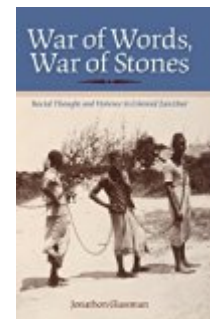


**Jonathon Glassman.** *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. Illustrations. xii + 398 pp. \$27.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-22280-0.



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Jonathon Glassman in *War of Words, War of Stones* strives to unravel the paradox surrounding Zanzibari culture. It is often held to be the epitome of transnational and cosmopolitan culture characterized by a high degree of fluidity. Yet during the Time of Politics (1950s to 1960s), Zanzibar became a victim of deep racial divisions that severely complicated the discourse on nationalism.

In part 1, Glassman challenges the view of some authors that the construction of a racial state in Zanzibar was a creation of British colonialists. Instead, he traces the origin of the racial state to the Omani conquest of Zanzibar and the entire East African coast during the preceding century. While acknowledging that the British played a role in making Zanzibari racial distinctions, he stresses that the British more or less acted on the realities they encountered on the ground. This argument can hardly be disputed. As the leading Zanzibari historian Abdul Sheriff has shown, Zanzibar's antagonistic racial relations date back to the introduction of a plantation econ-

omy that created social classes which conspicuously coincided with racial categories.[1]

In chapter 3, the author explains the role of a secular intelligentsia and the origins of exclusionary ethnic nationalism. His main source of information is a magazine, *Mazugumzo ya Walimu* (Teachers' Conversations), written and edited by schoolteachers employed by the colonial Department of Education. Most of these teachers, according to Glassman, were members of Zanzibar's elite Arab families. Interestingly, the author notes that although a striking number of editors and contributors of this magazine became prominent figures during the nationalist struggles, they cannot be directly associated with the genesis of racial politics on the islands. Glassman argues that "the intelligentsia who spearheaded the ZNP [Zanzibar Nationalist Party] had long advocated an inclusive vision of the nation, both in the classroom and on the public stage, in which all divisions of race and class would be transcended by loyalty to the sultan and to the values of Islamic civilization that he supposedly represented." In-

stead, the fathers of racial politics are “the poorly educated ideologues of the African Association and ASP [Afro Shirazi Party] whose crude anti-Arab polemics informed most of the later pogroms.” He further acknowledges that “ASP racial demagoguery lay behind much of the violence of the Time of Politics. But that demagoguery did not arise in a vacuum; rather it emerged within the context of ethnonationalist political debates whose general terms had been set largely by the elite intelligentsia” (p. 76). Glassman argues that “the intelligentsia invoked an Arab-driven history of Zanzibar civilization,” which privileged “one racially defined stratum of society—the town dwelling, land-owning Arab elite.” According to him, it was this version of civilizational nationalism that was countered by propagandists affiliated “with the African and Shirazi associations with narratives of Arab conquest and enslavement and with a definition of the nation based on race rather than *ustaarabu* [civilization]” (p. 77). As to why the counter-version of nationalism was so strong, it is not self-evident in the text; perhaps the author could have enriched his discussion by exploring factors beyond Zanzibar.

In chapter 4, the author discusses the role of subaltern intellectuals in the rise of racial nationalism. He describes two versions of nationalism. The first was represented by nationalist intelligentsia, most of whom became prominent leaders in the ZNP and advanced their ideas in *Mazungumzo ya Walimu*, and later *Mwongozi* (Leader), an independent weekly paper founded in 1942 by Ahmed Seif Kharusi, later edited by Ali Muhsin al-Barwani, and by 1955 a ZNP mouthpiece. He argues that “by the end of war the thinking of subaltern nationalists had begun to diverge significantly from that of the nationalist intelligentsia” (p. 105). Subaltern intellectuals, most of whom would later join the ASP, used *Afrika Kwetu* (Africa Our Homeland), the African Association’s weekly paper edited by Tanganyika immigrant Mtoro Rehani, as their outlet. *Afrika Kwetu*

played a leading role in convincing a significant number of Zanzibaris to perceive their political interests in terms of “explicit racial categories” (p. 108).

Interestingly, the author distances himself from the mainstream discussions favored mostly by mainland and foreign scholars who write about African majority and Arab minority discourse on the islands. He presents the competing versions of nationalism in Zanzibar as a contest between African (racial) nationalism as advocated by the ASP, Shirazi ethnic nationalism advocated by the Zanzibar and Pemba People’s Party (ZPPP), and what he calls “civilizational nationalism” advocated by the ZNP. The author rightly posits that the three versions were in essence exclusionary, although the ZNP did not involve overt racial politics like the others. This line of thinking has also been well explicated by Issa Shivji in *Pan-Africanism or Pragmatism? Lessons of the Tanganyika-Zanzibar Union* (2008). However, if Glassman is explaining racial/ethnic nationalism on the part of ASP and ZPPP, why is it that the so-called Shirazi ethnic nationalism does not aggressively exclude Zanzibaris of Arab origin, but largely does exclude mainlanders? If that is the case, it means Shirazi nationalism is a special blend crystallized by a racial identity, but in essence is predominantly civilizational.

In this same chapter, Glassman takes pains to dispute the official early ZNP narrative that “search[ed] for nativist authenticity” (p. 125). This narrative stressed the role played by village organizers who were indigenous islanders (whom Glassman refers to as Zanzibar Africans) rather than members of the Arab Association. He challenges the claim of nationalist intelligentsia, like Ali Muhsin and other ZNP activists, that “their party originated in a movement organized by the villagers of KiembeSamaki ... that in 1951 culminated in disturbances that came to be remembered as the Cattle Riot or Cattle War (*Vita vya Ng’ombe*).”[2] The author completely dismisses

the connection between the Cattle Riot and the founding of the ZNP, arguing that “it was probably an invention” (p. 125). Interestingly, however, Glassman admits that just as the general strike “had galvanized pan-Africanists to an awareness of the potential of mass organizing, the Cattle Riot seems to have had a similar impact on the progressive nationalists of the Arab Association.” Further, “the KiembeSamaki protesters had openly defied the colonial regime, both in their refusal to inoculate their cattle and in their confrontation with the police.” The author raises an argument that the protesters were not recorded to have uttered “anything that might be interpreted as a nationalist sentiment” and that “the most audible expression of a mobilizing sense of community were the calls of ‘jihad’ and ‘Allahu Akbar’ heard outside the courthouse” (p. 126). These arguments, however, are insufficient to reject claims that the ZNP might have sprung from authentic impulses of peasant protest, which ultimately led to the founding of the National Party of the Subjects of the Sultan of Zanzibar (NPSS). Pronouncements of such words by a predominantly Muslim community, in my view, do not necessarily negate the possibility of the existence of nationalist consciousness and the struggle for self-determination. Such words, for example, are common today among Muslim communities in the Arab world in their struggle for democratization, and do not necessarily imply any inclination to the establishment of a religiously based state. Thus, the conclusion drawn by the author might be largely attributed to the limitation of discourse analysis, i.e., excessive reliance on what has been explicitly written or said. In politics, however, many important actions may be taken and decisions made underground without being clearly stated publicly; and sometimes, public statements may be just a camouflage for hidden motives. On this issue of the ZNP’s origins, notwithstanding the author’s arguments, the debate will continue. Hence, further research is needed to establish the authentic genesis of the ZNP.

In chapter 5, “Politics and Civil Society during the Newspaper Wars,” the author examines the war of words in newspapers. During the Time of Politics, one of the devastating arsenals was the “bombardment of words,” a phrase used by the Commission of Inquiry in discussions of the June 1961 killings. “Zanzibar’s political journalists engaged in personal insult and other forms of *matusi* [insult and abusive language] that tested the limits of conventional discourse” (p. 150). All papers were invariably involved in the spread of insults—*Agozi* and *Afrika Kwetu*, associated with ASP, and *Mwongozi*, associated with ZNP, with the former leading.<sup>[3]</sup> Additionally, what was said on street corners, Glassman notes, was more horrible. In this chapter, the author shows the extent to which irresponsible journalism could lead to heightened community hatred that could fragment a society.

Glassman assesses the role of stereotyping in chapter 6. He posits that there was a tendency to perceive “people living at the margins of established community structures ... to have an innate propensity for crime and other antisocial behavior” (p. 182). This stereotyping largely affected mainlanders, particularly the Makonde who were perceived as violent criminals and thieves, but also the Wamanga and Washihiri, also thought to be violent criminals. In addition, Glassman examines rumors of racial violence. Rumors about criminal offences “were central to the discursive spirals of reciprocal dehumanization that culminated in bloodshed in June 1961 and during the revolution itself” (p. 212).

The analytical problem that arises here is that by elevating crime rumors to the level of underlying causes of spiraling violence on the islands, the author focuses on delineating symptoms of the problem rather than uncovering the underlying causes. In his analysis, Glassman considers rumors as causal factors, but one could advance an alternative hypothesis that such rumors simply accelerated the process of racial violence. It could

well be argued that there were underlying political-economic, or sociological issues. Why did the violence in 1961 largely target the Manga Arabs rather than other Arabs who were politically more significant? Part of the explanation, according to the author, was that it was presumed that Wamanga provided security services to the ZNP just as Wamakonde were believed to provide the same to the ASP. Analytically, this is a simplistic explanation. An alternative explanation might be that it was because the rioters were significantly motivated by racial sentiments and Wamanga, most of whom were relative newcomers, were easily identifiable.

Chapter 7, "Violence as Racial Discourse," and chapter 8, "June as Chosen Trauma," present more or else the same material such that they could have constituted a single chapter. In these two chapters, Glassman provides a detailed account of what transpired leading to the June 1961 riots which left sixty-eight people dead and several hundred wounded, mostly Manga Arabs. Glassman supports the conclusion drawn by the Commission of Inquiry that stressed the role of political speech in communal violence.

In his conclusion and epilogue, Glassman discusses the "shared discourse of race." He compares the first Time of Politics and the postrevolution period up to multiparty politics since 1992. Glassman concludes that "Zanzibar's current political tensions have not yet been racialized to the degree that they were during the first Time of Politics [as] most Zanzibaris seem to have resisted the voices trying to stir up racial fears." This is a truism. But the author argues that "to the extent that such voices still have some purchase, racial fears have not simply 'persisted,' from the early 1960s," but "were remade during the intervening years, in part through the habits of everyday life, but also by the willed actions of new generations of intellectuals and politicians" (p. 298).

Glassman argues that the persistence of racial thinking is due to it having been "remade not sim-

ply by recirculating old ideas, but by supplementing and reshaping them with added elements." He cites a number of issues, including "debates over the union and the legitimacy of a state based on claims of African racial nationalism; the quasi Marxist rhetorics of class and of neocolonial domination; historical debates about the events of 1964; and more recently, the global discourse of the 'war' on 'Islamic terrorism'" (p. 298). Interestingly, the author concludes that "of all these elements, the regime's racial nationalism has had the most profound effect. Although African racial nationalism has played a liberating role in many parts of the world, in Zanzibar it has run a perverse course, shaping opposition to ASP-CCM [*Chama cha Mapinduzi*, Party of the Revolution] government in ways that have reinforced nativist hostility toward mainlanders" (pp. 298-299). This kind of conclusion is not a conventional one.<sup>[4]</sup> Glassman deviates from the mainstream thinking of most scholars on Zanzibar's politics, and his work remains the most comprehensive study to date of discourse analysis on racial thought and violence in colonial Zanzibar.

In spite of its comprehensiveness and rigor, the book does not offer a clear main theme. Two inextricably linked but fundamentally different themes--racial discourse and civilizational discourse--are interwoven to such an extent that the reader is unsure which is the focus. The author seems to be talking about both in his narratives. However, in the conclusion it is the racial discourse that is prominently featured. As he aptly puts it, "of all these elements, the regime's racial nationalism has the most profound effect" (p. 298). Perhaps some Africans, particularly those of recent mainland origin, might be inspired by African racial nationalism, while other identities--mostly the Shirazis, Arabs and Indians, and Comorians--would rather talk of Zanzibari nationalism as a form of civilizational discourse. For example, viewing the union in terms of Zanzibari nationalism versus African racial nationalism is an intricate question. In other words, it is an at-

tempt to compare the incomparable. These are two different currents, one is largely racial and the other is largely civilizational.[5] They may both be exclusive in a way. But it is widely believed that civilizational form of organization and mobilization is generally less exclusive than the racial one. It is easier to assimilate to a dominant culture than change one's racial identity.

Methodologically, Glassman (a historian well versed in the history of the East African coast) employs a discourse analysis. As has often been pointed out, discourse analysis tends to lead to an overinterpretation of data without critically anchoring the analysis in any systematic theoretical perspective. As a result, it tends to judge results according to political implications rather than theoretical and methodological rigor. In other words, discourse analysis is not analysis in support of theory but merely interpretation in support of belief. Thus an analyst tends to select only those texts that will confirm his or her beliefs.[6]

There is no hard data provided through discourse analysis. The reliability and validity of research findings largely depend on the logic of one's arguments. And therefore even the best constructed arguments are subject to counterinterpretations. For example, the author states that the commissioners "portray[ed] the [June 1961] riots as the product of primordial racial hatreds. In fact, like the interpretation in this book and like much of the critical literature on South Asian communal violence, the commissioners stressed the role of political speech: what they called 'bombardment of words' to which Zanzibaris had been subjected during the Time of Politics" (p. 244).

Elevating the role of speech to a major causal factor makes for a theoretically shaky argument. One could advance a counterargument that the role of speech was at best a catalyst rather than a causal factor. Or alternatively, if the role of speech could be elevated to the status of a causal factor, then obviously it could not be a single factor or the most salient factor, but one in a set of multiple

factors, some of which might be even more influential. One could, for example, pose a similar question regarding the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Did the Rwandese Hutu kill their fellow countrymen and women because of the racial propaganda mounted by the Hutu extremists? Few analysts would take that stance. There were clearly underlying causes that led to such propaganda and therefore although propaganda by itself may act as both an independent and dependent variable, it might be more of the latter than of the former--words construct or deconstruct when they have substance.

On the whole, the book is well researched and written, and presents the most comprehensive and rigorous study of popular and intellectual discourses on nationalist politics on the islands. Relying on the richness of the archival sources available before the 1964 revolution, the author has made a lofty contribution to the history of Zanzibar which has been plagued by extreme partisan analysis from politicians to commoners, to intellectuals both local and foreign. By making use of these archival sources, the book presents a balanced view of the state of politics and racial relations in Zanzibar, a view that does not implicate any specific fringe of racial categories but rather presents a fate shared by all racial fringes on the islands, although with different magnitude and intensity.

With 379 pages (text and references) and with the use of a highly scholarly language, the book is not easily accessible to a wide audience. It is strongly recommended to whoever wishes to understand Zanzibar's political history from colonial times to the present, including historians; political scientists and students of politics; sociologists; sociolinguists, particularly those interested in discourse analysis; journalists; and politicians.

#### Notes

[1]. Abdul Sheriff, "The Peasantry under Imperialism, 1873-1963," in *Zanzibar under Colonial Rule*, eds. Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson (London:

James Currey, 1991), 109-140; and Abdul Sheriff, "Race and Class in the Politics of Zanzibar," *AfrikaSpektrum* 36, no. 3 (2001): 301-318. See also Mohammed Bakari, *The Democratization Process in Zanzibar: A Retarded Transition* (Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs, 2001).

[2]. Ali Muhsin Al-Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar: Memoirs* (Dubai: n.p., 1997). See also Aman Thani Fairoz, *Ukweli ni Huu* [This Is the Truth] (Dubai: n.p., 1995).

[3]. "Agozi" was a derogatory term used by ASP derived from the word "magozi" skins (black skins). The label "magozi" was used by ASP's rivals to refer to black people, particularly those of recent mainland origin, who also used to wear pieces of animal skins during their political rallies or celebrations. In retaliation, the ASP called their paper "Agozi" to express their sense of belonging and pride of their black color.

[4]. Only a handful of scholars have clearly come up with such a conclusion in explaining the current state of politics on the islands. See, for example, Sheriff, "Peasantry under Imperialism"; Sheriff, "Race and Class"; and Bakari, *Democratization Process in Zanzibar*

[5]. See also, for example, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

[6]. Henry Widdowson, "Review Article: The Theory and Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Applied Linguistics* 9, no. 1 (1998): 136-151.

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