

Abstract:

Africa in the Modern World: The Case of Pan-Africanism

Seen from the angle of the rich and powerful countries (the so-called “Global North”), Africa today seems to exist and work outside of the international world order, politically and economically as well as culturally. But Africa is indeed an integral part of the global system, no matter how asymmetrically integrated into worldwide capitalist structures and imperial power relations, or how peripheral her cultural productions may seem to metropolitan entertainment industries. The roots of such uneven integration reach as far back as to the early modern period. For almost four centuries, the transatlantic slave trade (and the slavery practiced in the Americas and the Caribbean) shaped the emergent global imbalances at the expense of Africans. Opportunities for certain kinds of development were henceforth barred, and a number of degrading racist clichés were invented and widely used in order to justify Africa’s subordination. The colonial occupation by European powers taking place since the 1880s and lasting until the second half of the 20th century, aggravated that uneven relationship, and in the subsequent times of decolonization only little was achieved to cut free from universal dependency. Hence, throughout the modern period, European racism, colonial rule and capitalist exploitation of African riches and resources played a role in justifying Western involvements in Africa. With the onset of colonial rule, Africa’s sovereignty was lost. Henceforth ideological justifications for the European conquest and presence in Africa considering it a duty (“civilizing mission”) became ubiquitous; and so was the urge to challenge foreign domination and repudiate the insulting hegemonic views. Africans consistently objected to their subordination by a variety of means. These included distinctively “modern” ways by invoking revolutionary ideas of freedom and liberty, equality and solidarity, thereby meeting the hegemonic Western discourse at its own ideological level. Since the second half of the 19th century, Western educated Africans with a Pan-African outlook were among the first in critically addressing the issues of racism and foreign rule, and, in time, came to propose sound analyses of colonialism and capitalism. Various aspects of this intriguing history of Pan-Africanism will be at issue in the present talk.

Short Biography:

Arno Sonderegger is Senior Lecturer in African History at the Institute of African Studies of the University of Vienna, Austria. From 2011 to 2014 he served as Deputy Head of the Vienna department. In 2012-13 he spent a term as Visiting Professor at Humboldt-University Berlin, Germany. His research and teaching is dedicated to the history of Africa since the early modern period, with a special regional interest in West and Central Africa. Thematically, Africa’s complex relations to other parts of the globe, its specific roles in a global context, are among his basic interests, as well as Africa’s position within a globally informed intellectual history. The latter includes questions of power asymmetries in knowledge production, of racism and racial discrimination, of imperialism and colonial rule, of forms and ways of Africans’ engagements with the world. He authored two monographs in German (*Jenseits der rassistischen Grenze: Die Wahrnehmung Afrikas bei Johann Gottfried Herder*, 2002; *Die Dämonisierung Afrikas: Zum Despotiebegriff und zur Geschichte der Afrikanischen Despotie*, 2008), and co-/edited several books on African history and racism in German and English (*Rassismus: Ein vielgesichtiges Phänomen*, 2008; *Perspectives on Ethnicity and “Race”*, 2009; *Afrika 1500-1900: Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2010; *Afrika im 20. Jahrhundert: Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2011; *Nord-Süd-Ost-West Beziehungen: Eine Einführung in die Globalgeschichte*, 2015; *African Thoughts on Colonial and Neo-Colonial Worlds: Facets of an Intellectual History of Africa*, 2015).