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Andreas Zeman, *The Winds of History*

Andreas Zeman, *The Winds of History. Life in a Corner of Rural Africa Since the 19th Century* (Africa in Global History; Bd. 7), Berlin (De Gruyter Oldenbourg) 2023, 479 S., 17 Abb., 65,95 €

How can historical inquiries into a seemingly remote settlement in rural Africa contribute to our understanding of global history at large? Andreas Zeman's work on the history of Nkholongue and neighboring Malango, two villages situated in northern Mozambique on the shores of Lake Malawi with both less than one thousand inhabitants in 2015, offers numerous answers to this question. On the example of these rural African communities, his book presents readers with insightful analyses of topics ranging from the pre-colonial slave trade to (anti)colonialism, from the expansion of Islam to the endurance of matrilineality in the twenty-first century, and from warfare to post-independence economic development.

Winds of History is a *longue durée* account of a small community since its inception as a palisaded settlement in the late nineteenth century, then deeply connected to the caravan trade routes crisscrossing eastern Africa, up until the contemporary era. It seeks to contribute to the extant historiography in two major ways. First, by demonstrating the usefulness of micro-history for global history in its ability to show how wide-ranging phenomena were interpreted and acted upon on a local scale; and second, by questioning elements of the »bigger picture« through paying keen attention to local actors and processes over extended periods of time. I consider it a resounding success on both accounts: Zeman's work not only greatly expands our knowledge of a very understudied region

of south-eastern Africa but also provides a solid example of how small places matter for better understanding the connections and disconnections that constitute global history as a productive research field.

As stated in the book's introduction, Zeman found himself in Nkholongue while engaging with a tourism project located in Niassa Province – the remotest region in Mozambique, as far as most political authorities, financial pundits, and academics in the country are concerned. His study of a »seemingly insignificant« place challenges what he identifies as three problematic views of African history: »The Aboriginal Delusion«, »The Legacy Mode« and »The One-Way-Analysis«. Zeman thus underscores, respectively, that pre-colonial Africa was never inert; that no direct legacies from an essentialized past can be straightforwardly applied to present-day Africa; and that processes of modernization and globalization influenced African societies in complex and non-unidirectional ways.

The array of sources in his study is impressive: he conducted 168 interviews in Mozambique and Malawi between 2010 and 2016 and analyzed data collected from over twenty archives located in six countries, ranging from British missionaries' correspondence to Portuguese military operations. Most importantly, Zeman was successful in consulting numerous archival sources in Niassa Province itself, which is especially exciting news for historians interested in northern Mozambique.

The book's title is a reference to a key narrative device deployed by Zeman in his study. Metaphors of wind and tempestuous times are used throughout the book to indicate how the lives, livelihoods, and political strategies of Nkhlongue's inhabitants were impacted and shaped by global phenomena. The conventional idea of a »wind of change« blowing unilaterally through Africa from the outside, however, is flipped on its head: Zeman does not write a history of African peasants resisting to or being blown away by external forces. His work is rather a detailed study on how historical agency can – and should – also be identified in small places of rural Africa that were anything but isolated from the world, and whose inhabitants found numerous ways to adapt to and mold the historical circumstances beyond their immediate control.

The book's twelve chapters are ordered chronologically – except for chapter eleven, which consists of a thematic incursion into the history of matrilineality in Nkhlongue. Each chapter contains a brief introduction to the topics at hand, an outline of its objectives, and a summary of how the findings from Nkhlongue's history speak to broader historiographical debates. Chapters two and three describe the establishment of the Nkhlongue settlement prior to the onset of colonial rule, dealing with its origins in the East African slave trade and with the subsequent arrival of UMCA missionaries that impacted the institution of slavery across the lakeshore region and beyond. Both these chapters support recent developments in the history of Islamization in East Africa: they portray it as being significantly driven from below. They also complicate the »slavery-to-kinship« paradigm in pre-colonial African history by demonstrating that the expansion of kinship units occurred by violently

incorporating enslaved persons held under the threat of being resold, rather than through a straightforward »integration« process of slaves into local kinship groups. Chapter four then moves on to show how the arrival of European colonizers was met by Nkhlongue's residents in a multitude of ways that cannot be adequately described by the all-encompassing concept of »resistance«. Zeman highlights the diplomatic capacity of local rulers in negotiating with British, German and Portuguese subjects to their own benefit, as well as important transformations in settlement patterns following the onset of European rule.

Chapters five through eight comprise not only most of the book itself, but also represent the bulk of Zeman's argument, namely that microhistory calls for important reconsiderations of the metanarratives conveyed by the »bigger picture«. Thus, the prevailing theme of Portuguese colonialism as exerting an ever-tightening grip over African subjects in Mozambique until the outbreak of the war of independence is questioned by Zeman in chapters five and six. These chapters show how Nkhlongue lost its economic prominence as a wooding station for steam-powered navigation in Lake Malawi and as previous connections to British territories were dismantled by the Portuguese upon the end of Companhia do Niassa's rule in 1929. The ensuing process of economic downturn meant that Nkhlongueans *became*, rather than *remained*, subsistence farmers and spurred most local men into becoming labor migrants in places as far away as South Africa. This case is at odds with descriptions of the imperviousness of African »peasants« to change as well as colonial exactions as the prime mover of labor migration, which adds to the book's innovative potential.

Chapters seven, eight and nine deal intensively with historiographical debates regarding warfare and post-colonial statehood in Mozambique, all the while aptly questioning »liberation script« of the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) – historical narratives that confer legitimacy to its incumbents. It must be highlighted that approaching both the liberation and the civil wars in a single historical account based on intensive archival research and fieldwork within a limited region constitutes a most welcome novelty to Mozambican historiography. So does the effort of incorporating a contemporary appraisal of the twenty-first century in chapter eleven.

Its impressive scope and its outstanding attention to detail notwithstanding, there are a few shortcomings in Zeman's book. As most readers are likely to be unfamiliar with the locations featured in the text, placing the lists of maps and figures at the end rather than at the beginning of the book makes locating the events under discussion unnecessarily cumbersome. And although clever, the three concepts outlined by Zeman in his introduction are not deployed consistently throughout the book, which would arguably still work without these terms.

As the sheer scope of the topics explored in this book is sure to make it an invaluable addition to many libraries, one final note is in order: by publishing his book in open access, Andreas Zeman serves especially the impecunious scholars and students from the global South, as well as independent researchers everywhere. I hope for a translation into Portuguese to be made available soon to further expand his scholarly contributions to wider audiences across the globe, not least in Mozambique itself.

Felipe Barradas Correia Castro Bastos (Guarapuava, Brasilien)