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## REFERENCES

GLASSMAN, Jonathan. – *War of Words, War of Stones : Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2011, 414 p., bibl.

- 1 Writing the history of a place, Zanzibar, where contentious and competing distortions of the past are pervasive today, where facts are reinvented to fit contemporary needs and claims, and where homespun nationalist history has long prevailed over the history of academic historians, is not an easy task. Jonathan Glassman proves up to it, though his work may not please local amateur historians. In *War of Words, War of Stones*, the author, a historian at Northwestern University who was much applauded for a previous book about rebellion and violence on the Swahili coast of Eastern Africa, aims to explain the birth of racial thought in Zanzibar in the 1950s and its violent impact on the population of this tiny Indian Ocean archipelago off the East African coast, today part of Tanzania. The book is first and foremost a political and cultural history of the last decade before independence, whose detailed and finely depicted intricacies, grounded in numerous archival sources and interviews, are explored over 379 pages (text and references) and eight chapters. As such, it is an incisive contribution to the understanding of the Zanzibari recent past which will fulfil the expectations of scholars working on this area today. But the book is more than that : it boldly engages with current theoretical debates on the determining actors and factors—ideas and discourses in the first places— that shape the past, most especially giving insight into the processes that trigger violence. The question of how discourse shapes subjectivities and, in a situation where real or imagined fears of the Other are internalized, can (but not inevitably) lead to massacres guides the reader throughout the text. Glassman again explores the theme of violence which constituted the central topic of *Feasts and Riots*, employing a similar method : starting from a major violent event, here the pogrom of

people of Arab origin in June 1961, he tracks the causes and the conditions of this event in a past of increased economic differentiation, social distinction, political struggles and, above all, ideological manipulation– in the case of Zanzibar, the construction, politicisation and opposition of two “races”, to refer to locally-built identity categories in use, “Africans” and “Arabs”. As such, *War of Words, War of War* is of interest not only to historians but also to sociologists, political scientists and anthropologists interested in unravelling the threads of wide-scale violence.

- 2 Opposing a trend represented by the work of Mahmood Mamdani on the Rwandan genocide that contends that in Rwandan society, “races” were invented by the colonizer, Glassman argues that the rise and increased pervasiveness of racial thought in Zanzibar is not the result of the sudden import of a foreign notion (“race”) by the European colonial powers (chapters 1 and 2). He demonstrates that, rather than being the product of colonialism, racial thought emerged from the work of homegrown nationalist intellectuals who, in the debates and disputation of the years 1957-1964 when political parties were created and the prospect of independence at reach, “created a locally hegemonic discourse of racial difference” (p. 7). By stressing the crucial role of the literati in articulating and disseminating racial thought in colonial Zanzibar, the author clearly opposes two trends in social sciences theory, one that sees the state as an allpowerful actor in its search for hegemony, the other inspired by subaltern studies that tends to make common people the sole driving force in society.
- 3 He shows that the local lettered created this pervasive discourse by turning a blind eye to an age-old history of ethnic fluidity and racial indeterminacy in a cosmopolitan archipelago characterised by continuous waves of migration throughout the Indian Ocean (chapter 2). They essentialized existing social categories which had arisen from the political economy of Zanzibar–based upon the slave trade and plantation economy– and from the emergence of the state, a sultanate, led by an indigenized yet ideologically Arab-centred Omani aristocracy. This discourse of racial difference polarized Arab-ness and African-ness on the ground of their incommensurable cultural (Arabic way of life) and religious (the practice of Islam) patterns with the objective to promote different conceptions of belonging and nationhood (Chapter 3 to 5). The “bombardment of words” of distrust, insult and humiliation, through the press in the late 1950s and early 1960s (chapter 5) both by the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), which posited itself as the spokesman of Africans, and by educated members of the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP), scions of Arab families who defended Zanzibar “civilisational” nationalism by referring to the Islamic culture of the Arabian Peninsula, is identified as the root of the wide diffusion of racial thought in Zanzibari society and its exacerbating divisive impact. Associated with the diffusion of stereotypes and rumours which created “discursive spirals of reciprocal dehumanization” in the population (p. 212), such exclusionary racial thought resulted in a general atmosphere of mutual hatred. Intense fears arose that the Other, built as a cruel, revengeful and bloodthirsty individual, would take up arms first. Internalized in people’s subjectivities, those fears finally led to two major pogroms in the islands in post-election contexts : in June 1961, such a pogrom took the life of 68 people of supposedly Arab origins, while in January 1964, anchored anxiety degenerated into the mass violence of the “Revolution” after the newly elected government of independent Zanzibar was overthrown and replaced by the ASP regime of President Karume. Both events targeted groups of populations regarded as alien, that is, people of Arab, Indian and Comorian origin (Chapter 7, 8).

Glassman's thesis undeniably asserts the agency of homegrown thinkers and their role in producing socially efficient narratives that are consonant with ordinary people—hence contributing to orientate their action. A *foule-en-action* is therefore not simply moved by “political tensions” or “extreme poverty”, or even straightforward “manipulation”, as some common sense made social theory has long assumed: collective action necessitates a specific configuration within which the rhetoric produced by local intellectuals resonates with a cultural repertoire of ideas, values and principles that undergird conceptions of morality, justice and ethics. The conclusion, which states that racial thought still prevails in contemporary political battles in Zanzibar, reveals how much the dark past of racial thought and violence the Isles, far from falling into oblivion, lurks under the surface.