

THE BIGGEST CHANGE IN ZANZIBAR since I had left was the introduction of political parties and the beginning of our independence struggle. We did not know how long the struggle would take; I personally thought it would take a long time, at least ten years, because I had followed the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya and knew how bitter a conflict that was.

Babu had returned from London the year before and had been appointed secretary general of the Zanzibar Nationalist Party, the ZNP. Babu turned out to be a brilliant and subtle strategist and tactician. He was also friendly and generous, a real man of the people. He drank a lot, sometimes a full bottle of whiskey a day, but all us comrades drank in those days. Babu wanted me to join the ZNP right away, even though the party had lost the elections the previous year to the Afro-Shirazi Party, or ASP. I told him I first needed to see my father in Pemba, and then we would see.

In Pemba, I attended the rallies of each party. I went to the ASP and asked to see the party constitution, but it did not have one. The ASP appeared to be an agglomeration of individuals all following their leader, Abeid Karume. Karume was a very strong man; he spoke Swahili, some Gujarati, some Arabic, and some seaman's English. He was a very good orator in Swahili and could move people and command an audience. And his words just came to him spontaneously—he never read a speech, just spoke from the heart. Karume was very popular among the working people because he came from them and was a simple man willing to talk and joke with everyone, especially the poor of every community.

But the ASP was too patriarchal, and in those days, it did not criticize colonialism. I could never join a party that did not want to get rid of the British immediately. Our society was divided into different ethnic associations, through which the British played the old game of divide and

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rule. Now we had a party called the Afro-Shirazi Party, which contested politics on a racial basis; since I was class conscious, I knew we had to break racial politics in Zanzibar.

The ZNP, on the other hand, had a party constitution. It also criticized colonialism, which I thought was the most fundamental contradiction. I did not agree with all the constitution—for example, where we swore allegiance to the sultan—but I knew the first task was to get rid of the British; we could deal later with the sultan and the feudalists, the big Arab landowners. The first struggle was to achieve our independence since socialism could not come under colonialism. The class struggle was not the immediate priority; rather, we had to unite the people of all the ethnic communities.

I could see that the ZNP was a very heterogeneous party, that it included all the ethnic groups, workers, peasants, and landowners. Although the feudalists in Zanzibar all supported the ZNP, the party also attracted nearly all the young intellectuals of the islands, people like Babu and others who had studied overseas. I could see the contradictions within the ZNP but was willing to cooperate with the feudalists for the time being in order to achieve victory against colonialism, and the ZNP was the only party then fighting colonialism.

Since we socialists were so few, it was foolish to organize our own party. Our adversaries would have branded us atheist communists. Of course, that is what I was in those days, but we socialists had to be subtle about it; we had to bury ourselves in a mass movement and then try to politicize from within. Even then, the British hardly tolerated us communists.

So I joined the ZNP and was very soon elected organizing secretary for Pemba. In March 1958, we called a mass meeting at Mkoani for the whole island, just one month after my arrival from London. I had a lot of work to do because the ZNP had lost the elections the year before and was a very young organization and unscientific in its methods.¹ We had to have an organization and needed to instill discipline in our members, so I started recruiting members and establishing branches everywhere in Pemba, following the party constitution to the letter. I began in the south; it took almost six months to get the island organized. We started with the youth because they are the ones who matter the most and can be remolded. We organized the men first, but later also the women since they knew we were pressing the British for women to be able to vote.

I worked very hard for the Nationalists. I was lucky that my first assignment was in Pemba where the ASP was weak. The Shirazi and the

Arabs considered themselves kin to one another, and however much the ASP tried to instigate racial tension, it could not succeed in that region. We were saved from that curse. In Pemba, things were relatively quiet and harmonious, and that is the reason we never had much violence there, even during the revolution.

Only in Unguja did the people experience deep social divisions because of politics. The ZNP instigated a campaign to evict African squatters on Arab-owned plantations in retaliation for their support of the ASP. The evictions deepened racial enmity, so that, for a time, people did not even attend the funerals of members of the other party. Village wells, once open to all, were closed to members of opposing parties, all depending on the whims of local village leaders. It was not, of course, in the interests of progressives to see such worsening divisions. We had to speak the same language and to confront the British with a united front.

I met my first Zanzibari wife, Aysha Amour Zahor, during that year in Pemba. She was a matron in a girl's boarding school, and she and two other teachers would come in the afternoon to visit my stepmother. I invited all three to go swimming with me, but Aysha was the only one who came. She was of the same clan as I, and I knew her father from the party. She had already finished secondary school and had been through teacher's training.

We first met in February 1958 and were married in June of that year. I was twenty-six years old, and she was twenty-one. At the time, we were opening a women's union in the party, and I did not want the men to be suspicious of me, to think I could not be trusted around their wives. I decided I should marry, so they would not be jealous and restrict their women from joining the party. Aysha was open and agreeable, though not the most beautiful among the three I had invited swimming. She wore glasses and was asthmatic. She was very simple in her tastes and had many friends among her schoolmates. I decided she met my criteria.

But when I asked my father for his permission to marry, he would not consent, and I still do not know why. I asked my uncle to make the marriage proposal to Aysha's parents, but he would not go without my father's permission. Since my family did not approach her parents, they refused to give their consent to the marriage. Her father and I were both members of the ZNP Executive Committee, but he was in Unguja, and I was in Pemba. I heard later that he did not cooperate because I did not believe in religion, but at the time, he told me it was because my father had not personally come to propose.

So Aysha and I took our case to the *kadhi's* court, something very new in Pemba in the 1950s. Aysha protested that she wanted to marry me, but her father would not consent. Her father was asked to come to the court to explain, but he did not respond to the first summons, or the second, and so the *kadhi* gave us his permission to get married. I paid my wife only a token amount of one hundred shillings as a dowry, and we had a small wedding party in my friend's house, with *taarab* music. Aysha was open-minded about the dowry, but even if she had wanted something more, where would I have gotten it? I was a politician with no salary.

Eventually the leaders of our party came to reconcile my father and me. They spoke to him first and then came to me; they asked me to bow down, touch his feet, and ask forgiveness. I refused, saying that he was the one in the wrong, so he should beg forgiveness and bow down. They said that kind of thing did not happen in our society, so eventually I agreed. All of us walked to my father's office. As I was bowing down to beg forgiveness, my father stopped me, saying it was not necessary.

It was a happy marriage, and Aysha was very good to me, very quiet, kind, and docile. We had a very good understanding. I indoctrinated her, and in time, she became very progressive in her ideas and very active politically. My wife would address the women at ZNP meetings. She almost caught me cheating once, but I did not confess. I was just like Bill Clinton: I repudiated the affair. But then one time I caught Aysha speaking with an Indian boy on the street, one of her former classmates. It was not an affair, but I warned him I would beat him if I ever saw him speaking to my wife again.

My wife gave birth to our first child, a daughter, in April 1959. I named her Raissa, after a Russian ballerina I had seen perform in Moscow in 1957. Another daughter, Fidela, was named after Fidel Castro [1961]. The third daughter was Maotushi, named after Mao Tse-tung [1962]. She later became known as Moona. The last of our four children was a son I named Stalin [1966], who later changed his name to Sultan.

So, in those days, we dared to struggle. I would be out on party business all day and come back late at night sometimes. We depended on friends for our food and shelter. We stayed with different people. From Amour Abdalla al-Kiyumi, we received rice, beans, cooking fat, and sugar. From Saleh Salim Shirgah, we obtained soft drinks, bread, and meat. They knew we had nothing, that my father had thrown me out for marrying my wife, and that I was not earning a shilling for my work with the ZNP. My wife and children learned to accept these conditions;

there were no luxuries, but neither were we deprived. In those days, I had no personal ambitions whatsoever; I was not thinking I wanted to be a candidate and be elected to the Legislative Council—no. I was the ZNP's organizing secretary in Pemba until 1959, when I was promoted to acting secretary general during Babu's absence on one of his trips overseas. And I was only twenty-seven years old.

Since the British were formidable, we had to find a way to reason them out of Zanzibar. Of course, time was on our side; after World War II, India became independent and then Ghana in 1957. The issue that united everyone here in Zanzibar was liberation from the colonial yoke, not emancipation from economic weakness. Early on, we foresaw there would be neocolonialism because, even though we might become independent, we could still be manipulated economically.

We also knew before we achieved our independence that there would be a breakup of the movement, because the ZNP was a temporary union of different forces. We progressives were the intellectuals, the organizers, and the blood of the ZNP. We had ideas acceptable to the majority of the people who were poor, and we spoke to them in a very simple way. When I spoke in town, I appealed to the workers, pointing out their exploitation. When I spoke in rural areas, I appealed to the squatters, saying they were doing a service to the landlords by clearing their farms without any return. I explained to the peasants why, when their harvests failed, they were losing their *shambas* to the court.

Ali Muhsin, a leading personality in the ZNP, could not speak to the people in this way. Once in 1960, he and the Executive Committee stopped me from speaking at mass meetings. Muhsin knew that, at the end of the day, I was aiming for a socialist Zanzibar, so I was banned from public speaking. Muhsin said my speeches were exactly like Karume's, the only difference being that Karume was an African and I was an Arab. The content was the same. That was his accusation, but it was those speeches that convinced people to join the party.

I went to Ghana in 1960 with Babu and Hussein Mubarak to attend a conference meant to protest France testing their bombs in the Sahara Desert. Kwame Nkrumah, who received our delegation for half an hour, was strong and energetic but not ideologically inclined to my standards, like most African leaders. He gave the impression of being an intellectual of the Westernized world, not a fully committed socialist. He theorized for a long time with us—but it was just blah, blah, blah. He did not have much of an influence on me. I had already formed my radical

opinions and thought most African leaders were too bourgeois, too willing to perpetuate the same system.

From Ghana, I flew to Guinea, for a much more substantial and international Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference, which grew out of the Bandung Conference of 1955. Babu headed the delegation and gave a speech about our struggle in Zanzibar and asked for support, whether moral or material. I had been to Conakry before as a sailor and knew the city when it was under the French, so I took Babu and Hussein around to the naughty places I had been in those days. We stayed a week or two, and Sékou Touré invited us to his palace, where he had a state banquet for us. Sékou Touré had a lovely wife, and he was actually nearer to me ideologically than was Nkrumah because he had come up through the trade union movement. Under Touré's leadership, Guinea was the first French colony south of the Sahara to gain independence.

Babu and Hussein Mubarak returned to Zanzibar, while I went off to China, where I stayed for almost a month, attending a trade-union conference. I was asked to give a speech on socialist liberation and made the front page of the *People's Daily* in China. I attacked Tito's revisionism in Yugoslavia, unaware that the Chinese were using my comments in their rhetorical war with the USSR, because, by then, the Chinese were accusing the Soviets, and not just Tito, of revisionism.

After the conference, my hosts wanted to show me the story of the communist struggle and to indoctrinate me, so they took me on a tour retracing the steps of the Long March. I had read about the Long March in London and was really impressed, so I was ready to learn. I traveled with an official interpreter, sometimes by train and sometimes by plane, all the way from Jiangxi through Hunnan and eventually to Shaanxi, near Inner Mongolia, a province of hills and caves, the cradle of the communist resistance.

The tour opened my outlook and broadened my horizons, to see how the communists had made huge sacrifices and how, wherever they went, they confiscated lands and gave them to the peasants. I was not as interested at the time in iron smelting or coal mining or in their heavy industry and armament factories. I wanted to understand the history of their party and how they had struggled. Our slogan here was "*Uhuru 1960*," and though I knew freedom would not come in 1960, I also knew it would not take as long as it had taken the Chinese.

The Chinese took me to many cities. Poverty was not as visible as in India; everyone had food and something to wear. People were neither naked nor in rags, and although the houses were old, I never saw people sleeping in the streets. The country was huge. It had been left behind for

so many years that, had it not been up as quickly as it did. Of course it should not; it is the same as how a backward country into an industrial is not easy—no wonder a lot of sacrifice of lives was justified; if I had the same as Mao or Stalin. If I had

wouldness to modernization, I would have Chinese struggle to the Algeria struggle in Africa. I remember En-Lai: a great man, meticulous one of his arms was weak, as if though I had been a member years and had visited Russia in greatness of the Russians as I state of change, and I was free to test, to see which was most victorious in Zanzibar. In China, formidable country, by the people when I returned to Zanzibar, about China, that this was the

After returning from China, I went to the International Department. I was sent to an office and where the party was working. The ships offered by the Egyptian government there was a delay in setting up relations with the North Vietnamese. I was invited to meet Ho Chi Minh, who invited us to his palace to discuss and apply what he knew to our country. It was a very common touch; once it was a very, very hot day. Ho walked in sandals made from tire treads. He opened the dinner by reminding me that we all took a t-shirt underneath, and asked me if it was so hot that we all took a t-shirt underneath. In fact, Ho was very simple. In fact, my life: he moved through

so many years that, had it not been for socialism, it would not have caught up as quickly as it did. Of course, now the Chinese blame Mao, but they should not; it is the same as how the Russians blame Stalin. Developing a backward country into an industrial country in a short period of time is not easy—no wonder a lot of people died in the process. But the sacrifice of lives was justified; if I had that same power, I would have done the same as Mao or Stalin. If I had a huge country to bring from backwardness to modernization, I would have done the same things, yes.

Mao Tse-tung gave us an audience in Wutan and compared the Chinese struggle to the Algerian struggle, which then was the foremost struggle in Africa. I remember that Mao was a chain smoker and that one of his arms was weak, as if he had suffered a stroke. I also met Chou En-Lai: a great man, meticulous, and very well briefed. In general, although I had been a member of the British Communist Party for four years and had visited Russia in 1957, I had not been as impressed by the greatness of the Russians as I was with the Chinese. Life is a constant state of change, and I was free to develop and put all ideologies to the test, to see which was most viable and most suitable to our own conditions in Zanzibar. In China, I was deeply impressed by the vast and formidable country, by the people's sacrifice and their achievements, so when I returned to Zanzibar, I was in complete agreement with Babu about China, that this was the ideological line to follow.

After returning from China, I was made director of the ZNP's International Department. I was sent to Cairo, where the ZNP was opening an office and where the party was already sending many students on scholarships offered by the Egyptian government. When I first arrived in Cairo, there was a delay in setting up the office, so in the meantime, I attended North Vietnam's independence day celebrations. I went because I was intrigued with the North Vietnamese's zeal and also because I wanted to meet Ho Chi Minh, who at one time was a seaman like me. Ho invited us to his palace to discuss his experiences and teach us how to apply what he knew to our own liberation movements. I remember he had the common touch; once we were at a formal dinner, and it was a very, very hot day. Ho walked in wearing a worn-out khaki uniform and sandals made from tire treads, the kind you see in the street on children. He opened the dinner by removing the top of his uniform, wearing only a t-shirt underneath, and asked the rest of us to do the same. Of course, it was so hot that we all took advantage of this.

Ho was very simple. In fact, I have never seen a president like him in my life: he moved through the streets without any guards, walking

among the children. He loved children, though he did not have any of his own, and all the kids surrounded him in the streets, calling him "Uncle Ho." I was being driven one day through the streets, and there he was walking in his tire shoes and wearing a faded khaki tunic. I had never seen such openness before or since—no protocol! All the other heads of state I have seen have moved around with an entourage and bodyguards, as if they were the enemy of the people or were afraid. Ho impressed me very much.

SIX CAIRO

CAIRO
Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, Africa and Asia. The whole country was the spokesman for the entire continent movements throughout Africa, especially in Zanzibar because the sultan was an Arab, and because Rashad arrived in Egypt around 1952, sending out Swahili broadcasts for independence. He had a radio program on *Afrika* [Voice of African Freedom] in Swahili tuned in to that program in all the cafes. Most of the people wanted to get rid of the sultan. He gave us inspiration.

I was supposed to obtain information on various foreign delegations. I had to visit various nations—even the Soviet Union. The Soviets had no information on Africa; they only had their clannishness. The North Koreans, the Chinese, and the Czechs explained our struggle in terms of their own ships, literature, or what.

I was also expected to visit Cairo on ZNP scholarship. I had a hundred, and I think that, a hundred Zanzibaris studied in Heliopolis, and Ali M. also provided us with a