

Andreas Eckert, Ingeborg Grau and Arno Sonderegger (eds.) (2010), *Afrika 1500–1900: Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Edition Weltregionen, 19, Vienna: Promedia Verlag, ISBN 978-3-85371-303-7, 235 pp.

Arno Sonderegger, Ingeborg Grau and Birgit Englert (eds.) (2011), *Afrika im 20. Jahrhundert: Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Edition Weltregionen, 21, Vienna: Promedia Verlag, ISBN 978-3-85371-338-9, 255 pp.

As noted by Eckert, Grau and Sonderegger in *Afrika 1500–1900*, over the past 10 to 15 years there has been a significant increase in the number of general studies on African history published in German. This is a most welcome development that reflects a growing interest in African history. The demand for general studies on Africa's past is closely linked to the recent interest in global history, colonial history and postcolonial studies. It should, however, be added that there is still a huge discrepancy between generalised and specialised studies on African history, the latter of which often do not attract a broad audience in German-speaking countries.

The two volumes under review here were edited by members of the Vienna Institute of African Studies, with the exception of Andreas Eckert (Berlin). The first volume covers African history between 1500 and 1900. The second book focuses on the “long” African twentieth century, from the “Scramble for Africa” to the present day. The two volumes contain 23 articles by 14 scholars, most from Austria and Germany. One of the editors' explicit intentions was to take into account Africa's global and, in particular, trans-Atlantic connections. Examining more than 500 years of African history, they attempt to offer problem-oriented approaches and to avoid top-down interpretations. Therefore, rather than being a classical handbook or textbook, the volumes read as a collection of articles covering a selection of important subjects in African history. Whereas some contributions recapitulate the academic debates in depth – which will be helpful to students and academics but challenging for the general reader – others have the character of essays. The volumes also provide four helpful maps, though an index is regrettably lacking.

After an introduction by the editors, the first volume starts with two general articles. The first one deals with economic history, notably Africa's inclusion into a new world economy (Schicho). The second contribution covers sub-Saharan society and politics (Grau). These are followed by articles on the slave trade and slavery in the Atlantic World and West Africa (Eckert), and in the Indian Ocean World (Campbell). Subsequent chapters are topically and geographically more specific. They analyse Africa's urban history (Baller); the jihadist movements in West Africa (Loimeier); the “modernisation” of the state, economy and society in North Africa (Zach); the interac-

tions of Christian missionaries in Southern Africa (Gütl); the Brazilian diaspora in West Africa (Strickrodt); and abolitionism (Sonderegger).

The second volume takes up some of the same topics, but extends them into the twentieth century. Individual chapters cover nation, state and ethnicity (Eckert); economic paradigms and foreign economic influence in Africa (Schicho); Muslims in Africa (Loimeier); and urbanisation and migration (Baller). In addition, the second volume covers themes such as colonial boundary-drawing and the African (nation-)state (Melber); African political integration (Spielbüchler); Pan-Africanism (Sonderegger); health and healing (Dilger); religion and politics in Nigeria (Grau); and the young generation as a political actor (Englert). The volume closes with two critical essays: on governance by liberation movements (Melber), and on historiography (Sonderegger).

The editors' decision to cover the whole continent including North Africa turns out to be fruitful. External involvements and developments that differ according to region – as in the cases of North and East Africa – are considered, but trans-Saharan exchanges are especially emphasised. The collection stands out in that it traces African history back to the “precolonial” era, itself an unsatisfying term that is rightly challenged in the volumes.¹ At the same time, colonialism is not reduced to a mere historical episode. Although both *Afrika 1500–1900* and *Afrika im 20. Jahrhundert* cover a broad set of themes, some topics have unjustly been neglected. Whereas classic themes of socio-economic and political history have been included, remarkably little attention has been paid to aspects of culture other than religion. The media, education, sports, and memory cultures – the latter having become widely accepted in African historiography – are not discussed. In addition, some important and recently debated topics in African history such as consumerism, environmental history, and the history of war and violence hardly appear. These important omissions notwithstanding, both volumes successfully locate African history in a global context. Several articles take African entanglements with other world regions into account and question why these entanglements often shifted to the disadvantage of African societies.

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1 See in this context: Richard Reid (2011), Past and Presentism: The “Precolonial” and the Foreshortening of African History, in: *Journal of African History*, 52, 2, 135–155.