Strategies of citizenship and belonging in the Comoro Islands and in Tanzania [1]

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In August 2009, the Zanzibar immigration commissioner, Mwinchum Hassan Salum, announced that his office would start confiscating the passports of Zanzibaris of Comorian origin under the pretext that they had failed to naturalise as Tanzanian citizens, as they had been instructed to do by the first president of Zanzibar, Abeid Amani Karume, in 1968.[2] This announcement followed a refusal to issue passports to a number of Zanzibaris: one of them, a woman travelling to Kampala on business, was eventually granted a temporary document but was told that it would be confiscated upon her return and that she would be required to naturalise as a Tanzanian citizen before being granted further travel documents. Somewhat ironically, the father of the woman in question had followed Karume's instructions to the letter, naturalising as a Tanzanian citizen in March 1969 and returning his French passport to the French consulate in June that same year. However, although his Zanzibari-born daughter was a minor at the time (and was included in the passport returned to the French) she was apparently not included in the naturalisation order and therefore was not considered to have benefitted from her father's naturalisation. Hopes that this was an isolated incident were dashed in November 2009 when a group of pilgrims intending to travel to Mecca were also refused passports. This prompted leaders of the Comorian Zanzibari community to write to the Union government (which has the final say on immigration and nationality) and prepare to take legal action. In the event the issue was dropped and Zanzibaris of Comorian origin are once again accepted as bona fide Zanzibaris, and thus Tanzanian citizens.

Comorian Zanzibaris could only guess at the reasons behind this decision, and although the commissioner explicitly denied the accusation it does seem that the move was politically motivated. Several individuals suggested that the intention was to disqualify a minister in the Union government who was apparently of Comorian origin and was potentially a candidate at the 2010 presidential elections; however, given the dubious legality of the commissioner's decision it seems unlikely that such a move would have had any effect—and in the event the politician did not run. Nevertheless, the fact that the episode occurred at all is revealing in the wider context of Zanzibari politics and renewed expressions of community identity in Zanzibar following several decades of official disapproval and/or prohibition.

For older members of the Comorian Zanzibari community, the announcement—as Salum made explicit—raised the spectre of a similar declaration made by Karume. On 15th November 1968, Karume announced that "all Comorians ceased to be citizens of Tanzania from yesterday unless they [had] renounced their status of French subjects and [had] been officially accepted as

[1] Comorians means Wangazidja and Comoro generally means Ngazidja.

[2] *The Guardian* (Dar es Salaam), Aug 27, 2009, p1.

citizens."[3] In contrast to the 2009 episode, Karume's decision was explicitly political. Karume stated that Comorians were playing "a reactionary role" in revolutionary Zanzibar, and confirmed that Comorians who were ministers or members of parliament would be required to resign their posts immediately and refund the salaries that they had received. The political character of his declarations was underlined by his excluding civil servants from the latter declaration: "they were human beings and they could not be deprived of a possibility to earn their living" (*loc. cit.*). Once again, the suspicion among the community was that a specific individual was being targeted, in this case Abdul Rahman Babu, one of the leaders of the revolution and something of a thorn in Karume's side despite having been sidelined into relatively powerless positions in the Union government on the mainland; and once again, it seems that the strategy failed since Babu was not removed from his post.[4]

If the 2009 episode went relatively unnoticed outside the Comorian Zanzibari community, in 1968 Karume's announcement was followed by anti-Comorian demonstrations organised by the Afro-Shirazi party that were inscribed within a long-term policy of anti-communitarianism on the part of the revolutionary government: the murder and subsequent expulsion of "Arabs" during and immediately after the revolution; the closure of ethnically-based institutions (including the Franco-Comorian school and the Comorian Association); and the "abolition of races" and the notorious forced-marriages of 1970.[5] Although these policies were aimed at a range of groups considered not to be Zanzibari by the revolutionary government, the repeated attacks on the Comorian Zanzibari community, particularly given the small size of the community and its lack of either economic or political power, merit closer inspection.

Comorians and Zanzibar: waypoints

Both the Comoro Islands and Zanzibar are part of the Swahili socio-cultural complex. Along with most other settlements of the east African littoral, these islands have been part of an economic, cultural and linguistic community through and between which individuals, communities and goods have circulated for two millennia or more. Comorians have long been present the length of the coast; according to Ibuni Saleh a number of families have been present in Zanzibar since the 18th century and there were certainly Comorians resident in Zanzibar by the time the Imam of Muscat, Seyyid Said, moved his administration there in 1840.[6] By the time the European powers began to exert their influence in the region links between the two archipelagos were sufficiently well developed for Seyyid Said to feel it necessary to complain to the British about French interference with his trade with Comoros.[7] This trade was clearly a lively one: the Comoros exported primary materials (cattle and goats, hides and skins, rope, millet, tortoiseshell, *ntsambu*, honey, cassava, shark fins, cowries and betel)[8] while Zanzibar mostly sent

[3] *The Standard Tanzania*, 16 November, 1968, p1.

[4] Babu's father was apparently a nationalist and had left the Comoros in the early colonial period for a self-imposed exile in Zanzibar. However, although Babu was born in Zanzibar, and neither he nor his father appear to have registered at the French consulate, from a legal perspective both were nevertheless French subjects.

[5] See Martin (1980) on forced marriages.

[6] There were "a few hundred Comorians already in residence here", engaged in fishing, rope spinning and petty trade. Saleh (1942).

[7] Imam of Muscat (Seyyid Said) to Lord Palmerston, 19/08/1847, ZNA AA1/4.

[8] Lelieur de Ville-Sur-Arce (1821) says there was more trade at Ngazidja than at the other islands: despite the constant wars the island was clearly a prosperous place, and there is evidence that Ngazidja also exported foodstuffs to Ndzwani for on-sale to European ships; Sunley; EIC passim.

back manufactured goods (above all cloth, but also pottery, glass and metal items such as knives). People moved too, both to trade and to seek a living, and Ngazidja certainly exported slaves to Zanzibar. The wars, famines and volcanic eruptions of the mid 19th century (following the Malagasy slave raids of the early years of the century) also saw large numbers of Comorians settle in Zanzibar:[9] if Burton estimated their number at about 2000 in the mid 1850s; :thousands" more arrived in the late 1870s and early 1880s: "dhows full of Comorians are arriving in Zanzibar," reported the French consul in 1882.[10]

Comorians filled a variety of roles in Bu Saidi Zanzibar: from ministers, soldiers and interpreters in the sultan's service, to fishermen, carpenters and rope-makers.[11] Both of Seyyid Said's successors, Majid (1856-1870) and Barghash (1870-1888) recruited Comorian soldiers—Majid hired 130 of them as troops to fight invasion, and by the end of the century there were perhaps 500 soldiers in the sultan's army; possibly as a result of this influx there were a sufficient number, and with a sufficient sense of community, for Majid to name heads of the Comorian community. Those of Hadrami origin in particular also provided religious leadership: most notable among them was Ahmed bin Abubacar bin Sumeit, chief kadhi of Zanzibar in the early 20th century.[12] Far from being outsiders, Comorians were part of the local population: recognised as a distinct group, their Hadrami Arab ancestry, real or imagined, allowed them to take their place alongside the Omanis, the Hadramis themselves, and the Indians, as one of several groups in the Swahili world.

Politically it seems that Seyyid Said exerted a notional suzerainty over the Comoros (and, indeed, as far as Nosy Be: he was particularly unhappy when France annexed the island in the 1840s) much as he did over the other minor states of the African coast; his links with Mwali were strong enough for the queen of the island, Jumbe Fatima, to marry one of his cousins. Relationships with the other islands were also close and Seyyid Said's son, Sultan Barghash (1870-1888) sent both troops and weapons to the sultanate of Itsandra on Ngazidja in its wars against the neighbouring sultanate of Bambao in the 1870s and 1880s (particularly as France offered military support to the latter); and there is evidence that the sultan of Ndzwani's acceptance of French protection in 1886 was partly in rebuff of Zanzibari claims over the island.[13]

Although France had occupied Mayotte in 1841, the British had long frequented the anchorage at Mutsamudu on Ndzwani: prior to the opening of the Suez Canal it was a valuable and popular supply station for ships of the East India Company. Britain, through the consulate in Zanzibar, had also established a relationship with Fumbavu, the ruler of Itsandra, and had signed anti-slavery treaties not only with him but with the rulers of Mwali, Ndzwani and Bambao.[14] In 1848,

[9] Food shortages had prompted emigration to Zanzibar "three times in the past decade" (Sunley, 1857, in AA1/5).

[10] -Ottavi B/3; Ledoulx, 265/591

[11] e.g. Holman (1835), Burton (1872), von der Decken (1978).

[12] See Al-Farsy (1944), Martin (1971), Bang (2003).

[13] The extent of Zanzibari authority should not be overestimated: any attempt at annexation of the islands by Zanzibar would certainly have failed. French claims that Zanzibar authority had been extended over the islands seems to have been at least partly based on an assumption that the red flag that flew over Ndzwani was the Zanzibari flag; it was not: the flag of the sultan of Ndzwani was also red (as were the flags of many other Arab rulers)

[14] Sultan Ahmed of Bambao, also known as Mwinyi Mkuu, was described as a rather unprincipled individual and not held in high regard by the British. He did not respect the terms of the treaty, which he apparently signed with great reluctance.

in response to French activities in the region, Britain opened a consulate on Ndzwani, thus strengthening its influence on the island; however, this consulate was closed in 1866 following revelations (by David Livingstone) that the consul, William Sunley, employed slaves on his plantations.[15] Sunley remained on the island but was not replaced as consul, and the delimitation of spheres of interest in Africa in the1880s finally led to a withdrawal of a formal British presence from the Comoros and a consolidation of French authority.

During the 19th century Comorians from all islands appear to have been represented in Zanzibar;[16] however, its proximity to Zanzibar, its stronger social and cultural links, the repeated wars of the mid 19th century, and the social upheavals during the colonisation process in the late 19th century, all led to Ngazidja becoming the island from which most Zanzibari Comorians hailed. In 1886 France, from its base in Mayotte, declared a protectorate over the remaining Comorian islands, and while this move met with resistance on all the islands, in the case of Ngazidja Zanzibar was closely involved. The move was controversial: it was based on the cession of the entire island to France by Said Ali bin Said Omar, the ruler of Bambao, despite the fact that he had no authority to do so. Resistance came from the sultanates of Itsandra, north of Bambao and closely aligned with Zanzibar; and Mbadjini, in the south of the island, which was negotiating with a representative of the German East Africa Company for German protection.[17] If the German intervention never materialised, Itsandra's relationship with Sultan Barghash involved the French consul in Zanzibar. The French position was particularly difficult since no only was there was a great deal of animosity between Barghash and France's protégé Said Ali, based on Zanzibar's historical alliance with Itsandra and fomented by Barghash's pro-Itsandra entourage, but Barghash's increasingly close relationship with the British also (if perhaps not entirely logically) incited him to an anti-French stance. However, as the French consul exerted pressure on Barghash not to intervene in Ngazidja, the fait accompli of the French protectorate and tacit British support for a French sphere of influence over the Comoros, Barghash had little choice but to acquiesce.[18]

Zanzibar nevertheless remained a centre of resistance against the French presence in Ngazidja. A small but vocal group of exiles continued to foment anti-French sentiment on the island and France required a strategy to win over the Comorian opposition. Barghash was allegedly capricious in his treatment of Comorians, and France recognised an opportunity in a case brought by a Comorian by the name of Mohamed bin Sultan in front of Barghash's court regarding the inheritance of an estate in Lamu (part of the sultan's dominions). The sultan's court ruled against Mohamed, who, based on his status as a native of what was now a French territory, appealed to the French consul, Emile Piat. Piat assumed jurisdiction and found in Mohamed's favour.[19] This episode, in early 1887, allowed Piat to extend French protection to all Comorians who registered at the consulate, having effectively demonstrating to the Comorian community of

[15] In the early 19th century the sultan of Ndzwani twice offered to sell his island to the British. On Sunley, see Gary W. Clendennen and Peter M. Nottingham, *William Sunley and David Livingstone: a tale of two consuls*. Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000.

[16] In the 1860s there were a sufficient number of Wandzwani (or "Johannamen") in Zanzibar for David Livingstone to recruit his porters almost exclusively from their ranks.

[17] Optimistically, given that the German in question, a Dr Schmidt, had no authority to represent the German government and that the German government made it quite clear that assistance would not be forthcoming (*Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* 1886).

[18] Barghash's former police chief was a particularly anti-French Comorian named Kari Hadji. Perhaps fortunately, Kari Hadji died in 1887.

[19] MAE Zanzibar A/65.

Zanzibar where their best interests lay. This was made quite explicit in exchanges between the consul and Paris: not only did the episode demonstrate French power in Zanzibar, ideally reports of French superiority would filter back to the Comoros and bolster the reputation of the colonial regime in the islands. Henceforth, therefore, policy would be to offer French protection to all who wanted it.

The take up was initially slow: only five Comorians registered with the consulate between 1887 and 1890. Then, on 23 December 1890, 19 Comorians registered, and another 82 registered between January 1891 and November 1896.[20] Although the numbers were small given the size of the Comorian community, Comorians were well aware of the advantages of appealing to the French consul for assistance and many did so despite not being registered. Somewhat ironically, many of these Comorians had fled Ngazidja in order to escape French colonial control. Indeed, the community seems to have grown particularly rapidly during this period, both as a result of the difficult conditions in Ngazidja and the attractions of Zanzibar. Opportunities for formal employment on their home island were few: in an oversupplied labour market, the only colonial company of any size, Léon Humblot's *Société Anonyme de la Grande Comore*, paid wages significantly lower than those offered on the other islands: Fr3 to Fr5 per month, extremely low compared to Fr20 at Nosy Be and in view of a head tax that was raised from Fr5 to Fr 15 in the early 1900s. Emigration was the only solution for Comorians, and participation in the prosperous economy of the Sultanate of Zanzibar was a more attractive proposition than labouring on the plantations of an economically and socially moribund Mayotte.

Despite the influx of migrants, the number of Comorians in Zanzibar seems to have remained relatively constant. Suggestions—inscribed within local debates of a political nature—by the French authorities in Comoros and by Humblot that there were ten to fifteen thousand Comorians in Zanzibar were fanciful: given that the vast majority of Comorians lived in town it was simply not credible that one in four of an urban population of perhaps 40,000 could have been Comorian.[21] The 1910 census gives a more reasonable figure of 2313, of whom only a fraction were registered at the consulate. Accepting this figure leaves aside for the moment questions of ascription of identity, for not all Zanzibaris of Comorian origin would have been prepared to be embraced by the French state; others would have, with time, assumed alternative Zanzibari identities. The description "Comorian" was a category with a fluid membership, all the more so since the nature of the relationship between Comorians and Zanzibar meant that many of them were "at home" on the island. They were described as being well organised, and a good number were clearly well off, possessing houses, *shamba*s and slaves.[22]

Consolidating French status

[20] MAE Zanzibar A/114. This increase in numbers lead to a complaint from the consul, Lucien Labosse, that he had neither the time nor the resources to register all the Comorians who showed up.

[21] In 1891 Humblot conducted an informal census in Ngazidja which indicated a strong gender imbalance among adults: about 8000 men for 15000 women. This was cited as proof that 7000 men had emigrated to Zanzibar. Somewhat disingenuously, Humblot neglected to account for fatalities in the recent wars, emigration to other islands and Madagascar, and the fact that it had been the practice of Comorians to sell male slaves on the mainland while retaining the women "for breeding". Humblot's arguments were rarely coherent: two years later, in an attempt to defend high taxes and low wages, he cited passenger figures to prove that there was a net inward migration from Zanzibar.

[22] Successions, MAE passim.

In 1893 Hamad bin Thuwaini acceded to the throne of Zanzibar. Not particularly well disposed towards Comorians, one of his first acts was to refuse the French consular court jurisdiction in the case of a Comorian woman who had accused her Comorian husband of assault, stating that the husband was a Zanzibari subject. The sultan appealed to Rennell Rodd, the British Consul, who informed the French consul that British policy was that Comorians who had arrived in Zanzibar before the establishment of the French protectorate over Ngazidja in 1886 were not entitled to French protection. Although French jurisdiction had apparently been established by Piat in 1887, Zanzibar since had become a British protectorate and the matter was now one that concerned the British.

In deference to the British, instructions from Paris were that any Comorian employed in the Sultan's service lost all claim to French protection, even after they left service. However, France did claim jurisdiction over Comorians who had arrived in Zanzibar before 1886, provided that they were registered at the French consulate, thus extending French protection only to those who requested it. The British refused: accepting that all Comorian-born individuals were French *protégés* status would allow them to claim rights under the 1844 treaty between France and Muscat which, amongst other things, granted France most favoured nation status and extended to French subject rights that the British did not wish to see granted to the substantial Comorian population of Zanzibar.

The French response might well have been to let the matter drop; however, there was pressure from two directions. The French colonial ministry was putting pressure on the ministry of foreign affairs to exert their authority over Comorians in Zanzibar and encourage them to return home and either to palliate the labour shortages on the other islands or pay taxes on an increasingly impecunious Ngazidja:[23] this clearly required that they be considered French subjects. At the same time, the local Comorian community was also insisting that they be recognised as French. In 1898, a petition (written in Arabic) addressed to the minister of foreign affairs and signed by 80 Comorians resident in Zanzibar, complained that the French steadfastly refused to register them, insisted on the fact that they were inhabitants of the Comoros, "where our families are, our children, our houses and our possessions. … If we live in Zanzibar, it is only in search of our livelihood and in no sense to make it our homeland. … Nothing must separate us from the French government."[24]

The British remained intransigeant; notes were exchanged between London and Paris. The principal stumbling block seemed to be the French request that the very small number—disputed, but no more than 105—of individuals who had been on the French register prior to 1886 be recognised by the British as French subjects, but the British refused even this minor concession.[25] However, as the two governments negotiated the Entente Cordiale, it became clear that the matter was not worth arguing and in 1904 the British suddenly announced that they were prepared to accept "as being under French protection all persons who were born in Comoro, irrespective of the date on which they settled in Zanzibar *and all direct descendants in the male line of*

[23] The administration on Ngazidja, operating on a very small budget, had not only inherited a substantial debt owed by the former sultan, Said Ali, to Léon Humblot, it was also required to pay the costs incurred by the government of New Caledonia in maintaining a group of Comorian political prisoners deported in ? which year?

[24] A/6

[25] Negotiations were somewhat complicated by the fact that more than a few of these individuals were not only not Comorian, but had very tenuous claims to French protection. One individual's claim to protection seems to have been based on the fact that his brother worked at the French post office.

Comorians who left their native country at a date subsequent to the declaration of the French protectorate."[26] If this were not enough, usage later extended the definition to anyone of Comorian origin, regardless when their ancestors left the Comoros.

This was to remain the accepted definition of a Comorian until after the Second World War and accorded all members of the Comorian community certain advantages, should they choose to accept them; registration at the French consulate was no longer a prerequisite for being recognised as a French subject, at least in the eyes of the British. In the early years this allowed Comorians to buy alcohol, a right which more than one member of the community turned to their advantage. They also benefitted from immunity from British jurisdiction, even though the French consular court had been closed in 1904: in particular, the police were not permitted to enter a Comorian house in the absence of the French consul (or one of his representatives); the French consul was also responsible for the management of the estates of deceased Comorians; and, of course, Comorians travelled on French passports.

Natives and the school

Although there were cultural associations of a social character at an early date—the earliest references to a Comorian Association date from 1911—the first formally constituted Comorian Association seems to have been established on 1 January, 1917 with the aim of assisting Comorians in need. There were clearly operational problems with this association, since another Comorian Association was founded on 11 June, 1924, this one explicitly inscribed within an ongoing debate within the Comorian community over the maintenance or abandon of costly customary events associated with marriages, to which I will return below. However, there was a more immediate political problem to be confronted: the proposed reclassification of Comorians in Zanzibar as "natives" under the Interpretation and General Clauses (Amendment) Decree of 1925. Comorians, as French subjects, had generally been exempt from many of the controls imposed upon the native population in Zanzibar. Over the years the British had gradually (if tentatively) eroded French capitulatory rights in Zanzibar by, for example, closing the French consular court and extending the laws prohibiting the sale of liquor to Comorians (as French subjects, which seemed to have provoked little opposition from France). The 1925 Interpretation Decree was a significant step since rather than explicitly including (or excluding) Comorians from specific decrees, it placed Comorians in the category of native and thus subjecting them by default to all legislation applicable to natives.

By 1925 French policy seems to have been to offer little resistance to legislation aimed at extending British control over the Comorian community as long as their status as French subjects was not challenged. However, from a Comorian perspective, their reclassification as native would—among other things—exclude their children from Section A in the government school, thus denying them the opportunity to learn Arabic. As the community pointed out, in a petition addressed to the French consul in February 1925 (this time written in French), Comorians were Arabs and could in no sense be conflated with Zanzibari natives from the African mainland. Despite their protests, the Comorians were indeed reclassified, and as a result decided to set up their own school where their children would learn not only Arabic, but English, French and Swahili too. The community took up a subscription to fund a fact-finding visit to the UK (sic) to

[26] Cave to Ottavi (AB27/40), emphasis in original.

establish just how to go about setting up a school, and raised the impressive sum of Rs 25,000.[27] They were saved the trouble, however: the French consul, also taking an interest, persuaded the colonial administration in Madagascar that it would be in their interests to support the school and in 1930 they sent a colonial inspector, one Charles Poirier, formerly a colonial administrator in the Comoros, to report on the matter. As Madagascar considered the matter, the Comorians used the money to set up a school themselves in an attempt to demonstrate that they were not, after all natives.

The school seems to have been well supported: there were 282 pupils when Poirier inspected in 1931, and following his recommendations Madagascar funded a teacher, a Comorian by the name of Abderemane ben Said, who arrived in 1931. This was the extent of French support, however, and it proved insufficient: by 1935 the school was bankrupt, Accusations of fraud were made against the treasurer and as the school's supporters (some as far away as Mozambique) became aware of the problems they ceased their financial support and withdrew their children. In 1936, with only 61 pupils on its books, the director of the school board, Sh. Burhan Mkelle (exerting a little gentle blackmail perhaps) informed the French consul that the French School of Zanzibar would be forced to close its doors .

André Bertrand, the consul, wrote to Madagascar, arguing that French honour was at stake. If the school closed the Comorian community—French subjects—would lose status, and it would rapidly become common knowledge in Zanzibar that France was incapable of looking after its own. There was also the matter of the knock-on effects on the sports club and the Comorian Boy Scouts. It was, the consul pointed out, the only school that received no government support and had done very well to last as long as it did.[28] In 1936, therefore, the Government of Madagascar assumed full budgetary control over the school. With perhaps some fortuity, the Franco-British convention of 29 July 1937 on the abolition of capitulations in Morocco and Zanzibar guaranteed that "French schools shall continue to enjoy in the territories of the Sultan of Zanzibar the same freedom as in the past, particularly in regards to the teaching of French" (Article 21). Although this did not entitle the school to Zanzibari government funding, it would guarantee the school's independence and protect it from closure. In 1938, therefore, and following some pressure from the minister of colonies, the French ministry of foreign affairs accepted that the school was of some importance to French status, agreed to match the funding provided by the government of Madagascar, to the sum of 25,000 francs. It was recognised that, despite repeated attempts to downgrade their status in Zanzibar, the British valued the Comorian community, finding them to be well-educated and assiduous employees; many of them held positions of responsibility in the civil service; others were teachers and religious leaders with some influence locally. It was thus doubly advantageous for French prestige if these devoted servants of the Sultan's administration were French subjects educated in a French school.

WW2 and conflict within the community

In 1940 the French consulate in Zanzibar closed and with it the French school. By now local policy restricted free education in Zanzibar's schools to Zanzibaris and British subjects: foreigners (mostly French Comorians and Portuguese Goans) were required to pay fees. However, given the

[27] About £1200

[28] Zanzibar government policy was that primary schools should not teach European languages and would not support any school that did so.

exceptional circumstances, it was decided that Comorian pupils would be admitted, free of charge, to the government school as long as hostilities continued. There was a condition however: parents of Comorian children who wished to attend the government school were required to sign a document disavowing any support for the Vichy administration and confirming their support for de Gaulle's Free French forces. This apparently straightforward requirement proved to be problematic.

In 1940, the former administrative assistant in the consulate, a Comorian Zanzibari by the name of Mohamed Salem convened a meeting in the Comorian school hall in an attempt to persuade the Comorian Association to call upon its members to collectively renounce their French citizenship and naturalise as Zanzibaris. Not unsurprisingly they refused. Salem, a somewhat venal character, was not highly regarded by the Comorian community: it was, apparently, common knowledge that in his tenure at the consulate—where he had been employed since 1915—he had systematically defrauded Comorians of their inheritances, liquidating estates at artificially deflated prices in connivance with accomplices and then pocketing the difference.[29] Somewhat ironically, this practice had apparently led a number of Comorians to naturalise as Zanzibaris in order to avoid falling victim, posthumously, to his predations. However in 1940 Salem clearly thought his best interests lay in abandoning France and throwing in his lot with the British; he naturalised as a Zanzibari and together with a small group of supporters, he set up a breakaway association, the Fighting France Comorian Association, aligned with de Gaulle. Although the remainder of the community, perhaps unaware of the details of events in Europe, remained faithful to the Vichy government in Madagascar, the Zanzibari government henceforth recognised Salem's splinter group (which only had 300 members out of a total Comorians population of perhaps ten time that) as representative of the Comorian community in Zanzibar. The majority of the community—members of the Comorian Association—were marginalised and, since they refused to align themselves with Mohamed Salem and (by implication) with de Gaulle, were excluded from the Zanzibari government schools. Even worse, in December 1941, the Comorian school reopened under the auspices of the Free French delegation in Nairobi and the control of Salem's FFCA.

This split, although centred upon an individual, Mohamed Salem, was nevertheless inscribed within a chronic (some might say structural) opposition within the Comorian community. Divisions within the community, expressed as disagreements over the retention of expensive customary practices (particularly weddings, but also funerals) of Comorian origin, are made explicit in the rules of the associations. Thus the rule book of the 1924 association stated that members "shall not be a member of any of the Comorian County Societies (*mji*) to which his parents may have belonged and that he shall in no case pay the traditional "*kata*" (marriage tax) or "*muongoleo*" (life tax) to any of his said county societies".[30] These "taxes" were contributions to life cycle ritual events that were and remain a feature of ritual practice in Comoros. The competing Comorian association, the Comorian Association Liberal Party, founded on 9 June 1925, imposed no such restrictions on its members and was characterised as "reactionary". As one might expect, the former party was mostly composed of older Zanzibari residents who

[29] Salem was responsible for a substantial debt to the consulate, discovered by Bertrand in 1940 and repaid personally by the latter in order to avoid further shame as the French government collapsed. It has to be said that Salem was undoubtedly encouraged, if not trained in this venture by Lucien Caumeau, consul from 1924 to 1928, who was an equally unsavoury character and who similarly appropriated the estates of deceased Comorians in his role as executor before being posted to Paraguay. The scale of Caumeau's fraud was discovered by his successor, René Goubin.

[30] A/13.

wished to assert their Comorian identity while members of the latter were younger, often recent arrivals from Comoros who had no desire to be bound by the archaic customs of their native land in modern Zanzibar.

The history of the Comorian associations of Zanzibar is replete with fractures and dissent. In 1928 Lucien Caumeau, the French consul, commented on the two preceding groups but announced that they had been reconciled in 1929; in 1933, however, the consul was requested to mediate again, and it was proposed that there should only be one association. This appeared to be the case until the war, when the above split occurred; and although reconciliation was again proclaimed when the consulate reopened at the end, in 1950 the consul once again received protests that a "Comorian Community" was being formed in opposition to the Comorian Association.

Regardless of the names of the associations (which were, understandably, often similar and frequently changed), within the community the two factions were known as Yaminis and Shimalis. The Yaminis (whose wartime manifestation was that of the Free French) were against the costs of customary practice:

> In the old days funerals had to be accompanied by big feasts and payments and often people couldn't afford it. So when someone died, the family hid it and said nothing to anyone, and they would be trying to raise some money, and often the person wouldn't be buried for several days. This is not Islamic … so a group of Comorians decided that the funeral expenses should be stopped. These people set up a group called the Ahsab Yamin.[31] The costs were often very high, because the whole *mji* had to be fed, and if you had a mother from one town and a father from another you had to feed two *miji*, and so on.

Members of the Yamini party were said to be well-educated and well-placed while the Shimalis were servants and menial workers, and while there is evidence that this broad characterisation has some truth to it, there were also divisions within families. Another informant recalls:

> The Yaminis were highly educated and often highly placed, and they were for de Gaulle; the Shimalis were against de Gaulle … but they were already split, the split pre-dated the war. When my grandmother died in 1934 there was already a divide between Yaminis and Shimalis, and the family argued over whether they should pay the *muongoleo* or not. My father was Shimali and his brother was Yamini. My uncle won and they didn't pay.

However, one shift that was noticeable was the tendency in the post-war period for the Comorian-born to support the Shimalis while Zanzibari-the born preferred the Yaminis. Clearly by now the Comorian cultural practices that had enjoyed the support of their ancestors (symbolic of their group identity and certainly a factor in the community's cohesion) no longer had relevance for the locally-born Comorians, while those who had themselves migrated to Zanzibar felt it desirable to retain their cultural practices and social networks.[32] In the post-war period, as large numbers of Comorian Zanzibaris opted for Zanzibari nationality, this was not without significance.

[31] Ahsab Yamin, from the Arabic, literally "the parties of the right". Shimal means "left".

[32] The seriousness with which some regarded the split should not be underestimated. One well-known Yamini forbade his children from visiting Comoros.

Comorian Zanzibari identity

For much of the 20th century policy in Comoros and in Zanzibar alike had been to maintain the French subject status of the Comorian community in Zanzibar. In the early years of the century this strategy was a response to fears of a depopulation of the island and part of a policy of encouraging them to remain engaged, if not return. Indeed, one French colonial governor was so worried that he travelled to Zanzibar to talk to senior members of the community and persuade them they had nothing to fear from Said Ali and could come back. Unfortunately it seems his intentions were misunderstood: the British administration (no doubt baffled as to why a French colonial governor should make a day-trip to Zanzibar) assumed he was intending to remonstrate with Comorians who had become British and warned him off. It appears he returned to Mayotte without meeting anyone at all; but he remained particularly insistent on the need to extend French protection to the Comorians of Zanzibar.[33]

In 1902 controls were imposed upon Comorian emigration,[34] and although the law was drawn up in the context of concerns about the recruitment of labour for the plantations of Réunion, it could usefully be applied to Comorians heading for Zanzibar. However, it was also recognised that the financial contribution to the Comorian economy from the community in diaspora could be of great importance and the policy was thus one of preventing further immigration, but maintaining the links between the two islands, and therefore the interests of the Comorians in Zanzibar in their homeland. It was clear, then as today, the Comorian emigrants did indeed maintain links, visiting Comoros, bringing (or sending) back gifts and money—in the early years, many Comorians left in order to earn money to pay French taxes) and, often, intending to end their days in Comoros. However, while there were strict controls on movements in and out of Comoros, under the terms of the 1844 treaty, French subjects were free to enter and leave Zanzibar as they chose. There was, as a result, a great deal of clandestine traffic between the two islands: Comorians who managed to leave Comoros need not fear being refused entry into Zanzibar.

The French administration was intent on managing movements. Requests for permission to travel to Zanzibar had to be made through official channels: individuals in Zanzibar who wanted to have family members in Comoros join them were required to submit the request tot he consul, who would generally approve it and inform the administration in Mayotte. Requests made directly by the intending emigrants in the Comoros would generally not be approved, and requests by those who did not have family in Zanzibar were, similarly, not approved. The strategy was very clear: maintain links with those already absent, encouraging them to remain engaged, but not allow further emigration.

Sustaining this latter policy was difficult, however: conditions in Ngazidja were getting worse. In the early period food shortages, the illegal appropriation of land by the colonial planters, the capitation tax and the lack of employment prompted a steady outward flow. In the inter-war

[33] GGM/7B41

[34] décret du 1e février 1902 portant réglementation de l'emigration des indigènes à Mayotte et dans l'archipel des Comores

years the colonial failure to develop the archipelago,[35] attacks (real or imagined) on Islam and the lack of education. A particular attraction of Zanzibar was the schools—the Zanzibar government schools in the early years, later the Comorian school. Education in the French colony was very poor, partly through a lack of investment—in 1912 there were only three primary schools in Ngazidja with a total capacity of 120 pupils, inadequate to meet demand. As late as 1920 there were still only 200 pupils in the schools of Ngazidja; when Poirier visited Zanzibar in 1931 there were probably almost as many pupils at the Comorian school of Zanzibar than in the entire colonial school system of Ngazidja. Once it opened, the Comorian school attracted a large number of pupils from Ngazidja: in 1933 more than half the pupils were born in Ngazidja. The school enjoyed an excellent reputation on the home island: it taught languages—Arabic and English as well as French—and religion, and books and pens were free. The teaching of religion was a particular attraction. The French secular educational system prohibited the teaching of religion in schools: in Zanzibar, religious instruction was part of the curriculum and children were escorted to the mosque on Fridays for prayers. The administration in Comoros were acutely aware of the problems, and comments on the failings of the French system run through several decades of administrative reports, often accompanied by exhortations to model the French schools in the Comoros on the British schools in Zanzibar.

By the 1930s the French were reconsidering their policy of opposing emigration to Zanzibar, particularly as there was no work for Comorians in Majunga. "There was a time when this was rigorously forbidden," the local governor observed,

> [but] I think it might be wise to facilitate to a certain degree the departure of young Comorians who go to seek work in Zanzibar or on the African coast, experience has shown that the Comorian always returns to his country, drawn by ancestral customs, and he brings back his savings. I know regions such as Mitsamihuli where entire families survive on the generosity of their relatives living in the British or Portuguese colonies.[36]

Restrictions on travel from Ngazidja were, as the above writer observed, strict but relatively easily circumvented. Until 1923 there were no effective controls on the movements of individuals into Zanzibar;[37] in 1923 the Immigration Regulation and Restriction Decree was passed but had little effect on Comorians since Comorians were generally permitted to land upon payment of a deposit of Rs 100.[38] As both the French consul in Zanzibar and the administration in the Comoros were well aware, large numbers of Comorians simply stowed away on steamers or dhows; upon arrival on Zanzibar those who had obtained a permit to leave Comoros paid their deposit while those who did not had the deposit paid by the steamship company Messageries

[35] The Comoros were administered as an isolated province of Madagascar, a prosperous colony with which they had nothing in common. this led to such anomalies as the appointment of Malagasy-speaking civil servants and the publication of official notices in French and Malagasy but not Comorian.

[36] GGM/2D75

[37] The 1906 Immigration Restriction Regulations decree was suspended following French complaints and by the 1920s the Zanzibari government could no longer justify maintaining the emergency restrictions imposed during the First World War.

[38] Somewhat ironically, "Africans" were exempt from immigration regulations, so if Comorians had accepted native status they would have been free to come and go at will. In the event, however, they retained their status as French subjects for the purposes of immigration law while being classified as natives in other contexts. If the immigrant had insufficient means, the deposit would invariably be paid by the Comorian Association if no family member could be found to do so.

Maritimes pending their return to Comoros on the return boat eight days later. There was a minor problem with this arrangement, however, in that the majority of the Comorians intended for repatriation found that eight days was amply time to disappear. The consul appealed to the Zanzibar government to imprison them pending their deportation but since they were legally landed in Zanzibar and had committed no crime, this was not possible.[39]

Despite increasing controls on immigration (and a period of little or no movement during the Second World War), Comorians continued to move freely between the two islands. The Zanzibari government seemed incapable of enforcing legislation which, by the 1945 required Comorians to obtain visas from the British consul in Madagascar before arriving in Zanzibar. Not unsurprisingly, few seem to have complied; and by 1951 unofficial policy was to let Comorians ("notorious for their inability to comply with Immigration Law"[40]) enter without the proper documentation:

> The point is that the Immigration Department are accustomed to treat Comorian immigrants with some leniency and to admit them without very much question, even if they have not got an entry permit before leaving the Comoros. I understand that it is not difficult to obtain exit permit from the Comoros owing to the venality of the authorities there. To refuse entry to all Comorians arriving without an entry permit would mean that we may expect petitions from the Comorian Association.[41]

Many of the immigrants would have had no claim to Zanzibari subject status, but the Comorians of Zanzibar certainly did. Until 1945, however, it was generally accepted that the advantages of retaining French subject status outweighed the disadvantages. True, travel was rendered more difficult—French subjects required visas to travel to Tanganyika or Kenya—but otherwise they were entitled to most of the advantages open to Zanzibaris. This changed after World War Two, when growing nationalist sentiment (which was to culminate in independence) led to the prospect of Comorians, as not citizens, being increasingly marginalised. Access to government schools (not all Comorians wanted to send their children to the French school), scholarships to Makerere University, free health care and employment in the public sector were all gradually being restricted to subjects of the sultan; as Comorians became aware of their impending marginalisation within their own country, they began to nationalise.

Initially there was reluctance on the part of both the British and the French. France, undoubtedly for fear of losing its influence and only foothold in British East Africa, quite simply refused to allow their subjects in Zanzibar to naturalise, although the expression used was to "change nationality": erroneously, there was a belief that in doing so, Comorians would lose their French nationality. This was in a context of a reversal of French policy on Comorian emigration and a desire (again, in the context of looming autonomy if not independence) to have educated Comorians return home. The school remained part of this project: educating Comorian Zanzibaris, teaching them French and countering the pan-Arabist propaganda, of France was convinced Zanzibar was a centre, were all part of the project of maintaining a loyal and pro-French group of exiles, all destined one day to return home. If the Comorians educated in the

[39] B/4

[40] AB26/30

[41] AB26/50

local school were able to find employment as civil servants in French colonies elsewhere, so the thinking went, then they would not be tempted to naturalise as Zanzibaris.

The British, for their part, seemed even more reluctant, despite the esteem in which they held the Comorian community. Although a small handful of Comorians were granted Zanzibari subject status while the French consulate was closed during the war, when it reopened in 1945 the British Chief Secretary informed Comorians that all applications would have to be referred to the French consul, who, of course, refused.[42] When one frustrated Comorian, Said Mbaye, announced his intention to pursue the matter in the Zanzibari courts, the administration informed him that since the Nationality and Naturalization Decree of 1941 had not been countersigned by the British Resident it was not applicable to persons subject to the Zanzibar Order in Council of 1924, which included French subjects, and his case would be a lost cause.[43]

Not all Comorians wanted to naturalise, of course, and, once again, a little gentle pressure was exerted on the French. In a letter to the French vice consul in Zanzibar in 1948, the President of the Comorian Association, Turkey Mbalia requested that France either provide financial support for Comorian students wishing to enter the British educational system or allow Comorians to naturalise. But he continued,

> In this connexion, however, I must remark that the second course suggested is too repugnant to me as Head of the local French Comorian Community, to contemplate, since it is quite obvious that if this flow of naturalisation continues every year, within a generation the intelligentsia of the French Community will be intolerably depleted. However, in the present circumstances, and in the absence of any scheme of higher education for the Comorian youths there is no alternative but to submit to the inevitable.[44]

In 1952, however, both France and Britain changed their minds: for reasons still unclear, Britain decided that (contrary to the French position on the matter) that any Comorian who had arrived, or whose ancestors had arrived in Zanzibar prior to the establishment of the Comoros as a French colony in 1912 was not a French citizen, thus abandoning half a century of policy on the matter. Any Comorian who fell into this category could therefore be naturalised as a Zanzibari without reference to the French consul. At the same time, the French consul realised that the assumption of Zanzibari subject status by a French subject did not entail the loss of French nationality.[45] The pretence was at least partly maintained, however, and Comorians naturalising as Zanzibaris returned their French identity papers to the consulate; in return the consular agent issued them with a letter of no objection that included the statement that "the acquisition of Zanzibari nationality by the above named does not, ipso facto, incur the loss of his French nationality, his new status not liberating him from his links of allegiance towards France, conforming to the dispositions of articles 87 and 88 of the *Code de la Nationalité française*.[46] this was,

[42] AB26/68

[43] Whether this slightly bizarre state of affairs was an oversight or deliberate is unclear: it effectively meant that legislation permitting foreigners to naturalise as Zanzibaris was not applicable to British or French subjects.

[44] B/9

[45] French nationality is particularly difficult to lose and any renunciation of French nationality outside France must be made before a French consul. Since there was no French consul in Zanzibar between 1936, when the consul in Zanzibar was downgraded to a consular agency, and 1963, it is unlikely that any Comorian would have done so. I can, in any case, find no records of any having done so. See particularly Articles 23-26 of the *Code Civil*.

[46] B/7

of course, to prose problems later, but in the 1950s and early 1960s, and independence became inevitable, several hundred Comorians took advantage of the changes in policy to naturalise as Zanzibaris.

By way of Conclusion

By the beginning of the 21st century few Zanzibaris held French citizenship. A small number had had recourse to French assistance during the revolutionary period—generally those whose links with Comoros were strong—but the majority, even those who had previously held French subject status and had been registered with the consulate in Zanzibar or in Dar es Salaam , lost it following the independence of the Comoros in 1978.[47] Comorian identity in Zanzibar today therefore is not based on any difference in legal status between them and other Zanzibaris, or indeed other Tanzanians. They do, however, express their identities through social and cultural practice, and this they have in common with other cultural groups in Tanzania: it is not in any sense indicative of non-belonging for, even if they maintain links across colonially constructed borders.

These expressions of identity are manifested in various spheres: in line with Comorian principles of hypogamous marriage, Comorian women marry into other communities, but the men do not. Food and eating practices,[48] clothing and wedding and funeral practices in Zanzibar mark Comorians out as different, although these practices are also different from practices in Comoros (where Comorian Zanzibari are described as "Tanzanians", emphasising the differences. Comorian identity in Zanzibar is, as identities are, situational and fluid: one member of a prominent (and old) Comorian Zanzibari family who I know well is always somewhat uncomfortable discussing his "Comorian" identity since, as he repeatedly remind me, he is Zanzibari. However, while my perceptions of his identity are forged more by a knowledge of his family history (including Comorians identities explicitly expressed by other member of his family) than by his own practice, he nevertheless attends (as do all "Comorians") social events such as funerals and remains embedded in the Comorians community by virtue of aspects of his identity ascribed by others.

While such individuals avoid describing themselves as Comorian, others actively maintain links between the two islands, links that preserve a the perception of the two islands as part of a socio-cultural continuum. Marriages between families, a constant movement of individuals between the island to attend wedding (in particular) but also funerals: the flights, thrice weekly, between Dar es Salaam and Moroni are inevitably full. These links do not represent relationships between diaspora and homeland as much as links binding a spatial diffuse and culturally diverse community.

[47] Zanzibaris of Comorian origin who held French citizenship by virtue of their Comorian ancestry automatically lost that citizenship on 11 April, 1978 unless they had made a declaration of recognition of French nationality before a French Consul or, in France, before a *juge d'instance* between French recognition of the declaration of independence of the Comoros on 31 December 1975 and 11 April 1978. This apparently arbitrary date was dependent upon the outcome of a referendum on the status of Mayotte, held on 11 April 1976, the outcome of which fixed the (French-recognised) borders of the independent Comorian state. Only members, active or retired, of the French armed forced automatically conserved their French nationality without having to make a declaration. 73-42 of 9 Jan 1973, 75-560 du 3 juillet 1975, loi n°75-1337 du 31 décembre 1975, 76-249 du18 mars 1976, and 76-250 du 18 mars 1976.

[48] Walker forthcoming

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