

Review / Rezension

McMAHON, Elisabeth. 2013. *Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa: From Honor to Respectability*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 293 S. ISBN 978-1-107-02582-0.

reviewed by

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In *Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa*, Elisabeth McMahon explores changes in Pemban society and the development of a distinctly Pemban identity following the British abolition decree of 1897. While the decree did not itself emancipate the island's slaves, it did set off processes through which many of them emancipated themselves. British colonialism offered slaves freedom but also the possibility of vulnerability if they lost the patronage of their owners. New Pemban identities emerged through cooperation among former slaves and elites against the colonial state in the realms of precolonial Islamic beliefs and witchcraft (*uchawi/wachawi*). One's respectability and reputation mattered more than ever before to ensure one's position in the community.

McMahon argues that Pemba's history of emancipation and identity formation was different from those on the mainland or Unguja. Unlike the process Laura Fair describes in Unguja, former slaves in Pemba adopted identities as devout Muslims while maintaining identities as people of the mainland. Pemba never saw widespread resistance against elites or the colonial state; Pembans rather acculturated and accommodated to the changing political situation. Marginalized people based their interactions on understandings of acceptable social behavior. They built social and kinship networks to avoid economic vulnerability. McMahon critiques R.D. Bowles' and Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson's arguments that Pemba did not experience revolution in 1964 because Pemba lacked the class stratification of Unguja, as well as Fair's argument that participation in the revolution would have been an admission of a slave past. Both approaches, she argues, posit former slave Pembans as the dupes of the island's Arab population instead of actors working in their own interest.

McMahon highlights changes in the meaning of the term "*heshima*" from "honor" to "respectability" in the emancipation process. Former slave litigants hoped to attain honor through litigation, but instead attained respectability. Government emancipation did not end slavery, but did allow slaves to impugn the *heshima* of their owners and demonstrate that owners no longer controlled them. There were two primary venues through which Pemban could establish *heshima*, courts and *wachawi*. Courts usurped the power of traditional elites to determine how much *heshima* litigants possessed and the power of elites faded in the face of a new politics of reputation. Open-air courts made reputations a matter of public debate. Economic success became tightly linked to that respectability, as it enabled people to attain the credit necessary to survive between harvests. *Kadhi* courts in particular played a role in creating former slave identities, as they emphasized oral evidence over the written evidence most former slaves lacked but needed in colonial courts. Courts provided women in particular with a new avenue to exert greater control over their own identities. Though courts were gendered as male space, women used *kadhi* courts to assert their rights in civil society, to refuse concubinage, and to save property from male relatives.

The centrality of courts to the process of establishing a Pemban identity provides McMahon with her largest source bases, court records from the Zanzibar National Archives and government documents from British officials on Pemba in the ZNA and Parliamentary Papers, Foreign Office, and Colonial Office archives in the United Kingdom. Court and probate records demonstrate how people identified themselves and resolved conflicts, providing a richness of detail about their lives not available in other sources. Though Pemba lacks the thick legal documentation for quantitative analysis of cases, McMahon notes their richness of detail about litigants' lives. She also uses records from the UMCA and Friends missions on Pemba and conducted interviews to see how former slaves built personal networks.

As the colonial state tried to assert control over Pemba, *wachawi* served as a means of shadow policing Pemban society in part because British officials

refused to acknowledge its existence. It became a sphere in which Pembans could set their own expectations for society and change the island's landscape of power outside of colonial control. Elites tried to use *uchawi* to retain control over the island's social hierarchy. Former slaves, however, participated in witchcraft in order to climb the social hierarchy themselves. Witchcraft was available to all levels of the social hierarchy whereas British legal channels were not always.

McMahon uses Vincent Brown's method of examining death rituals as a site to examine social relations among enslaved people. Who exactly was involved in someone's burial demonstrates who the deceased thought was important and/or who thought the deceased was important, i.e. the deceased's kinship network. Pembans created what McMahon refers to as "networked kinship," kin relations not necessarily based on blood. Kinship relations created during slavery remained in place if both sides benefited but fell apart if one side no longer saw value in the relationship. McMahon thus traces the afterlives of slavery on Pemba and the ways in which former slaves could work within existing networks or create new ones.

McMahon begins the book with an anecdote about Pemba not participating in Zanzibar's revolution of 1964. She traces its isolation from events on Unguja back to its story of emancipation. She notes in her conclusion that abolition marked the beginning of Pemban isolation from the African mainland and the Indian Ocean World. It would have been helpful to explore this process in more detail. Why did the development of a Pemban identity entail moving away from areas with which Pemba had earlier been connected? Why did the continued valence of mainland identities not entail connections to the mainland? The picture of Pemba we are left with in 1930 is that of an isolated backwater with little significance for events elsewhere. *Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa* provides us with another case for exploring the development of Islamic identities in East Africa following abolition. McMahon's analysis of Pemban society helps us think beyond the models of Unguja and the mainland for ways in which former slaves used colonial institutions and Islamic belief to establish positions for themselves

in civil society. We see how marginalized Pembans, rather than being cowed by the colonial state, instead used its institutions to increase the importance of Islamic belief.

MIESCHER, Giorgio. 2013. Die Rote Linie. Die Geschichte der Veterinär- und Siedlungsgrenze in Namibia (1890er-1960er Jahre). Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien. 378 Seiten. ISBN 978-3-905758-28-3.

rezensiert von

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Die Zweiteilung des Landes stellt ein „zentrales strukturelles Merkmal der Geschichte Namibias“ und eine beinahe „nicht mehr hinterfragte Grundvoraussetzung der Geschichtsschreibung“ (S.XIV) dar, hält der an der Universität Basel promovierte Historiker Giorgio Miescher einleitend fest. Über die Hintergründe dieser inneren Spaltung des Landes herrscht in der namibischen Geschichtsschreibung weitgehend Unwissenheit. Diese Forschungslücke dient als Ausgangspunkt für das vorliegende, 378 Seiten umfassende Buch, das im Jahr 2012 in englischer Übersetzung erschienen ist. Miescher bettet die historiographische Rekonstruktion der Grenzziehungsprozesse in eine Bandbreite darin involvierter Themen ein. Diese reichen von Veterinärwesen, über Wildschutz, hin zu Siedlungsentwicklung und zu kolonialer Raumordnung. Bei der Wahl des Forschungsansatzes bricht der Autor mit den die postkoloniale Geschichtsschreibung Namibias dominierenden regional- und ethnogeschichtlichen Ansätzen. Miescher schreibt die Geschichte Namibias aus der Perspektive einer inneren Grenze – der „Roten Linie“.

Die Rote Linie hat ihren Ursprung in einer von der deutschen Kolonialmacht 1896/97 eingerichteten veterinärmedizinischen „Abspermlinie“ (G.M.) zur Abwehr der in das südliche Afrika vordringenden Rinderpest (Kap. 1, S. 1-42). Die Kolonialregierung setzte den Grenzverlauf aufgrund geografischer Bedingungen sowie