

50 Jahre Unabhängigkeit. Kontinuitäten, Brüche, Perspektiven edited by
THOMAS BIERSCHENK and EVA SPIES

Köln: ~~Köppe~~ Köppe Verlag, 2012. Pp. 572. € 58.00 (pbk)

doi:10.1017/S0022278X13000657

Around 2010, many sub-Saharan African states celebrated 50 years of political independence. The volume *50 Jahre Unabhängigkeit in Afrika. Kontinuitäten, Brüche, Perspektiven* [Continuities, Dislocations and Transformations: Reflections on 50 Years of African Independence] edited by Thomas Bierschenk and Eva Spies, is a compendium of 23 chapters that lucidly take stock and address societal continuities and transformations of the past five decades. As the editors elaborate in the informative introduction, the volume provides not only a retrospect, but most of the 26 authors also refer to future challenges.

The book developed mostly out of presentations at the biennial conference of the African Studies Association in Germany (VAD) in 2010. Unsurprisingly, most of the authors are based at German-speaking research institutions and include anthropologists as well as linguists, historians and political scientists. Some contributions have been published previously in English in the journal *Africa Spectrum* (2010, 45: 3). This partly compensates for the fact that, except for short abstracts at the end of each chapter, the book is written in German.

The editors roughly organise the different contributions in four parts: 'Social Trends', 'Nation and Nation Building', 'Political Economy', 'Media, Art and Popular Culture', and, finally, 'Perspectives and Challenges'. Hence, this volume addresses a huge range of contexts. However, regardless of the different regional and topical foci of the individual chapters, a characteristic that runs through the entire volume is the authors' efforts to transcend different boundaries.

Most chapters question the time restriction and overcome temporal boundaries. Thus, various contributions address not only the past five decades or the independence momentum but also look beyond this period and stress other crucial historical moments. Examples include the chapter from Karin Langewiesche, who describes Christianity in the sub-Saharan African context by outlining the 19th century missionary movements, and Roman Loimeier, who situates Muslims in reference to the colonial legacy and the Islamic reform movements in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the most stimulating book chapters in that context is Cassis Kilian's 'Glimmering Utopias', looking at the history of African film. This focus allows for insights into imaginations and so-called utopia, hence revealing how societies wish to become.

The book also breaks territorial boundaries; hence many chapters follow a transnational perspective. Hans Peter Hahn, for instance, reflects on urban life worlds. He concludes his profound chapter by stating that to understand urban Africa we also have to look beyond the African continent. In a further chapter,

Hauke Dorsch investigates why Latin American music came to provide the soundtrack of the independence era in Africa, taking concepts like transnationalism and the Diaspora into consideration, too.

Various chapters of the book ask for changes of perspectives, thus going beyond the boundaries of dominant discourses in African studies. By looking at the education system in francophone West Africa, Thomas Bierschenk stimulatingly comments on both the scientific paradigms and the development agencies' discourses, which in turn impact education on the ground and vice-versa. Similarly, Andrea Behrends and Julia Pauli not only discuss characteristics that define elites but also debate research on elites in Africa since the 1960s and propose new research agendas. Grippingly, Patrice Nganang asks in the very last chapter what being independent finally means. Thus, many contributions include critical reflections on changing perspectives within African studies and also question the importance of the Eurocentric view that organises African history only along pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial timeframes.

Disappointingly, most chapters of the book fail to address the theoretical frameworks underlying concepts such as social continuities and transformations. Nevertheless, the book is a very rich reader and can be eminently recommended as an inspiring sourcebook for students, scholars and all other professionals interested in looking back to the future of sub-Saharan Africa, in reflecting on key topics within African Studies and in thinking beyond the conventional temporal, spatial and disciplinary boundaries that limit our reflections on social continuities and transformations time and again.

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