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Obituary

Gerhard Grohs, 24 June 1929 – 18 February 2015

With the death of Gerhard Grohs, we have lost one of Germany's pioneers in the field of African Studies. Grohs earned a doctorate in law in Heidelberg in 1959, before changing tack and completing a German *Diplom* (equivalent to a master's degree) in sociology in Berlin in 1961. It was at this time that he developed an interest in African Studies, and he went on to shape African Studies in Germany for many decades. He spent time studying in Paris and Pisa and took up visiting professorships at the universities of Leicester and Dar es Salaam, as well as at the New School in New York. Thus, Gerhard Grohs' work was embedded in an international context from the beginning and reflected the influence of both Anglophone and Francophone scholarship. This international network shaped his work as a professor of Sociology at the Free University of Berlin (1969–75) and at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (1975–94). He published extensively in the field of interdisciplinary African Studies, of which he was one of the founders in Germany. His habilitation thesis, *Stufen afrikanischer Emanzipation. Studien zum Selbstverständnis westafrikanischer Eliten* ("Stages of African Emancipation: Studies on the Self-Image of West African Elites") (Stuttgart 1967), opened up a field of study still relevant today and demonstrated an empirical approach that took into account the perspectives of the African actors, which was unusual at the time; the thesis was also significant for its critical approach to the consequences of colonialism. Two edited volumes, *Zur Soziologie der Dekolonisation in Afrika* ("On the Sociology of Decolonization in Africa") (co-edited with Bassam Tibi, Berlin 1973) and *Theoretische Probleme des Sozialismus in Afrika. Negritude und Arusha-Deklaration* ("Theoretical Problems of Socialism in Africa: Negritude and the Arusha Declaration") (Hamburg 1972), bear witness to his lively interest in political and social processes in Africa. Early on in his career, Gerhard Grohs concerned himself with issues relating to human rights in Africa, and he retained this concern throughout his entire scholarly career. He was one of the first scholars in Germany to carry out research on Lusophone Africa. His scholarly publications, numbering nearly 200, can only partially reflect his influence on African Studies in Germany. Gerhard Grohs was one of the first members of the African Studies Association in Germany (Vereinigung für Afrikawissenschaften in Deutschland, VAD; formerly the Vereinigung von Afrikanisten in Deutschland), which

since its foundation in 1969 has stood for the establishment of African Studies as a modern interdisciplinary and politically and socially engaged field of study in Germany. Even though he was the VAD's chairman for only two years, Grohs' dedicated support shaped the work of the association from the beginning. He helped to organize several VAD conferences: in 1975, the Janheinz Jahn Memorial Conference on Neo-African Literature; in 1982, a conference on the differentiation of African elites twenty years after independence; and in 1993, one on the processes and institutions of self-organization. Gerhard Grohs played an important role in the development of the VAD's scholarly and political profile by contributing to the formulation of critical political statements. Particularly significant was the memorandum entitled *Südafrika zum Frieden zwingen* ("Forcing Peace upon South Africa"), published in 1986, which demanded more rigorous political efforts to combat the Apartheid regime in South Africa. He was also able to combine sound empirical scholarship with practical (development) politics as a committed member of the Protestant Church in Germany and the World Council of Churches, also influencing the Africa-related and development policies of the Protestant Church over a long period. With his work, Gerhard Grohs made a significant contribution to the establishment of critical African Studies in Germany, and he taught and inspired more than one generation of Africanists.¹

■ Dieter Neubert

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1 This text was translated into English by Ruth Schubert.