

**Review:**

**Jan Hoorweg, Dick Foeken & R. A. Obudho (eds), *Kenya Coast Handbook. Culture, resources and development in the East African littoral*. With a Preface by Prof. Ali A. Mazrui. (A publication of the African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands). Münster / Hamburg / London: LIT-Verlag, 2000. xvi + 527 pp. (Distributed in North America by Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick).**

The handbook is a major reference book not only for the nation of Kenya and the neighbouring countries, but also for a world region of great fame and international exposure. Its roots are projects on rural development administered by the Kenyan government with fundings from the Dutch government. The executioners were a team of the African Studies Centre at Leiden and Kenyan scientists from the University of Nairobi and other institutions. For the *Handbook* further researchers were invited, among them the three members of the Editorial Committee, Frederick Cooper, Mohamed Hyder and John Middleton. Twenty-eight authors contribute new multidisciplinary knowledge to the fields of *agricultural studies, development studies, economics, environmental studies, geography, medicine* and *zoology*, all with special data of the Kenyan coast. A marked preference is given to approaches of the natural sciences and social sciences. Fewer scholars from the humanities contribute to the fields of *anthropology, history* and *political science*. The *Preface* by Ali A. Mazrui centers on 'The Kenya Coast: Between Globalization and Marginalization' (pp. xxi-xxvi). Here we find the motive of the *Handbook*: to make the coast better known in Kenya and the world and to counter certain prejudices and stereotypical views (which is further problematized in Henk Meilink's Chapter 2 and taken up again in the editors' *Conclusion*). The *Handbook* is rich with sketch maps, statistical diagrams and a comprehensive *Kenya Coast Bibliography* (pp. 433-492); a few b/w-pictures of medium technical and photographic quality merely appear as fillers between the chapters. The solid hardcover binding makes the book a true handbook of long physical lasting and generates trust into the contents while its pages are well printed in an appealing lay-out.

The twenty-five topical chapters are grouped into six Parts: I. *Introduction* into the regional study and 'The Kenya Coast in National Perspective'; II. *General Background* with introductions into the physical land resources, the marine resources, the current environmental problems, population dynamics and urbanization; III. *People and History* with introducing into the ethnic situation, colonial history, contemporary politics and the complex of 'religion and society' (written by authors from the humanities); IV. *Economic Resources* with agriculture, food marketing, industrialization, tourism and employment;

V. *Human Resources* with education, health, nutrition and gender issues; VI. *Development Issues* with land settlement, housing, water resources, dairy and port development. These chapters competently report the most recent knowledge in the respective fields. A great strength of the book lies in providing data from sources commonly not readily available. These include Kenyan government plans, reports and especially statistics, unpublished or locally distributed expert papers and, of course, the authors' own research data and views. The internationally published sources referred to reach up to the late 1990s, so that on the whole the book is highly up to-date.

As problematic one may regard the demarcation of 'the coast'. Here the editors did not opt for the administrative unit of the Coast Province, which one would expect, but for a reduced area reaching up to 150 km inland from the coastline (pp. 3, 29). With this range Lamu, Kilifi, Mombasa, Kwale and Taita Taveta Districts are fully covered, while Tana River District is only included with the southern Garsen Division. Its northern section with the Galole, Bura and Bangale Divisions (see maps on pp. 4, 423) is completely cut off (though some of the given statistics extend to the whole of Tana River District). A satisfying explanation for this editorial decision is not given. Was it based on lack of sources or contributors? Doubtlessly both do exist. Was the publication space too limited? Though certainly not intended by the editors the omission of the 'northern tip' could be felt by some inhabitants of the area as yet another case of marginalization<sup>1</sup> which – as the *Handbook* makes the marginalization of the coast within the Kenyan nation a critical point – would then mean 'marginalization within the marginalization'.

'Culture' as the first of the three components of the book's sub-title comes in in most chapters, most centrally in Part III which covers 71 pages of the entire volume of 550 pages (12%). Here one is particularly well informed by the chapters on *Colonial History* (Frederick Cooper), *Contemporary Politics* (Thomas P. Wolf) and *Religion and Society* (David C. Sperling). The latter chapter puts emphasis on the *history* of Islamization though for the contemporary situation one would like to know more about the recent influences on coastal Islam as exerted by Iran and Saudi Arabia, the recent Islamic factions and the issues of fundamentalism and Sharia. The chapter *The Peoples* by John Middleton serves as an introduction into the ethnic and interethnic situation on the coast, both in historical and synchronical terms. Here one would wish that the Bantu-speaking clusters of the Mijikenda, Pokomo and Taita (not even two pages) would have received the same attention and details as the Swahili (discussed on almost nine pages). The nomadic and 'hunter-gatherer' groups of the Orma, Waata, Boni, Dahalo and Somali are even less represented,

---

<sup>1</sup> For a historical foundation of this problem in the area see David L. Miller, *Social Formations in Transition: Social and Economic Change in the Lower Tana Valley, Kenya, 1850-1939*. Ph.D. Thesis, Syracuse University, 1981. (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor) (No. 1233 in the Bibliography, additionally Miller's article No. 358)

with the Boran and Wardey<sup>2</sup> not even mentioned. Here the editors should have been more acutely aware, willing to grant publication space and employ one or two more authors as this *Handbook* will be a reference source for the targetted government officers and development workers for the next many years. Especially the Cushitic-speaking peoples seem to be frequently unknown and partly misunderstood in Kenya so that the *Handbook* could have been of help here.

One further problem of the *Handbook* is the negligence of all aspects pertaining to the languages of the coast: the Lamu archipelago as the cradle of the Swahili language with its various dialects, the sociolinguistic situation of Swahili and its transcontinentally borrowed loanwords<sup>3</sup>, the other Bantu languages (with Ilwana recognized as an own language only in the 1970s)<sup>4</sup> and the Cushitic languages with a few languages even threatened of extinction (Boni, Dahalo, Degere, Kore, Segeju, "Taita Cushitic").<sup>5</sup> Kiswahili is seemingly without major problems *the lingua franca* among the coastal peoples, but still the other languages also exist and play a role in the development of their speakers. The *Bibliography* has an own section of 'Language' (pp. 475-481), but who of the targetted readers will have time to consult them for condensed referential knowledge, for a specific concept, for a clue of any kind?

The 'Language'-section also includes titles on coastal Kenyan literature. Literature can have its own functions in the discourse on development as the authors and performers and their texts provide *insider views* to societal conditions and problems. The texts give insights into symbol systems and modes of communication which altogether still seem to be unrecognized as a valuable resource and necessary base for development planners. This neglect of emic dimensions within the *Handbook*, of clear voices and opinions of the peoples studied and described is obviously a function of the mentioned preference for social science approaches with their known etic perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Hilarie Kelly, 'Orma and Somali Culture Sharing in the Juba Tana Region'. In: Thomas Labahn (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies, University of Hamburg, August 1-6, 1983. Vol. IV. Studies in Humanities and Natural Sciences*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1984. Pp. 13-38. Furthermore Hilarie Kelly, 'Wardey Migrants as Agents of Social Change in Tana River District, Kenya'. Paper presented to the 2nd International Congress of Somali Studies, Hamburg, 1.-6. August 1983. Ms., 13 pp.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Geider, 'Lehnwort- und Neologismenforschung'. In: Gudrun Mische & Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig (eds), *Swahili-Handbuch*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, 1995. Pp. 323-337.

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig, 'Aspects of the Language History of the Ilwana: Former Hunter-Gatherers of the Central Tana Valley in Kenya', *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 7, (1), 1986: 273-293; furthermore Derek Nurse, *Inheritance, Contact, and Change in Two East African Languages*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriele Sommer, 'A Survey on Language Death in Africa'. In: M. Brenzinger (ed.), *Language Death. Factual and Theoretical Explorations with Special Reference to East Africa*. Berlin / New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992. Pp. 301-417 (here: 323-324, 330-332, 333-334, 362, 382-383, 392-394).

It can be admitted that the issues of Culture (social system, 'traditional' material culture and modes of production etc.) and Language with Discourse, Communication and Literature linking the two are so complex that an equally thick sequel handbook could be produced. The *Kenya Coast Handbook* as it is presents a comprehensive 'state-of-the-art' of the environmental, economic and social potentials of the Kenyan coast and its major problems at the beginning of the 21st century. As a solid 'archive' of a social and natural science format it will be consulted by development planners and researchers for the next many years to come.

Thomas Geider