

## Book Review

ZELL Hans M. (ed.), 2006.

THE AFRICAN STUDIES COMPANION: A GUIDE TO INFORMATION SOURCES. 4<sup>TH</sup> REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION. Chippenham: Hans Zell Publishing. 786 pp. (B-5 size), + 47 pp. index, print and Web version. ISBN – 0954102924.

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The African Studies Companion has established itself as a standard guide to various kinds of information sources on Africa, and in the field of African Studies. The fourth edition of the guide has been fully revised and expanded from the third edition that appeared in 2003 (see for review in *NJAS* 12:2). It has 786 text pages with 1908 entries with rich information. The practice of a parallel print and electronic edition, started in the third edition, has been continued. Online access to the electronic searchable version is provided to those who have purchased the print version.

The guide lists a wide variety of sources, including general reference books, bibliographies, indexing services, and resources on biography, cartography, economics, statistics, film and video. Library collections on African studies have a separate section in the guide as well as the directory of more than 250 African studies journals. Also publishers active in the African studies field and distributors of African studies materials are included.

The inclusion of a directory of teaching and research centres on African studies and African American studies improves the usability of the guide considerably. A new section is also the directory of the African press, which has information on more than 250 African newspapers and news weeklies.

A large number of web addresses in the guide reflects the fact that the Web has become a major channel for acquiring information on Africa. The fourth edition contains even a guide for searching information using Google search engine. Because the Web is becoming an increasingly popular channel for distributing information, the value of appropriate tools for finding the desired information cannot be overemphasized.

The physical appearance of the print version of the guide is not particularly attractive, largely due to the mess of sometimes long and complex Web addresses. The compiler can hardly be criticised about this. It is just difficult to understand why those who maintain open Web pages allow the materials to have such long and cryptic Web addresses. In the online version this does not matter, because the user does not need to type the address, but for the user of the print version it is a nightmare. The result is that the user of the print version, wishing to visit several Web addresses, is almost forced to get access to the online

version. From the online version the access to the Web sources is easy, because no typing is needed.

For testing the reliability of the Web addresses I picked randomly 40 Web addresses from the guide. Except for two addresses all of them could be downloaded. I made also targeted tests to addresses in various African countries and found most of them alive, although the ratio of dead addresses was bigger than among the addresses in general.

The guide has a total of 23 different sections. Because most of these sections are the same as in the third edition and they were reviewed earlier in this journal (NJAS 12:2), I will concentrate here on the new sections.

*The African Press* is a new section and it covers more than 250 newspapers. The directory of the African press includes papers published in English and French – the two major colonial languages – and a small number in Portuguese, Afrikaans and Arabic. The directory does not list newspapers written in African languages or any papers on Africa published outside Africa. No criteria for excluding those papers are given. The directory gives only the basic contact information, including Web addresses, and further information on each paper can be found in the Web. This section is a welcome addition to the guide, and hopefully contact addresses of papers published in African languages will be added in future editions of the guide.

*Centres of African studies & African studies programmes and courses worldwide* is also a new section in the guide. The basic concept in it is as in the African press directory. Sufficient contact information is given, including Web and email addresses as well as telephone and fax numbers, so that the user can choose the contact method. The directory serves, inter alia, those who want to look for suitable study programs, as well as those who look for suitable addresses for marketing purposes.

A fairly large section, 69 pages, is *Using Google for African studies research: a guide to effective Web searching*. This is a condensed and updated version of a guide that was earlier published as a Web edition. It contains useful information on various search possibilities, from basic search to fine-tuned search for specific information. While the development in this field is very fast, the printed guide will need updating fairly soon. However, the basic search methods are not likely to change, and the user can look for updates in the Web, as the compiler promises to update the guide regularly. Also valuable is the critical evaluation of Google and some other search engines, a feature not found in Google's own guide.

Although most of the sections are the same as in the third edition, there is a lot of new information in each section, and the names of some sections have been modified to meet the current needs. A general feature is that for most of the resources there is currently a Web address and an email address for taking contact.

In conclusion, the fourth edition of the guide is a vast source of information, and it serves the needs of a wide variety of people and organizations, including

higher education institutes, libraries, researchers, writers, and also those who need relevant addresses for marketing purposes.

The increase of information to be included into the guide raises the question whether there is need to maintain a double version in future editions of the guide, especially when the Web edition is vastly more usable than the print version. Also the high price of the guide, EUR 220, prevents most African libraries and research centres from acquiring it. Therefore, it serves mostly the libraries and researchers in developed countries with sufficient resources for acquiring the guide.

The commercially viable guide available only in the Web is perhaps difficult to implement, but there is no doubt that the development goes to that direction. Hans Zell has done excellent work in compiling and arranging a huge amount of valuable information that has no parallel. I hope that this work continues and finds ways of adapting to the Web-based implementation in a cost-effective way.