, as foreign minister for Tanganyika, about Zanzibar’s identification with other Muslim states now betrays evidence of a retrospective conspiracy. The union, this piece of evidence seems to say, had nothing to do with the Cold War after all; it was always an attempt to restrain Zanzibar from its envisioned Islamic destiny.

The predominance of this religious discourse suggests that locally autonomous forms of authority were not, as Partha Chatterjee suggested “overwhelmed, swamped by history,” after all, in the postcolonial state’s project of “cultural normalization.” In fact, Chatterjee’s study of cultural politics in India illustrates how deeply contingent, and therefore partial, this process was, negotiated among numerous interest groups. Regardless, such hybrid projects still had to seek membership in an international order built by those same colonial powers, and filled with prescriptive interventions. Cynthia Weber’s “code of sovereignty” is an ongoing negotiation built largely on reiterated symbols, rituals, and phrases that communicate conformity to a global order and gendered power structure.

Historians encounter this code of sovereignty as an archival artifact and, following Ann Stoler’s view, both scholars and governmental agents (like Martin Herz in his Congo report) contribute to the means by which archives reproduce governing strategies. As we see in internal American intelligence analysis, diplomatic archives produce sovereignty in


codes and practices molded from modes of expression, classification, and perception. For this very reason sovereignty becomes a useful point of analysis; it is a product of the source base. Conversely, the indifference shown towards official archives in many postcolonial countries may reflect habits of personalized power exercised with conspicuous disregard for bureaucratic procedure. If Ann Stoler is correct, then the sharp break between relatively copious colonial records and scarce postcolonial records represents a significant change in governance that would be worth exploring.

Scholars can listen to the expressive tropes of those who produced neo-colonial archives, but also the lingering palimpsest of activity by those under observation. Matthew Connelly’s attempt to find Algerian agency in metropolitan records of the Algerian war demonstrated the “paradoxical consequences” arising when diplomatic history unexpectedly yielded a “key entrepot of intellectual exchange.” At some point, prior to all the classification and codification in the archival process, someone did something meaningful; some situation arose that was worth noting. We find moments, like Nyerere’s “miracle,” that break the bonds of archival teleologies.

167 See Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); also the concept of the “shadow state,” in William Reno, Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

