

WHEN I CAME TO CHINA, I WAS very happy to see my wife and two daughters. Fidela only spoke Chinese, so when I went to take her from my wife's arms, she shouted out, "*Wo bu yao ni!!*" I had to ask my other daughter, Raissa, who was then four years old, what she was saying. She told me she was saying, "She doesn't want you." *Wo* = I, *bu* = no, *yao* = want, *ni* = you. Fidela was two years old and dressed like any Chinese girl, and she had a round face, so she could pass for a Chinese girl. My daughters stayed in a boarding school in Beijing because my wife was working and could come to visit them on the weekends. They were fed there, and they played with the other expatriate children from Russia, America, Germany, Australia, and so on. Our third daughter, Maotushi, remained in Zanzibar with my wife's parents.

We stayed in a flat designated for Russian expatriates, in building Yo Yee Ping One, room 2235, or in Chinese, *ah ah san woo*. I was content and never demanded anything extra. I was a disciplinarian; I never flirted with any girl and never begged for anything. But I had access to a car; and in a period of rationing, I had plenty of food, clothing, and gasoline. I also received treatment for my ulcers, but the Chinese doctors did not operate.

I was in the flat during the day, reading mostly Maoist revolutionary works. Sometimes I would ask a friend to take me on day trips to visit historical places, instead of remaining idle. I met with dignitaries from the Chinese trade unions since we had been working together since my first trip to China in 1960. My wife and I and Muhsin Abeid attended a trade-union conference in North Vietnam organized by the World Federation of Trade Unions, in support of the struggle in South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh hosted a huge banquet; since my wife was the only woman delegate present, Ho invited her to be seated next to him at the main table. She had that privilege. As an appetizer, we were served a

snake cut into small pieces, which tasted like a kind of fish we have here in Zanzibar called *ngogo*. I told my wife in Swahili, "You are eating snake, but eat it and don't vomit." But she had been living in China since 1962 and was used to eating all kinds of concoctions.

Ho gave a toast and gave my wife a hug and kissed her on the cheeks. They flushed afterward—Ho and Aysha both became red—and we all clapped because we were very happy.

At the beginning of January 1964, just three weeks after Zanzibar had obtained its independence, the ZNP government banned the Umma Party and confiscated all our property at the party headquarters. The authorities wanted to arrest Babu under the false pretext that they found a pistol in his compound. The police had planted a gun in his home, forcing him to flee Zanzibar for the mainland in a canoe.

As soon as I heard the news, I wanted to return to Africa to carry on the struggle, which I knew was reaching a climax. I had discussions with the Chinese for a week on how to organize as an illegal party because, for most of their history, they had worked underground. How did they work under such conditions? They taught me from their own experience; I was being groomed, so to speak. I made preparations to move my family to East Africa, but in those days, it took some time to book a ticket from Beijing to Dar es Salaam.

Then on January 12, 1964, around five in the evening in China, we received the BBC news relay from Hong Kong. It announced a revolution in Zanzibar. I remember I had a high temperature on that day and had my sweater on, but when I heard the news, all of a sudden I was well. My temperature, boof! Gone! My Chinese friend heard the news over the wireless, and we both came out of our rooms at the same time, to inform one another. We embraced, and to celebrate, we opened a bottle of Chinese champagne, known as Mao Tai.

That night I did not sleep because I thought we were going to be suppressed by colonial forces. In fact, for three days I did not sleep; I just listened to the radio, expecting British intervention at any moment. I could hear my comrades in Zanzibar, the ones I had sent to Cuba for training, shouting in Spanish, "*Aki esta oi, Zanzibar proklama ente Afrika e el mundo Zanzibar primero pais libre d' Afrika.*" [Today Zanzibar proclaims in front of Africa and the world that Zanzibar is the first liberated country of Africa].¹ "*Nos otros sobrenia nunca negociables!*" [Our sovereignty is not negotiable] "*Patria o muerte!*" [Our fatherland or death] and "*Venceremos!*" [We shall conquer] These were Cuban slogans the comrades remembered from their time there; they just substituted Zanzibar

for *Cuba*, and since that time, we have greeted each other in this way, using these words. Eventually I managed to book tickets to return home, and we left China on January 15, 1964.

Later in Zanzibar, I was told how the revolution took place. The ZNP-ZPPP government refused any defensive agreement with the British because Ali Muhsin's policy was to wait instead for a treaty with the Egyptian government. He was a racist, naïve, and stupid because he should have first agreed with the British for a limited period and then phased them out in favor of the Egyptians, if that is what he wanted. If he had had foresight, he would have signed a temporary pact, but he did not. I think it was because God wanted the revolution to happen.

When the ZNP banned the Umma Party, the ASP thought its turn would be next. There is a Swahili expression that when you see someone having his head shaved, it is time to water your head, to prepare yourself to follow: *Ukimwona mwenzako ananyolewa wewe tia maji*. The government started with us comrades because they feared us more than they did the ASP, though we were much weaker in numbers. They could not believe the ASP was capable of launching any kind of attack, but, in reality, the leaders of the ASP Youth League organized the revolution. They were men of very little education, some of whom had not even finished primary school and were doing manual work around town as tradesmen, dockworkers, and tailors. Babu had a phrase for these elements: the lumpen proletariat. Umma comrades had been in discussions with the Youth League about the need for a revolution, but the ASP had the support of the majority of the population, and we did not.

The government received intelligence reports of a possible uprising among the police rank and file, who generally supported the ASP, while the officers supported the Nationalists. Many of the rank and file were Africans from the mainland who were rapidly being dismissed and replaced with island recruits more loyal to the regime. To counter the threat of a police mutiny, the government decided to collect and dismantle as many weapons as possible and put them in the armory at Ziwani. Information was leaked to the Youth League that, at Ziwani, only the sentries were armed and that each sentry was limited to just five bullets. Seif Bakari and other Youth League leaders decided to mobilize a considerable force of men armed only with clubs and machetes to attack the armory at Ziwani and also the police barracks at Mtoni, both located on the edge of town.

On the night of January 11, the Youth League organized a dance concert at Raha Leo in Ng'ambo in order to distract the police. While some

people were dancing, others secretly approached the armories. They escaped notice and attacked around midnight, taking the government completely by surprise. They were led by people like Yusuf Himidi, Said wa Shoto, Abdullah Said Natepe, Khamis Darweshi, Ramadhan Haji, Pili Khamis, Seif Bakari, and Saidi Iddi Bavuai. By 2:00 a.m. both Ziwani and Mtoni were in their hands, and probably no more than fifty died in the attack.

The revolution came as no surprise to the comrades. The Youth League first brought the captured guns to a taxi stand near Mwembeladu, in Ng'ambo. Within a couple of hours after their capture, Badawi called the boys I had sent to Cuba to come and assemble the guns and give them out because very few people in Zanzibar had ever handled a gun. So the comrades cooperated with the revolutionaries from almost the very beginning, though Babu was in Dar es Salaam at the time for his own protection. I was told that Karume also went to Dar es Salaam.² Although Karume did not organize the revolution, he must have known about the plans and given his blessing and then went to Dar es Salaam in case they failed.

The only real government resistance was at the Malindi police station, where I was told there were a few losses among the revolutionaries. But once the revolutionaries arrested all the ministers, the sultan sailed away on his yacht. He could have gone to Pemba where he had much support, but he did not. I do not know why. Maybe the British advised him not to.

Had they wanted, the British could have intervened militarily and defeated us, but I think it was a plan. A week later there was an army mutiny in Dar es Salaam, and the British intervened there; so why did they not intervene in Zanzibar? Here in Zanzibar, they had a number of British expatriates; even some principal secretaries in the government were still British.³ But it was a blessing because, if they had not stayed away, we would not have succeeded. *Al-hamdullilah!*

With all those guns now in people's hands, thousands of people died, generally Arabs. I cannot say how many. A revolution is not a tea party; things like that are anticipated. The arrogant ones suffered after the revolution; for certain things, there were repercussions. It was a day of reckoning, based on how you had treated your fellow being. If you were a good Muslim, you had no fears. If you lived nicely with your neighbors, you were all right. If not, then some people might have a grudge against you, and when they got the upper hand, they could be nasty. There were some Arabs hidden in African homes, so it all depended on how you had lived with your neighbors.

It was not so much a genocide as it was revenge killings or a chance to steal and rape. Sometimes the killing was accidental because the revo-

lutionaries could work whimsically: they might be nasty one minute and nice the next. Criminals whom we released from the prisons murdered people, but at other times, people were killed for political reasons. The violence was conducted primarily by men from town who went to the countryside with guns. Stone Town was too congested for the revolutionaries, so few people actually died there. They died mostly in the *shamba* or in Ng'ambo where they were more isolated and where there was little chance of resistance. Outside of Stone Town, few people had guns with which to resist.

Some Arabs were killed immediately, while others were rounded up and detained either in town or on Prison Island. Eventually ships came from the Red Cross to take them to Oman. After I returned from China, I did not visit the island to see their misery, but I knew they were there.

I do not know if any central authority directed the violence in those days. There was a revolutionary headquarters at Raha Leo where John Okello claimed over the radio that he was field marshal of the revolution, but that was just rubbish. In fact, I remember when Okello first came to the islands in 1958 from Kenya. He was a stone breaker, and I secured a job for him in Pemba. I sent him to a fellow named Mazrui who had a quarry in Vitongoji, and I forgot about him until he wanted to see me after the revolution to thank me for finding him work in those days.

The Youth League recruited any element prepared to fight, including John Okello. Later he claimed to be the field marshal, but if he really was, then how a couple of months later did we manage to throw him out of the islands just like that? The other revolutionaries used him because people did not know his name, and it frightened them. It was easy to believe he was Mau Mau, with a name like that. "What monster is this?" they asked. The names Seif Bakari or Yusuf Himidi would not have inspired such terror. Okello was really a naïve, simple fellow who was used to frighten people. So it is rubbish that Westerners believe John Okello planned and organized the revolution.⁴

The violence lasted about ten days, and I would estimate that about one-third of the Arabs in Unguja were killed or forced into immediate exile. I personally supported the revolution completely and had no reservations about the government's being overthrown. Good riddance! For us who had nothing to lose but our misery, we welcomed the revolution. The authorities had banned our party, and they had confiscated our property; but we got it all back after the revolution, whatever little we had, even including a table fan.

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I may have sympathy for some unfortunate ones who died in the process, but in a revolution, those kinds of things happen, like in any war. I cannot condone it, but it happened.⁵ My own uncle, an Arab landlord, was killed in Mfenesini. But let me tell you: I warned him before I left Zanzibar, saying, "I'm leaving for China, and I'm asking you not to spend your nights in the *shamba*. Move your family into town and go every day to the *shamba* to do your business, but please sleep in town. Never mind if you think you have a gun, that it can protect you. Do this until I return from China."

There was already hatred in the country when I left in 1963, and that is why I warned my uncle. "If these people in the ZNP can turn against me, those with whom I've worked for years, then why can't the Africans in the countryside turn against you, my uncle?" He just laughed and did not follow my sincere advice; the result was he was killed. I heard people set fire to the thatch of his roof, and he fired his gun until he ran out of bullets. I do not know what happened after that. I did not ask the details from those who survived. Painful. I was not very close to him, but he was my uncle, after all. His name was Nassor Issa, and he had quite a bit of land, planted mostly with coconut trees.

But I warned him, and he did not listen, so he was meant to die. He must have lived badly with the people around him. He was the only one we lost in my family; I had brothers and sisters in Unguja, but they were well known as members of my family, so no one would touch them because they knew of my role in the Umma Party. During those days, comrades distributed photographs of Babu around town to our members or sympathizers, so that, when men with guns came to their door, they could show them Babu's picture and the gunmen would know they were comrades and not to be harmed.

I was blessed by being away because sometimes I was unpredictable. I really do not know how I would have reacted, how I would have conducted myself during that month around December and January, during independence and revolution. I missed that part of my life, but it was a blessing. Today no one can blame me or say anything because I was not there. No, my desire when I returned home was for no further excesses.

The revolution took place on January 12, 1964, and my family and I left Beijing on January 15. We stayed in Hong Kong for a couple of days because my wife was interested in doing some shopping. My idea was to return home as fast as possible, but I had to consent to her wishes. She wanted to buy some clothes for herself and the children and gifts for friends and family at home. Hong Kong was more stylish than the

Chinese mainland, and since we were Western-oriented, we had that stupid mentality. Even I, as a seaman staying in London, would go to a Jew in the East End, opposite Aldgate East tube station, to have my suits tailored. We in Zanzibar had imported materials like gabardine, linen, khaki, and silk. We had our suits made during Ramadhan so that by *sikukuu* [celebration marking the end of fasting], they would be ready to wear.

After Hong Kong, we spent a night in Bombay. The next day we were ready to leave for Tanganyika, but the management of Air India informed me that the airport in Dar es Salaam was now closed because of an army mutiny. A revolution in Zanzibar, and now a week later an army mutiny in Tanganyika!

I asked where we could go closer to Zanzibar and was told we could go to Nairobi, where we managed to arrive on January 19. In our hotel were the wives and children of British expatriates fleeing from Zanzibar. One of them said to me, "Why are you going to Zanzibar? You are an Arab, and you are taking your small children there to be butchered." I said, "Don't worry. I'm part of this struggle."

I met Babu where he stayed at the New Stanley Hotel, and he gave me his condolences. I said, "Don't give me your condolences because we've won the revolution." But then he told me that my mother had passed away a week earlier in Dar es Salaam. So, despite the mutiny, I had to go to Dar es Salaam first rather than to fly directly to Zanzibar. No commercial planes were flying, but I flew the next day on a government plane with Babu.

The army mutineers wanted to Africanize the higher echelons of the army and sack all their British officers. They wanted to capture Julius Nyerere and make their demands to him, but he was hiding in a house somewhere in Dar es Salaam. I thought this situation was clearly the effect of the revolution in Zanzibar: when the soldiers on the mainland saw that, in one day, we had turned our world in Zanzibar upside down, it gave them the idea to mutiny and to demand changes. A few days later there were mutinies also in Kenya and Uganda.

The soldiers controlled the airport and their two barracks but nothing else, so I could drive through town and visit my mother's grave. In the evening, I went to drink at the Dar es Salaam Club, a place for the African elite that, in colonial times, was the European yacht club. I was there with Lawi Sijaona, the minister of home affairs, and some other ministers and ambassadors, when some soldiers involved in the mutiny approached and asked the ministers why they were talking to an Arab. After that, Lawi advised my family and me to stay in our hotel room and not to drink

with ministers like him in public places. I was not surprised; we had racism in Zanzibar, so why would there not be racism in Tanganyika?

On the fourth day in Dar es Salaam, a Czech intelligence officer awakened me early in the morning, saying he had heard gunfire and wanted me to find out what was happening. I took a car and went to the home of Oscar Kambona, the minister of foreign affairs and defense. Kambona was gone, but I met Lawi Sijaona there who informed me that Nyerere from his hideout had asked the British to intervene and suppress the mutiny. Lawi told me to return to my hotel and rest and by noon the airport would be open. The mutineers surrendered without a fight; and on that day, January 25, my family and I were able to fly to Zanzibar Town.

I went immediately to report to the State House. Karume welcomed me and said, "Look, there's a boat going to Pemba tonight with some forces. And that man John Okello is already in Pemba. You'd better go and have a look and see which points are the weakest, from where, in your mind, infiltration from outside might come." So that night I left for Pemba; it took me three days to follow his instructions. I located all the strategic points and all the good harbors with deep water, any place where people might land by sea. The vulnerable places were formerly used by smugglers, where we had to strengthen our positions.

After returning to report, I stayed less than a week in Zanzibar Town before I was dispatched again to Pemba as an area commissioner over Chake Chake, the central area, even though I was originally from Wete. I had to move my family to Pemba; I had three young children, four younger brothers and sisters, and I was taking care of the five children of my deceased sister Dalila. There were fourteen of us in total, including my wife and me.

When I arrived in Pemba, I found the people dejected; they had surrendered without a fight and showed no open hostility to the revolutionary government, though the island had been a ZNP-ZPPP stronghold. Okello was going around frightening people, moving with a jeep-load full of men with guns. People were afraid of this Okello because he had a strange name and spoke Swahili with an accent, as I said.

It was chaos almost, but I have seen *Gone with the Wind*, and I am sure you saw the same thing in the American South after the Civil War. The Asians and Arabs who wanted to leave Pemba for Kenya or Tanganyika had to surrender their jewelry. We did not ask for anything else, just their jewelry. Of course, they were also afraid to take any currency out of the country. We would search them before they left, confiscate their jewelry, and send it to the central government coffers in Zanzibar Town. What the government did with the jewelry after that, I do not know.

There was a spirit of revenge in Pemba, which I think was wrong. It was a revolution, so it was like any revolution in the world. We tried to tell the people to work together and forget the past, but still there was a day of reckoning, and the arrogant ones suffered. Again, there were certain repercussions, depending on how you treated your fellow human beings.

There was a breakdown of law and order; people would not take their cases to the court, only to administrators like me from the revolutionary government. At the time, a decision came from Zanzibar Town that was sent to the regional commissioner in Pemba, Rashid Abdalla. Instead of putting people in jail, all offenders were to be flogged and then released. That was the decision. I thought it better than sending them to prison because if you send a bread earner to prison, you ruin the whole family. When he is gone, the family invariably disintegrates. When the man is inside, people can do anything to his family, like rape his wife and plunder his goods.

So I sat in a chair in the marketplace, and I dispensed punishments. We did the caning openly, for people to see, so they would behave themselves. Any offense would lead to flogging. I prescribed a maximum of twenty-one strokes, mostly for thieving, not for political reasons. I never caned a woman, but I did order seven strokes for a homosexual who dressed like a woman and even wore beads around his waist. This was an open violation of our customs. We have a saying here: *Ukifanya kwa siri, Mungu atakuhukumu kwa siri*. If you do something in secret, God will judge you in secret. He was openly dressing like a woman, so I ordered him to be publicly caned.

I tried in most cases to reconcile those who came to report offenses. There was a case, for example, of a wife's reporting her husband for having taken and sold her jewelry. I knew both the husband and the wife, and I used all my persuasive arguments in asking the wife not to prosecute. Eventually I won her over because I said the man had sold the jewelry to buy a lorry to earn money and to maintain the house in which she lived.

One night my father telephoned and wanted to see me after work. I was on my way to Wete when I reached a point on the main road still under my jurisdiction where I saw a group of people. I stopped my car; just two or three houses away from the road I found an old man whom they wanted to lynch. I intervened and told the old man, "Don't worry. No one will touch you because I have witnessed this. If anything happens to you, I know the culprits." And I told those young boys, "If anything happens, I will hold you responsible." I checked again that night, and in the morning I called the local *sheha* and told him, "I don't want this kind

of thing in my area. You people are taking the law into your own hands, and this I will not tolerate."

I was also very strict about looting. I had the Youth League in my hands, and they respected me. Were they responsible, or was I? If any-thing happened, who would be blamed? There was no looting, as far as I remember; but, of course, our boys got out of control sometimes. One of our soldiers raped a girl, and we flogged him in front of the whole town and threw him out of the army that same day. There were excesses, but we tried also to have a semblance of a society based on the rule of law. I was appointed to create an administration out of chaos; actually, I thank God I did not stay longer in Pemba because I do not know what kind of cases I would have faced later on.

So I worked and listened to people's grievances; then one day I heard Babu announce over the radio that all Umma Party members should join the ASP. I knew immediately that Karume had pressured Babu to dissolve the party because normally there would have been a meeting of the Umma Party Executive Committee, of which I was a member, as I have said. We should have had a resolution for the party to be dissolved, but there was none. My reaction was just to follow the stream—that is all. I decided to work within the ASP because it was not antagonistic to my ideas since it was the party of downtrodden peasants and workers. We socialists had to work in whichever way possible. We were not in the time of Lenin, and the only possibility for us was to work within the ASP. The merger was permissible since the Chinese Communist Party had once joined with the Goumingdang, though they remained separate. The advanced countries may have a different way, but we had just come from being a colony and had to follow a different path. So after listening to Babu over the wireless, I went the next day to buy my ASP membership card.