

Comparative Views and the Prospects for Transatlantic Cooperation: German Resources in African Studies

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Overview

1. Introduction: African Studies in Germany
2. Primary Sources Online: Picture Archive of the German Colonial Society
3. Bibliographic Tools: Databases and more

1. Introduction: African Studies in Germany

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

in the following 15 minutes I would like to draw your attention to German digital resources in African Studies. A first nice example is “Africars”¹ provided by anthropologists of the University of Munich (LMU). Besides “Africars” - what kinds of resources produced in Germany are available to our colleagues in North America? I would like to start with a short characterization of African Studies in Germany, then give a quick overview about the status quo of Open Access-initiatives in this area study. Then I would like to introduce some of the international relevant projects of digital resources in Germany. That are mainly online presentations of primary sources, in this case photographic material, and bibliographic tools supporting research.

In Germany African Studies is in terms of professorships and institutes very small. There are around 12 Professors for African Languages, 6 for the history of Africa and 6 for the anthropology. They all know each other and work on their own region or subject with little overlapping. The organisational structure (concerning size, funding, ...) is heterogeneous, some of the institutes at universities are too small to survive on the long run. Further merging of locations and institutions will take place and growing competition sometimes prevents closer cooperation.

¹ <http://www.fak12.uni-muenchen.de/vka/Africars/index.html>

The study programmes are already moving away from the old divisions of “Afrikanistik” studying African languages and “tribal” “Anthropology”. The multidisciplinary „African Studies” are oriented on a broad concept of cultural studies.

The German Science Council – the most important advisory body to the Federal Government and the state (Länder) governments drawing up binding recommendations on the development of higher education institutions – in July this year issued recommendations on the area studies at Universities and other research institutes.² For the first time the importance of area studies is acknowledged. Especially the need to consult politicians and businessmen and the provision of language and intercultural competences are highlighted. The form of organisation of interdisciplinary „Centers for Area Studies“ is suggested for the universities. And in the future there should be established one national centre per region. A model is always the SOAS.

The Frankfurt ZIAF³ is seen as a good example with the necessary number of staff. Its special strength lies in the connection of humanities with natural science. These centres – others are located in Bayreuth, Cologne, Leipzig for example – are possible partners of North American Universities.

Until now there is just one peer-reviewed open access journal, which is still waiting for its broad acceptance in the scientific community.⁴ „Afrikanistik online“⁵ is a scientific journal published in co-operation with the Department of African Studies at the University of Cologne. It is started with a funding of the state government of North Rhine Westphalia (Ministry of Innovation NRW)⁶ and the technical support of the Hochschulbibliothekszentrum (HBZ), Köln, the host and provider of one of the German union catalogues.

Individual institutes are beginning to enter the green road to open access. They offer working papers⁷ or results of their own studies⁸ on their website. There is often no long term accessibility guaranteed. Additionally, there is also one subject repository online since 2005.

² Wissenschaftsrat: Empfehlungen zu den Regionalstudien (area studies) in den Hochschulen und außeruniversitären Forschungseinrichtungen, Juli 2006 (Drs. 7381-06); <http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/texte/7381-06.pdf>; 18.9.06

³ Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Afrikaforschung (ZIAF) = Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Africa (CIRA), University of Frankfurt; http://www.ziaf.de/englisch/index_e.htm.

⁴ Compare also “Ntama - Journal of African Music and Popular Culture”; <http://ntama.uni-mainz.de/>; and “Swahili Forum”; <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/index.html>.

⁵ „Afrikanistik online“; <http://www.afrikanistik-online.de/>.

⁶ The initiative "Digital Peer Publishing NRW" supports novel forms of scholarly communication by providing technical, legal, and organisational frameworks and tools for scholars, libraries and academic institutions for better digital information sharing and distribution among peers.

⁷ E.g. Working Papers of the Department of Anthropology and African Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz; <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/workingpapers/Arbeitspapiere.html> or the Hamburger Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere (HAAP); <http://www.uni-hamburg.de/Wiss/FB/10/AfrikaS/veroeffentlichungen.html>.

⁸ Compare for example <http://www.dierklange.com/>.

The contents mainly focus on Ghana and African Music.⁹ Many projects are initiated by individual researchers. They depend very much on the capabilities and energy of one person. Does the person leave the institution the future remains unclear, as we will see again later on. In general the potential of the world wide web is just started to be explored by the German Africa-scientists. There remain a lot of things to be done and libraries have the task to campaign and inform.

2. Primary Sources Online

Photographic materials are increasingly acknowledged as an important primary source material especially for historians and anthropologists. After the Second World War the library and photograph-collection of the German “Reichskolonialamt” came to Frankfurt in order to compensate extensive losses. Some 15.000 books and colonial periodicals in the same size/order as well as around 50.000 photographs in different formats are the foundation of the Africana and Oceania Collection at the University Library Frankfurt. By the way in 1964 the “Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft” (German Research Foundation) commissioned the library to be responsible for the Special Collection (Sondersammelgebiet - SSG) 6.31 "Afrika Südlich der Sahara" (Africa - South of the Sahara). It has been the library's duty since to buy foreign and German literature on this area, serving high-end-research nationwide.

The photographs were collected by Lobby groups of the colonial movement in Germany. They were used to illustrate promotion talks with glass slide presentations throughout Germany. They document all aspects mainly of the former German colonies.¹⁰ Main themes include the activities of Africans and European settlers, like schools and missions, transport, or vegetation and agriculture. The collection was a tool for daily usage, not for archival purpose. So unfortunately, few of the early photographs are dated and it is often difficult to ascertain the exact time period. The preservation and digitization work since the mid-1990s has been supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) and various private foundations. Today the website of the archive is freely accessible and searchable.¹¹

⁹ Scientific African (e.V.) is a registered non-profit organization founded at Witten/Herdecke University in Germany. The organisation aims to disseminate scientific content from Africa and to enhance the visibility and accessibility of African scholarly material on the Internet; <http://www.scientific-african.de/>.

¹⁰ That are Togo, Cameroon, German Southwest Africa (today's Namibia), German East-Africa (Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi), as well as Qingdao (Tsingtao) in China and parts of Micronesia and Papua New Guinea.

¹¹ Picture Archive of the German Colonial Society, Frankfurt University Library; <http://www.ub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de>. It incorporates a digital version of the 3 volume „Deutsches Koloniallexikon“, 1914/20 as an important primary source for definitions of terms.

Metadata included with the pictures gives all available information, including German subject headings. A hierarchical system of keywords describes the individual pictures: “Region” (place), “Sachgruppe” (subjects) and “Völker” (ethnic group) are the most important. Recently we started to internationalise our photographic archive. We build up an english search interface and it is possible to search with english keywords.¹² Thanks to the work of Helene Baumann, Duke University, Durham, and a grant of Coutts-Nijhoff International, the thesaurus underlying the Bildarchiv database was translated into English in 2004/2005. This cooperation was arranged by GNARP.¹³

In future it might be necessary to connect the different picture archives to enable cross searching. Until today most of the projects were especially designed for the specific holdings and specific research communities, internationalization and standardization were rarely discussed. Is it possible to build interfaces? How is the metadata structured and standardized? Further expense should be rewarding. I think there is a need for cross-searching, e.g. concerning colonial history or missionary history. For the history of East Africa a common search interface with the Winterton Collection¹⁴ of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University might be profitable. We in Frankfurt will already include the 15.000 pictures of the Sam Cohen Library in Swakopmund, Namibia in our Colonial Picture Archive. The „Internet Mission Photography Archive“ hosted by the University of Southern California¹⁵ already includes two picture archives of German Missions. The Moravian Church (Herrenhuter Brüdergemeinde, Nyasa), and the Leipzig Mission (Pare, Arusha) were both active in Tanzania. Some 2.500 pictures are fascinating sources for indigenous political, social and economic history in the covered area. Regarding Ghana and Cameroon the protestant Basel Mission - first named the German Missionary Society - was particularly active. It has also digitized its photographic archive. These 20,000 photographs date from the 1860s to the 1950s.¹⁶

To realise a cross search one has to take into account the following aspects/problems/questions: 1.) the character of the collections - a small and carefully selection vs. a broad mass of pictures for the daily usage, 2.) the different regional focus and scope of the collections – e.g. many of the mission archives are not restricted to Africa, 3.) the

¹² The English keywords entered into the database are not displayed with the individual pictures. Reading knowledge of German is preferable.

¹³ There exists also a cooperation with Vassar College, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA, USA. A student seminar of Patrice Nganang, Associate Professor of German and French, on german colonial history (“Tropical Germany”) is preparing an exhibition using lots of the pictures of our colonial pictures.

¹⁴ <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/africana/winterton/>

¹⁵ Internet Mission Photography Archive; <http://www.usc.edu/isd/archives/arc/digarchives/mission/index.html>.

¹⁶ <http://www.bmpix.org>

different quality of metadata - e.g. in the Basel Mission Archives most pictures are dated and the photographer is usually credited while in our Colonial Picture Archive not, 4.) the different cataloguing procedures/rules and the depth of documentation, 5.) the basic information included in the metadata, e.g.: original caption, the photographer's name, and the time, place, occasion, and subject of the picture, 6.) different metadata schemes, IMPA using Dublin Core, 7.) how should the original context of the picture be preserved, e.g. the album structure of the Winterton Collection? 8.) the language of description (original vs. description), 9.) handling of copyrights, 10.) organisation of search interface and underlying strategies (hierarchical, free text, ...) I really do not like to rise the last question: Is there any funding available to rework/adapt the extensive indexing already done. Is a common metadata scheme for digitized picture archives possible? How rewarding to scholars would be the alternative of a google-like search engine or is it helpful to include everything in WorldCat? I think these questions are relevant to other projects as well.

3. Bibliographic Tools

Because of the peculiarities of the african book trade and publishing (e.g. a lack of bibliographic control and ISBN-allocation) every online resource is welcomed that helps to get to know a certain publication. Some of them find their way to libraries only by chance. Every Online Catalogue is an important bibliographic account. Lists of new acquisitions are used for acquiring resources of African studies and make collection development a bit easier. Both the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) Institute of African Affairs (Institut für Afrika-Kunde)¹⁷ and the University Library Frankfurt offer lists of their new acquisitions which might be of interest to american libraries as well.¹⁸

The Hamburg GIGA Institute of African Affairs also takes part in producing the database "World Affairs Online",¹⁹ one of the largest bibliographic social science databases in Europe. The German Information Network - International Relations and Area Studies (FIV-IBLK) is a cooperation of 12 independent German research institutes, e.g. the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik / German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt or the German Development Institute (GDI) Bonn. The main subject areas covered are global and regional developments, foreign and security policy and social trends. It currently contains over 665,000 references, mainly journal articles, book chapters and grey literature. WAO's speciality is its use of a highly differentiated subject and regional

¹⁷ http://www.duei.de/index.php?file=fb_af_neuerwerb.html&folder=bibliothek

¹⁸ <http://www.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/cgi-bin/neuerwerbungslisten/fachlist.rb?fach=631>

¹⁹ <http://www.fiv-iblk.de/eindex.htm>

classification and the multilingual thesaurus "International relations and area studies", a joint product of European research institutes working in this field. The fortnightly published Current Bibliography IRAS (Literaturdienst Internationale Beziehungen und Länderkunde), contains new entries of the database World Affairs Online listed by subject classification or by regional classification. The database World Affairs Online is part of the EINIRAS (European Information Network on International Relations and Area Studies) Database Network (EDN) for Journal articles since 1990.²⁰ Beside WAO six further European databases (e.g. The Royal Institute of International Affairs) with controlled terms in English, German, French are included.

Another fine German database presents articles of African online newspapers. The electronic press-archive called "Habari"²¹ (>12 Mio articles, since 2001) collects the online-versions of around 220 african newspapers and some press agencies in the original versions. The archival situation of the african web-offers are not always save. Political changes or financial problems could lead to the collapse of a website. The newspapers themselves often do not file their data in a proper and safe way. With Habari the proof for Scientific reference is possible in the long term. Every year around ca. 350 GB disc space for archival storage is needed. Until today the database is usable only in the rooms of the GIGA Institute for African Affairs Hamburg.

However, there exist a selection of articles searchable in the internet. After intellectual controlling of the date of publication, after providing some standard metadata and converting into the pure text selected articles are put in the so called "INDABA" = Internetdatenbank Afrika. Around 850,000 articles from african newspapers and some documents of governments, political parties and other groups in their original language are included. Scientific usage is free, however, a daily password is necessary and needs to be applied for. Until today there is only a German search interface. The process of selecting articles out of Habari into INDABA is not always up-to-date due to the work load. There is one person administering these databases and very soon he will retire. The future of these formidable databases are unclear. The money for disc space is not safely provided. There are plans to offer an English search interface and to make Habari accessible through the web. Perhaps some GNARP-cooperation can be of great help.

Let me finally turn to some future prospects. Together with Hamburg we are working on a free internet-library for Africa South of the Sahara called "ilissAfrica".²² We would like to

²⁰ <http://einiras.coe.int/edn/>

²¹ http://www.duei.de/index.php?file=fb_af_pressearchiv.html&folder=bibliothek

²² Compare Evifa; <http://www.evifa.de/cms/en/> and Menalib; <http://ssgdoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/vlib/html/index.html>.

implement a cross-search over many different library catalogues relevant for the African Studies. It would be wonderful to include some of the strong Africana libraries in the US, like the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies. Therefore it would be necessary to include an area restricted sample of the catalog. ilissAfrica also will select, index and present important internet resources, websites, digitalization projects and so on. The updating and description of interesting links can be done in a cooperative way. In the US there already exist some famous and extensive link lists, mostly administered by one person. Perhaps an exchange of this information is possible, an extension with international standardized classification, subject indexing a benefit for both sides.

IlissAfrica will promote the usage of “The International Directory of African Studies Scholars” (IDASS) hosted by Columbia University and not build up a new “German” directory of African Scholars. I think the community of scholars working on African Studies especially in a country like Germany is too small for “national” services. We should combine the limited resources and manpower.

Some of the online projects I have introduced to you are hopefully also relevant for other area studies. The problems to solve, obstacles and necessary preliminary work will be similar in other area studies as well. I have sketched some areas where cooperation is possible and makes a lot of sense. Resource sharing will be of growing importance in the future. I hope to have given some ideas of how the transatlantic library partnership concerning African Studies can be put into practice.

Thank you for your attention.