

Killing Popobawa: collective panic and violence in Zanzibar¹

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Popobawa is dead!

On the night of Monday 3rd April 1995 a visitor from the Tanzanian mainland was killed by a frenzied mob in Zanzibar town. He was killed because he was thought to be one of a number of manifestations of Popobawa, an evil spirit which had terrorised the people of Pemba island for more than a month and was now rampaging through the densely populated capital of Zanzibar. This was the first killing of its kind during the Popobawa panic of 1995, and as we shall see it became the most notorious. But it was not the first instance of collective violence in those months, nor would it be the last that ended in the death of an innocent victim, supposed by the mob to be the nocturnal phantom in person.

In this paper, based on information collected during and after the events of 1995, and including both published and unpublished written accounts, I will first outline the little that is known about these incidents. In the second half of the paper I will discuss the reasons for the selection of particular victims and speculate on the underlying causes of this violence.

The 1995 Popobawa panic in brief

In early February 1995, during the first week of Ramadhan, people in the south-west of Pemba island began to complain of nocturnal assaults by a shape-shifting spirit (Swahili *sheitani*). They dubbed this spirit 'Popobawa' (literally 'bat-wing'), after a similar set of occurrences sometime after the Zanzibar Revolution, during the rule of President Abeid Amani Karume (1964-72). Whereas the original Pemban Popobawa was described as an anal rapist, the new one was said to attack men, women and children in a variety of ways, sometimes by squeezing the ribcages of victims until they lost consciousness. Whatever their particular experiences, all of the victims felt extreme terror, and in many cases were unable to move or speak when they were assaulted.

It was not unusual for different family members to be attacked in turn, while those with their own possessory spirits might go into trance and identify, challenge, and alert others to the presence of Popobawa. The result was often general pandemonium, especially when multiple manifestations of Popobawa (pl. *mapopobawa*) assailed different homes simultaneously. As the panic spread from village to village across Pemba, people took to spending the nights outside their houses, huddled around open

¹ This paper has outgrown its original subtitle, 'madness and violence in Zanzibar'. Although in its current form it is restricted to consideration of the events of 1995, I may later widen its scope.

fires with their neighbours and desperately trying to remain awake – a strategy which did not always succeed in keeping Popobawa at bay. The progress of the panic was accelerated by the belief that victims were liable to be revisited if they did not make their experiences public.² Still, a few communities on the island were able to resist Popobawa, ascribing their collective immunity to the comparative strength of their traditional spiritual guardians.

Figure 1: Chronology of the 1995 panic

Pemba	
2 February	Ramadhan begins
first week of February?	Popobawa attacks in Mkoani
3 March	Idd ul Fitr begins, fast ends
29 March	only sporadic incidents
Unguja	
c.20 March	reports of Popobawa in Zanzibar town
3 April	'Popobawa' killed at night in Zanzibar town
4 April	body of 'Popobawa' exhibited in town hospital
6 April	mob takes 'Popobawa' to police in Mazizini
mid-April	Popobawa moves out of Zanzibar town, killing in Bumbwini
28 April	final incident and killing in Nungwi
Dar es Salaam	undated incidents from around mid-April
Tanga, Mombasa	unconfirmed reports of incidents

After a couple of months the panic died down on Pemba. By the last week or so of March 1995 it had spread to Zanzibar town on the main island of Unguja. Here the assaults took a more violent turn and both male and female victims reported that they had been forcefully sodomised by Popobawa (or one of its manifestations, claimed by some to number up to 70, sometimes more). By mid-April the focus of the panic had shifted into the plantation areas north of the town, and up to the northern tip of the island at Nungwi. But by the beginning of May the attacks had fizzled out without spreading to villages in the south and east of Unguja island. They did, however, spread to at least one quarter in Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, where many Zanzibaris live. Popobawa was also rumoured to have appeared in Tanga on the north Tanzanian coast and Mombasa in Kenya. For lack of information these mainland locations are excluded from the rest of this discussion.

Collective violence against (suspected manifestations of) Popobawa

I have reports of six different incidents in which men are reported to have been assaulted by mobs because they were believed to be Popobawa, two on Pemba and four on Unguja island. Three of the latter cases are said to have led to death, though two of these accounts are uncorroborated. Although only three of the incidents are reasonably well dated, they are presented below in their likely chronological order.

Attack on a man in Miti Ulaya, Wete, Pemba (?March 1995)

² For detailed discussion and analysis of this “obligation to tell” and other aspects of Popobawa discourse see recent papers by Katrina Daly Thompson (2011, 2013).

This first incident is described by a single source, my research assistant in Wete, here referred to as “Jamila”.³ Her narrative of this and other incidents was based on her own knowledge and discussions with others, and written down (with one exception) in April 1995:

One day Popobawa decided to do his evil here in Wete, in a part of the town called Miti Ulaya, near the harbour. He went into the first house and the people inside made a lot of noise; when he left he also left his terrible stench behind. He then went to another house, whereupon one of the inhabitants fell into a possession trance. When she was possessed she came outside chasing Popobawa away, making a great racket as she did so. The neighbours also came out of their houses and some of them became possessed too and joined her in pursuing Popobawa. And so there began a great chase from one alleyway to another, with a lot of shouting: “There he is! There he is! Seize him! Seize him!”

The chase continued and they ran down to Miti Ulaya school, then back to up to the houses, below the banana palms, and finally they ended up on the road which goes to the harbour. Near this road is the Six Saw Mill building (this was a company which used to sell timber), and they saw a man standing beside it. So they ran after him shouting: “Here he is! Here he is!” There was a lot of commotion and the man they were after began to say: “I’m not him, not him, not him, please, I’m not him.” But he was told: “You are him and there’s no way we’re going to let you go!” He began to be beaten and dragged towards the road, one person pulling him this way and another that, regardless. There was a great turmoil and he was carried up in the air and the commotion continued until he was brought to the road.

Once he was by the road a lamp was brought so that he could be examined properly. “The poor man!” Everyone could be heard saying: “Oh, it’s that lunatic.” It really was a sad affair because the man they had beaten up was a mentally ill person who lived in that very area. He was seriously injured: his arm was broken and his face was badly swollen, while both his legs were very badly grazed. He had to be taken to the hospital and everyone in that area had to look after him until he was better. This unfortunate incident was all because of Popobawa. (“Jamila” 1995)

Jamila later added that the victim of the attack was called Bakiri. He evidently recovered from his injuries following treatment in the government hospital at Wete and with the help of people in his neighbourhood, who realised that the attack upon him had been a case of mistaken identity.

Attack on a man at Likoni, Pemba, by the crossing to Kojani island (?March 1995)

I was given two descriptions of this second incident, which is less straightforward than the first. The first was related by Salim, who worked as my watchman and gardener in Limbani, Wete, on 29 March 1995. He averred that Popobawa had failed to reach Kojani, which is the name of a relatively isolated islet and village off the eastern coast of Pemba. He then told me following story that he had heard at Chwale junction, which is on the road to Likoni and the crossing to Kojani.

A mainlander from the Tanga area had appeared at the junction one day asking the way to Kojani. He had a scar right round his neck and spoke in a faint throaty voice. People asked him who he was going to see in Kojani and he said a local *mganga*

³ Jamila asked not to be identified because of the political content of some of the narratives that she recorded for me and the potential threat to her and her family if her authorship of these made public.

(traditional healer). But no one believed this and they accused him of either being Popobawa or wanting to bring Popobawa, following which he was seized and brought to the police at Wete. Salim did not know what had subsequently happened to him, but believed that he really was an innocent visitor in search of traditional treatment.

The second, more detailed, version was recorded by Jamila:

One day a man appeared – it's not known where he came from – and was seen heading towards Kojani (Kojani is an island in Wete District which you can only reach by crossing the sea). It's said that if you go there with any bad intent at all then you can be certain that you won't complete the crossing safely.

So, this man travelled towards Kojani, and walked until he had reached the shore where the crossing is. Once you reach this point then you must climb into a dugout or boat to cross to Kojani. The man stayed there for a long time, looking at the scene around him and the busy activity of the local inhabitants – first some of them crossing to the island, then others returning from there...

Eventually an old man came up to him and asked: "So, what do you say? Do you want to cross to our island?" The stranger replied: "Yes, I want to go there", and he pointed with his finger to show that he wanted to go to Kojani. The old man told him: "If you want to go then you will go." As is their habit, the Kojani people didn't ask him anything, everyone made as though keen to be ahead of his fellows, and others pretended to be so busy that they didn't have the time even to greet the stranger.

That man stayed there with his bag under his arm until the sun went down. In the late afternoon a man in Kojani fell into a possession fit and asked people: "Do you know that today you have a visitor?" They replied: "We don't know." And so he told them: "Today you have a visitor, but this visitor hasn't arrived here, nor will he, first of all because he can't ask anyone to ferry him across. When he tries to speak his tongue won't budge, and we have tied him up so that he can't leave that place again. If you want to confirm that he is really Popobawa, then go and open his bag and look inside. What do you think you'll see?"

The folk of Kojani took note: "What have we just been told?" Everyone pulled out his canoe and sped across to the mainland. When they reached there they didn't wait and the stranger was well and truly dealt with. One with a stone, another with a stick, yet another pulling his shirt... Others took his bag, opened it, and found it full of paraphernalia: charms, roots like those of herbal medicine, and something like a mask for wearing on the face. That man was severely beaten and if it wasn't for the KMKM sailors who are stationed there I'm sure that he would have died. (KMKM means *Kikosi Maalum cha Kuzuia Magendo*, the Special Anti-smuggling Unit.)

The sailors heard the great commotion on the beach and asked themselves: "Hello, what's going on, what's all the noise?" Coming outside, they saw that man being dragged this way and that and being seriously beaten. They ran to save him, asking as they did so: "What has he done? Wait first!" They entered into the middle of the fray and stopped the mob from hitting him: because they are soldiers they were able to quieten and calm down matters straight away. When they'd done this they began to ask: "What has happened here to make you beat this man?" His attackers explained: "This man is one of the people who turn themselves into Popobawas (*mapopobawa*) when the night comes. If you don't believe this then look at the things that he's carrying. We've seen him here at the harbour since the daytime, but we've not asked him anything. It was only when we reached home that we were told about him. So leave us alone to finish him off: he isn't fit for this world."

When the sailors looked in his bag they saw that it was true that he had a lot of bad things: "This charm alone, see how terribly it smells!" (At this everyone said: "Yes, it's him, because this is indeed the stench that wafts past people when visited by Popobawa at home). Now the sailors had to turn to the stranger with questions. He was

asked: “So, how come all this has happened to you?” He replied: “Ah – it’s just my fate.” “What fate?”, the sailors asked him, “Tell us where you were going to, explain to us.” He began to explain: “I was ill in hospital for a long time and have taken a lot of hospital medicines, but I’ve still not recovered from the illness that I had. That’s why I’ve decided to go to Kojani to look for traditional Swahili treatment (*matibabu ya kiswahili*): it’s likely that I’ll then recover.” He was asked again: “What? Do you know anyone over there in Kojani?” He answered: “I don’t know anyone, not a single person.” “Now, if you don’t know even a single person there, and up until this hour you haven’t reached your destination, what does that mean?” He was asked this and replied: “I thought that even if I told them to ferry me across they wouldn’t, because ever since I got here they’ve ignored me.” He was asked again: “Since first falling ill till today have you been to any traditional healer (*mganga*) at all?” He answered: “No, I’ve not been even once.” Then he was asked: “So, where did you get the medicines which are in your bag?” And he had no reply.

At this the KMKM sailors decided: “We’d better take him to the police and hand him over to them.” The KMKM commander urged them to do this, and they telephoned the police in Wete. The police came in a vehicle at around nine o’clock at night. The people there related everything from start to finish, and the police did their job, recording all the explanations in detail. Then they took that man and told the rest that they would be called if needed.

It is said that the police just kept him that night for his own safety. Early in the morning they gave him permission to leave and so continue with his Popobawa activities (*upopobawa wake*). This made it even more evident to us that those Popobawas (*haya mapopobawa*) had been brought deliberately to harass the people – but God will help us, Amen. (“Jamila” 1995)

Whereas Salim was otherwise a firm believer in Popobawa (see the incident related in Walsh 2009: 26), in this case he was inclined to think that the victim was indeed innocent. But Jamila sided with the attackers this time, and was prepared to believe that the stranger was indeed a manifestation of Popobawa (unlike the Miti Ulaya victim, who she presumably had personal knowledge of). When I asked her about some of the details of her account, she said that she had heard that Popobawa wore a mask when attacking people, but did not know if this was true. She compared the terrible stench of Popobawa, mentioned in her and many other descriptions, to that of a medicine made of leaves (*madawa ya majani*) which is put on the fire and smoked.

In the sequence of narratives recorded by Jamila, this followed another in which Popobawa was kept out of a village by its indigenous spirits. The village in this case was Shumba Mjini in Micheweni District, which like Kojani is a relatively remote fishing and coral rag farming community. Both villages are in the northeastern part of Pemba where the island’s original dialects and elements of traditional village organisation and communal ritual practice have persisted. This was evidently a factor in their resistance to Popobawa, as it may also have been the villages on the coral rag of southeastern Unguja which likewise seem to have been largely immune to the 1995 panic.

The killing in Mti Pepo, Zanzibar town (3 April 1995) and subsequent events

This incident and its aftermath is by far the best known and I have information on it from a number of sources.⁴ Jamila's account reflects the state of knowledge on Pemba soon after the event. It is relatively brief and lacking in detail, with the wrong date assigned to the killing (2nd April instead of the 3rd):

It was only recently that we heard the news that on Sunday 2nd April 1995 a man had been killed on Unguja because he was suspected of being Popobawa. This, at least, is what is said.

All night long people had been kept awake by the noise and disturbance made by Popobawa, first in this house, then in that, through until the early morning. One man opened his front door and outside saw a stranger he didn't know. This stranger was wearing a large charm (*hirizi*) around his neck (it was said that when Popobawa walks about he wears a large charm which has an awful stench). The local man immediately suspected that this was Popobawa. Immediately he shouted out, calling people to come and deal with the stranger.

On hearing this the stranger began to run away. Everyone came out of their houses, some with machetes, some with knives, and others with clubs. "There he is! There he is! It's him! It's him!" There was a great commotion and chase until they caught up with him and began to beat him. Whatever weapon a person had – whether it was a machete, a club, or something else – was used to strike Popobawa until he was dead. And once he was dead his body was cut into pieces.

Unfortunately, the poor man who was killed was not Popobawa, but someone who was mentally ill. He had been brought from Dar es Salaam in order to be taken to a psychiatric hospital. In two days' time he was due to be taken to there, but the poor soul was out of luck. This is what a member of the murdered man's family said afterwards. ("Jamila" 1995)

The most immediate account was published in *Tanzanian Affairs* in January 1996 in the form of diary entries by Henriette (now Henrica) Jansen, who was then working as a Health and Statistics Advisor in the Ministry of Health in Zanzibar.⁵ An earlier, slightly more detailed version of this article, was posted online, and the following extracts are taken from this:

"Popobawa is dead!" Part I

This morning [4 April 1995], when I arrived at the Ministry of Health, where I work, I saw hundreds of people on the road outside the hospital. There were also policemen from the field force unit with weapons and loudspeakers. When I asked Mwanakheri, my secretary, what was going on, she said "Popobawa is dead". The crowd was gathered around the mortuary; everybody wanted to see the body of Popobawa (literally 'batwing'), the cause of public hysteria for the past couple of weeks.

[...]

Last night, on a street corner, Popobawa undressed himself. One of the men with magic powers saw the Popobawa. He was covered with stinking medicine, holding his jar and cow's tail, and ready for his round. The man chased him, and in a struggle, took away Popobawa's jar and cow's tail. At that moment, Popobawa turned into a human. The

⁴ Including my wife, who joined the crowds in filing past the corpse at Mnazi Mmoja hospital.

⁵ Jansen was in this post for five and a half years (March 1991 to August 1996) according to her profile at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/henricajansen> (accessed 15 November 2014).

man started screaming, and a mob gathered with pangas (machetes) and sticks, and plunged upon Popobawa.

The body of the man the mob had attacked was taken to the mortuary. By the morning, the story of the death of Popobawa had spread throughout the town, drawing the large crowd I saw when I arrived at work. My secretary who was in the crowd this morning, told me that “he looked like a normal man”. She sighed: “It was a good day for Zanzibar”. (Jansen 1995)

The next entry, dated 5 April 1995 in the published version, relates the next twist in events:

Popobawa – the story of a mental patient and other poor devils. Part II

Last night, on the day that the whole of Zanzibar was under the spell of the recently murdered Popobawa, a long programme on Popobawa was shown on local television. There were eyewitness accounts of the murder, shots of the place where it had happened, of the crowd at the hospital, and of the corps[e] in the mortuary. The body of a young man was lying face down on the autopsy table. He was naked, except for a piece of rope around his waste [i.e. waist]. The arms were dangling on both sides. You couldn't see his face as it was turned away from the camera. His back and head were covered in gashes, and stained with blood. The people interviewed in the crowd were relieved and happy that Popobawa was dead.

Yet this morning at the office, the word ‘Popobawa’ was buzzing again. My colleague, Attiye, was moody because she had been awake the whole night. Her neighbourhood, and several others, had been visited by Popobawa that night. She was also upset, as it had just been announced that the man who had been killed last night was not Popobawa, but was a mental patient, originating from the mainland, who had come to Zanzibar for treatment. (Jansen 1995)

After detailing other incidents alleged assault by Popobawa that she learned about that day, Jansen concluded with the wry observation that “One day after ‘the death of Popobawa’, nothing has changed; the mass-hysteria continues” (Jansen 1995).

Bethan Rees Jones (now Walton), who was living in Zanzibar's Stone Town at the time, gave me further details when we met there on 22 April 1995. She had started keeping rough notes on the Popobawa panic and the following year wrote these up for me. The following is her account of these events:

On April 4th, 1995, the road into town was blocked by people clamouring to get into Mnazi M[m]oja Hospital. Soldiers guarded the entrance trying to control the mob. Rumours spread through the town that *popobawa* had been killed the night before at Mto Pepo (between Amani and Mtoni). He was invisible but one man with a *shetani* [possessory spirit] had been able to see him and had snatched several *hirizi* [charms] off him. The spell was broken and then everyone could see him. He was a mainlander with some scarification marks and was completely naked. By this time a large, hysterical crowd had gathered and a few moments later he had been beaten and hacked to death.

Mpaji Iddi [an interviewee] went to [the hospital at] Mnazi M[m]oja to try to see the body. People were so eager to get inside that the door was broken. She and many others paid the soldiers to get in. She saw scars on the man's body, like a Makonde and

he was badly gashed. Everyone wanted to make sure that he was really dead. One man wanted to sodomize the body in revenge for the rape committed on his wife. She [Mpaji Iddi] returned to the hospital in the afternoon and saw a man arriving who said that his son, who was mentally handicapped, had been missing for three days. He was allowed in to see the body and she saw him coming out looking relieved and saying that it was not his son. At that moment, the Chief Minister arrived and when the soldiers explained to him about the man, he was asked to accompany him to see the body.

That evening the man spoke on T.V. Zanzibar saying that it was his son who had been murdered. Many people commented that he showed no emotion and even looked quite light-hearted.

Summayah Ibrahim [another informant] said:

“The two parents were not at all sorrowful as one would expect from a parent in such a situation, after the sudden death of their own son, particularly the mother... After that I heard rumours that the people who had appeared for the interview were not at all the real parents of the victim. People claim that those were members of his [Popobawa’s] gang who rushed in to save the situation and recover the body of their friend.”

A few days later, when the body was taken for burial at Mwanakwerekwe, rumours abounded that the lost man [the mentally handicapped son] had been found. These rumours quickly dispelled the hope that *popobawa* had been killed. (Rees Jones 1996)

On 24 April Musa, a man living in Saateni not far from the site of the killing, told me that when attacked the victim was carrying charms (*hirizi*) and that a bad odour issued from his armpits. He asked his attacker(s) not to stab him with a knife and they desisted.⁶ He then told them that if they were to kill him it would not matter, because there were 80 manifestations of Popobawa about. Although Musa clearly believed otherwise, these details of the victim’s appearance and response might well be thought not unusual for a man who was suffering from mental health problems, sleeping rough, and desperate to preserve his life.

After telling me this, Salim added that people in Zanzibar town had different explanations of Popobawa’s origin. There was also a clear fault line between official and popular understandings of the panic, and how people should respond to it. The government was evidently alarmed by the violent turn of events in the town, and both secular and religious authorities made strenuous efforts to defuse the panic through both radio and television broadcasts (Mohammed 2000: 22). In this instance, however, their attempt to control the narrative misfired, and only added fuel to existing conspiracy theories about the complicity of the government and ruling party in Popobawa’s rampage.

Attack on a man (or two bats) at Mazizini in Zanzibar town (6 April 1995)

Feelings in Zanzibar town were evidently running very high after the events described above, and another incident of collective action occurred in the days which followed. This was at Mazizini, the leafy suburb in the south of the town where many expatriates lived. Bethan Rees Jones’ written account continues:

⁶ According to Amir A. Mohammed (2000: 22) he was actually hit by a machete (*panga*) on the head.

Two days later on April 6th, another mob gathered outside the police station at Mazizini. A woman had recognised the “real” *popobawa* and the person was caught and taken to the police station. They were [i.e. he was] said to have been naked and many people claimed that the person then turned into a bat. (Rees Jones 1996)

When she first told me about this incident on 22 April 1995, Bethan said that “According to one person it was 2 bats which were captured and taken to the police, after which they turned into a person while in police custody” (quoted from my notes).

Henriette Jansen witnessed the immediate aftermath of this incident, and her description introduces the third and final part of her online text:

Popobawa – The Election Genie? Part III

A couple of days after the first Popobawa-murder, I was driving to work, when I saw that the whole primary school around the corner from where I live, was turned out onto the street. There were children everywhere; the Muslim girls in their uniform of blue skirts, broken white blouses and white headscarfs, and the boys, also in blue [and] white, some sporting neon-coloured backpacks. Somebody waved at me. It was Suleiman, the cook of friends of ours. He’s always to be found where the action is. I slowed down and stopped next to him.

“What’s going on?”

“Popobawa was in the school. An old woman saw him and ran after him. They say she caught him.”

“Did the children see him?”

“Some did, and they all rushed out screaming. They’re not going back”.

Fifty metres down the road, I could see a crowd gathered at the police station.

“They say the woman was taken there”, Suleiman told me.

It was unclear whether she was with or without the Popobawa she was supposed to have captured. Later some people said that the woman herself was the Popobawa! The accusations get more ridiculous. (Jansen 1995)

It is apparent that there was considerable confusion over the details of this incident at the time, and that a number of alternative interpretations began to circulate from the outset. Nothing certain is known about the identity or subsequent fate of the principal characters in this drama, whether man, woman, or bat. The lack of further information on this incident leaves open the possibility that it was not a case of mob justice at all, but an outbreak of collective panic originating, for whatever reason, in the school at Mazizini.

The killing at Bumbwini (mid-April 1995)

The incident at Mazizini was the last recorded incident in Zanzibar town during the 1995 panic, but it was not the last serious one on Unguja island. Here is Bethan Rees Jones again:

Increasingly, rural areas of Unguja were affected while incidents died down in Zanzibar Town. Weeks later a man was beaten to death at Bumbwini and on April 28th, another man was killed at Nungwi. (Rees Jones 1996)

On 21 April 1995 a taxi driver in Zanzibar town told me that Popobawa had moved out of Zanzibar town and into the countryside about a week earlier, i.e. sometime around 14 April 1995. The following day, 22 April, Bethan Rees Jones confirmed in conversation that Popobawa had indeed moved out of the town to places like Mahonda to the north and also across to Dar es Salaam. The killing at Bumbwini most likely occurred in the second half of April. It was one of the last of the Popobawa narratives which Jamila wrote up for me, given to me in March 1996. Here is her account:

To the north of the capital of Unguja (Zanzibar town) there's a village called Bumbwini. If you want to go to this village from town – and if you don't have your own vehicle – you must board the No.2 country bus.

One day a man appeared at Darajani and when he saw the No.2 bus he boarded it. From this moment on, once he'd got inside the bus, he didn't say a single word until it had reached its destination. His only activity in the vehicle was just to look into the eyes of other people. The other passengers on the bus were people from Mangapwani and Bumbwini, and almost all of them knew one another. The only stranger was that man who closely resembled someone who was dumb.

All of the other passengers began to ask, "Who is this?" but no answer was forthcoming. As the turnboy announced [the different stops], "Fujoni... Nyumba ya Ndege... Mangapwani... bring your money!", the stranger remained silent. Finally the turnboy ventured to touch him and ask, "Eh! How come you're so quiet?", but he replied with just one word: "*Bado*", "Not yet". Given his silence and apparent nervousness, all of the people in the vehicle started worrying about his intentions, and they decided to follow him to the end of the journey.

The bus continued on its journey until it reached Bumbwini Bwaga, which is indeed the final stop for this vehicle. Some of the passengers got off the bus before this point, but the others, who wanted to see where he was going to, remained on the bus till the end. The driver switched off the engine and the passengers began to alight. The turnboy touched the stranger again and told him: "We've arrived, father. What's up – haven't you got there yet?" The man started a little and then got up and began to alight.

The stranger stepped down from the bus and stood by the side of the road, looking hither and thither as he did so. A local man, one of those who was on the bus, approached him and asked: "Hey, who are you looking for, or rather who is your host here?" The stranger explained that he was searching for a certain young man, and gave his name. However in that area there was no one with that name. All of the people who were there asked one another, but not one of them had heard of a person of that name.

As a result it was decided to take the stranger to the local *sheha*, the leader of their *shehia* [administrative unit]. He was taken to the *sheha* and the *sheha* himself began to ask him a lot of questions. However, the stranger was unable to answer even a single question, and in the eyes of all of the people there he appeared to lack any grounds for being there. The *sheha* therefore called on a member of the local militia (*askari mgambo*) to search him. He was asked to hand over his baggage so that it could be searched, but he refused. As a result the people present began to shout: "This is Popobawa! This is Popo!"

One of them went off on a bicycle to report to the police. Meanwhile at the *sheha*'s a serious commotion began. The stranger's bag (*mkoba*) was pulled from him by force and a search of it begun. Inside the bag were a lot of objects (*vifaa*), including a large amulet (*herizi*) which gave off an awful stench, and dry leaves which the islanders

usually call *mafusho* (and which are used to fumigate small children, or even adults who have come down with certain types of sickness). The stranger also had a small bottle which contained a certain medicine, the use of which was not known, and there were lots of other things besides.

Seeing these things, the people present believed that this man was indeed one of the Popobawas (*mapopo bawa*) which they had heard about. They began to beat him with sticks, with stones, and with their fists, until the police arrived, at which point he was very weak from the beating. The police took him to the police station and then rushed him to the hospital. Unfortunately before arriving at the hospital his heart stopped, and he was delivered there as a corpse. He was kept in the hospital so that his relatives could find him: an announcement was made on the radio, but none of his relatives came forward and it was proved that he was indeed Popobawa. (“Jamila” 1996)

Jamila’s is the only detailed account of this incident, which was not mentioned in Jansen’s later diary entry (see below).

The killing at Nungwi (28 April 1995)

As we have seen this final incident was dated 28 April by Bethan Rees Jones. It occurred after Jamila had written her narratives, and is presumably the killing referred to by Henriette Jansen at the end of her third diary entry, dated 4 May 1995:

Now, one month after the first murder, in the town, the Popobawa scare has calmed down somewhat. Popobawa has moved into the shamba (rural areas). Though it may seem quieter, the day before yesterday, yet another unfortunate person was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and a second Popobawa was murdered. (Jansen, 1995)

Although this would date the killing as occurring on 2 May 1995, it almost certainly describes the same event. On 3 May 1995 a colleague in Wete, Suleiman, told me that someone suspected to be Popobawa had been killed on Unguja island in the last couple of days. These discrepancies in dating no doubt reflect the distance from events in Nungwi and the time that news took to travel. Only three cases of such killing were known to have taken place in 1995, all of them on Unguja. This was confirmed to me a year later by a herbalist and traditional practitioner on the island whose brother had been especially active in waging spiritual warfare against Popobawa on Pemba.⁷

The only details I have of the Nungwi case were given to me by a local schoolteacher in July 1996⁸:

Popobawa came to Nungwi during the first month of the Muslim calendar (*fungo mosi*), not long after celebrations of Idd-ul-Fitr (*siku kuu*) at the end of the holy month of Ramadhan. It troubled them for a whole month. Women in particular went into possession fits and people slept outside of their houses all night. The affair came to an end when one day a young man arrived on a bicycle and said that he wanted to cross to Tumbatu island by boat (*jahazi*). But, they asked, why had he come to Nungwi by bike

⁷ I discussed the Popobawa panic with this man at Limbani in Wete on 15 June 1996. He also claimed to have used his own magic to catch a manifestation of Popobawa in a bottle, but was dissuaded by his father and brother from showing it to people – because of the disturbance this would cause. He told me that instead he had buried it in a deep hole in the ground.

⁸ Interviewed at Nungwi on 16 July 1996, jointly with Helle Goldman, during our survey of practices and beliefs threatening the Zanzibar leopard (Goldman and Walsh 1997).

when it's easier to sail to Tumbatu from Mkokotoni? They investigated, and found that in his bag he had charms (*hirizi*) and small bottles which smelled very badly. They also established that he was from Rufiji – as were many other manifestations of Popobawa. He was then very badly beaten – almost to the point of death. He was taken to the KMKM [*Kikosi Maalum cha Kuzuia Magendo*, Special Anti-smuggling Unit] post near Nungwi lighthouse. From there he was whisked away by the police to hospital – he doesn't know where. Immediately after this Popobawa stopped troubling Nungwi. (paraphrased from my notes)

Although it does not mention his death, this account implies that the Nungwi victim died in hospital. Although the schoolteacher did not know which direction Popobawa had come from, his account suggests that the panic first arrived in Nungwi at a relatively early date: the four-day Idd-ul-Fitr celebrations began on 3 March 1995 and ended on the 6th. He opined that Nungwi had been attacked by Popobawa, whereas other villages in the constituency had not, because most of its residents were supporters of the opposition CUF (Civic United Front) party. It is quite possible then that the panic crossed directly from Pemba, where the island's CUF majority had already begun to blame the ruling CCM (*Chama cha Mapinduzi*) party for the spiritual affliction being inflicted on them.

Scapegoats and folk devils

In sum then, we have evidence for five, possibly six, cases of collective violence during the 1995 panic against men suspected to be Popobawa or manifestations thereof. Three of these, all on Unguja island, resulted in death. How do we account for this violence? Although this is a small sample of cases, and the descriptions of them vary in level of detail, some obvious patterns can be discerned.

Figure 2: Victims of collective violence and their characteristics

Location of incident	Killed?	Stranger?	Suffering from illness?	Carrying medicine / charms etc.
Mti Ulaya, Wete	No	No, but mistaken for one	Yes, mental illness	No
Likoni	No	Yes, from the Tanga area	Yes, seeking treatment	Yes
Mti Pepo, Zanzibar town	Yes	Yes, from Dar es Salaam	Yes, mental illness	Yes
Mazizini, Zanzibar town	No	?	?	?
Bumbwini	Yes	Yes, but origin unknown	?	Yes
Nungwi	Yes	Yes, from the Rufiji area	?	Yes

Their salient characteristics of the known victims are shown in Figure 2. All but one of the five about whom we have information were strangers to the communities in which they were attacked. At least three of them were from (different) locations on the Tanzanian mainland. The only exception was a man who was in the wrong place at the wrong time – at night on the streets of Wete during a frenzied Popobawa chase – and mistaken for the evil spirit. It is perhaps no surprise that all or most of the victims of mob justice during the Popobawa panic were unknown or unrecognised men. Strange men are perhaps generally seen as more threatening than women, and Popobawa was generally conceived to be male. As strangers they were perceived to be outsiders without local connections and lacking the protection of kin, neighbours and friends.⁹ This made them vulnerable to suspicion and attack. By contrast, when the first victim in Wete was discovered to be a local man known to have mental health problems, people in the neighbourhood are said to have rallied round to look after him.

The mainland origin of at least three of the victims made them even more vulnerable to suspicion. In 1995 Popobawa was seen by many people to be an external threat originating in one way or another from mainland Tanzania (for details see Walsh 2009). The suggestion in one account that the man in the mortuary at Mnazi Mmoja hospital had scars on his body like those of a Makonde may also be significant in this context. The Makonde originally came to Zanzibar as slaves and immigrant labourers from Mozambique. They are often represented in the islands as archetypal savages, non-believers with a penchant for deep facial scarification and the wearing of large lip-plugs. During the Zanzibar Revolution a number of Makonde were employed as thugs by the self-styled Field Marshal Okello, who used them to terrorise the inhabitants of Mkoani and the south Pemba. I have suggested elsewhere that it may be no accident that the first Popobawa panic on Pemba was blamed on a man of Makonde origin (2009: 27).

If the presence of strangers during the 1995 panic was one cause for suspicion, then odd appearance and behaviour was another. Two of the victims were said to be suffering from mental illness; according to his parents the man killed in Zanzibar town had come over from Dar es Salaam for hospital treatment (perhaps at Kidongo Chekundu psychiatric hospital). A third victim, the man beaten up at Likoni, told his inquisitors that he had been hospitalised for a long time with an illness that he did not specify, and was now seeking traditional treatment in Kojani. Judging by Jamila's secondary account of his behaviour, he may also have been suffering from mental health problems. It goes without saying that people with serious psychiatric and other illnesses are especially vulnerable in stressful situations, and may be less capable than others of explaining their actions let alone defusing verbal aggression and threats of violence.

Four of the victims were also said to be carrying traditional medicines and charms, along with ritual and other paraphernalia, the purposes of which was open to speculation. While the wearing of small amulets and charms is widespread, the possession of large amounts of such material inevitably leads to suspicion that the

⁹ I am grateful to Ray Abrahams for making this last point and suggesting other ways in which these men might be considered as 'disconnected' and so vulnerable to suspicion and collective violence by community members.

bearer is a traditional doctor (*mganga*) and/or up to no good and engaged in sorcery (*uchawi*) or other nefarious activities. As an evil being, Popobawa was also widely thought to carry material of this kind, including the charm that on some accounts was the source of his terrible smell. Suspicious strangers behaving oddly and carrying such objects conformed to widespread stereotypes of Popobawa during the 1995 panic, and were therefore especially prone to being targeted by anxious citizens who were all too ready to coalesce into violent mobs.

Of course it may be that common representations of Popobawa, including the possession of charms and other paraphernalia, have been introduced into the accounts of his identification. This may also have happened with at least some other features of the narratives that I have reported here. There are intriguing parallels, for example, between the story of the man at Likoni who wanted to cross to Kojani, and the man at Nungwi who declared his intention to travel to Tumbatu island, a similarly isolated location that has also retained elements of traditional social organisation and practice. Without further information, particularly on the second case, it is difficult to say much more about this, and it might after all be no more than coincidence.

It is also important to note that many Zanzibaris resisted the stereotypes and scapegoating of individuals during the 1995 panic. The accounts given in this paper include a number in which the narrator and/or actors in the narrative cast doubt on alleged identifications of Popobawa. In some cases the police and other forces acted to protect the victims of assault; and we know that after the first killing the government and religious authorities in Zanzibar town made strenuous, though not entirely successful efforts, to persuade people not to take the law into their own hands.

This may go some way towards explaining why there were not more instances of mob violence towards presumed Popobawas in 1995, at least in the capital. But there were also other factors at work. On Pemba island and in the CUF-supporting communities of Unguja a collective folk devil was found in the shape of the ruling CCM party and its grandees, who were blamed for sending Popobawa to distract them from campaigning for the first national multiparty elections later in the year (Walsh 2009: 28-29).¹⁰ The solution adopted by CUF supporters was to wage both spiritual and verbal warfare against CCM: while some members of the ruling party were threatened, they were too well protected to become individual subjects of mob action, and throughout the election campaign and after remained firmly in command of the army and other instruments of state-controlled violence.

Underlying trajectories of violence (and non-violence)

Although the rulers of Zanzibar have not been afraid to employ violence against citizens threatening their monopoly of power, and the victims of this violence have sometimes attempted to respond in kind, many Zanzibaris remain reluctant to confront and take direct action against their kith and kin, even when others might think they have good reason to do so. When President Karume initiated a nationwide anti-witchcraft campaign after the 1964 Revolution, the persecution of individual witches on Unguja island fizzled out relatively quickly, while the killing of the leopards that

¹⁰ Contrast the first Popobawa panic during the first President Karume's rule, when he provided Pembans with an individual scapegoat who was subsequently gaoled (Walsh 2009: 27).

were presumed to be under their control continued unabated until the 1990s and there were very few left to kill (Walsh and Goldman 2007). When Tekelo, a witchfinder from the mainland, worked his way across from Unguja to Pemba in the early 1990s, he was eventually spurned by Pemban villagers objecting to his open humiliation of the accused witches in their midst. Indeed when the Popobawa panic began to spread on Pemba in February 1995, one theory was that this was Tekelo's revenge for being earlier turned away from the island (Walsh 2009: 27).

Needless to say, both the threat and practice of violence have played a very significant role in the modern history of Zanzibar. The 19th century Arab state was grounded in the structural violence inherent in its trade and slave-based economy; the British abolished slavery but reinforced the racial and class divisions that remained in its wake. The extraordinarily violent Zanzibar Revolution is widely agreed to have been a direct consequence of the failure of the islands' colonial rulers to prepare them for a more equitable future. David Parkin has therefore asked whether the Popobawa panic in 1995 recreated "the fears and terror of the oppression and brutality suffered by the people of Zanzibar during and since slavery", and as such prepared the emotive ground for the electoral campaign of that year and the escalating political conflict between CUF and CCM (2004: 115-116).

In an earlier presentation (Walsh 2010) I have argued that the panic was indeed shaped in part by trauma, both by memories of past violence – in particular collective memories of the Zanzibar Revolution – and by the severe anxiety that was afflicting many Zanzibaris in the run-up to the 1995 elections. Hatred breeds hatred and violence begets violence. The violence and suffering that Popobawa was believed to have inflicted on people in 1995 goes some way towards explaining the brutal treatment that they meted out on occasion to strangers who were acting oddly and so suspected to embody Popobawa. To a large extent, however, people's anger was either suppressed or diverted elsewhere, into other forms of action, spiritual and political, against both Popobawa and the evil genie's presumed masters.

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