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## They Bewitched the Generator

### State Power and Religious Authority at the New Year's Festival in Makunduchi, Zanzibar

#### Introduction

The New Year's festival in Makunduchi, Zanzibar, has been one of the central sites for the interaction between state power and religious authority. It has changed considerably since colonial times, as political rituals were grafted onto religious ones, and a commercial fair developed. I argue that these changes can be explained in part by the renegotiation, both in conflict and co-operation, of the relationship between local religious experts and state officials.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I will first analyse the New Year's rituals as central practices for the production of local religious authority. Then I will discuss the colonial history of the festival, before finally turning to the interactions between state power and local authority at the festival in post-colonial times.

#### Religious Rituals and Local Political Authority

The religious rituals of the New Year (re-)establish reciprocal relations between the people of the town of Makunduchi and local spirits. These spirits (commonly called *shetani*, pl. *mashetani*) reside in specific places, called *mizimu* (sing. *mzimu*), which are marked by natural features like caves, stones, trees or thickets. Often small huts are built for the spirits. The ritual interactions with the spirits take place at the *mizimu*. The main feature of the practices is the sacrifice of food or cloth to the spirits: within

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1 This article is based on research conducted in 2001 and 2002, made possible by a scholarship by the University of Bayeruth. My thanks go to the people of Makunduchi, especially to my host Dume.

the reciprocal relations the spirits are given their due. In return, the spirits ensure the fertility of the land and the people, and aid their human relations in case of sickness or other personal problems.

From local perspectives the rituals relating to local spirits are classified as *mila* (local/traditional/rural customs) as opposed to *dini* ('orthodox' Islam). Nevertheless Islamic elements, like prayers to Allah or recitation of the Koran, are part of most of them. The terms *mila* and *dini* are used in a strategic fashion within the discourse on acceptable religious practices, and representatives of reformist Islam criticise rituals relating to spirits for being idolatrous.<sup>2</sup> In Makunduchi however, most people participate in practices of the *mila* kind and still consider themselves to be good Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

More specifically the rituals of the *mizimu* are considered as *uganga*, i.e., religious practices of healing, as opposed to *uchawi*, religious practices of harming. This distinction is somewhat ambivalent: It is generally suspected that the practitioners of *uganga* are able to practise *uchawi* as well, although there are no public accusations and no one admits to practising *uchawi*. Both practices employ similar means to achieve opposite ends: plants, spirits, and the Koran. In both cases the Koran is thought to be most effective.<sup>4</sup>

Every citizen of Makunduchi inherits relations with local spirits. This is a strong marker of local identity. A citizen is a member of a local descent group, which is linked to local spirits. As descent is reckoned both matrilineally and patrilineally, individuals can belong to several descent groups, and therefore be linked to several *mizimu*. Within every descent

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2 In 2001 an article entitled 'Avoid the superstitions of the New Year's festival' was published in a Muslim newspaper. *An Nuur* 2001: 3.

3 E.g., there are Muslim teachers who participate in the rituals of the *mizimu* or spirit possession groups. Interviews with Amina 06.08.02, Hassan 09.06.02. I have changed the names of all my informants.

4 Interviews with Mzee 10.06.02, Haji 19.06.02, Kazija 15.08.02. For *uganga* and its relation to western medicine, see Nisula 1999. Klaus Hock (1987: 89–130) provides an overview of the 'popular/instrumental/magical' religious practices of the Swahili; for the question of sorcery, see Lienhardt 1968: 51–80. Michael Lambek (1993: 237) describes the link between knowledge and the suspicion of 'sorcery' for Mayotte: 'One of the best, if left-handed, compliments I received in the field was from a man who said near the end of my first field trip that it was a good thing I was leaving for home so soon. When I asked why, he replied that I would surely begin to practice sorcery if I stayed. With some surprise, I protested my innocence, but he brushed that aside saying that I simply knew too much. People are curious; no one with power will forgo the experience of trying it out. No one with knowledge is innocent. Sorcery is inherent in human practice.'

group religious experts, called *wavyale* (sing. *mvyale*), take care of the rituals directed towards the spirits. Most *wavyale* are elders, because it takes time to acquire religious expertise. Both men and women can be religious experts. In the past the *wavyale* controlled access to land through the rituals required for the appropriation of local resources.<sup>5</sup>

The New Year's rituals integrate the religious practices of the various descent groups on the level of the town. Some of the local spirits are considered especially powerful, and therefore important for the protection of the town. The rituals take place at the *mizimu* of these spirits. They are led by the *wavyale* of the related descent groups. These religious experts are called elders of the year (*wazee wa mwaka*).

In preparation for the New Year's festival a number of rituals take place. Two weeks before New Year's day the Koran is read at some of the *mizimu* which guard the borders of the town. Thereafter the town is circled, while Allah is praised. Both of these practices are thought to drive away evil spirits. Finally an animal is sacrificed to the spirits.

One week before New Year the spirits of important *mizimu* receive their due. On this day the spirits are believed to celebrate New Year, and they receive sacrifices of food and cloth. During the night before New Year's Day *uchawi* is said to be practised.<sup>6</sup>

But the New Year's festival is most famous for the public performances on New Year's Day. In a central area a hut is build, set alight, and as it burns, it is circled by women singing. The smoke of the fire is used to predict the weather during the coming year. The young men of the southern and northern half of Makunduchi fight each other, armed with sticks. In the evening there are dances.

The traditional political leadership of Makunduchi was closely linked with religious expertise. It consisted of a council of five elders, who were

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5 The spirits, and the religious experts, had to be given their dues three times within the context of millet cultivation. A first ritual took place in the clearing of the field (located in the bush land outside the town proper), a second when the cultivators moved out to the field to guard the growing crop, a third before the harvest. Likewise, rituals had to be performed in connection with hunting, net and trap fishing. (Middleton 1961: 29–30; Pakenham 1947: 8–10.) Land rights continue to be based on membership of a local descent group, but the religious rituals are no longer practiced in this context.

6 I did not see these rituals, and they are shrouded in secrecy. A number of informants alluded to sacrifices, dances and a 'magical' competition, but only one claimed to have taken part. He considered *uchawi* the most important of the New Year's rituals. Interviews with Haji 19.06. and 19.08.02.

called elders of the town (*wazee wa mji*).<sup>7</sup> They represented the most important descent groups of the town. Their authority was backed up by religious practices. Some of the elders of the town were also elders of the year. The elders of the town were responsible for relations with outsiders. When strangers wanted to settle in, or use the resources of the town, they had to seek permission from the elders, who then performed the necessary rituals at the *mizimu*. They were also in charge of the town purse, and used this money, gained from fees for ritual services and collections among the citizens, to finance communal undertakings and rituals (Pakenham 1947: 5, 9 f.).

With the establishment of the Omani state in Zanzibar in the first half of nineteenth century, state representatives were added to the local leadership. The government headmen (*masheha wa serikali*, sing. *sheha wa serikali*) were responsible for the collection of taxes.<sup>8</sup> They were recruited from the dominant local descent groups, and they were also represented in the New Year's rituals: The public performances of the New Year's day were presided over by the *sheha* of the south of Makunduchi.<sup>9</sup>

The power of the traditional leaders was not based on the use of physical force, and its effectiveness was disputed among colonial administrators.<sup>10</sup> Their authority was to a large extent based on symbolic capital, on

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7 Interview with Jecha 09.09.02. In other towns different terms were used for the political leaders (e.g. *watu wanne* – four people). My reconstruction of traditional political authority in rural Zanzibar is based both on the reports of colonial administrators (Pakenham 1947, Middleton 1961), who studied the system in a state of serious decline, and on information given by my informants, who experienced 'traditional' authority within the colonial context only. Both sources are liable to offer a somewhat idealised account of the 'good old times'.

8 See Nicholls 1971: 281–5; Sheriff 1991: 117. Before the advent of the Omanis Makunduchi was part of a regional political organisation, headed by the *mwinyi mkuu*. Local *masheha* might have been part of this earlier political system. See Middleton 1961: 17.

9 Today the performances are presided over by a descendant of the last pre-revolutionary *sheha*.

10 'The *Watu Wanne* are chosen from different kin-groups that compose the proprietors of the town. In most indigenous settlements they are still known (and were usually introduced to me), but except for their religious and magical tasks their duties are now rarely performed and their authority has been superseded by that of the government *sheha*. The traditional sanctions for their authority seem to have been very weak. Troublemakers could be expelled, if the majority of their co-residents agreed, and diffuse sanctions of ostracism, ridicule and general disapproval could be marshalled by the *Watu Wanne*.' (Middleton 1961: 17.) Conversely,

their status as acknowledged by their fellow citizens. The symbolic capital was produced primarily through the religious practice of the communal rituals, which transformed cultural capital, i.e., the religious knowledge and practical mastery of the elders, as well as social capital, i.e., their position within the dominant descent groups of the town, into the acknowledged status of *mvyale* / elder of the year / elder of the town. Rituals produce ritual leaders, but in the pre-colonial context this leadership was not restricted to the religious field. The rituals produced legitimate local power that included more or less effective control over access to the productive resources of the town.<sup>11</sup>

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R. H. W. Pakenham (1947: 4) judges the traditional sanctions to be highly effective means of social control: 'Within the clan, and between inter-related clans, exist a tolerance, generosity, and a code of loyalty which constitute an unwritten law, and he who violates it is liable to suffer the most effective penalty of social ostracism viz. People will not attend his celebrations, will rise and leave when he joins a group or enters a room, and so on.'

- 11 Pierre Bourdieu compares the actors within a field of practice with players of a game: 'C'est à chaque moment, l'état des rapports de force entre les joueurs qui définit la structure du camp: on peut imaginer que chaque joueur a devant lui des piles de jetons de différentes couleurs, correspondant aux différents espèces de capital qu'il détient, en sorte que sa *force relative dans le jeu*, sa *position* dans l'espace de jeu, et aussi ses *stratégies au jeu*, ce que l'on appelle en français son «jeu», les coups, plus ou moins risqués, plus ou moins prudents, plus ou moins subversifs ou conservateurs, qu'il entreprend, dépendent à la fois du volume global de ses jetons et de la structure des piles de jetons, du volume global de la structure de son capital ... (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 74). In the field of religious practice in Makunduchi the players employ two kinds of capital: cultural capital, i.e., the knowledge (taken to include the incorporated mastery to put this knowledge into practice, as in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*) of how to ritualise one's actions when facing the spirits, of the rules/taboo of the *mizimu*, of how to divine the time and nature of the sacrifices, of the uses of plants, of the uses of the Koran, etc., and social capital, i.e., membership of the dominant descent groups, together with the accompanying relations to powerful spirits, and high status within this descent group. This capital is used to gain positions of leadership, e.g., to become one of the elders of the year, or to become a leader among the elders, who decides what kind of animal is to be sacrificed. In pre-colonial times local authority based on this religious leadership extended over economic and political matters.

Following Roy Rappaport (1979: 175) I take rituals to be 'more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers'. Two aspects of Rappaport's concept of rituals serve to explain how rituals produce symbolic capital. First, the rituals appear not to be encoded by the players. In Makunduchi the elders follow the tradition inherited from the ancestors, or change the tradition because of demands by the spirits. This serves to hide the per-

Although the field of religious practice was clearly structured, it was not static. Spirits of certain *mizimu* and their related descent groups had been established as powerful through past practices, and in order to become a leader it was certainly helpful to be a member of these dominant groups. But as local authority was both traditional and charismatic,<sup>12</sup> positions of leadership were competed for, and the structure of power relations was subject to change. Within the field of practice it was possible to invent new *mizimu*, to challenge the position of a senior religious expert within a descent group,<sup>13</sup> and it was even possible to gain a leading role within the town without any connection to a local *mizimu*, as the case of Mwita shows. According to local histories, Mwita came to Makunduchi (from the African mainland) as a stranger sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. He received permission to settle in Makunduchi from the elders of the town and started out in a subservient position. But he managed to gain a

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sonal interests of the actors. The power of the elders '... cannot take place overtly and must be disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships ... in order to be socially recognized it must get itself misrecognized' (Bourdieu 1977: 191). Second, rituals convey (indexical and canonical) messages, and the most important indexical message is that the participant '... accepts, and indicates to himself and to others that he accepts, whatever is encoded in the canons of the liturgical order in which he is participating' (Rappaport 1979: 193). A participant in the New Year's rituals publicly accepts the leadership of the religious experts, who lead the rituals in practice, and acknowledges the spirits' agency, at least in the sense that the elders appropriate wealth on behalf of the spirits. The only 'consumer's choice' is not to participate in the rituals, but that might have been difficult in pre-colonial times, when the rituals were mandatory for the appropriation of local resources.

- 12 As defined by Max Weber (1976: 124, 140): 'Im Fall der traditionellen Herrschaft wird der *Person* des durch Tradition berufenen und an die Tradition gebundenen *Herrn* kraft Pietät im Umkreis der Gewohnten gehorcht. Im Fall der Charismatischen Herrschaft wird dem charismatisch qualifizierten *Führer* als solchem kraft persönlichen Vertrauens in Offenbarung, Heldentum oder Vorbildlichkeit im Umkreis der Geltung des Glaubens an dieses sein Charisma gehorcht'; "'Charisma" soll eine als außeralltäglich (ursprünglich ... als magisch bedingt) geltende Qualität einer Persönlichkeit heißen, um derentwillen sie als mit übernatürlichen oder übermenschlichen oder mindestens spezifisch außeralltäglichen, nicht jedem andern zugänglichen Kräften oder Eigenschaften oder als gottgesandt oder als vorbildlich und deshalb als "Führer" gewertet wird.'
- 13 A colonial report on Uzi Island, to the west of Makunduchi, mentions both cases (ZNA AK 12/15: 42–5). As this is a late source (1951), it is possible that competition for positions of leadership, i.e., the charismatic aspect of local power, was accompanied by the decline of the religious field of practice during colonial times. But I doubt that competition was completely absent from the pre-colonial system.

position of leadership among the elders of the year. Several of the current (2001–2) elders of the year claim to be his descendants. One of his sons became *sheha* for the south of Makunduchi, and this line of descent held on to this position until the revolution in 1964. Another one of his descendants was among the elders of the town during late colonial times.<sup>14</sup>

## Colonial Times

The British colonial state took an ambivalent stand towards traditional authority. On the one hand, it used the symbolic capital of local authority. The colonial state took over the structures of its Omani predecessor to implement a system of indirect rule, within which the local political leaders formed the lowest level of the colonial administration.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the state tried to replace local authority with institutions of state power. There were some attempts to exert more direct control over Makunduchi, but these failed. In the late 1920s, increased police patrols were used, but judged ineffective and abandoned soon after. In the 1950s, the institution of an elected town council, which would have replaced the elders of the town, failed in Makunduchi.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Interviews with Mussa 01.08.01, Ali 13.06.02, Ameer 18.06.02, Haji 19.06.02. The stories I was told do not specify how Mwita gained a leading position, but as he became a leader of the communal *uganga*, he must have been competent in this field. Through his religious expertise he founded one of the dominant descent groups of the town.

15 For the history of Zanzibar, see Middleton and Campbell 1965, Nicholls 1971, Sheriff 1987. Zanzibar became a British protectorate in 1890, and was administered by the Colonial Office from 1913 until 1963.

16 In 1928 two policemen were injured when they intervened in a fight between villagers (not *mwaka* fighting, the incident occurred in October). The annual report comments: 'This large village will shortly be connected by roads with headquarters. Both from an administrative and police point of view, it is most desirable that this portion of the island should be brought under closer supervision.' (ZNA BA 30/2: 3.) In 1934 the new system of increased police patrols was judged ineffective for the south of the island: 'Where the population is mixed, shifting and fairly thick, uniformed police is required, but in the coral rag country and at Makunduchi where the people form an homogeneous group the only effective control is exercised by the Mudirs, Shehas and Elders.' (ZNA BA 30/4: 11.) In 1951 the colonial administration tried to form a local council at Makunduchi. This failed '... since the villagers are unwilling to elect the representatives to sit on a council' (ZNA BA 30/13: 4).

But while the local leaders were somewhat successful in fending off state intrusions in the political field, the system of local authority based on religious practice was weakened by economic changes. In order to supply the plantation economy with workers to replace the freed slaves, the state strove to establish a system of paid labour. To this end, the colonial administration employed forced labour, and implemented a legal code that included offences like vagrancy, drinking and dancing. (See Cooper 1980: chapter 3.) The introduction of a labour economy was not only successful because of the use of force by the state, but also because it opened up new economic opportunities to local actors. Especially the young men (but also young women) of rural towns like Makunduchi could escape the strictures of the local gerontocracy by working for money.<sup>17</sup> This seemed to have had direct consequences on religious practices. By the 1940s, the rituals at the *mizimu* relating to the use of local resources were no longer practised, and the elders complained about the lack of respect from modern youth.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Jonathon Glassman (2004: 748 f.) notes: 'Within the Hadimu fringe itself [i.e., the southern and eastern areas of Unguja island – M. E.], mounting generational conflicts in the 1930s and 1940s had given rise to acute anxieties about the cohesion of village institutions and to dreams of community renewal. Hadimu elders were convinced that the seasonal outmigration of younger villagers had caused a loss of respect for village traditions. In fact, much of the rancor arose when the migrants used their wages in efforts to intrude in village customs more forcefully than their elders deemed proper, paying bridewealth or sponsoring other festive rites by which authority and prestige were accrued.' The (seasonal) involvement in the paid labour economy seems to have been high: 'The social survey carried out in southern Unguja in 1989 showed that 91 out of 93 informants had worked as clove pickers before the Revolution on plantations owned by both Arabs and Shirazi, especially in Pemba. Moreover, some had even worked as weeders and coconut collectors, and 22 of them had worked in town as house-boys and in construction work.' (Sheriff and Tominaga 1992: 15; see also Cooper 1980: 96 f.)

18 '... to-day the impact of the materialistic influences above mentioned, arising from the ingress of novel economic and social factors in the past half century, have led to an irreparable dissolution of the indigenous social structure ... The village lost its leadership, and authority was dissipated. They have tried to muddle along in a ragged and individualistic way without the substance of power which comes of unity. Their children withhold the respect which parents used to claim and, as they grow up, submit to no control save the economic laws which are taking a greater hold on village life. The young are mostly ignorant of local tradition and custom.' (Pakenham 1947: 4 f.) There were local differences in the decline of traditional authority: in Chwaka, the town this report was concerned with, the traditional leaders were replaced by an elected council, in Makunduchi they were not.



Thus the power of the colonial state can be defined by its means: the use of coercive force. But the colonial administration also strove to dominate the production of symbolic capital, the production of legitimised power.<sup>19</sup> The use of force was legitimised by an ideology of rationality. The fight against 'irrational' practices was considered central to the modernising effort itself. In this context religious practices, and especially religious festivals, became targets of government action. In Makunduchi police stopped young men fighting on New Year's Day from the 1930s onward, i.e., the state enforced its monopoly on the use of force.<sup>20</sup>

Not only British officials participated in the discourse on rationality, modernity and religion,<sup>21</sup> but also local intellectuals, Zanzibari schoolteachers, i.e. local actors within an institution of the colonial state, predominately from an urban, upper class, 'Arab' background, discussed the value of rural religious practices within the framework of barbarous-civilised and African-Arab dichotomies.<sup>22</sup> Muslim scholars from reformist

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19 According to Bourdieu (1999: 56): 'the state ... successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical and *symbolic* violence over a definite territory and over the totality of corresponding population. If the state is able to exert symbolic violence, it is because it incarnates itself simultaneously in objectivity, in the form of specific organizational structures and mechanisms, and in subjectivity in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought.'

20 State action was commented on in colonial records: 'Much to the disappointment of the multitude orders were issued that sticks for the fight were not to be thicker than the little finger and rather than comply with this reasonable restriction the parties preferred not to fight. A rather mediocre year is anticipated by the prophets.' (ZNA BA 30/6, Report for the 3rd quarter, 1935: 8.)

21 'Hardinge clearly saw dances (*ngomas*) and the drinking of palm wine (*penbo*) as alternatives to work. Unable to restrain themselves, ex-slaves and other "natives" would drink and dance all night and sleep all day. Edward Clarke, Consul-General in 1912, was particularly eager to "prevent a number of childish savages from wasting their money and their very small stock of energy in a demoralising dance" that was also likely to lead to a "dangerous state of sexual excitement", as well as crime. The Government banned all *ngomas* in public places and required a permit for dances in private homes, for which a small fee had to be paid.' (Cooper 1980: 114 f.)

22 Glassman (2004: 744) summarises the discourse within the teacher's magazine (*Mzungumzo ya Walimu*): 'The schoolteachers published many condescending essays on village customs, particularly dance rituals, in which they stressed an obligation to reform popular culture along the lines of modernity and (Arab) civilization. The critiques were often harsh: dances were described as foolish, indecent, and unhealthy – a common adjective was *kishanzi*, barbarous – and at least one headmaster thrashed pupils he caught participating in them.' This discourse was part of a constant differentiation and reconstruction of local identities. For other practices of identity construction in Zanzibar, see Fair 2001.

movements similarly attacked local/rural/traditional religious practices in their attempt to redefine orthodox Islam.<sup>23</sup>

### Post-revolutionary Times

In Zanzibar, independence was quickly followed by a revolution (1964) which overthrew the Omani dominated ruling-class and replaced it with an African-oriented autocracy, supported by a socialist-flavoured one-party system which permeated all aspects of social life. No organisations outside the party were tolerated, and a secret police and people's courts were installed.<sup>24</sup>

After the revolution the political structure on the local level was changed decisively. In Makunduchi, the elders of the town lost state recognition and practical importance. The former two *masheha* were replaced with four government appointed officials. Some of the important descent groups were completely excluded from political positions, but there was also some reconciliation with traditional authority and political opposition on the local level.<sup>25</sup> However, party membership became more important than membership of the right descent group for access to political positions.

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23 Kai Kresse (2003: 300) summarises the critique of one such reformer: 'Sheik Muhammad Kasin explains why some Swahili Muslim practices are not reconcilable with the ideals of Islam, why they should not constitute elements of East African Islam. As in much popular discourse (and anthropological literature) of the region, he invokes the dichotomy of *mila* (custom) and *dini* (Islamic religion). He portrays the practices of *mila* as threatening cultural counterforces to *dini*, the "true" religion of Islam.' For reformist Islam in East Africa, see also Pouwels 1987 and Loimeier 2003.

24 During the reign of Karume (1964–72), all organisations were aligned with the party (ASP – Afro-Shirazi Party, later CCM – Chama cha Mapinduzi), a secret police and people's courts were established. There were sanctions against Asians, but also Comorians and Shirazi (who at least in part had been ASP supporters). Private business was prohibited and a policy of autarky was implemented which led to food shortages (Clayton 1981: chapter 4). Even membership in an initiation dance group became dependent on party membership rather than on proper initiation (Fair 2000: 171, note 75).

25 The *sheha* from the south lost his position; his descent group claims to have retaliated by using their mystical power and religious expertise (interview with Haji 19.06.02). One former elder of the town became one of the four government appointed *sheha*, as did one of the local leaders of the ZPPP, one of the political parties opposing the ASP in late colonial times (interview with Jecha 09.09.02).

The elders of the year continued to perform the New Year's rituals, but the ASP Youth League (the youth organisation of the ruling party), and later the District Commissioner, took over the organisation of the commercial aspects of the festival. Commercial activities in the context of the festival had started in colonial times, but were now intensified. Dance halls, which charged entrance fees for entertainment, became an important source of income.

Fighting was permitted again, although weapons were restricted to the stems of banana leaves. Probably around this time women and young men started singing obscene songs as part of the public performances of New Year's Day festival.<sup>26</sup>

In the late 1970s, struggles between the elders of the year and state and party representatives increased over the income generated by the festival, but in the early 1980s the New Year's committee was founded. Within this committee co-operation between traditional authority and state power was organized. Its members invented the political rituals that were grafted onto the religious ones. During the festival, the guest of honour, a (male or female) state or party official, is greeted by committee members, as well as by representatives of the state and the party. Members of the youth organisation give presents to the guest of honour. The guest of honour cuts a ribbon to open the central performance of New Year's Day, and is then led around by elders of the year. The instructions regarding the religious practices include a visit to the *mzimu msikiti kichaka* (bush mosque), which the guest of honour, if he is a Muslim, is made to enter in order to pray there. Thereafter, a banquet takes place, attended by invited dignitaries, including state and party officials, the members of the New Year's committee, as well as other high-ranking citizens. Here the guest of honour gives a speech.<sup>27</sup>

The foundation of the New Year's committee and the invention of the political rituals constitute a renegotiation of the relation between the state and local authority. In this context it is interesting how the religious experts tell the story: the elders of the year claim that they bewitched (or rather asked the local spirits to interfere with) their opponent's generator, thereby spoiling their commercial enterprise. The generator provided elec-

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26 E.g., interviews with Ramadhani 11.06.02, Ali 13.06.02, Vatima 25.08.02, Mzee 30.08.02. For the political role of the ASP Youth League, see Burgess 1999.

27 For the political rituals, see Racine 1994, Madumulla 1995. For a list of the past guests of honour, see Chum 2000: 26.

tricity for night time dancing, and it broke down on three consecutive nights. Thereafter the state officials gave up and handed over control of the commercial festival to the religious experts. Thus, the elders of the year claim that they succeeded in their conflict with the state because of their religious expertise.<sup>28</sup>

From a less local point of view, the early 1980s were also a time of political and economic reforms which loosened strict state control in a number of areas (Bakari 2001: 130–3; Crozon 1994: 114 f.). But irrespective of its real origin, with the establishment of the New Year's committee, including chairman and treasurer, the elders of the year adopted a form of organisation from the field of political practice.<sup>29</sup> The religious experts turned into players within the field of 'modern state' politics, and while the members of the committee continued to be drawn from the descent groups connected with religious expertise and traditional authority, the committee soon included members who lacked religious expertise, and who were not therefore proper elders of the year.<sup>30</sup>

The religious experts managed to improve their situation through their co-operation with the representatives of the state, and they solved the problem of how to finance communal rituals by gaining control over the income generated by the commercial festival.

But their position did not remain unchallenged. During the time of my research in 2001–2, the New Year's committee struggled with the District Commissioner over the economic benefits of the festival. In 2001 the District Commissioner together with the District Committee took control of part of the income generated by the festival. They charged the members

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28 Interviews with Ali 13.06.02, Ameir 18.06.02 and Haji 19.06.02. There is a second, conflicting interpretation of the incident, which claims that Allah interfered with the generator because there should be no dancing during Ramadan. Interview with Baraka 18.08.02.

29 In Zanzibar committees form the usual institutionalised relation with the state. Sally F. Moore (1977) analysed the rituals of similar political bodies in mainland Tanzania.

30 E.g., the chairman of the New Year's committee in 2002 was a descendant of Mwita (from the line of descent that held the position of *sheha*, and that was ousted from power after the revolution). He was a teacher at the Teachers Training College near Zanzibar Town, and he visited Makunduchi only on some weekends. He had no idea of how to perform the New Year's rituals, or of how to divine the date and type of sacrifice. He was not a religious expert, not a *mzee wa mwaka*. But he was very good at public relations and political activities such as giving speeches, explaining the history of the festival, or arguing against criticism from reformist scholars. Interview with Masema 22.06.02.

of the New Year's committee with using the money for their own purposes and with neglecting the welfare of the town. The New Year's committee countered by claiming that the festival belonged to the people of Makunduchi, and not to outsiders like the state administration (the D.C. was from mainland Tanzania), and by pointing out that they needed the money to perform the communal rituals.

Two months after New Year, spirits took possession of about 20 primary school pupils and the school had to be closed.<sup>31</sup> The child first possessed was the daughter of the D.C. Religious experts, including some elders of the year, had to perform cleansing rituals before the school could be reopened. The rituals had to be paid for by the state (the district) because the religious experts lacked the means to finance communal rituals.

The religious experts had been able to show their worth, but the conflict continued. In 2002 the *wazee wa mwaka* threatened not to perform the religious rituals unless they were given full control over the festival. There were meetings between the New Year's committee and the District Committee, the rituals were delayed, and there were high winds which could be interpreted as a manifestation of angry spirits. In the end, high-ranking politicians from Makunduchi (the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education of Zanzibar) intervened and the conflict was decided in favour of the elders. The religious rituals were held, and the festival took place with the president of Zanzibar as guest of honour.

The invention of the political rituals can also be interpreted as the attempt to invent a national festival.<sup>32</sup> In a sense the political rituals put into practice the demands of earlier intellectuals 'to reform popular culture along the lines of modernity'. When the president of Zanzibar declared in 2002 that the culture of the New Year's festival is the culture of all Zanzibaris, he shifted the frame of reference from the town of Makunduchi to the whole of Zanzibar. Following Max Weber, who argued that although it is interests, not ideas, that dominate human action, it is still the ideas that shape the frames for future interests,<sup>33</sup> it is necessary to place the New

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31 The description of the incident is based on information provided by Edward T. Clark (Edinburgh) who conducted research in Makunduchi at the time (personal communication).

32 For the invention of tradition in colonial Africa, see Ranger 1983.

33 'Interessen (materielle und ideelle), nicht: Ideen, beherrschen unmittelbar das Handeln der Menschen. Aber: die "Weltbilder", welche durch "Ideen" geschaffen wurden, haben sehr oft als Weichensteller die Bahnen bestimmt, in denen die Dynamik der Interessen das Handeln fortbewegte.' (Weber 1988: 252.)

Year's festival within its ideological framework, in order to understand why it is suited as a national festival.

When the president participated in the New Year's festival, he positioned himself within two ideological frames: the discourses on Zanzibari identity (African versus Non-African origins) and religious identity ('orthodox' versus 'local' Islam).

Within the discourse on national identity, the president took an ambivalent stand. Towards the end of colonialism, local intellectuals developed two conflicting concepts of nationalism: one based on the Omani sultanate, the other on African origin (see Lofchie 1965, Glassman 2000 and 2004). The indigenous people of Zanzibar identified themselves as *Shirazi*, i.e., they claimed to be of Persian origin. According to Jonathon Glassman (2000: 405), *Shirazi* identity is ambivalent about what constitutes its 'other'. The *Shirazi* can side with the 'Africans' versus the 'Arab oppressors', or they can side with the 'Arabs' versus the 'African barbarians'. In the political struggles leading to independence and the revolution they did both. Makunduchi, as a remote rural town, easily qualifies as a centre of indigenous culture, and two intellectuals from Makunduchi have claimed that the New Year's festival is a *shirazi* festival, i.e., a religious tradition of Persian origin. (Chum 1988, Muombwa 2002.)

In relation to the discourse on religious identity, the president positions himself unambiguously, as the New Year's rituals are clearly considered *mila* (customs) only, and criticised for being idolatrous by representatives of reformist Islam. But the president may gain votes in the next election by this, as both these discourses on national and religious identity have been central to the ideologies employed in the struggle for power within the multi-party system established in 1995 (see Husby 2001).

## Conclusion

In this article I assumed that actors within the religious field of practice, like in any practice, play for stakes. I argued that the New Year's festival has been an important site of interaction between local authority and state power, and that the changes in the festival can be explained in part by the renegotiation, both in conflict and concord, of the relationship between local religious experts and state officials.

The ritual practices relating to spirits produce symbolic capital (the authority and status of a *mvyale*, as acknowledged by others), or, rather, they transform cultural (knowledge and expertise in the use of rituals, taboos,

Koran, and herbs) and social capital (relation to the right spirits, position within a descent group) into symbolic capital (the acknowledged status of the religious experts).

Within the traditional context political authority came with ritual leadership, because the communal rituals, particularly the New Year's rituals, were the most important practices that integrated the various descent groups on the level of the town, i.e., the practices that re-constructed the social structure of the town. Citizens were made by establishing reciprocal relations with local spirits, and local leaders were made by taking leading roles within the communal rituals.

The colonial state made use of, and backed local authority within a system of indirect rule, but intervened directly to enforce its monopoly in the use of force. Fighting in the context of the New Year's festival was judged irrational, and not considered to be legitimised by religious tradition.

The post-revolutionary state devalued traditional authority within the one-party system. With regard to the festival, fighting was permitted again, but state or party officials exerted greater control, especially over its economic aspects. With the invention of the political rituals the representatives of local authority co-operated with the state. The state gained legitimacy (symbolic capital) through the rituals. The religious experts gained the support of state power and money. However, the relations between state power and local authority are not fixed, but constantly renegotiated. In the open conflict of 2001–2, the representatives of local authority used the ultimate threat: a refusal to practice religious rituals, i.e., they relied on the capital at their disposal: their expertise to lead the communal rituals.

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