



Tuesday, 2 May 2017

Commemorating Dr. Jan-Georg Deutsch (1956-2016)

By **Katrin Bromber** (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient)

On 2 May 2017, former colleagues and current ZMO fellows met to commemorate Jan-Georg Deutsch. Georg, as we usually call him, joined ZMO in 1996 at a time when it was still in the process of completing the transition from an institute of the Academy of Science of the German Democratic Republic into a research institute that had to fit into the (West) German academic landscape. With full engagement and expertise in the field of African History, which he had gained in Germany and Great Britain, he was among those who pushed ZMO to the forefront of this discipline. His *modus operandi* was described as friendly competition and a great deal of cooperation. This also meant that Georg generously shared both his knowledge and his international network; especially the one that he had established during his time in Great Britain.

We also remember Jan-Georg Deutsch as a scholar who very actively fostered the study of African History in Berlin. Together with Albert Wirz, he edited the volume *Geschichte in Afrika. Einführung in Probleme und Debatten* (History in Africa: Introduction to Problems and Debates, Klaus Schwarz 1997), which summarized for the first time in German the rapidly expanding scope of knowledge about the core topics of the African past. He was very much interested in conceptual debates that emerged from the marriage between history and anthropology. With his research on the Indian Ocean from an East African perspective, Jan-Georg Deutsch contributed in a fundamental way to the development of one of ZMO's key concepts – translocality. Apart from his interest in conceptual debates and theoretical issues, Jan Georg Deutsch was a researcher with a keen interest in details and sound empirical work, i.e., developing concepts from “below”.

We spoke, of course, about “Georg in the field”, i.e., during his field and archival research in Nigeria and on Zanzibar. He was very close to the people whose history he studied. He did not turn away from them when help was needed most. Georg not only was aware of injustice, but also effectively organized protest when his colleague and friend Prof. Abdul Sherrif (Historian of East Africa and the Indian Ocean) lost his job for political reasons. We remember Jan Georg Deutsch as a warm-hearted colleague and friend, as an innovative historian of Africa, and as someone who loved to laugh – loudest about himself.

Venue

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Hosted by:

