

Personal Profile

Thomas Bierschenk is Professor of Anthropology and Modern African Studies (Kulturen und Gesellschaften Afrikas) at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz. He has specialised in the political anthropology of French-speaking Africa and in the anthropological analysis of development. His current research interests are African public services and civil servants, the ethnography of public policies as well as decentralisation and the local state in West Africa. He currently is winding up an international comparative research project on States at Work. Public Services and Civil Servants in West Africa: Education and Justice in Benin, Ghana, Mali and Niger. He is a senior researcher in the project Significations of Oil and Social Change in Niger and Chad: An anthropological cooperative research project on technologies and processes of creative adaptation in relation to African oil production (coordination: Prof. Schareika, Göttingen; Dr. Behrends, Halle), and a cooperating partner of the French-German project "Models, practices and cultures of school institutions in West Africa" (for these projects, see <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/65.php>). He has done extensive fieldwork in the Sultanate Oman and in French-Speaking West and Central Africa.

Among his more recent publications are "Ethnologie im 21. Jahrhundert", Berlin, Reimer 2012, edited with Matthias Krings and Carola Lentz; "States at Work. Dynamics of African Bureaucracies" Leiden, Brill 2013 (in print), edited with Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan; "50 Jahre Unabhängigkeit in Afrika. Kontinuitäten, Brüche, Perspektiven (Mainzer Beiträge zur Afrikaforschung. 29). Köln, Köppe (edited with Eva Spies, 2012); "Democratisation without development: Benin 1989 – 2009", International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 22 (3) (2009): 337-357, cf. www.springerlink.com/content/t02435278748/?p=23cda5c7b75d43d69a193389cd564cf0&pi=0; "The every-day functioning of an African public service: Informalization, privatization and corruption in Benin's legal system", Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law 57 (2008): 101 – 139, cf. <http://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/3-643-10157-0>; Islam und Entwicklung in Afrika (Islam and development in Africa, Köln: Köppe, edited with Marion Fischer, 2007); "The local appropriation of democracy in an African middle town: An analysis of the municipal elections in Parakou, Republic of Benin, 2002/03", Journal of Modern African Studies 44 (2006), 543-571; "Powers in the Village. Rural Benin between democratisation and decentralisation », Africa 73 (2003): 145 - 173 (with Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan); Courtiers en développement. Les villages africaines en quête des projets (Paris: Karthala, 2000, edited with J.-P. Olivier de Sardan & J.-P. Chauveau).

Before coming to Mainz in 1997, he held assignments at Georgetown University (Washington, DC) and the University of Bielefeld (Germany), and taught anthropology and development sociology at the Free University of Berlin, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) at Marseilles/France and the University of Hohenheim at Stuttgart. He also held visiting assignments at the University of Bonn (Germany/2001-2), the University of Uppsala (Sweden/spring 2006) and the New School of Social Research (New York/2007-2008).

He served first as general secretary, than as president of the Association Euro-Africaine pour l'Anthropologie du Développement et du Changement Social (APAD; cf. <http://www.association-apad.org/>). From 2008 to 2010, he was the president of the German Association for African Studies (VAD). He was a member of the scientific advisory board of the Germany Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ) between 2005 and 2009, and is on the editorial board of Zeitschrift für Ethnologie (Berlin) as well as the scientific advisory board of the journal Africa Spectrum (Hamburg). He also was an advisor to the African Power and Politics Programme of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI, London; see <http://www.institutions-africa.org/>) and is chairman of the scientific advisory committee of the Laboratoire d'études et des recherches sur les dynamiques sociales et le développement local (Niamey, Niger; see <http://www.lasdel.net/>). In 2010, he was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Bénin by the government of the Republic of Benin in recognition of his engagements in German-African scientific cooperation.

Thomas Bierschenk received his MA in history and social sciences from the University of Bielefeld in 1977, his PhD in sociology from the same university in 1983 and his Habilitation from the Free University of Berlin (1991). He was an undergraduate and graduate student at the University of Trier (Germany), St. Peter's College, Oxford, the London School of Economics, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, London) and the universities of Bordeaux (France) and Bielefeld (Germany).