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With and without Zanzibar: liminal diaspora voices and the memory of the Revolution

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This paper explores discursive narratives as inextricably linked to the construction of identity, place and history by a number of interviewed individuals. From an interactional sociolinguistics (cf. De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012) perspective, the study explores the context of the East African diaspora (Georgiou, 2006; Manger & Assal, 2006 among many others) as the interviewed participants are all Zanzibar-born individuals for whom the relationship with the island and its history is crucial to their construction of selfhood. The study analyses the narrative voices (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008) of those individuals who decided to leave Zanzibar at the time of the 1964 violent political upheaval never to return and those who, on the contrary, decided to go back after a lengthy period abroad. However, more than establishing a division between these two groups, the paper highlights how these individuals take a different positioning (Bamberg, 1997) towards Zanzibar and its history and construct a range of identities in the context of the interview.

Keywords: Identity, diaspora, liminality, hegemonic, narrative.

1. Introduction¹

This paper investigates the topic of place-identity, as the “cluster of positively and negatively valenced cognitions of physical settings” (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 2014, p. 80) in terms of a person’s memories, beliefs, preferences, aspirations that define that person’s everyday existence and contribute to profiling who that person is. The study explores narratives that ten individuals who have a special relationship with the African island of Zanzibar produced during a series of interviews. The aim is to trace the identity, understood as the “social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2009, p. 18) expressed through language that they negotiated while remembering their past on the island and explaining their association with it. The approach taken is interactional (cf. Lindström, 2009; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012) and the overall objective is to describe “linguistic structures and meanings as they serve social goals” (Lindström, 2009, p. 96) in talk in interaction. The attention, therefore, is in particular to the textual choices at the level of lexis and pragmatics the speakers make and the sequential organisation of turns during the specific context of the interview in which a negotiation takes place between the two interlocutors about the topic in hand. The study’s context is the East African diaspora (Georgiou, 2006; Manger & Assal, 2006 among others) as these people were all born in Zanzibar, but either left for good or spent a long period elsewhere, after which they decided to return to their birth place. The term “diaspora” refers to groups of people who reside in a country other than their homeland and who are transnational in that their social, cultural and economic existences go beyond the

¹ The present article is forthcoming in Piazza, R. (Ed.). *Discourses of Identity in Liminal Places and Spaces*. London, Routledge in a slightly different form and is reproduced here with permission.

boundaries of one single nation. The physical and emotional distance from the island, whether still on-going or relegated to their past, has a strong impact on the identities they construct during the exchange with the interviewer and on the “positioning” - in terms of the “relation to one another that traditionally have been defined as roles” (Bamberg, 1997, p. 336) - they take when explaining the various motifs in their existence.

Notions of diaspora and identity are brought together and the study establishes points of contact between the two concepts and areas of investigation. It is suggested that contemporary interpretation of diasporic identity or identities as emerging from the discourse of the interviewees can encourage our understanding of the dynamic “liminality” (van Gennep, 1960/1909; Turner, 1969, 1974 and more recently Derrida, 1983) that characterises individuals who have left or have returned to their homeland and are still suspended between places. Within this framework, the objective of the study is to identify the tropes, as significant or recurrent themes, indexing the different identities that the interviewees construct and the roles they take when talking about their life in relation to Zanzibar. It was expected that the two groups of individuals who left Zanzibar never to go back and the counter-diasporic ones who returned would display different perspectives on the historical events and they would also construct very distinct identities. However, the data yielded a considerably richer variety of positioning and suggested that the simple dichotomous distinction between returnees/diasporic and non-returnees/counter-diasporic was a super-imposed construct, which was not particularly helpful in revealing the complexities of diaspora identities as both dynamic and situated. The paper, therefore, discusses the many identity roles that, irrespective of their condition, the participants constructed during the interviews.

The article opens with a discussion of the core constructs on which the analysis is based, in particular the notion of diaspora and the concept of liminality. After a discussion of

the methodology of the study, the analysis of the narratives engages with the speakers' different "positioning" (Bamberg, 1997) - as an indication of their alignment and evaluation vis-à-vis a social situation, topic and storyworld, objects or actors, the interviewer - and their discursive identities.

2. The geo-historical context

Consisting of Unguja, the main island, Pemba, and a few other small islands, the Zanzibar archipelago in the Indian Ocean is a couple of hours ferry ride or a 15 minute flight from Dar Es Salaam on the Tanzanian main land. Zanzibar is part of the United Republic of Tanzania although "constantly at loggerheads with the Union Government on Mainland Tanzania" (Lodhi, 2014, n.p.) and still fighting for equal representation in all sectors of political life. The historic centre of Zanzibar, Stone Town, on Unguja island is a World Heritage site and tourism is the main source of income. The islands were a key conduit for the international slave trade from Africa and Asia, which attracted a variety of people. As a result, Zanzibar is ethnically diverse, the main ethnic groups being are Shirazi Africans 56%, mainland Africans 19%, Arabs 17% (Omanis, Yemenis, mixed Arab-African-Indian origins), and Indians 6% (Lodhi, 2014).

Zanzibar has a dramatic colonial past. The Omani Arabs who occupied the islands in 1698 may have raised the living standards of the indigenous population, but did so through the creation of a highly exploitative feudal system. In an attempt to end the slave trade, Zanzibar was incorporated into the British Empire (with protectorate status) in 1890. As elsewhere, British colonialism accentuated the country's major ethnic divisions with an administration that preserved and encouraged the existing racial divisions. Fearing a leftist

insurgency, the British temporarily transferred power to the Arabs in 1963 (Wilson, 2013 and, with national elections planned later that year, it was expected that an African-majority government would finally take control of a newly created independent state². However, the elections reinstated the status quo; the main political parties were banned and newspapers closed down by the government. According to Lofchie “[t]his was the immediate cause of the revolution (...) because there no longer seemed to be any way to create an African state by constitutional means” (Lofchie, 1965, p. 257).

The 1964 Revolution was “conceived, planned and implemented entirely by the unemployed, frustrated urban youth of the ASP [Afro-Shirazi Party], who were angered by the weakness of their own party leadership and by what they perceived as an improperly conducted election that had robbed them of their rightful victory” (Babu, 1991, p. 239). The uprising began on the night of 12th January 1964 when a group of 300 African insurgents led by John Okello, overthrew the ZNP [Zanzibar People’s Party]/ZPPP [Zanzibar and Pemba People’s Party] government and “installed a Revolutionary Council headed by [the] ASP” (Lofchie, 1965, p. 257) under the leadership of Aman Karume. “[M]ass arrest and internment of thousands of Arabs and the confiscation or destruction of considerable Arab property” (ibid.) were the first acts of the new regime. However, the strong popular support for the Revolution partly reduced the bloodshed and the inter-racial violence. This is evident in the narratives examined in this study that make reference to a degree of respect by the African revolutionaries for the people who, while belonging to the powerful class, were an integral part of the island population and not recent colonisers.

The Revolution greatly exacerbated race/ethnic-class divisions and led to chronic economic stagnation, which fueled the exodus of mainly Zanzibari Arabs and Indians overseas. For those who went to more advanced countries (Oman, Canada, the UK, France,

² About one hundred days before the Revolution, Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous country, and the recently independent Tanganyika, united under the present day name of Tanzania.

the US), the diaspora provided an opportunity to attain high levels of education and professional training. From the late 1990s onwards, the Zanzibar government has become more inclusive and increasingly acknowledged the contribution of the diaspora to the island's identity and economic development (principally through financial remittances sent to the island by some of the people who were working abroad)³. Recently the government has established a Diaspora Unit, which promotes the engagement of diaspora Zanzibaris in the economic and intellectual development of the islands by transferring resources and knowledge and promoting the exchange of ideas. The exact size of the Zanzibar diaspora is not known; the most recent (2001) Census reports 32,630 individuals of Tanzanian descent living in the UK with similar numbers in Canada and Scandinavia.

This, then, is the context of the present study that argues that these diasporic and counter-diasporic individuals appear suspended in a hybrid liminality (Turner, 1969) within which their identities are constantly reconstructed. Besides Zanzibar, the Revolution is an inevitable protagonist of their oral narratives; not only is it crucial to an understanding of the cultural and political situation, it seems to hover as a ghost over the memories of the people and impact their self-construction in their narratives.

3. Diaspora and liminal identities

3.1

³ However at the time of the data collection there were still governmental voices of political dissent and in an interview a government official, who did not want to be recorded, denied any value to the diaspora project and claimed that the diaspora department was a ridiculously small nearly non-existent office. Until there are serious remittances, he argued, no one can seriously talk about diaspora and diaspora's impact on Zanzibar.

The notion of diaspora, and African diaspora in particular, first appears in the 1960s as an attempt to re-establish the connection of expatriates to Africa. As Manning (2003, p. 490) notes, “[t]he originality of the notion lay in its emphasis on historically created populations rather than racial essences or regional continuities”. The concept of diaspora, coming from Greek and indicating “migration” (Adamson, 2008), has recently undergone a radical re-examination. In the past, diaspora conjured up ideas of fractured and displaced identities of uprooted individuals constantly dreaming of returning to their original homeland. Such an essentialist interpretation of diaspora, which is based on a “logic of fixed – if abandoned – places and a naturalization of belonging (Sökefeld, 2006, p. 266) and enforces “the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing form of ‘ethnicity’” (Hall, 1990, p. 235), positioned diasporic individuals in eternal relation to their roots and reinforced notions of nation-states and fixed boundaries. More recent conceptualisations of diaspora are, on the contrary, dynamic and “synonymous with celebrations of ‘travelling’ or nomadic, identities and living ‘in-between’ spaces and cultures [...] and [...] seen as disrupting the homogeneity of the nation-state” (Mavroudi, 2007, p. 7). According to Vertovec (1997), diaspora can be understood as a “social form”, a “type of consciousness”, and a “mode of cultural production”. The term “social form” denotes an uprooted group scattered in different places, collectively identifiable in ethnic terms, relating to the new country of residence, but still associated with their birth place. Diaspora as “consciousness” is a state of mind involving a tension between the feeling of discrimination that migrants suffer in the host country mixed with the positive sense of sharing the same historical and cultural heritage with their compatriots; such consciousness favours a sense of connectivity with the migrants’ countries. Finally, in the sense of “mode of cultural production”, diaspora is associated with globalisation and “described as involving the *production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena*” (Vertovec, 1997, p. 289 original emphasis).

From a post-modern perspective, diaspora is conceived as a complex process that determines collective entities unified by their similar existential experience across time and place as well as individual subjectivities that are different, fluid and in constant relation to a variety of geo-cultural contexts. Diaspora communities are inextricably linked to a “consciousness” of diaspora that is “an idea of shared identity, of common belonging to that group” (Vertovec 1997, p. 267). For Mavroudi (2007), such a diasporic process is in opposition to older conceptualisations of diaspora as both “bounded” homogeneous groups of uprooted people and “unbounded” dynamic entities in persistent movement occupying an “in-between” physical and cultural space. In diaspora as a process, “space, place and time can be seen as bounded and unbounded within constructions of identity, community and the nation state” (Mavroudi, 2007, p. 9). Mavroudi’s approach fuses various interpretations of diaspora and, while acknowledging that the term is synonymous with movement across space and time, it understands it as mainly provisional and heavily dependent on the specific circumstances in which it occurs.

This more dynamic and fluid conceptualisation of diaspora also challenges the related concept of displacement as an uprooting phenomenon that brings with it fragmentation, dispersal and isolation. Tsagarousianou (2004) emphasises the connectivity inherent in the modern diasporic condition and the transnational linkages that individuals and groups establish and maintain. The present study demonstrates how such connectivity emerges in the interviewees’ narratives in terms of their on-going relationship with the other diasporic individuals as well as their engagement with the island’s past.

The post-modern conceptualisation of diaspora is central to the discussion of self-narratives in the present study, since it is consonant with a non-essentialist interpretation of identity and self-conceptualisation as shaped through language. The study therefore emphasises “the locally occasioned, fluid and ever-changing nature of identity claims” (De

Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006, p. 3), which Hall's (1990) seminal paper on cultural identity and diaspora precisely captures:

Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

Identities and diasporic identities, in particular, are therefore not fixed and permanently "lying unchanged outside history and culture" (Hall, 1990, p. 226). The diasporic and counter-diasporic individuals in this study are constantly involved in a dialogue with their place and time through narrative memory and imagination. The identities they construct in the interviews are the result of a positioning vis-à-vis their first-hand experience of the Revolution as well as the master narratives or "big D" Discourses (Van De Mieroop, Miglbauer, & Chatterjee, 2017, p. 181) in other words the "accepted ways of thinking about how the world works" (Kiesling, 2006, p. 266) that have been divulged around that historical event. These, in particular, refer to the island's multiple ethnicities or the social and political inequalities between the various groups as the main causes of the Revolution as well as the vision of Zanzibar as governed by untrained poorly educated and inefficient elite. The speakers' local narratives therefore connect to bigger narratives (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 392). In the course of the analysis it will be shown that, even within the same group of interviewees and against the same backdrop of well-established Discourses, the stance towards the revolutionary events varies greatly.

3.2

The concept of “liminality” and liminal identities seems heuristically rewarding (Eksner & Orellana, 2005) to characterize the life experiences of this study’s participants. Originally conceptualised by van Gennep (1960/1909), liminality was finally brought to scholars’ attention by Victor Turner (Thomassen, 2009; Eksner & Orellana, 2005) who, by that term, described the phase through which people pass in processes of transition. Later revisited by Derrida (1983), liminality refers to individuals or entities that are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Liminal individuals stay on the *limen* (Latin for ‘threshold’), “stripped off their ordinary identities, roles, and positions” (Eksner & Orellana, 2005, p. 2) that associate them with their fellow human beings; thus they temporarily live in the cracks or interstices of society, to use Turner’s (1974) terminology, where they have a heightened perception of themselves. As a result, by contrast to socially structured communities, these individuals construct spontaneous and non-institutionalised *communitas* that can act as a resistant force or support nucleus for liminals.

Turner (1974) sees liminality as other than marginalisation. Both of them are associated with issues of power and dominance (Eksner & Orellana, 2005), and both of them although in different ways, disalign with mainstream society. However, while marginalisation means relegating people to the margins of society and attributing them an inferior status that is generally permanent, liminality implies a temporary and provisional condition. It is theoretically possible to abandon liminality and, although liminal people tend to be society’s outcast, they are also people with a positive social connotation and high status (see Piazza & Rubino, 2014). The provisionality concept seems to be contradicted by this study’s participants who are permanent members of the East African diaspora; yet, they are provisional liminals in the very moment in which they reflect on their condition and engage

in a consideration of their place-identity during the interview, while they can abandon their liminality at any moment if they strengthen their membership in either the host society or their rediscovered Zanzibari reality.

In this study, the implementation of the construct of liminality against the backdrop of the diaspora allows an understanding of the participants as suspended between two distinct places and times. On the one hand, whether they are in Zanzibar or away from the island and whether their cognitions are positive or negative, they construct that place as associated with their past identity, while at the same time Zanzibar is still very present in their personal and collective representations; on the other hand, they are all suspended between a past in which they belonged to a specific space and a present in which this space has radically morphed into a different location, for those who migrated, or into a space very different from the Zanzibar of their memories and experiences, in the case of those people who returned to the island. In both cases these participants are holding on to negative and positive memories, beliefs and aspirations that have a visible impact on their present and that keep them in between two different spaces and two different times. In conclusion, the multifaceted approach to diaspora adopted in this study in its association with that of liminal identities makes it possible to understand how these Zanzibar diaspora individuals construct themselves as they construct their place in different ways in their talk (Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2013, pp. 15-16). The analysis shows that their place-identities, more than to their present location in or out of Zanzibar, are linked to their positioning towards the topic in hand, whether it is the history of that corner of East Africa and their role in the Revolution, their own experience of migration or their existential choices linked to their ethnicity and sexuality.

4. Methodology

The data presented here come from a larger body of interviews (15 in total) with counter-diasporic Zanzibaris of various age including young people who had left the island simply to study abroad, but all after some time established themselves back on Unguja. For the present study, however, only five of those conversations were selected, which were with people of more or less the same age who, at the time of the fieldwork, were in their mid-60s and early 70s, therefore old enough to have been young witnesses of the Revolution. These were accompanied by five more interviews with individuals who left Zanzibar and never returned, having established themselves in such countries as the UK, Sweden and Canada. The returnees' interviews were conducted in Zanzibar in February-March 2014 and were followed two years later by skype interviews with other Zanzibar-born people who never (or only for short periods) returned to their original birth place. The interviews were semi-structured and generally aimed to elicit the reasons why the interviewees left Zanzibar, which generally triggered a life narrative and an account of what the island meant for them. Written (for the Zanzibar interviews) and oral (for those interviewed on skype) consent was obtained from all participants.

The selected ten interviews are admittedly gender-imbalanced as they comprise nine men and a woman. This was not deliberate but, unfortunately, more men than women were available and willing to be interviewed; this may also reflect the island's social reality and its conservative attitude to women⁴. The study's participants, both in Zanzibar and abroad (for the skype interviews) were identified through two diasporic Zanzibaris and were those who responded positively to the invitation⁵. The language of the interviews was English as all

⁴ The larger collection of conversations included two more women but of much younger age than the present interviewees and hence belonging to a different diasporic wave.

⁵ I am much indebted to Feroz Jafferji for his very generous help and hospitality. Without him and the financial support of the School of English at the University of Sussex, this study will not have been possible. For the skype interviews with the non-returnees, I am very grateful to Hassan Jaffer for putting me in contact with the

participants spoke that language proficiently both as the second language in Zanzibar besides Swahili and as the language of the country where they permanently migrated or spent a long time. In fact, for some of the interviewees English was a much more comfortable means of communication, whereas Swahili was a mostly forgotten code that some had to relearn. The in-person interviews were recorded on an ordinary MP3, while for the skype interviews the Evaer system was used and occasionally it was possible to ask the interviewees at a later time for some clarification on their accounts, which they provided by email. While these interviewees belong to different groups (Indians, Omanis, Comorians), they can be considered “hegemonic” (Gramsci, 1971) in that they were all part of the elite class before the uprising, although they had not necessarily felt powerful nor did they “dominate” anyone (Kiesling, 2006, p. 261). Consequently, they offer an understanding of history from the side of the “losers” in that they fell from a position of supremacy to one of dispossession and subordination. In light of this, the speakers’ identities interpreted as “situated accomplishments” (Schubert, Hansen, Dyer, & Rapley, 2009, p. 501) engage in a direct negotiation with the master narrative of Zanzibar in ways that will be discussed. It is a widely accepted assumption that narrative and self are inseparable (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 20); in this sense, these individuals talk about themselves against the backdrop of the Revolution to achieve particular interpersonal effects. The selection of events that they report is in itself an indication of their positioning and the identity they want to construct discursively since “[a] life narrative might consist of facts but the individual chooses which facts to highlight and which to exclude” (Sala & De la Mata Benítez, 2017, p. 109).

For a qualitative analysis like the present, the interview is the most common and effective method (Dornyei, 2007, p. 132; also see Rapley, 2001). The conversational interviews aimed to establish a comfortable and informal atmosphere; the interviewees were

Zanzibar diaspora in different countries. Thanks also to John Masterson, Simon Williams, Paul Bennell and the two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on this work. All mistakes are obviously mine.

involved in a semi-structured conversational exchange during which they were asked when and why they had left Zanzibar as a loose prompt to stimulate their self-narrative. During the conversations, therefore, they received the occasional back-channelling as a natural way on my part as the researcher to show interest and empathy with their stories. All the interviewees responded to the invitations to talk with great enthusiasm, both in the case of the Zanzibar interviews and the subsequent skype conversations. They are anonymised and referred to as R and NR, followed by a number, for the returnees and non-returnees respectively; in some cases pseudonyms are used in their narratives and some other elements that would make the participants recognisable have also been changed. However, during the general discussion that, as pointed out, looks into further patterns other than this division between the participants, the reader is directed to pay attention to the different speakers' positioning through the successively numbered excerpts.

In linguistic identity studies generally the linguistic indicators are categorised into three levels of lexis, pragmatic, textuality, within the interaction (De Fina, 2003, p. 23). The present analysis focuses on the micro-level of the individual's stylistic choices as well as the macro-level of the topics the participants choose to bring to the fore and the recurring thematic patterns. Particular attention is, therefore, laid on the choice of words, the "textual logical and argumentative relationships, both explicit and implicit" (Van De Mieroop, 2011, p. 571) and the negotiation between the interviewer and interviewee as reflected through positioning and stance.

5. The narratives

This section identifies in the interviews the general discursive patterns in the individuals' talk emerging in their narratives that instead of "rendering [...] some pre-existing social reality", construct a particular one (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 309). The proposed categorisation of interviewees' responses is an attempt to characterise the different persona and roles that, beyond their specific existence in or out of Zanzibar, these diasporic individuals adopt in the interviews. The analysis will show how the speakers "situate themselves and their accounts not just in social and geographical space, but also in relation to history, and in time" (Kramer, 2014, p. 1) and how, through this process, they construct their multiple identities.

5.1 Hegemonic identities as Zanzibar historians

The stories the interviewees offer are "first order narratives" (Elliot, 2005 cited in Harling Stalker, 2009, p. 222) or "life stories" (Linde, 1993) as they recount their personal experiences of the Revolution mainly during their teenage years. It is important to bear in mind that, given that they belonged to the ruling elite prior to the Revolution, their narratives are likely to be a hegemonic version of the actual events. As mentioned earlier, "hegemonic" only refers to these individuals' privileged status in Zanzibar society prior to the Revolution vis-à-vis the downtrodden indigenous African population, but does not suggest that these people were or felt powerful (Kiesling, 2006, p. 261). Even after 60 years, these people's memories are still vivid, which contributes to their well-rehearsed personal script in which specific details legitimise them (van Leeuwen, 2008) as trustworthy narrators and witnesses of the Revolution (R7: "I left Zanzibar on 17th January 1964, it was five days after the Revolution", R9 "I left Zanzibar on January 1967 [...] three days after the Revolution").

This section discusses the narratives of participants who never returned permanently to Zanzibar; in them, the personal is interspersed with a collective recollection of the

dramatic events of 1964 as the speakers talk about themselves and their family against the backdrop of public events and spaces. A good example is the following excerpt in which the domestic and circumscribed history of NR1, who was 15 years old at the time, systematically alternates with historical considerations. For easier identification, the relevant linguistic items are underlined.

(1) NR1. Basically, I was born in Zanzibar. And, my education was in Zanzibar. We are third generation Omanis of Arab origin. And, after the revolution, there was a massacre of Omanis and Indians and anyone who was associated with the government which was overthrown. And, I was about to do my Cambridge School Certificate at that time. So my parents decided I should go to England and complete my education there. So that's one of the reasons why I left. But, then, subsequently, life was very difficult for the Arabs and [people of] Omani origin. And, my parents and the family left and went to Dar Es Salaam. And, after a few years, they (.) when Sultan Qaboos came to power in Oman, he asked all the Arab Omanis to go back because he knew he had people with human capital, well educated, previous civil service technocrats. And, the whole family and all in relation to everybody in the Arab community came back to Oman to build Oman from 1970. [...] So, we don't get involved in the politics. We are bystanders as far as we are concerned.

Int. Yeah.

NR1. We may have an opinion, this or that, but they're all coming to Oman now and we are helping them building mosques, building health system, scholarships.

Quite a lot.⁶

⁶ Key to symbols

In this narrative, the crude account of the post-Revolution violence converges with the interviewee's long family history of belonging to the island for generations, which validates (van Leeuwen, 2008) him as a true Zanzibari. The morpho-lexical choices in the narrative point to the particular diasporic context of the Revolution exiles from Zanzibar through which we understand what is relevant to the speaker. Following Kiesling (2006) and Fetzer (2007), context is understood as the social and interactional environment in which the interview is produced; hence, it refers both to the category to which the speaker belongs (gender, class etc.) as well as the relationship to the interviewer. Context, however, is also the talk surrounding a particular narrative segment as well as the type of exchange in which it occurs (conversational/loosely structured interview in this case). In this light, the speaker's emphasis on education and his need to complete the academic training that open this narrative are echoed in the subsequent self-promoting reference to the Omani group as "people with human capital, well educated" and able to build the country's infrastructure. The switch from a personal pronoun ("I was about") to the general Omani group situation ("Sultan Qaboos [...] asked all the Arab Omanis to go back") signals the speaker's positioning vis-à-vis the other non-Arab Zanzibaris and the vision of himself as an upper class person with superior potentials, which later proved to be true as he claims he contributed and still is contributing to the rebuilding of another nation state (Oman). Later in the interview (excerpt 2), this speaker concedes that his privileged past experience is inscribed in Zanzibar's situation under British control (*Okay, I went to an elite school*) and insists on the intellectual superiority of his

[added text]

[...] deleted text

(non-verbal information)

(.) pause

(1.0) long pause indicated by seconds

Underlying for identification of relevant elements

CAPS for rising intonation

group, a tangible indicator of which is women's position probably vis-à-vis their present situation on the island.

(2) NR1. Zanzibar had a number of people educated over the years. It was under the British protect [sic], the educational system was of a high quality [...] They [the British] had women in the high positions such as lawyers, doctors, engineers. The hospitals were self-supporting [...] Okay, I went to an elite school, it was partly British teachers and partly Indian, partly Zanzibari teachers, all that produced individuals who could go to Oxford and Cambridge and other places.

The relevance this speaker attributes to education naturally reinforces his liminal positioning. In his narrative, he was, even before the Revolution, caught between the certainty of having a socially high status and the aspiration to reach a level worthy of Cambridge and Oxford. It is in the way he sees himself as slipping in the interstitial space between the foreign colonisers' aspired standards and the awareness of the locals' reality that his liminality materialises.

In (3), a Gujarati Indian non-returnee (NR2) also admits to having lived in a "sheltered" condition with African servants and helpers, a situation in which only the distant echo of the political unrest reached him. Through the use of the pronoun "you" the speaker tries to generalise his situation to that of others and possibly involve the interlocutor by the use of a generalised pronoun "you" that, differently from the narrower perspective offered by "I", extends the speaker's experience to others and draws a more interesting scenario for the interviewer.

(3) NR2. We lived together and until, until such time, for a large part of that time my, my grandparents, other children lived together so we lived in a joined family. [...] being well looked after. Ah, you were sheltered from all the goings on in the, in the, ah, in Zanzibar at that time including the, the political upheaval that started taking place in around 1956/57. [...] Ah, let me give you an example, Int. Mhm

NR2. we had, ah, house helpers, ah, at home an African house helper male and an African house helper female, and ah, while they were, they were very courteous, calm, and, ah, and fairly congenial, ah, we somehow felt that um, when the political upheaval ah, will, will take place, and the African dominance in, on, on the island will take place, the same people that were so, ah, (1.0) er, I mean [...] The same people that, who were very cordial to us [...] We always feared that their loyalty would switch, and, in fact, it did.

What characterises this narrative is the oscillation between the historical reconstruction that traces the uprising back to 1956/57, which allows the speaker's self-construction as a well-documented historian, and the domestic history centring on the helpers' changed attitude at the time of the Revolution; an example produced after this speaker has assured the interviewer's attention with the instructive phrase "let me give you an example" (this pedagogical attitude will be commented on later in the paper). For participant NR2, Zanzibar is a place historically dominated by the Arabs and Indians as he shows in (4), where he appropriates Zanzibar ("my forefathers emigrated to East Africa"). By doing so, this speaker attempts to deny his liminal condition as an individual who lives between places and events and, instead, stresses his long-standing membership in Zanzibar society. Such positioning is reinforced by a show of agency (Duranti, 2004) when he describes Zanzibar as a chosen space to migrate to and later on as a place to "abandon" in 1960s.

(4) NR2. I (.) my forefathers emigrated to East Africa, to Zanzibar to be specific, in about, in around 18-, late 1860s and this is from the records that I've been able to trace back. [...] We emigrated from, from India in the 1860s and after living in Zanzibar for almost a century, ah, we abandoned Zanzibar.

In the narratives of these “historian” interviewees, the memories of the Revolution are generally associated with violent imagery and even sensory memory of the events (the smell of tear gas in excerpt 5). This legitimises their testimony as a first-hand report of the events, but also often accompanies the admission that they were among the lucky people who escaped tragedy. This point is crucial as it explains the reason behind the speaker's persisting emotional attachment to Zanzibar, in opposition to those unlucky ones who have excised Zanzibar from their mind (6).

(5) NR2. I was very young in that time in 1961 I was only 11 years old.

Int. Mhm

NR2 But that had a profound effect on me.

Int. Mm

NR2. Ah, that was the first time I smelt, ah, the tear gas which was, ah, which was ah, used by the, the GUS General Unit, General Service Unit GSU that had been flown from, ah, from I believe Kenya to restore peace.

(6) NR1. The people who are tortured or subjected to all sorts of things don't want any association with Zanzibar. We were lucky in the sense that nothing happened to our family other than imprisonment. But they all came out. None of them were killed.

Int. All right.

NR1. So, we were a bit isolated. I remember having to give my father's guns to the revolutionary people. And I remember going on a bicycle, sending food to the prison for my father. But, apart from that, there was not really a lot of harassment. But, because of where we lived, so the people who lived with the revolutionaries then, they were subjected to all sorts of tortures.

Excerpt 6 is particularly meaningful in that it reveals how after the initial bout of violence, the ethnic and racial hatred slightly subsided due to the general support for the Revolution (NR1 remembers how he helped by procuring guns to the revolutionaries). These memories talk of a degree of tolerance between members of the dominant group and the insurgents, and in spite of the diffused fear, the acknowledgment that nothing more severe than imprisonment occurred to anyone of Indian heritage. Importantly, this narrator dichotomises between his group of people who were treated with some respect and those others (probably high ranking Omanis) who were tortured. By such antonymous opposition (Davies, 2012), he constructs himself as belonging once again to a privileged and lucky section of society, while at the same time, his membership in the group of those for whom torture and death were spared, connotes him as a liminal suspended, at the time of the uprising, between the African Shirazi revolutionaries and the Omani dominant ruling class. The insistence on “I remember” is a reminder that the aim of story-telling is often that of mediating between a private self and the outer world (Bruner, 1987; Capps & Ochs, 1995). Often these speakers take pride in constructing a self that allows them to assess retrospectively the historical and political situation of Zanzibar. In this case, a pedagogical attitude to the researcher emerges that is not exclusive to this specific group, but probably typical of narratives by individuals reporting similar experience of exclusion (see Piazza &

Rubino, 2014 for the case of Jewish witnesses of the anti-Semitic persecutions). Such a stance - already present in speaker two (in excerpt 3 NR2: “Ah, let me give you an example”) - is illustrated in the two excerpts below. In (7), the speaker promises some illustrative “snippets”, while, in (8), he validates his account by making reference to a book as authoritative documentation (van Leeuwen, 2008).

(7) NR2. Let me, let me give you some snippets of ah it was January 12th, ah, I recall, ah, it happened to be my 14th birthday, ah, and ah, and we woke to the sound of gunfire. Ah, things had taken place at night that we were unaware of, ah, but from where we lived we could see a police station

(8) NR2. And ah, and I recall an incident, ah, for our community where a member of the revolutionary council just burst into a prayer call one evening and shot dead...

Int. (gasp)

NR2 ...ah, four people, five people, including, ah, two children and three adults and and and that was something that ah, that never happened

Int. (gasp) terrible, well why? Why? Why? Yeah, but why? What was the reason? [...] For the shooting?

NR2. I mean the reason was ah, first of all I mean the reason was given at that was was that ah, the prayer call was used surreptitiously as a venue to plot for the, for the overthrow of the government

Int. Oh right, yeah [...]

NR2 It's, it's quite a, a tragic episode...

Int. Mhm

NR2 ...in the, in the life of Zanzibar. Ah, and I think, you know this is something that I think if you get a chance you might want to read...

Int. Mm

NR2...a book by M. G. Vassanji

Int. Mhm

NR2 You've heard of his name?

Int. No, no, I don't think so, no. what is it, what is the book, er, called?

NR2. The book is called "And Home Was Kariakoo".

The speaker's pedagogical positioning towards the interviewer (or audience, Bamberg, 1997, p. 337) is realised through the suggestion to read historical sources about the Revolution, and followed by a precise indication of a useful text. Besides, the excerpt shows an emphasis on the established master narrative (Van De Mieroop, 2011) of the Revolution as the watershed event that for ever changed the history of the island ("NR2... riots took place in Zanzibar in 1961 (sic), ah, as a result ah, of the African majority feeling that they were disenfranchised...and the election didn't represent proportional representation"). For NR1, this is mixed with the need to clarify his personal positioning towards those events ("I regret") and highlight his understanding of the political situation ("If they had done that, they wouldn't have a revolution")⁷. The opening of the dramatic narrative that is responded to by the interviewer's gasp (see Lambrou, 2014 on the "ethnographer's paradox") is marked by yet another token of pedagogic stance as the speaker stresses the significance of his recollection of the terrible incident ("And ah, and I recall an incident").

⁷ Quite interestingly, this speaker's if-clause by which he retrospectively reflects on the political situation of Zanzibar, mirrors historian Lofchie's (1965) similar syntactic constructing in the chapter "The African revolution": "Had Zanzibar's electoral districts been differently arranged or had proportional representation been employed instead of single member constituencies, the ASP's strong popular majority would have enabled it to assume power as the result of an orderly electoral process." (Lofchie, 1965, p. 257)

The speaker's accommodation to the interviewer is indexed by the switch from "slaughtered" to "butchered", which, especially from the perspective of interactional sociolinguistics that informs this study, highlights how interviews involve a negotiation between the parties and how the interviewees' identities as the result of an "intersubjective interaction" (Llamas & Watt, 2009, p. 3), are situated and context-driven (De Fina & Perrino, 2011).

(9) NR1. Well, I regret for the people who are killed, who are innocent. Of course, I do.

Yeah. So, a lot of Arabs of Omani origin who were slaughtered.

Int. Butchered, yeah.

NR1. And the Indians were butchered and Africans. It's not just us. Africans as well. I have regret for that, respect. But they were the majority, quite honestly. At the end of the day, it was a problem that the rulers at that time didn't form a coalition government to sort of build a nation. If they had done that, they wouldn't have a revolution.

These two first interviewees' narratives seem to conform to the Revolution's master narrative that highlights the long-lasting ethnic and economic inequalities, which the majority African population, as the principal victim, suffered. At the same time, by positioning themselves between the indigenous Africans and the colonialist Arabs, these Indian narrators accept their historical status as liminals who occupied the social interstices and openings becoming available in a society exacerbated by inequality.

At times these narrators do not refrain from expressing their strong emotional engagement, which is often indexed by their choice to "animate" (Goffman, 1990/1959) and "voice" (Bakhtin, 1981) the revolutionaries ("you Asians and your Arab ah, Arab masters

[...] will now see who are the rulers”) as in excerpt (10). Here, besides the memory of the sound of the gunfire, the speaker creates a performative recollection of the events by resorting to the use of a direct quote, which “add[s] verisimilitude to the narrated event” (Moita-Lopes, 2006, p. 301 in Van De Mieroop, 2011, p. 580). In terms of the speaker’s positioning towards the reported events (Bamberg, 1997), this narrative offers an interesting switch as the speaker’s animation collapses both Asians and Arabs together under the label of “masters” as the enemies of the African revolutionaries, who are portrayed by the generic (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 35) label of a “hoard” of unprincipled looters exploiting the dramatic situation. By so doing, the speaker constructs himself and his group as “helplessly at the mercy of outside [...] forces” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 337), an image that is strengthened by the “huddling together” in a safe place away from “stray bullets”.

(10) NR2 ...[we could hear] the rattle of the gunfire from time to time, from one end aiming to the to the to the Malindi police station [...]. And ah, and that was a frightening experience because we’d never experienced it.

Int. Mm

NR2. Now, that was at the back of the house, whereas at the front of the house, (.) ah, a hoard of ah, of ah, looters appeared.

Int. Yes

NR2. These were predominantly Africans [...] they were making comments like ah, “you Asians and your Arab ah, Arab masters

Int. Mm

NR2. will now see who are the rulers”

Int. Mhm, mhm

NR2. And ah, and that was frightening, ah, (.) my parents, we siblings, and our grandparents we huddled together away from the windows because we feared that, ah, ah, ah, ah stray bullet=

Int. =Mhm

NR2. might make its way into the house, ah, so we were waiting on what's the next thing that would happen ah, then when we turned on the radios, I mean obviously we heard the foreign sounding accent of somebody called John Okello⁸, ah, who was um, who was making ah, all sorts of vociferous statements and that led us to believe that this is the beginning of an end [...] Ah, and when he asked them where we'd be taken, ah, somebody rather in a cavalier fashion was saying "you will all be taken (.) to be shot dead." And then here I am a 14 year old, every word that they uttered registered in my mind and it created fear in us, and, and our lips were trembling and we were whispering prayers, in silence

While this narrative is interspersed with tokens of evaluation (for example the distancing phrase "somebody called John Okello", and the dismissive qualifier "vociferous" that conjures up the chaotic vehemence of the Revolution), one distinctive feature is the dramatic switch to the present tense. Rather than reflecting a temporal or aspectual function (Fludernik, 2003, p. 119), such tense change ("And here I am a 14 year old") introduces the speaker's evaluation and foregrounds his attempt to conjure up what he felt at the time towards the event he is recalling. This discourse choice also realises the speaker's new positioning vis-à-vis the interlocutor as he draws attention to his identity at that time as a young easily scared teenager. Prior to the tense switch, the direct speech in the quote ("you

⁸ John Okello was an Ugandan man who lived in Pemba, hence his accent was different from that of the people of Zanzibar.

will ...be shot dead”) dramatizes the scene and justifies the speaker’s following evaluative comment in the historical present.

5.2 Identities of historians challenging hegemony

In the above narratives the interviewees appropriate Zanzibar as a space and its history and, by so doing, acquire credibility and authority in the eyes of the others (Ochs & Capps, 1996). As was discussed earlier, they fully accept that they were part of a privileged group for which good schools and jobs were reserved. Their identity construction as historians of the 1964 events, therefore, shows understanding of the prevailing political dynamics and, especially, the failure of the elite of which they were an integral part, to relinquish their dominant social and political position. In these speakers’ narratives, it is possible to identify a somewhat confessional style when they recognise their own lack of awareness of the imminent change (NR2 “I think looking back now we were somewhat oblivious to the impending change”). Their narratives contain moments of regret for the comfort they lost in the uprising and the disappointment they felt when the delicate equilibrium on the island was shattered (NR2 again talking about his family’s helpers “We always feared that their loyalty would switch, and, in fact, it did” in excerpt (3)).

Belonging to the Arab or Asian group is not however, directly synonymous with a construction of a monolithic hegemonic identity, since these interviewees show varying degrees of leniency towards the revolutionary forces. Within the Asian middle class group, a non-returnee interviewee positions himself critically towards his own ethnicity and class and, in his narrative, highlights how his reconstruction of the events departs from the official hegemonic narrative and thus is more reliable than any others’. Mavroudi (2007, p. 7) points out that in recent conceptualisations of diaspora, “feelings of home and belonging are

increasingly being seen as affected by the processes of migration and globalisation”. Home, therefore, is no longer an uncontested concept but “an arena where differing interests struggle to define their own spaces” in relation to people’s identities (Rapport & Dawson, 1998, p. 17 in Mavroudi, 2007, pp. 7-8). As in many other cases, in (11) below the speaker’s insistence on depicting Zanzibar as his then only home is plausibly intended to lessen his liminality as a person who, originally from India, settled in Zanzibar, although the feeling of non-belonging and being in-between spaces resurfaces at the moment of the India-Pakistan split.

(11) NR3. And ah, (clears throat) in Zanzibar particularly, ah it became a home to us, ah, people of, Indian origin (.) whose parents migrated to Zanzibar, (.) ah, we didn’t have any other home.

Int. Mm

NR3. It was our home, if you will, ah even though ah, my forefathers hailed from India I don’t know anybody in India, I have no...

Int. Mhm

NR3. ...we have no (.) relative that I know of or could recognise

Int. Mm

NR3. Ah and after India partition, er ah, India was divided between India and Pakistan, I don’t know where I really belong so...

In (12), following the militaristic sounding choice of “serve the people of Zanzibar” suggesting the speaker’s dedication to cause for equality and justice, the admission of racial and social inequality appears immediately without any mitigation thus acquiring salience due to the primary positioning vis-à-vis the reported events. Noticeable is the choice of the

singular in “indigenous black man/white man” suggesting a stylistic switch from a personal narrative to a more analytical register.

(12) NR3. I was gonna go to school, come back and serve the people of Zanzibar, the community of Zanzibar because it was my home. However, ah, Zanzibar was ah, ah, unfortunately divided along racial grounds.

Int. Hm

NR3. The, the indigenous black man, ah was at the bottom of the economic scale (.) whereas the white man who was basically British...

Int. Mm

NR3 ...was at the top of the food chain

Int. Mhm

NR3 And between those two extremes were the Arabs who were the landlords

Int. Mm

NR3. And then the Indians like my parents and myself, if you can call me Indian today, ah, were the professional (.) and the business class

Int. Mm, hm, hm

NR3. And um (clears throat) because the Arabs and the Indians, ah, because of their professional class and their business class, they concentrated on accumulating wealth

Int. Mhm

NR3. And they, leads to, end up being the have class versus the have not class the indigenous people

Through the explanations provided, NR3 constructs himself as a sympathetic and reliable witness of the uprising whose narrative expresses his moral stance towards the events

(Ochs & Capps, 1996). Through his clear analysis of class conflict and the tripartite division between the landlords, the professionals and the untrained indigenous people, NR3 constructs his identity as an expert of the socio-economic nature of Zanzibar society. His focus on the “unfortunate” lack of education of the black people shows he has sufficient information to state that, while the privileges of the hegemonic groups may not have been enormous compared to those in other countries, they were still notable for the indigenous Africans. Of note is the use of the adverb “unfortunately” prefacing his evaluation of the locals’ unsuitability to run the country after decades of dispossession. Still portraying himself as a historian, therefore, this speaker is defying the hegemonic master narrative and taking some collective responsibility for the uprising.

(13) NR3. The blacks were discriminated, they didn’t get good jobs, they didn’t have very good schools, ah, in the villages and suddenly the power was in the same, in the hands of the same people, who are unfortunately uneducated and ill-prepared to lead ah the country at that time, um, and ah they (1.0) wittingly or unwittingly ah brought a lot of, ah, damage caused a lot of damage on the island in terms of this infrastructure.

Although he belonged to the same elite group as the other speakers, in (14) NR3 critically “others” them (Riggins, 1997) by pluralising a proper common Asian name (“I was more political than, than, than the Umeshes of the world”) and making it into the category of privileged people lacking sensitivity to the events. Such different positioning vis-à-vis his own ethnic and social group adds to his identity as “liminal persona”. In other words, NR3 does not just hang between spaces that are part of his life history, his memoir locates his past identity in the liminal interstice between a membership of a hegemonic group and loyalty to the oppressed community of Zanzibari Africans. Excerpt (14) clarifies this point further. Note

the recurring use of the singular in “the plight of the black man” echoing such historical phrases as “the white man’s burden” and aiming to reduce the social distance between the speaker and the local disenfranchised Africans (“we were born in a poor area”).

(14) NR3. I was a little bit more, ah, political than the majority of my, ah, my classmates. I, ah, sympathized with the plight of the black man. I understood their, (.) their, their, their, sense of being undermined in, in their own country if you will, and I sympathized with them a lot. So even though I was of the lighter skin.

Int. Mhm

NR3 I was a lot more progressive, I can use that that word and a lot more socialistic than those people who came from the half-class however little money my parents had we were born in a poor area of town and I related to the poor people a lot more than Umesh⁹ for instance (.)

Int. Mhm

NR3 who was born, who was brought up in, in the rich area of town he was totally, ah, unfamiliar and oblivious of the condition under which the black man lived

Int. Mm

NR3. To, to him, ah, black man was a servant in his shop or in his house or wherever, ah, whereas I played ah and and played football with these guys and and understood a lot more. So I was more political than, than, than the Umeshes of the world.

The above excerpt does not just attest to NR3’s political stance; through the reference to other individuals the speaker knows (*a lot more than Umesh for instance*), it also points to the network of relations that exists within the diaspora, which, on the one hand, reifies the

⁹ Umesh, a common Asian name, which the narrator pluralises later on, is here used as a pseudonym.

speakers' status as migrants while, on the other, grants them membership in a "spontaneous, immediate, concrete" (Turner, 1969, p. 127) *communitas* that sustains their identity. Through his linguistic practices (for instance, his pluralisation of the middle class individuals who were insensitive to the African cause), NR3 discursively undermines the *communitas* of Zanzibari witnesses of the Revolution and ideally aligns himself with others who are more "socialistic" and more understanding of the Black Man's plight.

A similar supportive positioning towards the Revolution and its main actors is at times constructed through the recall of the roles the speakers fulfilled during the upheaval and their participation in it as volunteers. This is the case of the following non-returnee in (15) whose account (offered to me in a clarification email, following the skype interview) is marked by the precision of the details provided and the clear insistence on his personal contribution to local history.

(15) NR10 During 62-64 I was much involved in student politics in Zanzibar – [I was] Secretary and later Chairman of The All Zanzibar Students' Union (AZSU)/Umoja wa Wanafunzi wa Znz, Vice Chairman of the Zanzibar UN Student Commission (with Unesco in Dar El Salam) and also Secretary of the Unguja & Pemba Student Council (to promote secondary education in Pemba which had no secondary schools until 1962).

I took part in the Revolution from the 3rd day helping the authorities collecting dead bodies and burying them. After all the political parties (except for the Afro-Shirazi Party/ASP and its Women's/Student/Youth/Trade Union wings), youth and student bodies, communal associations and clubs and sports teams etc. were dissolved

following the Revolution, I was appointed Secretary of Student Affairs in the ASP Vijana (Youth League).

Similar to the other interviewees, the speaker in (16) constructs himself as a reliable, “validated” (van Leeuwen, 2008) historian by lamenting his lack of “documentary evidence or conclusive evidence” for other possible causes of the Revolution. This is strengthened by the specificity of the naming he provides both in terms of political parties and ethnic groups. He also claims an identity as supporter or at least sympathiser of the Revolution with which he soon became involved and for which he fulfilled important roles.

(16) NR3. And, ah, the British government I think, I don't have documentary evidence or conclusive evidence, sided with the Arabs ah in that the elections were consistently won by the Arabs and ah, (1.0) the Arab affiliated parties called the Zanzibar and Pemba Peoples' Party which was ah headed by a Shirazi it was the collusion of the British with [...] the Shirazis are as you know the descendants of the first Persians who arrived in Zanzibar [...] So, when ah the Arabs conti- continuously won the er er er elections even though the popular vote was only always ah, ah, ah, always belonged to the indigenous African party called The Afro-Shirazi Party, um, (clears throat) the minority ah formed the government because they were, they won the right number of seats and ah, formed a coalition where it was necessary to form the government. That, in turn, created a lot of resentment on part of ah Zanzibar Africans...

In what appears an attempt to distinguish themselves from the oppressors, other speakers explain the root of the rupture between Africans and Arabs on historical grounds (“I

suppose it was because of the slavery and the slave past that was the main issue of the Revolution really”) and make clear that the Shirazi Africans’ enemies were the Omanis not the Indians (“for more than three years after the Revolution, we didn’t experience any problem whatsoever”).

The following non-returnee NR9 does not deny his elite status. His father was a highly respected head teacher, the family owned two houses and he could afford a trip to East Africa after his senior Cambridge Certificate. Instead of accepting the Government’s demand to teach “in primary schools and do six months of military training”, he decided to follow his father’s advice: “Look, it’d be wise for you not to come back to Zanzibar and instead to proceed to England”. In an email correspondence following the interview, NR9 clears Indian Zanzibaris of any political responsibility and constructs them as occupying an unfortunate and difficult position (being “scapegoats”). This speaker’s attempt to historicise the island’s uprising within the context of Cold War attributes to it a much broader and international character, while once again portrays him as an expert on local and world history .

(17) NR9 The population of Indian origin had initially come over as traders or professionals. They just became scapegoats. Most of the traders were resented as they were seen as exploiters of the poor masses. This phenomenon is universal rather than just pertaining to Zanzibar. [...] The local indigenous population was instigated by forces from the mainland to think of revenge for the slavery issue. This was an ideal opportunity for the new scramble for Africa between the rising US expansionist policies replacing the weakening Britain against the fear of the Soviet Union and Chinese prominence. Do remember this was during the peak of the so called Cold War when the US was trying to establish its supremacy clout by every possible means.

The above interviews are with those Zanzibaris who left the island soon after the uprising. The protagonist of their narratives is the life-changing experience of the Revolution with clear differences in its portrayal that depend on the speakers' political stance rather than their decision to stay away from the island or attempt a return. The 1964 Revolution, therefore, seems the most direct way of reconnecting to the island through the construction of identities of more or less politically engaged historians. The desire to appear well-documented and to show in-depth understanding of the complex ethnic and social composition of Zanzibar as well as the decision to focus on the historical events contribute to a self-construction of the interviewees as individuals who made an informed choice for their life.

5.3 Zanzibar as a search for identity

In contrast to those speakers who defined their identities in relation to the Revolution as historians and as testimonies challenging the hegemonic master narrative, in the narratives of those members of the Zanzibari diaspora who, for various reasons, returned to the island whether permanently or for a period, references to the Revolution are either absent or obscured by an emphasis on the reasons behind their decision to return to Zanzibar. In these cases, therefore, the economic and political explanations of the events that changed the island's history give way to a more personal account in which the interviewees take the opportunity to analyse their own history and explicitly reflect on their self. What marks the following (18) is the speaker's clear mindedness about the reasons of his move to Zanzibar. His precise and honest dissection of what started to greatly disturb him in the UK, the desire to be more than a black man from an unspecified country or mistake for what he was not ("I

ceased to be in London I ceased to be an African”), is accompanied by a stylistic choice of vivid metaphors (“my freedom bells started ringing”) that signal the moment of his decision.

(18) Int. What made you come back here?

R4. um I think it could well be a question of identity

Int. mhmm

R4. because just before I left London I was invited to do a fashion show in New York with all the African fashion designers (1.0) and on the catalogue all the designers were from Senegal (.) Zambia (.) Nigeria (.) Ghana and then this (he refers to his own name) UK

Int. ah

R4: and that’s how I think you know my freedom bells started ringing (.) I thought this is not right and the next morning I got a few orders and people assumed that I was Pakistani (.) they said you speak very good English for a Pakistani heh heheh (.) and I thought there’s something wrong here (.) so I remained in New York for few months (.) then I went back to London (.) umm I looked around my flat and I thought right if I don’t move out of here now I will end up with my Zimmer frame in this pokey little flat [...] um but I think it was a question of identity because I ceased to be in London I ceased to be an African

Int. mhmm

R4. I was a black Londoner and I think inside something worked in me and I think my clients would sometimes ask me oh Mr. (interviewee’s name) have you been to Africa? Because I specialise in African textiles and African wear (.) and I thought maybe I was losing an ID.

In contrast to the other speakers' insistence on Zanzibar as home, this speaker who left the island more or less at the same age as the others ("very young yeah I was fourteen"), but returned to it, distances himself from the island, which for him is not 'home' but only the place of birth ("it's not my home it's where I was born"). Most notable is his repeated admission that he chose Zanzibar again for very personal reasons and as a cure for his lost or damaged identity. In reporting about his many moves and his decision to try and live in Zanzibar many years later, he does not disguise his disappointment at discovering a much changed place, which he constructs through a clear "then and now" opposition. In spite of the expected trope of idealisation of a locale in one's memory, the choice of the strong term "horrified" in association with the line about someone playing a trick on the island indexes the speaker's utmost consternation.

(19) R4. so I came here and literally I was horrified

Int. really?

R4. because I left here '68 (.) no I [...] London in '68 (.) I left here in 1966 (1.0)
and um when I came back I couldn't relate to anything or anyone

Int. why?

R4. I actually thought someone played a trick I felt that I wasn't from here

Int. yeah what tell me more (.) in what way?

R4. everything had changed

Int. mhmm

R4. um the buildings have changed

Int. mhmm

R4. um people have changed [...] I didn't have any friends (.) all my friends were gone back to wherever they had gone or died (.) the houses had changed (.) you know

what I remember this house the door was there and now it's here (.) this streets (.) you know it was very confusing and um things were moving slowly and you know I was frustrated (.) I did not like it the first time I came here (1.0) I really didn't like it

The most striking difference between the previous speakers and R4 lies in his admission that returning to Zanzibar was mainly in response to personal identity issues, i.e. the sudden realisation that he was just another black African in London or even a person challenged in his African identity. In the following excerpt (20) the pressing desire to escape other people's ethnic categorizations is immediately visible.

(20) R4. and they were asking what race are you and I refused to say what am I African because they would say well of course you're not African look at my skin I am African you are not African (..) see African is not to do with the colour (.) you know I am African it's only when they insists and I say actually no I am British heh heheh and they went ho ho ho ho

Int. mm

R4. I hate that you know when they (..) even in England I hated it when they put in a box are you black African (.) are you Asian African (.) are you (.) why does it matter?

R4 constructs Zanzibar as the land where he was received enthusiastically and where his creativity triumphed. Geographical Zanzibar, therefore, loses any tangible spatial physiognomy to be moulded into an extension of R4's personality that he uses to talk about his own life and his existential choices (Shoshana, 2014; Korpela, 1989; Baynham, 2009); therefore, from an event-centred narrative, this speaker moves to a tale centred on consciousness (Bruner, 1987).

Liminals are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). As argued earlier, these interviewees construct themselves discursively as liminals in a variety of ways. As diasporic individuals, they belong to hybrid *communitas*, which albeit devoid of institutionalised rules, create cohesion in an immediate and spontaneous way. The historical narratives of the Revolution, the recollection of the emotions experienced in 1964, the reflections on their positioning vis-à-vis the events and the people who triggered them all contribute to creating such diasporic *communitas*. In addition, these individuals discursively construct further aggregations when they distance themselves from their contemporaries and compatriots as a consequence of their different political views. NR3 (excerpts 11-14), in particular, is an example of such further liminality as he detaches himself from the diasporic *communitas* to create yet another, which ideally includes socialist sympathisers of the African Shirazis. If this seems to be the condition describing the non-returnees, the counter-diasporic Zanzibaris seem to experience a further level of liminality. In the following excerpt, R4 admits to not feeling part of the island’s present community to the extent that he cannot have a normal exchange with the locals with whom relationships are generally dictated by instrumental purposes.

(21) R4 you see there is a problem here I think for coming back (.) I think you are [...] like to be quite honest (.) um these are people but sometimes you realise you have nothing in common (1.0) absolutely nothing in common [...] and it’s very sad (.) the only people local (.) the only time they approach you is if they want money (..) visa to go to England (..) that’s all (1.0) you can’t have a decent conversation (.) you can’t discuss (.) you just can’t (.) it’s very frustrating.

In narratives like R4's with a clear emphasis on personal identity issues ("I didn't want to be because I wasn't a colour I was a person/ I was suddenly put in a box") behind the choice to return to Zanzibar, the analysis of the personal motivations blends in with the awareness that being back on the island does not automatically mean integration. Having been away for a long time and being a gay man in Zanzibar (R4 "I'm gay and I don't hide it and it's not their idea of a gay man (.) their idea of a gay man is to be like grotesque caricature of a woman"), R4 is now a foreigner in his own land. The use of the term *mzungu*, meaning white man in Swahili and hence extraneous or foreign to Africa, is used by him, against the context of a conversation in English, to define who he is and how his people see him after his return to his own land. This is a crucial point in his personal narrative as the moment where he acknowledges his situation of liminal suspension between a prior life as a "black man in a box" and another as a gay foreigner in his own place. Such suspension, however, is not necessarily accompanied by regret or sadness. The liminality that R4 represents is a situation of comfort that allows him enough freedom to justify his unconventional behaviour in an otherwise traditional Muslim place ("said okay if they treat me like a mzungu then I'll behave like one").

(22) R4. yeah when I first came I realised what mixed race people feel like in England

(.) you don't belong here (.) you don't belong there (.) you are just (2.0)

Int. so you keep on being suspended because you left England because you were on the verge of becoming a black Londoner

R4. well exactly and I didn't want to be because I wasn't a colour I was a person

Int. yes

R4. and I was suddenly put in a box like black Londoner and I thought I have my own people I have my own country I have my own land but not colour (..) coming here you are mzungu

Int. yes you are mzungu

R4. you have to accept it (..) like the first time I came here I was struggling and telling people that I am local but they insisted that I was mzungu (..) and said okay if they treat me like a mzungu then I'll behave like one (1.0) and you live happily ever after you know

Int. so you accepted---

R4. yeah

Int. yeah you accepted how you mzungu

R4. yes you accept that you aren't from here but you are from here

While R4 seems to have gladly accepted his liminal position of *mzungu*, other returnees admit to having a difficult relationship with the locals both in terms of the people who overturned the asymmetrical power on the island as well as those who lost their status due to the Revolution. Like many others, R5 left Zanzibar in 1964 with his family (“soon after the Revolution maybe a month or two I can’t remember but probably a month or two after the Revolution [...] I think it was April 1964”) starting a long journey through East Pakistan (today’s Bangladesh), Kenya, India and often encountering further political unrest in those destinations. Often the grief about what was lost through the uprising emerges in his narrative (“I wasn’t very happy we were not in good financial state you know we had to leave everything behind”). Married in France, R5 continued his pilgrimage in Europe before deciding to go back to Zanzibar and open a restaurant in Stone Town with his brother, a choice that at times he perceives as constraining (“R5: I said we were stuck. Int: yeah yeah

you got stuck yes because it's doing so well you don't want to move. R5: yep Int: would you move if you could? R5: probably")

In (23) below, R5 constructs Zanzibar as a place that allured him but with which he engages in a complex love-hate relationship. For him, the island is a liminal place where he occupies the interstices of a Muslim society to which he now feels extraneous and whose social pressure, of which he is still well aware, he strongly resists (by never going to the mosque).

(23) R5. I think my mental is much different from uh a real Zanzibari

Int. Why?

R5. I'm not religious (.) I don't believe in religion or follow a religion (.) and I like to be more [...] which you can't be in Zanzibar

Int. No

R5. express too much of yourself and you could get in trouble

Int. Really? What politically? Religiously?

R5. No religiously (.) socially [...] so [...] keep quiet

Int. So, do you go to the mosque every now and again or not?

R5. No

Int. No not even (.) no no (1.5) well that's quite commendable of you because you don't accept compromises in a way

R5. Yeah I don't know that's one of the drawbacks of me living in a place which (.) where my outlook towards life is different from most people here (.) that's the difficult part for me

Due to his liminality, therefore, by a sequence of negatively connoted statements (highlighted below), this speaker denies his assimilation to local Zanzibaris and expresses the need to develop an identity within a context of non-belongingness (“so it’s difficult coming to a sense of this is my home (.) that is one thing you know I’m lacking (.) I don’t have any place I can call my homeland or my country”).

5.4 Disappointed and cynical identities: Zanzibar’s betrayal

Most of the speakers construct themselves as historians of the 1964 Revolution and predominantly picture the events as a hindrance to their personal development (R7 “My parents felt, as I said earlier on, that we were young, we had a future ahead of us. We didn’t know what the Revolution would bring for us”). However, others like, R6 of South Yemen-Comorian origin in (24) below, prefer to focus on more contemporary history, although the starting point is the same reference to the political unrest and the low socio-political status of the group to which the speaker belonged.

(24) R6. So thinking of those times, when the Revolution occurred, things changed and that hope was fading away, and we were possibly at that time being considered at best, non-persons [...] And, at the worst, we were considered as enemies to be suppressed

The crude images this excerpt conjures up are undeniable. The Revolution took people’s hope away and transformed those who were non-African not only into the out-group

but into non-people or political antagonists to get rid of. This is accompanied by descriptions of the treatment to which Comorians and Arabs were subjected as in the case of the loading of people on boats (called “dhow” in Swahili, as the speaker observed later in the interview) for repatriation. In (25) the negative othering of the non-African by the local population based on physical traits (the long beards) evokes the horrors of ethnic cleansing.

(25) R6. The Omanis, they didn't like especially those with long beards, they didn't like them and they put them on boats. [...] So some of them, the boats, as you know, sometimes they don't reach their place of destination because of the seas and if you overload them.

Following this opening, R6's narrative insists on more recent historical events linking his decision to return to Zanzibar in the 1980s with the courage Zanzibari people showed at the time of President Karume's assassination. Note that the fact the speaker's mother was still in Zanzibar is presented as a secondary and additional consideration.

(26) R6. It showed that it's not just people succumbing to one-man rule or one-party rule or things like that, so that also gave some sort of hope that changes may come. Yeah, after all, he was a president for only eight years I think, yeah. So he was gunned down on his eighth year. That gave me a thought, I would just go. Whatever it is, let me go there. After all, my mother was here.

In his narrative, therefore, Zanzibar is constructed as a morally exemplar place where people do not submit to a dictatorship and where they are daring enough to even destroy, if necessary, what they had created during the revolutionary process. This interviewee, who is very critical of the post-revolution political scene (“The elections are a facade, you see, just a facade to show that there are elections”), constructs Zanzibar as a beacon of bravery and performs his daring identity in line with the daring people in Zanzibar by voicing himself (“Whatever it is, let me go there”). In common with the other returnees, however, this man’s relationship with the locals is that of a liminal *mzungu*. He is a stranger in his own country where he was invited back for unclear reasons and then denied basic human rights. In the following extract, the crucial phrase “non-persona” (a term that appeared earlier in another interview and that underlines the liminality of these people) indexes the lack of consideration he feels the government has for him and people like him. Once again, this is a case of a speaker constructing himself as a liminal and placing himself in a non-place.

(27) R6. Yes, I was still a non-persona. I mean, they [Zanzibar government] took me because I was seconded to them, and because I had the proper expertise in the medic. In fact, they have no surgeon at the time, the only people they had were the Chinese [...] They accept me on the basis that I am quite innocent to them. I have my own clinic. I am running my clinic, I am not interested in any government job, which is made for people who have the right material.

Through the works of memory and imagination, speakers like the one above operating within the context of diaspora are constantly in a dialogue with their place and the historical events that transformed their life. In this case, the choice to return to Zanzibar, on the one

hand, seems due to the speaker's hope that Zanzibaris will have the courage to change their political destiny as they did in the past, while, on the other, his narrative betrays a cynical lack of faith in the group now in control of the island ("people who have the right material").

The critical stance towards Zanzibar also extends to the present time in the voice of those Zanzibaris who have returned to the island only temporarily and on a particular mission. In the words of R7 who insists that "it never was my intention to come back here", returning to his birthplace on a charitable mission and setting up a registered medical NGO involved "lots of hassle, red tape from the government [...] everything is so difficult, even to open a bank account here is like an impossibility". Following an unfortunate theft of some donated goods, this narrator cynically states "So I learnt my first lesson: don't give these people a damn thing. These people meaning people in Zanzibar government organisations." The bitter tone of this statement requires no explanation nor does the use of the proximal deictic "these" used as a distal reference in the context of "damn thing" and revealing the speaker's attitudinal orientation to the Government (Glover, 2000 among others).

It is noticeable that such a critical stance extends to the whole island (28), the diaspora itself and the way it is managed by the local government (29). The last utterance in the final excerpt by this speaker noticeably contains a political demand for equal rights and recognition, albeit formulated as a hypothetical proposition.

(28) Int. So would you say you are a Zanzibari?

R7. I think my attachment to Zanzibar is the fact that I was born here. I've got no emotional attachment to the island [...] because of my childhood when I grew up but I wouldn't say this is my home ever, it'll never be my home . [...] I'm delighted we came here, set up a system which works [...] and I'm already planning my exit strategy to get back to get out to go back to the UK, France or wherever.

(29) R7. This diaspora is a bloody joke,

Int. Hmm

R7. Really is a joke. Having said that, there is a chap there who is really passionate about it and he is very helpful but the department itself couldn't organise a piss [up] in a brewery. [...] I think they should walk the talk and not just talk about it and they are not doing ANYTHING to recruit these people because it's a diaspora and we get charged 3000 dollars to work here for two years and we have to pay 50 dollar visa every time we come into the country. If they were really serious, they would waive those fees for all diaspora to come here.

Like other liminals, this speaker is caught in a void and inhabits a space in which he feels not totally at ease to the extent that he is planning his "exit strategy". Zanzibar is the place of memory that allures but then betrays and rejects its own people. Even the community of practice that the diaspora represents is false ("a joke/a bloody joke") and based on false promises if the returnees are charged visa fees.

Unlike the other participants, the only woman in the group in (30) is different and, more than a cynical attitude, shows a detachment from anything that may sound problematic about Zanzibar. She recounts that she spent a long period outside the island with her husband but "ALWAYS wanted to come back", that showing a romantic attachment to Zanzibar, marked by the themes of peace and innocence and an insistence on the island's irresistible charm ("those who left are coming back").

(30) R8. I am born and bred in Zanzibar. So my childhood was here and they (referring to some episodes she mentioned earlier) were the happiest childhood ever

and I think that is one of the beauties of Zanzibar up to today when a child can be a child and the innocence with which I grew up now it strikes me because I've seen more of the world

Int. Huh

R8. Everybody [is] attracted to Zanzibar and why are they attracted. It's something about this place, it's that innocence with which children play.

A pedagogical stance still characterises this speaker's talk as with other participants, as she references an important local novelist ("Do you know him? I'll show you his books"). However, this interviewee exhibits a fresh, even childish attitude to the historical events. She constructs herself as an oblivious and distracted witness when she left Zanzibar in 1967, just three years after the Revolution and, although she admits there was a lot of tension, she says she learnt about the uprising through historical sources rather than through direct experience.

(31) R8. I didn't even know there was a revolution. [...] I was very innocent I was still playing marbles we were still children. Even now I read books about the Revolution, I think oh my god has this really happened?

In spite of this participant's young age at the time of the events (which is the case with all other participants of course), her naiveté is disarming when, besides being unaware of the Revolution, she decides to reveal her surprise about discovering a reality outside colonialism when, on her arrival in England, she saw for the first time white people working ("How come white people are working here?"). However, she interprets the reasons behind people's decision to go back as due to the racism of the West ("they were second class citizens in the

West”) and depicts Zanzibar as a place where “you CAN make your money and feel you belong”.

6. Conclusion

Through a discussion of selected narratives by Zanzibaris with different experience and life histories, we have observed how those who used to be individuals with a hegemonic status construct themselves in relation to their birth place and the events that occurred there. Not surprisingly, their relationship with Zanzibar emerges from rupture and a severance that they somehow attempt to bridge whether they have decided to go back or stay away. The constant trope in these narratives is the attempt by most of the speakers to historicise their island’s past by on the grounds of their direct knowledge of the events. Their narratives, therefore, are legitimated as first-hand historical accounts and validated through the accuracy of the details provided, the understanding of the historical dynamics and the vividness of the memories (Ochs & Capps, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2008) (this is for instance the case of NR9’s narrative of a shot policeman who “collapsed outside our front door and lay there for two days so we couldn’t open the door”). Behind the historical narratives, though, we can identify the construction of a self that, in the choice of returning to Zanzibar or staying away from it, constructs a convincing argument and particular positive identities in spite of their hegemonic role prior to the Revolution (Van De Mieroop, 2011, p. 587).

The analysis has also shown two crucial features characterising these diasporic individuals. In the first place, they are in an open real or imagined dialogue with both the other individuals who are part of the diaspora and the master narratives around Zanzibar and its Revolution. Such “socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of

thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting” (Gee, 1999, p. 17 in Van De Mieroop et al., 2017, p. 181; also cf. Hammack, 2011) about Zanzibar in particular revolve around the political uprising, the different ethnic groups, their different access to resources and different ways of managing power. Moreover, the individuals’ narratives are not isolated memories; they are various versions of a similar story of a hegemonic group that lost its dominance. Through the various versions of such narrative, each one of the interviewees constructs themselves in a different way and moulds their self originally and creatively by using a number of strategies that have been pointed out in the analysis. Secondly, the major pattern that emerged from these self-narratives is the liminality of these speakers’ lives, which they also construct discursively during the interviews. Issues of power in their relation with the new group in control of the island, the positioning towards the local people with whom the narrators no longer identify, the notion of change both in terms of potential political and personal transformation, and the crucial suspension between various places both in the present and in the speakers’ past recollection locate these people in an in-between sphere or as Bhabha calls it, a hybrid space that is created at the heart of First world cultures to which the speakers escaped and Third World postcolonial states to which Zanzibar belongs (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2 in Eksner & Orellana, 2005, p. 6). As a group of people who are no longer part of an elite, these individuals fit Bhabha’s definition of subjectivity of the liminal experience, as the “social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2 in Eksner & Orellana, 2005, p. 5).

This study is admittedly based on a small corpus of interviews and can only be considered as a case study of diasporic individuals. For an analysis of greater depth more data would be necessary and possibly diverse data sources including interactions involving the participants with local people or focus groups in which they discuss topics and ideas about their place and its history and where their positioning to them emerges clearly. However, I

hope that the study has shown that on a theoretical level the construct of liminality has lent itself profitably to interpret the existential condition of these diasporic people for whom the events around the Revolution still provide a strong emotional link with Zanzibar. The analysis of the narratives proposed in this paper has shown the heuristic usefulness of this concept as a tool to capture the identities these interviewees construct discursively, especially in the context of a dynamic conceptualisation of diaspora that refuses to reify and fixate individuals in a rigid and permanent dualism between a country of birth and another of residence (Tsagarousianou, 2004). Assuming liminality as a lens through which to look at migrants' experience makes it possible to appreciate the complexity of their lives and the connection they establish with their original place, the host countries, the people in the old and new space/s. Liminality therefore enables a more dynamic interpretation of diaspora in which the individuals who belong in it display multiple identities rather than limit their selfhood to the issue of uprooting and displacement. In the conceptualisation of van Gennep (1960/1909), Turner (1967, 1969, 1974) and more recently Derrida (1983), liminality revolves around the concept of a suspension *in itinere*. The narratives of these diasporic individuals suggest an emphasis on the middle of the three stages that van Gennep identified in any rite of passage, "separation, liminal period and reassimilation". It does not seem implausible to suggest that the narrators locate themselves discursively in an existential limbo in which their identities dialogue with a lost past ("I related to the poor people a lot more than Umesh for instance"), an indeterminate present ("they treat me like a mzungu") and an even more fluid future ("I'm already planning my exit strategy").

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