

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Hans M. Zell, ed. *The African Studies Companion: A Guide to Information Sources*.
Lochcarron: Hans Zell Publishing, 2006. xxx + 833 pp. \$296.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9541029-2-0.

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Published on H-SAfrica (June, 2007)

Studying African Studies

The fourth revised and expanded edition of *The African Studies Companion: A Guide to Information Sources* continues Hans Zell's fine tradition of guiding scholars to print and electronic sources on African studies. With 475 new entries, 2 new sections, 8 new features, and 171 deleted entries, this bibliographic tool will be a valuable addition to any academic library's African studies collection. Access to the electronic version accompanies purchase of the print edition, and allows regular updates beyond the editorial cut-off date of October 2005 until the planned publication of the next edition in 2009.

The work consolidates and expands successful features of earlier editions, for example, by providing more evaluative annotations and identifying outstanding online resources. The inclusion of prices for print resources and journal subscriptions is noteworthy. This is not just because they reveal shocking increases, but also because they provide valuable data for investigating African academic library purchasing patterns of African studies titles, or for undertaking comparative studies to analyze Africa's participation rate in the global scholarly output on African study themes.

The chapter on using Google for African studies research is particularly impressive simply for its recognition that undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as seasoned scholars and librarians, use this search engine almost daily. Commendations and caveats are interspersed with Google's Web search techniques and its new services in an instructive essay that will open new

and unexplored avenues for researchers.

A handy list of abbreviations and acronyms facilitates use, although placed disappointingly too far back, while a detailed index offers alternative access points to the 2,908 entries in the main arrangement and to the page numbers (in bold) for the chapter on using Google for African studies research. The online version offers even more flexible navigation through the entries and the wealth of information contained in this rich resource on African studies. But it is how all the information is presented and arranged that invites questions about how this bibliographic guide relates to the field of African studies and about African studies itself.

In a review on H-SAfrica of the third edition, Mary-Lynn Suttie commends Zell's efforts to deal with a colonial view of the continent that African studies and the companion sustain. She proposes stronger consideration of regional specificity and cultural diversity that would begin to deconstruct this conception of Africa.[1] In practical terms this would probably influence the companion's typically alphabetical arrangement that separates countries from the same region and that may have language, cultural, and historical links across national borders. Such connections manifest themselves in nuances and peculiarities that are easily missed or perhaps lost to younger scholars. South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, for example, is now owned by Trevor Ncube from Zimbabwe and the newspaper has a stronger regional focus than before.

An alphabetical arrangement of African countries, unfortunately, appears to accept and naturalize colonial political identities and national entities. It is by, what Mahmood Mamdani calls, “historicizing geography” that it becomes possible to problematize this arrangement and that knowledge of Africa can break out of state boundaries.[2] In other words, epistemological boundaries are not necessarily the political boundaries that area studies bring to African studies.

The point of course is how research guides like this companion can challenge instead of promote controversial views of Africa. One approach could be that its introduction to students and researchers by African studies teachers, librarians, and specialists should itself be guided by an awareness of these issues. It is therefore

to its credit that *The African Studies Companion* will continue to provoke searching questions about the field of African studies while it remains its most helpful guide.

Notes

[1]. Mary-Lynn Suttie, “Review of Hans Zell, ed., *The African Studies Companion: A Guide to Information Sources*,” H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews, June, 2006, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=294321159034586> (Accessed 20 April 2007).

[2]. Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), xii-xv.

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Citation: Archie Dick. Review of Zell, Hans M., ed., *The African Studies Companion: A Guide to Information Sources*. H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. June, 2007.

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