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Born in 1941 of German parents who were repatriated from East Africa at the beginning of the Second World War, I went to school in Hamburg where I finished my secondary education in 1961. After one year of military service I left the army as a conscientious objector, joined the Service Civil International in Paris and served unofficially in an international work camp in Southern France as compensation for three remaining months of military training.

In 1962 I began studying at the Sorbonne in Paris where I became interested in various academic fields such as Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, Economics, African Sociology, Anthropology, General History, Islamic Studies, and finally African History. Besides these studies in many directions there was also time to join Easter peace marches in neighbouring countries such as England, Switzerland and Germany. A work camp in Poland gave me the opportunity to become acquainted with life behind the Iron Curtain. Since I was with a group from France, I was in a slightly better position than if I had come from my home country.

Uncertain about my future career, I undertook an adventurous open-end trip through the whole of the African continent with Michka Sachnine in an eleven-year-old Citroën 2 CV. We set off in Paris in November 1966, travelled through the Sahara to East and southern Africa as far as Botswana, back through the Congo at the time of civil war, and finally arrived at our starting point after more than one year's absence. Determined to continue travelling in the future in a more useful way, we both embarked on academic careers related to Africa.

In Paris I pursued my studies financing them by a part-time job, and did not refrain from joining the *Événements de soixante-huit*. I gained my Master's degree in 1969 and finished my PhD in African History in 1974 with a thesis directed by Raymond Mauny, later published as *Le Diwan des sultans du Kanem-Bornu: Chronologie et histoire d'un royaume africain,* 1977. Situated on both sides of Lake Chad, Kanem-Bornu was one of the great empires of West Africa. Since the reconstruction of its medieval history relies mainly on its Arabic chronicle, the first edition of this unique document and the drawing up of a new chronology broke new ground for a scholarly view of African history in general. Having accomplished that work, my twelve years residence in Paris had come to an end. Time was ripe for a change and for opening up a wider view of the world than a solely European perspective.

Supported by a grant from the DAAD and with French backing, I continued my studies in Cairo for the improvement of my knowledge of Arabic and for the extension of my research on Arabic manuscripts related to African history. At the same time I developed a keen interest in archaeology and ancient Egyptian civilization. I married Shamsa Dirie from Mogadishu, Somalia, herself a specialist in Arabic literature, and experienced the life of a European expatriate living in Egypt with mainly Egyptian friends at the intersection of European, African and Islamic cultures and at the frontiers of Arabism, Egyptology and African studies.

The German and Egyptian scholarships which I was awarded were quite sufficient to support the modest life of a mixed couple who regarded the future not in terms of materially rewarding careers but bedazzled by the dream of greater satisfaction through contributions of a general and more lasting value.

While I was in Cairo, our friend, the Swiss medical doctor Silvio Berthoud from Geneva, suggested I should join an expedition to last several months for the purpose of exploring the Central Saharan trade route which had never been the object of valid research in recent times. During this journey along the now forgotten but earlier most permanent route between the Mediterranean world and sub-Saharan Africa, which was subsequently funded by the DFG, we discovered several new sites worth of archaeological exploration. As a follow-up of that expedition I began doing field research on oral traditions in the Bornu kingdom west of Lake Chad and the Sao-Kotoko civilization south of the lake, lasting for more than half a year. My experience of travelling on three different routes showed that the Sahara was much easier to cross than normally supposed. On that basis I was later able to develop the theory of intensive connections between Africa and the ancient Near East.

Back in Cairo, the need to put an end to reliance on uncertain scholarships made itself increasingly felt. Providentially, old contacts in Paris and academic needs led to an offer by Djibo Hamani, the head of the History Department of the University of Niamey, Niger, to join the staff of his department. With additional financial support from the DAAD, my duties as a lecturer for medieval African and Islamic history began in 1980. Meanwhile my book on the second chronicle of Bornu was taking shape and was finally published in 1987 as *A Sudanic Chronicle: the Borno Expeditions of Idris Alauma (1564-1576).* Teaching African history in Africa and directing the research work of students in a francophone African country was a good experience for a German expatriate who owed his university education to French scholars.

Continued residence in Egypt for a total of ten years with periodical travel between Niamey and Cairo, and the absence of a more permanent home than occasional rented flats turned into serious handicap for a productive life of research. Moreover, in Niger, as elsewhere in Africa, it became obvious that European expatriates needed to give way to local academic staff especially in such a sensitive field as history. Therefore, after five years teaching at the University of Niamey and altogether twenty three years spent abroad, I decided to move back to Hamburg, my home town, to write a *Thèse d'État* or Habilitation in view of a more stable university career.

The writing up of the thesis on the basis of earlier research was accomplished in the course of two years' residence in Hamburg, financed by of another DFG grant. It was Jean Devisse who organized a *Soutenance de Thèse d'État* at the Sorbonne in 1987 and Eike Haberland - who for many years had supported my applications for scholarships - was generous enough to agree to participate in that important *rite de passage* for an academic career. Titled *Contribution à l'histoire du Bornu et des États hausa*, the thesis explores the duration, scope and implications of the domination of the Bornu Empire over the Hausa city-states. It prepared the elaboration of more advanced ideas concerning statehood, imperial expansion and ethnicity in the context of West African history published in later articles.

As the culminating point of my long training as a scholar, this success in Paris came just in time for the new position in African History at the young University of Bayreuth. After being appointed Professor of African History in 1988, I subsequently became a member of the African research group of Bayreuth University (SFB). From now on field research, mainly in

Nigeria but marginally also in Niger, was no longer a painstaking personal enterprise but an institutionally sponsored normal undertaking. Also, a wonderful library was at hand, my own books were always around on book shelves which soon became too small and curious students, eager to know more, asked stimulating questions. From this secure material basis the focus of my teaching and research slowly began to widen, from medieval West Africa to a transcontinental perspective involving the idea of important connections with the ancient Near East. First conceived as remnants of Phoenician trade relations with West Africa, anthropological survivals, the testimonies of oral traditions and the onomastic pointers in the early sections of local chronicles and king lists when properly analysed finally began to provide evidence of more important influences on African history from the major civilizations of the ancient Near East than ever imagined before. First presented in my book, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa*, 2004, this theory in favour of a global historical approach to ancient Africa certainly needs to be more deeply explored and more comprehensively explained in future.

Looking back at my appointment to professorship in Bayreuth, I can now say that it was not only the end of an adventurous life in several countries and cultures but also a turning point and the beginning of a new stage in my research. On the basis of my secure position, the exploration of new and fully unorthodox perspectives on African history became a realistic possibility. Research on Israelite and Ugaritic religious and Assyrian historical texts were thus put on the agenda of African studies for the first time. Seriously opposed by influential Africanist colleagues, presumably because they thought it negated African creativity, such ideas could only be set forth and intensively explored in a small university with a limited number of students and exceptionally open-minded colleagues. The few students who were willing to follow me on that adventurous track and more than everybody else my wife have come to know how many disappointments and reversals one meets on such a track. After retirement from my university function in 2007, my further exploration and better understanding of how Africa was integrated in global history in ancient times does not seem to leave much room for leaning back and being pleased with previous achievements.

For the sake of completeness I should add that my wife and I have had the pleasure of bringing up Hassan Sidatt, a son of her first marriage who spent his early years in Mogadishu, and our common daughter Mona, both computer scientists, one in Africa, the other in Germany.