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# Zanzibar: The Nine-Hour Revolution

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I arrived in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in June 2013 to conduct my dissertation field research through February 2014. My dissertation aims to provide a multifaceted micro history of a short slice of time surrounding the January 1964 Zanzibar Revolution. This revolution has fostered many conflicting accounts but no single coherent tactical analysis of what transpired. It is still so politically sensitive that, at first, many Zanzibaris said it would be difficult to get people to talk. Having visited Zanzibar countless times over the last twenty plus years, I was fortunate to tap into long-standing networks in order to connect with relevant historical figures, many of whom have not previously told their stories. Even my location ties in to my topic, as my rooftop flat overlooks the Malindi Police Post, the site of the last skirmish of the Revolution.

My methodology has included archival work at numerous archives, intensive

interviews with people who played a role in the revolution, and informal discussions at a local *baraza*. I have asked open-ended questions about the individual's role in planning and implementation, as well as specific questions addressing various rumors and theories about the revolution. Finally, I am inquiring about the identity of the different actors as well as the reasons revolutionaries give for why they participated in the revolution. I have spoken with one of the last living members of the "Committee of 14," the group of mostly *vibarna* (day laborers) who have been credited with leading the revolution as well as a former policeman who researched and wrote a report in 1980 on the Revolution for Aboud Jumbe, the second President of Zanzibar. Equally ground-breaking are conversations with several of the Comrades of the Umma Party who had received military training in Cuba in 1962, and who formed the beret-wearing group of rebels saying "*Vanceremos!*" in the early days of the Revolution. Their attire and use of Spanish led to inaccurate western media coverage which speculated that the revolution was Cuban-sponsored and led.

Finally, I have also been part of a local *baraza* with an unusual political mixture of people, including a former member of the Police Mobile Force whose armory was attacked as the first target of the Revolution, as well as a Principle Secretary in the current government. Additionally, through an archival newspaper article and contacts in Uganda, I have located a

previously unknown wife of Ugandan Field Marshall John Okello, who was the initial face and voice of the Zanzibar Revolution. Therefore, after Zanzibar, I am heading to a remote village in northern Uganda to meet this wife, as well as other friends of Okello, to find out more about this revolutionary leader whose desire for power got him unceremoniously deported from Zanzibar only two months after the Revolution.

The opposing narratives of the Revolution that are regularly debated in blogs and *barazas* each entail factual details as well as conspiratorial imaginings. In my dissertation, I will deconstruct the narratives, situating and analyzing both the actualities and the roots of the conspiracies. At this juncture, it seems that what actually happened was that there were many separate plans that came together at the last minute, with various groups of people joining in when it began to appear that the government was actually toppled with much more speed and ease than almost anyone imagined was possible.

*Ann Lee Grimstad is a doctoral candidate in history. Research funding provided by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad fellowship.*