Africanising African history: decolonisation of knowledge in UNESCO's general history of Africa (1964-1998)

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AFRICANISING AFRICAN HISTORY

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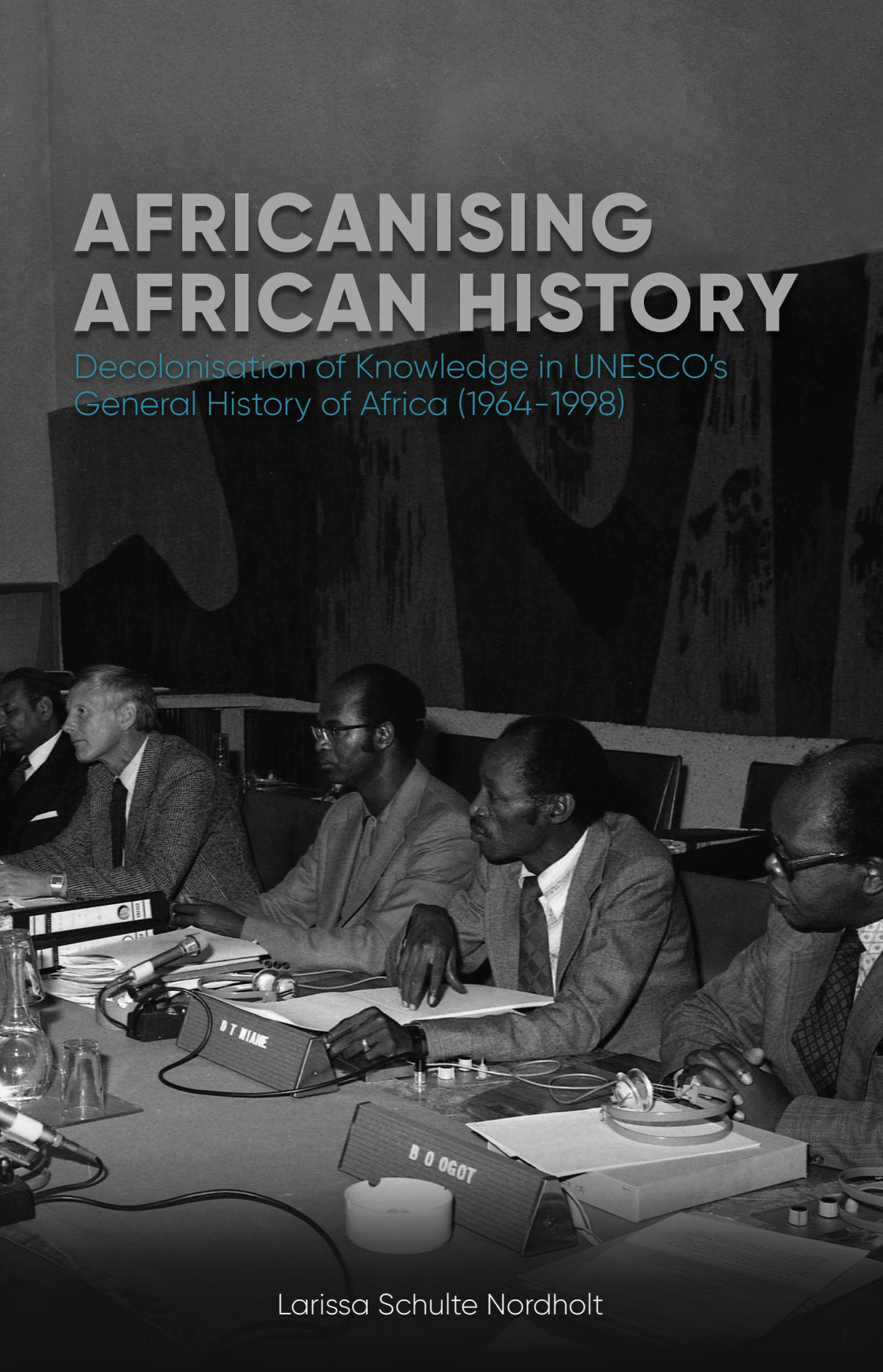

Larissa Schulte Nordholt

AFRICANISING AFRICAN HISTORY

Decolonisation of Knowledge in UNESCO's *General History of Africa* (1964–1998)

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Cover Image
1977 meeting of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Taking pan-African historical initiative at Flagstaff House in Accra

The First International Congress of Africanists was organised in Accra, Ghana in December 1962.[1] It was no accident that the conference took place in Accra. The first All-African Peoples' Conference, which had demanded immediate political independence, had taken place there four years earlier. In Accra it quickly became clear that Africanists who hailed from outside the continent would have to take on a position of relative modesty when it came to deciding the future of African historical studies, as far as Africans themselves were concerned. The president of Ghana, the pan-African intellectual Kwame Nkrumah, and Kenneth Onwuka Dike, first African head of the historical department at Ibadan University in Nigeria gave the opening speeches. This was described by one of the delegates as follows: 'The two opening speeches reflected and projected the African scholars' abiding awareness of their dependence on the West, of their recognition of the massive power of Western Intellectual and Scientific traditions in their lives. There were also pleas to the Western delegates to be constantly aware

1 The term 'Africanist' or 'Africanism' was first used to refer to knowledge created about Africa on its own terms. It has since come to designate the study of Africa more generally, particularly in American and European contexts.

of their great wounding powers'.[2] Both Nkrumah and Dike therefore impressed upon the audience the importance for Africans to write their own history. Despite the fact that the two keynote speakers were both Anglophones, the congress included a significant number of Francophone Africans as well. The congress also aimed to bridge the east/west divide.[3] In the end, it left the African-American writer of the report quoted here with the impression that Africans were finally free from 'western' domination and able to write, and therefore shape, their own history. It was a meaningful milestone.

One of the attendees was a Kenyan historian and specialist in collecting Luo oral traditions through the use of oral history — one of the newly developed methods of African history which tried to defy European ideas of historical methodology — Bethwell Allan Ogot. He, too, felt that the Congress was a monumental occurrence; If only because it was during the Congress that he located the birth of what would later be called *The General History of Africa*, or *l'Histoire* Générale de *l'Afrique*. Nkrumah became an important figure in Ogot's narrative concerning the congress and the later creation of the *General History of Africa (GHA)*. In his autobiography, which appeared in 2003, Ogot described how Nkrumah had invited twelve African historians back to his official residence in Accra, Flagstaff House, to discuss the creation of a general history of the continent — to be sponsored by UNESCO. The number twelve was meaningful. According to Ogot, Nkrumah, raised a Catholic, compared the twelve historians to the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, thereby casting himself in the role of a pan-Africanist Christ. 'We were to be his cultural disciples' Ogot wrote.[4] Ogot, moreover, christened himself and the other eleven present 'African cultural activists'. In this way he articulated what it meant for him to be an African historian. The meeting took all night. The historians, spurred on by Nkrumah's 'African personality', a drink rather than a philosophy in this instance, stayed up to deliberate until 4 am. They spoke about the history of Africa as a whole,

2 Institute of Current World Affairs, CJP-10, The First International Congress of Africanists, Commonwealth Hall University of Ghana Legon, Ghana. Charles J. Patterson to Mr. Richard Nolte. December 18, 1962.

3 Jean Allman, "Kwame Nkrumah, African Studies, and the Politics of Knowledge Production in the Black Star of Africa" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46:2 (2013): 181-203, 196.

4 Bethwell Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisumu: Ayange Press Limited, 2003), 384.

but, importantly, they discussed the future just as much. They decided, amongst other things, that the future capital of a 'United States of Africa' would have to be located in the Central African Republic.[5] Ogot in his description of the night at Flagstaff House made it clear that historical initiative was of the utmost importance, not just because of history itself, but because history had the capability of shaping nation states and political realities. History was not just an ethereal activity practiced by intellectuals far removed from society. Ogot, in his autobiography, connected the ability to write one's own history to the ability to shape one's own future. History was a political tool.

The meeting at Flagstaff house shows how much was at stake for African historians during the period of political decolonisation. During that time, writing history was a way to bequeath the emerging nation states with a national narrative and link these nationalities together in a larger pan-African narrative.[6] In 1964 UNESCO's thirteenth general conference made the decision to sponsor the project that had been discussed, possibly for the first time, at Flagstaff house two years earlier.[7] This marked the beginning of a more than 30 year project of writing African history in which the African initiative and African perspective would be favoured.[8] The *General History of Africa* was to be a collaborative project, encompassing the entirety of the history of the African continent from its prehistory until the present over the span of eight volumes of around 800 to 1000 pages each. Like the congress of its birth, moreover, it would aim to bridge Cold War divides in knowledge production. The GHA strove to be a revisionist history of Africa that would provide a pan-African and Afrocentric or Africa-centred vision

5 Ogot, *Footprints*, 384.

6 Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "*Présence Africaine* as Historiography: Historicity of Societies and Specificity of Black African Culture" in *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987*, ed. Valentin Mudimbe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 95-117, 101.

7 UNESCO, *Records of the General Conference. Thirteenth Session, Resolutions, Paris 1964* (Paris: UNESCO, 1965), 66.

8 See Appendix I for a short explanation on the administrative organisation of the ISC.

of the entire continent, specifically including North Africa.[9] The GHA was also determined to include as many authors from the entire African continent and the diaspora as possible. It was led, from 1971 onwards, by an 'International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa', consisting of 39 members, the majority of which were also African or of African descent.[10] The first volume was published in 1980 in French and in 1981 in English, the last volume appeared in 1993 in English and finally in French in 1998.

This thesis takes UNESCO's *General History of Africa* as a case study to investigate what it meant to Africanise African history. It therefore studies how an imagined pan-African decolonisation of African historiography was brought into practice in the decades during and after African independences in the 20th century and what political, intellectual, academic and practical difficulties the historians working on this project encountered in the process. The ambition to write a *General History of Africa* was motivated by the Euro-American denial of the

9 'Afrocentrism' has referred to both the idea that everything can be explained as stemming from Africa, as an inverse Eurocentrism, and as way to explain the world as seen from Africa and African viewpoints, rather than Europe and European viewpoints, but without positing Africa as the centre of the world. The term Afrocentrism has been most associated with African-American conceptions of history, specifically connected to Temple university, which sought to place the conception of civilisation in Africa, specifically Egypt. This type of Afrocentrism was conceived of by Cheikh Anta Diop, who also played an important role within the GHA. I shall return to his contribution in detail in chapter four. See: Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); John Cullen Gruesser, *Black on Black. Twentieth-Century African American Writing about Africa* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000) and C. Tsehloane Keto, *The Africa Centered Perspective of History and Social Sciences in the Twenty First Century* (Blackwood: K.A. Publications, 1989) 1. In the French language, moreover, there are also different words sometimes used to describe these different meanings, *afrocentrisme* for the former meaning and *afrocentricité* for the latter. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "African Historiography in Africa South of the Sahara" *Revue Tiers Monde* 216 (2013): 111-127, 118. This dissertation will use the term 'Africa-centred' or 'Afrocentric' to mean that the GHA aimed to take Africa as a geographical starting point from which to create a historical narrative and a new historiographical logic. It specifically also uses Afrocentric because this is a term that historians within the GHA sometimes used themselves.

10 UNESCO archives Paris (hereafter UAP), SHC/CONF.70/8 rev. Paris 5 April 1971, First Plenary Meeting of the International Scientific Committee for the drafting of a General History of Africa, Rules of Procedure, Article 1, UNESCO, Paris, 30 March – 8 April 1971, 1.

existence of African historicity from the 19th century onwards.[11] The role Africa played in 19th century European historiography was uncomplicated. Africa was regarded as a site of difference.[12] Its history was described as a terra incognita — a 'dark continent' — in need of exploration. As a result, Africa, as a concept attracted a multitude of different clichés, narratives and ideas formulated from the outside. Yet, that outside gaze largely excluded 'Africa' itself from the historical agency to influence the narrative. The continent was excluded from historical thought as historical scholarship developed into a distinct discipline in 19th century Europe. Of course, this did not mean that Africans themselves did not engage in historiographical activity of their own.[13] Until the 1950s, however, the Euro-American academy mostly ignored historical thinking that was present on the African continent. This changed when during the swan song of colonisation and the long aftermath of decolonisation African historians trained in the historiographical tradition as it had developed in Europe began to assert themselves in an organised and collective manner.[14] They aimed to insert their continent into the Euro-American historiographical ra-

11 Throughout this work I use the terms 'Euro-American' and 'Euro-Americans' to refer to North-American and European institutions, North-America and Europe generally and white European and white American scholars. I use the term rather than 'western', which as a category is rather vague and hard to pin down. The term is moreover used instead of 'White' to emphasise the importance of the geographic location of these actors. It, secondly, also aims to separate the historians mentioned in this thesis from the systemic Whiteness and historic White supremacy from which they may benefit, but to which they do not always consciously subscribe. In other words, the term serves to emphasise a shared position and identity, but not to always identify those who the term describes with the system of white supremacy itself.

12 I use the term 'historiography' generally to refer to the historical discipline, the practice of writing history or the history of history writing. When used in its sense as the study of historical methods or the philosophy of history I will alert the reader.

13 In her book *Insurgent Empire* Priyamvada Gopal makes the argument for sensitivity to 'reversed pedagogy', the idea that anti-colonial intellectuals may have influenced European ideas on freedom and democracy rather than the other way around, as is conventional wisdom. This may also be the case for historiography as Gopal generalises Michel Trouillot's argument on the historiographical silence surrounding the Haitian revolution for struggles against colonialism. Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire. Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso Books, 2019). Daniel Woolf, moreover, details some of the early modern historiography of Africa in: Daniel Woolf, *A Concise History of History. Global Historiography from Antiquity to the Present*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 101–6.

14 Individual African scholars such as Africanus Horton and Sol Plaatje had previously emphasised the existence of an African past apart from European influences.

tionale that had hitherto excluded them. The intent was to prove that Africa had history towards a discipline that had long denied this fact. In doing so, the historians involved in the GHA project were caught in a paradoxical translation of the historical difference between their societies and Euro-American projections of modernity on those societies as part of the effort to negotiate inclusion in the post-colonial world order.

The *General History of Africa*, therefore, was a part of the process of decolonisation. In this work of historiographical scholarship, I argue that the African historians who aimed to rewrite African history from an African perspective were influenced by ideals of anti-colonial nation-building and epistemic diversity and tried to reconceptualise the historical discipline by Africanising it so that their histories would not be forgotten. To show why this particular case study is of interest, I will discuss the historiography that has led me to my research question, followed by a reflection on the concepts which form the theoretical backbone to this study. I will then conclude by providing an explanation of my methodology and the sources upon which this thesis is based as well as a description of the structure of this thesis.

Historiography

UNESCO sponsored the *General History of Africa* because it aimed to provide postcolonial states with a history of their own writing. The United Nations played an important role in the history of political decolonisation; both due to the fact that they published a declaration on decolonisation and because membership grew dramatically between 1945 and 1960 to include Asian and African states. This culminated in the 'year of Africa', when in 1960 seventeen new states, sixteen of them African, joined the UN, thereby shifting the balance of power — creating also the possibility of projects such as the GHA.[15] The study of decolonisation within international organisations and as a political phenomenon in which the transfer of sovereign power as well as national movements in newly independent countries are seen as key, has

15 Raymond F. Betts, "Decolonisation. A brief history of the word" in *Beyond Empire and Nation. The Decolonization of African and Asian societies, 1930s-1970s,* eds. Els Bogaerts and Remco Raben (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 23–37, 26.

been rich.[16] Most important for my purpose here is perhaps the 2019 study by Adom Getachew on the intellectual history of the political imagination of anti-colonial leaders during the era of decolonisation: *Worldmaking after Empire. The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Getachew demonstrates that the new world order, imagined as a set of sovereign nation states, was anything but obvious as she focuses her analysis on the idea of decolonisation as a move away from 'western' domination and towards egalitarianism.[17] Matteo Grilli, in his book on Nkrumah's pan-African foreign policy, also argues that nationalism may be a limiting frame to understand the period of political decolonisation.[18] Getachew's book forms an especially interesting point of departure because it questions the very meaning of the word 'decolonisation' as a transition of power wherein African states more or less naturally adopted the system of Westphalian sovereignty. This thesis equally attempts to look at decolonisation or Africanisation of history writing as more than just the inevitable professionalisation of the historical discipline on the African continent through the creation of national histories and sees it also as a concerted effort to take control of one's own narrative from multiple African perspectives.[19]

That this happened within the realm of a UN organisation is perhaps not coincidental given the UN's stance towards decolonisation

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16 See: Ebere Nwaubani, *The United States and Decolonization in West Africa, 1950–1960* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001); Evan Luard, *A History of the United Nations. Volume 2: The Age of Decolonization, 1955–1965* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Elizabeth Smith, *Foreign Intervention in Africa. From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Prasenjit Duara ed., *Decolonization: Perspectives From Now and Then* (London: Routledge, 2003); John D. Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa* (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1988); John Darwin, *Britain and decolonization; The retreat from empire in the post-war world* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The transfer of power in Africa; Decolonization 1940–1960.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) ; Henri Grimal, *La décolonisation de 1919 à nos jours* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1985 [1965]).

17 Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire. The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019)

18 Matteo Grilli, *Nkrumaism and African Nationalism. Ghana's Pan-African Foreign Policy in the Age of Decolonization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 7–12.

19 Pieter Boele van Hensbroek equally argues that we should approach African nationalism with an open mind and not just as a copy or adaptation of European thought. Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, "Philosophy of Nationalism in Africa" in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy,* ed. A. Afolayan and T. Falola (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 405-–16, 405–6.

and the possibilities the organisation offered within the bipolar world system of the Cold War era. There are a number of studies that make an effort to conceptualise and historicise the way UNESCO moved as a historical actor itself, chief amongst them Chloé Maurels study of the first 30 years and Poul Duehdahl's work on the impact UNESCO made in various parts of the world.[20] The intellectual history of UNESCO, too, has been studied to some extent, specifically regarding the organisation's focus on cultural diversity, cultural relativism and the 'one world' idea.[21] There are also a few more linear histories of UNESCO as well studies that focus specifically on it's efforts at heritage conservation.[22] Yet, studies that focus explicitly on UNESCO as a historiographical actor or that examine the historiographical practice within UNESCO are scarce — even if there are some journal articles dealing with the organisation's attempts at writing a world history. They remain focused on the political implications of the project within the international order and its internationalist aspects.[23] They do not conscientiously examine UNESCO's historiographical output as part of the history of scholarship, nor as part of the history of intellectual decolonisation. This is the case despite the fact that UNESCO produced several General History projects, of which the *General History of Africa* was the first one and the most elaborate.[24] This study aims to

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20 Chloé Maurel, *Histoire de l'UNESCO: Les Trente Premières Années, 1945–1974* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010) and Poul Duedahl ed. *A History of UNESCO Global Actions and Impacts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

21 Roger-Pol Droit, *Humanity in the Making: Overview of the Intellectual History of UNESCO, 1945–2005* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005); Glenda Sluga, "UNESCO and the (One) World of Julian Huxley" *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008): 393-418; R. Toye and J. Toye, "One World, Two Cultures?: Alfred Zimmerman, Julian Huxley and the Ideological Origins of UNESCO" *History* 95:319 (2010): 308-331.

22 Lynn Meskel, *A Future in Ruins. UNESCO, World Heritage and the Dream of Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Marie Huber, *Developing Heritage – Developing Countries. Ethiopian Nation-Building and the Origins of UNESCO World Heritage, 1960-1980* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021) and Fernando Valderrama Martínez, *A History of UNESCO* (UNESCO: Paris, 1995)

23 Paul Betts, "Humanity's New Heritage: UNESCO and the Rewriting of World History" *Past and Present* 228:1 (2015): 249-285; Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, "New Histories of the United Nations" *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008): 251-274; Poul Duedahl, "Selling Mankind: UNESCO and the Invention of Global History, 1945-1976" *Journal of World History* 22:1 (2011): 101-133.

24 Such as *The General History of Latin America, General History of the Caribbean* and *History of Civilizations of Central Asia.* "General and Regional Histories," UNESCO, accessed March 15, 2021, https://en.unesco.org/themes/generalregionalhistories

explicitly focus on the latter project: to produce a history of the GHA as a project of intellectual decolonisation within the history of the humanities.[25] It conceives of UNESCO not so much as a historical actor, but as an organisation made up of individuals that was used by African historians as a means to an end and a way to help launch the African academy as well as the individual careers of African historians.

The GHA itself contributed massively to the production of knowledge about Africa. Yet, despite the fact that over 300 intellectuals contributed to it, it has not been studied extensively and hardly at all as part of a longer tradition of anticolonial critique. It has been recognised as a project that contested eurocentrism as European perspectives on African history, but not conceptually questioned as such.[26] In 2014 Maurel, making use of her comprehensive research on UNESCO as an organisation, published an article about the GHA in which she identified it as a project of Afrocentric historiography and transnational intellectual cooperation. Maurel notes that the project contrasted with UNESCO's earlier endeavours to write a history of humanity, in that it was decidedly pan-African and sought to adorn the Afri-

25 'Decolonisation' throughout this thesis should be read as a multifaceted process that includes both the end of empire as well as the intellectual movement away from Euro-American epistemologies. I use the term in a much broader sense than the 21st century decolonial movement to include the history of decolonising knowledge, of which I argue the GHA is unequivocally a part, as well as current understandings of what it means to decolonise knowledge.

26 Within this thesis there are different ways in which I use the term 'Eurocentrism'. Firstly, I make use of the actor's perspective to denote how the GHA historians understood eurocentrism as scholarship that looked at African history from a European perspective, with European concerns in mind and that, moreover, placed Europe at the centre of world history. For this type of 'eurocentrism' I will use the non-capitalised term. Secondly, I also make use of the term 'Eurocentrism' when referring to the postcolonial argument that even beyond perspectives and concerns, 'Eurocentrism' can also pertain to the very organisation of categories of knowledge production within the history of modernity, such as 'state' or 'race'. These two conceptualisations, however, overlap in some instances because European theoretical universalism in the understanding of modernity stemmed from a conceptualisation of Europe as the centre of the world. Lastly, I also observe a focus on European case studies within the history of scholarship. I do not call this 'Eurocentrism' because it is not in and off itself Eurocentric to study European history. Eurocentrism, rather, describes either a distortion wherein the histories of non-European societies are studied from a European perspective, my actor's category, or it may describe a systematic mis-categorisation of European theories and histories as universal. The latter is the postcolonial argument.

can world with a history of its own.[27] This recognition that the GHA was one of the first big and global historical works to propagate an Afrocentric perspective was made by Muryatan Barbosa as well, who wrote a PhD thesis on the subject.[28] Maurel and others have investigated UNESCO's wish to promote the 'invention' of historiographical traditions in the postcolonial world. Casper Andersen specifically has written a noteworthy chapter on the GHA and its attempt to be taken seriously as part of postcolonial nation-building.[29] Andreas Eckert, too, has noted the GHA's role in the Africanisation of African history.[30] None of these contributions, however, really engage extensively with the GHA as part of a decolonisation of knowledge on a conceptual or practical level or as part of the history of scholarship, nor do they question the role of decolonisation as a cultural and epistemic phenomenon. Maurel, moreover, focuses her conceptual analysis on what the GHA can say about the history of international relations and the historiography of world history, rather than what it might tell us about African historiography itself or the history of academia.

The UN promoted the creation of historiographies for new nation states in an effort to contribute to postcolonial nation-building. It was an essential part of the UN's investment in world history, which started with the creation of UNESCO's *history of humanity*, the brainchild of Julian Huxley.[31] The first edition was completed in 1965 and was an

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27 Chloé Maurel, "L'histoire générale de l'Afrique de l'unesco: Un projet coopération intellectuele transnationale d'esprit afro-centré (1964–1999)" *Cahiers d'études africaines* 54:215 (2014): 715–737, 715–6.

28 Muryatan Santana Barbosa, "A construção da perspective Africana: uma história do projeto História Geral da África (Unesco). The construction of the African perspective: a history of the General History of Africa project (Unesco)" *Revista Brasileira de História* 32:64 (2012): 211–230 and Muryatan Santana Barbosa, "The African Perspective in the General History of Africa (Unesco)" *Tempo. Niterói.* 24:3 (2018): 400–21.

29 Casper Andersen, "UNESCO's General History of Africa, memory and the quest for relevance" in *Memory, Commemoration and the Politics of Historical Memory in Africa: Essays in Memory of Jan-Georg Deutsch,* eds. Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, Moritz Mihatsch and Michelle Sikes (Melton: James Curry, forthcoming 2022)

30 Andreas Eckert, "Auf der Suche nach der 'wahren' Geschichte Afrikas: Die UNESCO General History of Africa," *Periplus. Jahrbuch für außereuropäische Geschichte* 5 (1995): 178–83.

31 Maurel, "L'histoire générale de l'Afrique de l'unesco", 720 and Amrith and Sluga, "New Histories of the United Nations", 253, 269.

attempt to write a universal history of human progress.[32] African and Latin American observers, however, noted that it failed to sufficiently include their continents in the narrative, even if it did dedicate more pages to Jomo Kenyatta than some European leaders and declared decolonisation as the single-most important event of the 20th century. It continued to define African and Latin American history in relation to universal historical developments. But the universalism it espoused looked suspiciously European even if its rhetorical disavowal of eurocentrism had been at times revolutionary.[33] Such a disavowal of eurocentrism has always been a key, if elusive, aim of global history.[34]

The *General History of Africa*, then, was partly a reaction to the conceptual failure of UNESCO's history of humanity, which was used as a counter model for the GHA. However, it needs to be stressed that the creation and sponsorship of the GHA was also, and maybe more importantly, an opportunity for upcoming African intellectuals to write and shape autonomous African history. The GHA was successful in that it inspired the creation of several more general histories; a *General History of Latin America*, a *History of the Civilisations of Central Asia*, a *General History of the Caribbean* and a *History of the Different Aspects of Islam*, formerly called the *General History of Islam*.[35] All these general histories focused on 'people writing their own history' and the inclusion of 'local historians, with impeccable academic credentials.'[36] The GHA's inclusion and promotion of non-European, African, historians in an effort to stimulate diverse narratives then, became a part of the other General History projects as well. As such it seems necessary to analyse the project for its emancipatory purpose as an intellectual project of decolonisation as well as a project of extraordinary international cooperation. I will therefore delve into the GHA for its decolonising mission and its, sometimes, radical exploration into the meaning and philosophy of African history as part of the history of

32 Koïchiro Matsuura, "Preface", in *History of Humanity. Scientific and Cultural Development. Volume VI The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Peter Mathias and Nikolaï Todorov (Paris: UNESCO, 2008), V.

33 Betts, "Humanity's New Heritage", 271-2, 278, 282-3

34 Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 211.

35 "General and Regional Histories," UNESCO, accessed September 18, 2020, https://en.unesco.org/themes/generalregionalhistories

36 Ibid, accessed June 18, 2018, https://en.unesco.org/themes/generalregionalhistories

decolonisation within scholarship. The GHA was part of the history of emancipation within Euro-American academia and knowledge creation and should therefore be regarded from a history of scholarship perspective that includes the history of decolonising knowledge.

To look at the GHA from a history of scholarship perspective, or rather, as part of the history of the humanities, it is necessary to ascertain how it has been treated within the history of its own discipline. The study of historiography, however, has long been a European endeavour. Recently historians and philosophers of history have tried to amend that one sidedness.[37] One example is the forum on *Decolonizing Histories* in the journal *History and Theory*, which, like this dissertation, posits the question of what a decolonisation of history writing could look like in practice.[38] Emma Hunter, moreover, has argued that African history as a project is part of a decolonising practice.[39] The GHA was an essential part of this practice because of its central role within African historiography after the Second World War. It is named in virtually all recent historiographical overviews of global historiography.[40] Toyin Falola contributed a chapter on Africa in Q. Edward Wang and Georg Iggers' *Turning points in Historiography*, in which he classifies the GHA as 'the ultimate achievement of nationalist histori-

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37 There have been historiographic studies of specifically the independence period in African historiography, see: Caroline Neale, *Writing 'Independent' History. African Historiography 1960–1980.* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985); Lidwien Kapteijns, *African Historiography written by Africans, 1955–1973: The Nigerian Case* (Amsterdam: PhD Diss. University of Amsterdam, 1977), also see this study on the development of Yoruba historiography in the 19th century: Michel R. Doortmont, *Recapturing the past. Samuel Johnson and the construction of the history of the Yoruba* (Rotterdam: PhD Diss. Erasmus University Rotterdam, 1994) as well as appraisals of the field from those who participated in it themselves: Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury eds., *African Historiographies. What History for Which Africa?* (London: Sage Publications, 1986)

38 Warwick Anderson, "Decolonizing Histories in Theory and Practice: An Introduction", *History and Theory* 59:3 (2020): 369–75, 371.

39 Amanda Behm et al., "History on the Line. Decolonzing History: Enquire and Practice", *History Workshop Journal* 89 (2020): 169–91, 172.

40 See, for instance, the Francophone encyclopedia of African, Asian and American historiography, in which the editors pay homage to the GHA: Nathalie Kouamé, Éric P. Meyer and Anne Viguier eds., *Encyclopédie des Historiographies: Afriques, Amériques, Asies. Volume 1 : sources et genres historiques (Tome 1 et Tome 2)* (Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 2020), 15. Thomas Spear ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African historiography: Methods and Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) also includes multiple references to the GHA, in the entries about the Dakar and SOAS schools of African history, for instance.

ography.'[41] In this piece and others, and again in his book on *Nationalism and African intellectuals*, Falola argues that the *General History of Africa* was part of the early wave of post-independence nationalist or what was otherwise called Africanist historiography. This was often identified with the Ibadan school of history, but also similar in outlook to Makerere, Dakar and Ghana Legon.[42] In another volume by Wang and Iggers, which aims to provide the reader with an overview of the history of historical scholarship from a global perspective, the same point is made.[43] Africanist historiography has often been connected to European nationalist historiography of the 19th century; both were engaged in providing their nations states with historical narratives as a part of what scholars have called nation-building.[44] Similar observations regarding post-independence historiography in Africa as essentially nationalist were also made by contemporaries and contributors to the GHA as well.[45] In *A Global History of History* Daniel Woolf, too, argues that the GHA should best be understood as an African attempt to apply European methods to the African past.[46] Paul Tiyambe Zeleza argues that post-independence historiography had never successfully managed to write history with a sensitivity to everyday African realities in the present. It had been preoccupied with elites through the study of organised political entities in the service of nationalism.[47] There are a series of publications from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s that express similar kinds of, sometimes Marxist inspired, critique

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41 Toyin Falola, "Nationalism and African Historiography" in: *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective,* eds. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester: The University of Rochester Press, 2002), 209–236, 224.

42 Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 227, 237

43 Georg G. Iggers and Edward Q. Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008), 298.

44 See: Stefan Berger, *Writing the nation: a global perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

45 Jewsiewicki and Newbury eds., *African Historiographies.*

46 Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 443–6. Also see Woolf, *A Concise History of History,* 262 and Markus Völkel, *Geschichtsschreibung: Eine Einführung in globaler Perspektive* (Cologne, UTB GmbH, 2006), 15, 366.

47 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997), 88–112, 90–1. Also see Arnold J. Temu and Bonaventure Swai, *Historians and Africanist history: a critique: post-colonial historiography examined* (London: Zed Press, 1981).

and which explore nationalist historiography from their own historiographical moment and to which some GHA historians themselves contributed.[48] Moreover, the GHA was itself chided for making use of European categories of analysis.[49] I argue that although all of the above appraisals are true, the GHA was more complicated in its emancipatory goals and should, moreover, not be identified with just nationalist historiography.[50] It, furthermore, should not be read outside of its historical context of political decolonisation, which explains its nationalist tendencies. The GHA was both the culmination of post-independence Africanist historiography as well as a project of anti-colonial intellectual decolonisation that was deeply engaged in questions of identity; what it meant to be an African studying African history.[51] We should therefore not judge the GHA by the standards of postcolonial critique which argues that the project never really escaped the European epistemic frameworks it meant to question, for that would be reading back into history a problem space that did not yet exist.[52] That, however, does not mean we should not question the position of the GHA within the landscape of postcolonial knowledge production.

As part of the history of scholarship there is one other body of literature to which this study of the GHA belongs: The study of knowledge production in an African context and the history of African studies as a discipline, which includes work by the aforementioned Zeleza

48 Jewsiewicki and Newbury eds., *African Historiographies*.

49 Eckert, "Auf der Suche nach der 'wahren' Geschichte Afrikas", 178–83 and Bogumil Jewsiewicki and V.Y. Mudimbe, "Africans' Memories and Contemporary History of Africa" *History and Theory* 32:4 (1993): 1–11.

50 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch moreover argues that the work has not lost relevance. Coquery-Vidrovitch, "African Historiography", 120.

51 A similar argument regarding the pursuit of 'authenticity' within African historiography was made by E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, "From African Historiographies to an African Philosophy of History", *Afrika Zamani* 7/8 (1999–2000): 41–89.

52 Which this essay argues: Finn Fuglestad, "The Trevor-Roper Trap or the Imperialism of History. An Essay." *History in Africa* 19 (1992): 309–326.

as well as others.[53] This literature engages in questions about the materiality and politics of knowledge production, sometimes from a decolonial perspective. It criticises contemporary dynamics of African knowledge production through an appraisal of its history and the way this was influenced by geopolitics. Specifically, it questions and historicises the fact that the location of the majority of academic inquiry into Africa is still based in Euro-American institutions, including this work. Questions of public relevance and value (value for whom and by what measure?) trouble these academics in 21st century African studies. The very idea of 'African Studies' could be seen as problematic as they may suggest a study of what is different within Africa vis-à-vis Europe, which is rarely ever treated as an 'area', primarily because the Euro-American academy is hegemonic. African studies are seen as bringing together all knowledge on Africa under one signifier, in ways that knowledge about Europe rarely ever is. Even if the argument could be made that area studies serve a purpose in their recognition of the unicity of a certain place and a certain expertise that is particular to that place, it is still perceived as awkward that African studies has primarily had an external orientation.[54] Meaning, it is, by and large, mostly not produced by Africans, but rather, on them and therefore not always relevant to them. This might begin to explain why critique regarding European categories of analysis, articulated during the period under discussion here and again as part of postcolonial studies have not yet been answered satisfactorily. I therefore draw on histories of African studies. I show how changing dynamics within the global politics of knowledge production in the bipolar world of the 20th century

53 See: Paul Tiyambe Zeleza ed., *The Study of Africa. Volume 1: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2006); Paul Tiyambe Zeleza ed., *The Study of Africa Volume 2: Global and Transnational Engagements* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2007); Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies,* Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Siphamandla Zondi eds., *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2016); William G. Martin and Michael O. West eds., *Out of One, Many Africas. Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Pearl T. Robinson, "Area Studies in Search of Africa" in *The Politics of Knowledge. Area Studies and the Disciplines* ed. David Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 118–83 and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa. Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2018)

54 Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 6.

influenced the daily practice of knowledge production about Africa within the GHA.

Another reason for an enduring focus on Europe as centre of understanding, besides the Euro-American predominance within African studies, may have to do with a continuing focus on Europe within the disciplines that study the history of academic knowledge production — to which I am also responding. In an effort to break through this and some of these other aforementioned issues, this work aims to bridge the analytical divide between the study of Africa and the study of scholarship in that it approaches the transnational GHA as part of both American, European and African worlds of scholarship. As part of that, discussions on inclusion and exclusion within the writing of academic history are central to this study. Discussions on the formation of scholarly personae, which are focused on mechanisms of academic inclusion and exclusion, form another perspective from which to engage in the emergence of African historical studies.[55] Personae tell us something about collective cultural identities as well as individual positioning and performances of scholarship through individual lives.[56] Studies of scholarly personae generally highlight the relation between individual lives and collective scholarly identities and as such note in what way the creation of knowledge is related to the bearer of knowledge.[57] The inclusion of postcolonial intellectuals into the Euro-American academy in this moment therefore offer new ways through which to study the interaction between models of scholarship as they had been created in Europe and America, including exclusionary racism and, in this context, African ideals of intellectualism and equality.

The study of scholarly personae has so far remained focused primarily, although not exclusively, on European scholarship and Euro-

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55 Herman Paul, "What is a Scholarly Persona? Ten Theses on Virtues, Skills, and Desires" *History and Theory* 53: 3 (2014): 348–371 and Herman Paul, "The Virtues and Vices of Albert Naudé: Toward a History of Scholarly Personae" *History of the Humanities* 1:2 (2016): 327–338.

56 Herman Paul, "Introduction: Scholarly personae: what they are and why they matter" in *How to be a Historian. Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800–2000,* ed. Herman Paul (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 1–15, 3–7

57 Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum, "Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories" *Science in Context* 16:1-2 (2003): 1–8, 7 and Kirsti Niskanen and Michael J. Barany, "Introduction: The Scholar Incarnate" in *Gender, Embodiment, and the History of the Scholarly Persona,* eds. Kirsti Niskanen and Michael J. Barany (London: Palgrave macmillan, 2021), 1–17, 3.

pean case studies.[58] This dissertation therefore further draws on the recent global turn in intellectual history, central to which are transfers, criticisms, and negotiations of so-called 'western' templates and categories of thought in 'non-western' contexts.[59] African historians in the GHA invite us to adopt a macro perspective of the development of scholarly personae, since they engaged in a dichotomous critique of nothing less than 'Europe' and the 'eurocentric' historian. Formulated ideals of scholarship within the GHA might teach us something about the history of emancipation from European modes of thinking within the historical discipline specifically and the academy generally. I aim to answer questions on the intersection of global history and the history of the humanities that have so far gone unanswered: What did models of scholarship which purposefully sought to criticise the existing ideal of 'good scholarship' from an African perspective look like? This study therefore takes the GHA as a pars pro toto for the emerging collection of scholars studying African history and therefore enriches the study of scholarly personae.

The GHA may be especially suitable for this purpose because the project focused on historiographical actors. As a project it was particular about which scholars were and were not welcomed as directors of volumes and as authors. Africans were favoured. This entailed the creation of new ideals and practices of what it meant to be a historian writing African history. The project attracted many celebrated Afri-

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58 There are of course some exceptions, scholars such as Michael Facius, Q. Edward Wang and João Rodolfo Munhoz Ohara have applied to framework of scholarly personae or selfhood to Japanese, Chinese and Brazilian historiography. Q. Edward Wang, "Interpretative and investigative: the emergence and characteristics of modern scholarly personae in China, 1900-30" in *How to be A Historian. Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800-2000.* ed. Herman Paul (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2019), 107-129; João Rodolfo Munhoz Ohara, "Virtue Language and Boundary Drawing in Modern Brazilian Historiography: a reading of Historians of Brazil, by Francisco Iglésias" *História da Historiografia* 12:30 (2019): 44-70 and Michael Facius, "A Rankean Moment in Japan: The Persona of the Historian and the Globalization of the Discipline c. 1900" *Modern Intellectual History* (2020) doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000335. See also my own contribution on the GHA: Larissa Schulte Nordholt, "What is an African historian? Negotiating scholarly personae in UNESCO's *General History of Africa*", in *How to be a Historian. Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800-2000,* ed. Herman Paul (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2019), 182-201. The relatively young journal, *History of Humanities* has also laudably included more non-European perspectives in its issues, especially in its special issue on *decentralizing the history of the humanities* (2021)

59 Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, ed., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Pres, 2013)

can historians, mostly from Eastern and Western Africa; such as Adu Boahen, Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Cheikh Anta Diop. Educated at least partly at Euro-American institutions, these were people who stood at the forefront of African historical studies at the time and as a result they were constantly engaged in fundamental questions of discipline formation regarding the meaning and purpose of African history in a world that seemed like it was being remade after the Second World War. Not all of those who laid the groundworks however were Africans and notwithstanding the project's aims to include as many African authors as possible, European and American authorities on the African continent were also included and played important roles. Jean Devisse, for instance, became an indispensable contributor in his role as *rapporteur* and Jan Vansina as well became a key figure, often fulfilling multiple roles at once. Philip Curtin and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch also contributed more than one chapter each. The latter was one of the few Marxist-oriented historians to be included and, more important perhaps, one of the few women, too. There were only two black African women who played a (minor) part in the GHA, Mutumba Bull and Abeodu Bowen Jones.[60] The GHA's exclusion of more African women is telling, specifically because it thought of itself as an inclusive pan-African project. South African historians were also notably absent from the project. The GHA historians nevertheless realised that perspective and identity mattered when it came to the writing of history. They, as Vansina would later put it in his autobiography, realised the 'essential role of subjectivity' in historiography and set to rethink historiography concerning the African continent.[61]

Research questions

Following from the historiography discussed above, this study seeks to research what the case of the GHA may tell us about a decolonisation of the writing of history and its challenges during the period of independence and political decolonisation. My research question is the following:

60 Maurel, "L'histoire générale de l'Afrique de l'unesco", 717.

61 Jan Vansina, *Living With Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 100.

Why was the ideal of 'African history', as formulated by the African historians who instigated the General History of Africa, difficult to translate into practice?

To answer this question, I have divided it into sub questions. Firstly, I will reconstruct what the GHA's ideals of decolonisation were. What did the initiators of the GHA envision an Africanised or decolonised history of Africa should look like in terms of, content, personnel and public? Secondly, I will research what came of these ideals in practice during the long process of drafting the GHA. In what way did GHA historians have to adjust their initial ideals and what were factors causing such an adjustment or negotiation of formulated ideals? Thirdly and finally, I will analyse how both GHA historians as well as historians of Africa more generally related to the results of 34 years of work after the project was finished. How did both insiders and outsiders reflect on the project after it was finished and how did such perceptions influence the way the project was remembered? I ponder this last question because it turned out the ideals formulated in the 1960s and early 1970s were not always easy to bring into practice as a result of practical, financial, political and ideological difficulties. I therefore analyse why it was difficult for African historians to translate their ideals of Africanising African history into historiographical practice.

This question is especially pertinent to ask because although the *General History of Africa* was praised for representing an authentic African historiography, it was simultaneously criticised for not really moving beyond the conceptualisations and methodologies it so ardently critiqued as racist and colonialist.[62] I want to argue, however, that this does not mean that the project does not merit further analysis in terms of its historical moment, as I have already noted above. Not because the GHA aimed at profound epistemic change, but because the project of Africanisation was not entirely successful on its own terms either and postcolonial critique concurrently emerged as a result of newly arisen problems. I show that an earlier generation already tried to recentre knowledge production about Africa in the continent itself and that postcolonial critics in part responded to their failure. This failure was not entirely the fault of this earlier genera-

62 Eckert, "Auf der Suche nach der 'wahren' Geschichte Afrikas" 178-83 and Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe, "Africans' Memories", 2.

tion, but partly a result, not only of the categories of analysis they wielded, but also of geopolitical and financial contexts. Moreover, as argued by David Scott, amongst others, the first generation of African historians can hardly be blamed for not identifying a problem that had not yet emerged.[63] The coloniality of knowledge that postcolonial critics sought to unearth could not have become visible without previous study of non-European areas and histories. It is therefore pertinent to ask how ideals of African history, whilst being mindful of the fact that ideals are, per definition, very different from practices, formulated in the wake of political independence translated into a practice of Africanisation and why this was not always entirely successful.

The study of GHA as part of the global history of historiography that follows from this question provides a much needed and crucial case study to complement books providing general overviews and theoretical reflections. The case study, secondly, is located on the intersection of two discussions within the history of the humanities: the aforementioned field of the global history of historiography as well as questions pertaining to the decolonisation of history in practice. As such, this thesis also aligns with a practical turn in the history of scholarship, which concerns itself with everyday realities of scholarship, or, in this case, what historians actually do on a daily basis.[64] It follows a perceptive observation made by Lyn Schumaker that, 'when practices become standardised and mythologised, scientists call them methods.' Like Schumaker, whose book title has inspired mine, I show what daily practices made up the creation of historical knowledge about Africa in the 20th century through collaborative practices, but in the context of decolonisation.[65] This thesis is both an attempt to challenge the focus on Europe within the history of historiography as well as a history of decolonising knowledge in practice. Decolonisation of knowledge as it is being called for in 21st century academia, inspired by postcolonial critique, I argue, has a history of its own and the rewriting and

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63 David Scott, *Refashioning Futures. Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 10-15.

64 See: Markus Friedrich, Philipp Müller and Michael Riordan, "Practices of Historical Research in Archives and Libraries from the Eighteenth to the Nineteenth Century" *History of Humanities* 2:1 (2017): 3-13, Daniel J. Hicks and Thomas A. Stapleford, "The Virtues of Scientific Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics, and the Historiography of Science" *Isis* 107:3 (2016): DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/688346

65 Lyn Schumaker, *Africanzing Anthropology. Fieldwork, networks, and the making of cultural knowledge in Central Africa.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

reshaping of African history during the period of independence is a crucial and essential part of it. Decolonisation, in this thesis, should be read as a multifaceted historical process which has not yet come to an end in the 21st century, but has merely shifted from direct questions on political sovereignty and nationalism to questions of cultural and economic interdependence.[66] This thesis nevertheless aims to recall a moment in history during which issues of intellectual independence were being discussed, but in a way that differs from the 21st century and with different political stakes.

The colonial library

In this section, I will delve into the theoretical underpinnings of my study of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* and explain some of the concepts that play a pivotal role therein. The GHA aimed to negate Africa's position as a marginalised part of the globe by rewriting African history from an Africa-centred perspective. This meant that history would be constructed using African sources primarily. For instance, by recognising the value of oral historiography as a worthwhile tool in the reconstruction of pre-literate African societies and placing these narratives at the centre of historical explanation.[67] Yet, this tended to treat oral material as if it was text. This was the case partly because historians working on the GHA had to convince historians of Europe that non-written societies also had history, or, that decentralised societies, such as that of the Igbo in Nigeria or the Luo in Kenya, had something akin to what Euro-American thinkers had called 'civilisation' or 'states', in terms that were understandable by pre-existing standards of historical scholarship. In their efforts to demand an inclusion for African history within the Euro-American historical discipline, Afrocentric or Africa-centred historians within the GHA were dealing with European projections of what constituted history on their societies.

This conceptual problem has been theorised by a multitude of postcolonial thinkers. The Congolese philosopher Valentin Mudimbe, most

66 Raymond F. Betts, "Decolonisation. A brief history of the word" in *Beyond Empire and Nation. The Decolonization of African and Asian societies, 1930s-1970s*, eds. Els Bogaerts and Remco Raben (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 23-37, 26.

67 Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 116. Oral historiography refers to both the methodology of oral history as well as oral traditions as a genre of source material, David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London: Longmans, 1982), 2.

notably in this context, argued that 'Africa' as a concept was an imaginary construction by European outsiders and, importantly, African insiders as well. Like Edward Said before him concerning 'the Orient', Mudimbe analysed the creation of an African alterity.[68] He specifically observed how African methods of knowing, African epistemologies, had become entangled with the creation of a Euro-American epistemological system of superiority. Mudimbe argued that Africa as an idea in modernity had essentially been invented by Europeans from the 15th century onwards, culminating in the creation of a colonial library. As a concept the term 'colonial library' refers to a constellation of 'western' mythologies, racisms and narratives of what constitutes the 'dark continent' — a term which was and is in itself a part of that very colonial library.[69] Anthropology and ethnology had been the disciplines within the European academy that had most contributed to a body of knowledge that distinguished between Africa as the Other and 'the west' as the Same, otherwise known as tradition and modernity.[70] Knowledge produced about Africa, Mudimbe argued, was therefore grounded in the early stages of the discipline of anthropology and may have said more about those producing it than about those who were the object of such production.[71]

Protest or rather reaction against this colonial library is as old as colonialism itself and also forms a key part of the history of decolonisation. African and black intellectuals from the 19th century onwards, such as the West Indian Edward Wilmot Blyden had already started asserting that the specific cultures of African peoples needed to be preserved and promoted in order to resist Euro-American cultural hegemony and the erasure of an African uniqueness.[72] The intellectuals

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68 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)

69 V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988)

70 Mudimbe frames this assertion in a structuralist paradigm because he uses the work of Clause Lévi-Strauss as a starting point from which to investigate the possibility of anthropological knowledge about Africa. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 16–22.

71 'Africa' or African studies were part of the fundaments upon which the theoretical and methodological basics of anthropology was built. Sally Falk Moore, "Changing Perspectives on a Changing Africa: The Work of Anthropology" in *Africa and the disciplines: the contributions of research in Africa to the social sciences and humanities* eds. Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3-57 and Moses, *Afrotopia*, 18-43.

72 Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, 54-94.

who began advocating for a *General History of Africa*, continued this reaction against what Mudimbe called the colonial library. They, too, were concerned with a restoration and preservation of specific African heritage, in the form of history. They were determined to showcase what they called the African initiative in history. African history, they declared, had not just been a part of European history. This was a challenge to the very notion that Europeans had been the key determinant in African history.[73] Being free, from Europe, from racism and imperialism, from anything non-African essentially, was key. As part of this process, however, postcolonial thinkers who have concerned themselves specifically with historicity and the historical discipline and its importance for public intellectual life, have noted that for history to become truly 'decolonised' a necessary step is to move away from European paradigms in explaining non-European pasts.

In 2000 Dipesh Chakrabarty published his now seminal work *Provincializing Europe*, in which he problematised the use of European categories in historical explanations of post-colonial modernity.[74] In order for the specific past of localities outside colonising Europe to be understood on their own terms, historians had to move past the idea that Europe could be used as a universal model on which to base theories written about the rest of the world. Europe, in other words, had to be provincialised, to be understood on its own terms as well.[75] Chakrabarty called this History 1 and History 2; wherein History 1 referred to 'universal historical logic' and History 2 referred to historical differences 'on the ground'.[76] This did not express a kind of historical relativism, but rather commanded the historian towards the need to hold notions of modernity and historical differences in perpetual tension. It was meant to make historians realise that they had conflated certain aspects of History 1 and History 2.[77] Chakrabarty, and many others before and after him, wanted Europe to recognise its particularity and to distil from European history what was and what was not universal. Europe was to re-become a province of universal history rather than

73 Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, 240.

74 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)

75 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 3-6.

76 Ibid, 62-71.

77 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "In Defense of "Provincializing Europe": A Response to Carola Dietze" *History and Theory* 47:1 (2008): 85-96, 92.

its metropole. The assignment thereby put to the historical discipline by Chakarbarty, which echoes through most postcolonial theory, has proven hard to fulfil.

Race could be seen as one of those universalisms that was developed in Europe to categorise the rest of the world.[78] For some time, it was difficult for African historians to be seen as truly objective by Euro-Americans due to the difference inherently installed in their race. They were caught in the dubious inheritance of 19th century racialism.[79] Racialism here refers to the idea that humanity could be classified into different and distinct 'races' with heritable characteristics that are shared. In a racialist view of the world these characteristics constituted a racial essence. Much of 19th and early 20th century European intellectual thought and academic study on non-European areas is based on these assumptions.[80] That racial essence was called 'extrinsic racism' by Kwame Anthony Appiah — the idea that one should treat races differently based on these inherited characteristics. 'Intrinsic' racism, moreover, describes the, conscious or unconscious, idea that one race is superior over the other, that there is a moral difference between races and that no matter the success or intellect of someone from the other, inferior, race, they will always remain different and shall therefore be treated differently.[81] 'Racism' in the colloquial use of the word is usually not based on such a thought-through idea of racialism. Rather, it is the result of special advantages that are derived from assumed differences in races, which result in a vested interest to uphold those advantages and which do stem from racialist and racist ideas on superiority and inferiority of other perceived races. That in-

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78 See Will Bridges' work on the 'inhumanities', on the exclusion of certain humans – the enslaved - from the studies of the humanities as well as the contribution the humanities have made to dehumanising logics that tended to place black Africans outside of humanity, Will Bridges, "A Brief History of the Inhumanities." *History of Humanities* 4:1 (2019): 1-26: http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/701981

79 For a good summary of the discussion on the historical origins of racism and whether we should look for them in modernity or pre-modernity, see: Vanita Seth, "The Origins of Racism. A Critique of the History of Ideas" *History and Theory* 59:3 (2020): 343-68.

80 For a good study on the 'recalibration' of racial politics as a justification for empire in 20th century Africa, see: Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 217-259.

81 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13-15.

feriority is linked to difference: the word 'race' usually only comes in use when referring to an 'other' and therefore it almost subconsciously pertains to that other — the African in this context.

Simultaneously, the concept of race has been adopted throughout the black world — in a political sense of the word 'black' — as an emancipatory mechanism. It has been a declaration of identity, the consciousness of blackness morphing into the freeing ideology of black consciousness, part of a long history of resistance and anti-colonialism. The notion of race, or blackness, then, refers to a double spectrum, both damming and freeing. In the context of the GHA it is, moreover, inherently connected to universal Human Rights, for the constitution of black humanity contains the idea that humanity extends beyond the white European. UNESCO's denunciation of racism in 1947 follows from this idea and the GHA was in a way a logical result of the ideology that all humans deserved equal treatment and therefore history — echoed in Amilcar Cabral's call for the 'inalienable right' of Africans to have their own history.[82] The GHA's focus on pan-Africanist African history cannot be seen as entirely separate from the emancipatory efforts of those who conceptualised (political) blackness in order to further emancipation. Yet, at the same time, precisely because of its biological essentialising tendencies racialism had been made suspect within the GHA. However, even though 'race' as such does not correspond to a biological reality, it nevertheless structures the lives of those who undergo racialisation and this was no different for the historians working on the GHA. Scholars understand this presence of race as a socially meaningful category of identity that can and should therefore be studied as a part of society.[83] As a result of this understanding, scholars have also delved into the study of white people as a distinct social and racial grouping.[84]

Throughout this thesis, I will make use of race as a category that is historically determined and will be attentive to the socio-economic and historically and culturally determined context of race as it played out within the practice of decolonisation. This is the case also for the role

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82 Amilcar Cabral, *United and Struggle. Speeches and Writings* (London: Heinemann, 1980), 130.

83 See for instance: Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory. An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 10-11.

84 See for instance: Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010)

of whiteness within the history of the GHA. Such attention to the historically and socially determined role of race within the history of scholarship, I argue, is an important part of unravelling the everyday practice of Africanising history and the problems that such a project ran into. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni has argued that decolonising historiography during the period of the GHA was akin to deracialising it.[85] A focus on race as a historically and socially mediated position may therefore highlight the various issue that the GHA ran into by virtue of its agenda of deracialisation in a world that was still thoroughly racialised.

It should be noted therefore that 'decolonisation' can refer to a multitude of different epistemological interpretations and aims as well as the historical phenomenon of the end of empire itself.[86] In his seminal *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) Frantz Fanon first treated decolonisation as a process that involved the whole of society and which thereby transcended the purely political.[87] Following from Fanon and others, the construction of decolonisation as a concept and critical angle developed as a way to analyse both the past and present of formerly colonial societies, akin to but not the same as 'postcolonial'. The African-Caribbean context also has its own Marxist tradition criticising colonialism, to be associated with Eric Williams and C.L.R. James. Decolonial thinking is a part of this and principally associated with a Latin American group of thinkers, most notably Walter Mignolo.[88] Decolonial analysis therefore, is often focused on the production of knowledge. In an African context, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, however, makes the case that the decolonising projects of the post-independence period are truncated and that decolonisation as a turn away from European ways of thinking has to further permeate institutional structures.[89] These thinkers as well as the older traditions described above have

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85 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Imperative of Decolonizing the Modern Westernized University" in *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa,* eds. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Siphamandla Zondi (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2016), 27-46, 42-43.

86 See for instance the roundtable mentioned above which engages with the theory, history, and practice of decolonisation: Behm et al., "History on the Line", 169-191

87 Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961)

88 Walter Mignolo, *On decoloniality: concepts, analytics, and praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018)

89 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Imperative of Decolonizing", 39-43; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa,* 162-3, 176-81.

today inspired new groups to demand a decolonisation of the university in the form of liberation from Euro-American hegemony in the academy as well as economic justice, particularly in South Africa.[90]

This particular study, however, focuses on decolonisation as Africanisation or deracialisation in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, which could be seen as a different although not unrelated phase within the history of decolonisation. It should not just be considered as a prehistory of 21st century calls for a decolonisation of academia, but rather as a different episode within the same narrative.[91] It thereby attempts to repair a certain amnesia present in our current moment. As such, this thesis locates the GHA as situated within a long emancipatory tradition of 'moving away from the west'. Mudimbe's as well as Chakrabarty's work are themselves part of this tradition and of the history of liberation from European epistemologies.

Methodology and primary sources

This section will detail what methods and sources I use throughout this thesis in order to answer why the ideal of African history as formulated within the GHA was so difficult to translate into practice. I will make use of historiographical methods of source criticism through close-reading and contextualisation. As already detailed above I am indebted to the scholarly personae as an important methodological angle and, like those who have developed the concept, look at the history of scholarship not just through its intellectual output, but through the 'doings' of those who produce that output. I take the critical angle of postcolonial studies to augment this with a sensitivity to the discursive and social aspect of these doings — equally influenced by scholars

90 See: Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*, 221-42; Gurminder K. Bhambra, Kerem Nişancioğlu and Dalia Gebrial, *Decolonising the University* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); Lynn Hewlett et al., "Key Features of Student Protest Across Historical Periods in Sub-Saharan Africa" in *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa*, ed. Susan Booysen (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 330-4 and Jonathan D. Jansen ed., *Decolonisation in Universities. The Politics of Knowledge* (Johanesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), see also, in a Dutch context, to which this thesis also belongs: Melissa F. Weiner and Antonio Carmona Báez, ed., *Smash the pillars: decoloniality and the imaginary of color in the Dutch Kingdom* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018)

91 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Imperative of Decolonizing", 42-43.

who have concerned themselves with personae.[92] At the same time, I offer a reconstruction of decolonising modes of scholarship, including but not exclusive to its intellectual output, before postcolonialism, but not as a prehistory of postcolonialism. I do not necessarily aim to write a narrative that shows how and where postcolonial critique finds its origins, but rather wish to recall a moment in the history of decolonisation that is different from such postcolonial critique, but not entirely separate from it. I ask the question of what it means to decolonise knowledge, not on a theoretical, but on a practical level. This is therefore not an intellectual history of decolonisation, or of the GHA itself, but rather a history of the practice of decolonisation as it took place within the GHA.

This study, moreover, is based mostly on archival material and written published sources and concerns itself with both the ideal and the reality of scholarship. It therefore looks at several scholarly practices whilst making a sharp distinction between ideals and practice. I do not aim to provide for a typology of the ideal of Africanising history in its entirety, but will offer such a typology focused on the specific project of the UNESCO *General History of Africa*. Following scholars such as Paul and Jo Tollebeek, I first look at what people imagined their historiographical ideals should be and then analyse how these ideals were exercised in daily and often partly predetermined scholarly practices — reviewing, editing, convening and corresponding.[93] That means analysing the GHA's policy papers, detailing the duties of editors and authors, and how they came into being through official meetings conducted under the auspices of UNESCO to understand how the ideals that became guidelines throughout the project came into being. It also means analysing how such everyday scholarly practices such as the editorial decision-making process and the internal peer reviewing were expressed specifically in the GHA's context of active and con-

92 Mineke Bosch, "Scholarly Personae and Twentieth-Century Historians: Explorations of a Concept" *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 131:4 (2016): 33-54 and Niskanen and Barany, "Introduction", 1-17.

93 Herman Paul, "Performing History: How Historical Scholarship is Shaped by Epistemic Virtues" *History and Theory* 50:1 (2011): 1-19, 11, Jo Tollebeek, *Fredericq & Zonen. Een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008) 22-3, Jo Tollebeek, "L'historien quotidien: pour une anthropologie de la science historique modern", *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 61:2 (2011): 143-67, 153. See also: Pieter Huistra, *Bouwmeesters, zedenmeesters. Geschiedbeoefening in Nederland tussen 1830 en 1870* (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij van Tilt, 2019)

scious decolonising of historical scholarship. I therefore use the concept 'practice' as pertaining to preconceived processes of scholarship. I wish to emphasise however, that this includes a sensitivity to cultural and political contexts and how these influence everyday realities. In fact, the realities that I discuss in this thesis, as they emerged from the formulated ideals, were often deeply influenced by geo-politics and cultures of scholarship. My study, therefore, intertwines a focus on the everyday reality of history writing with a receptiveness to larger historical and cultural developments. Practice here therefore carries a heuristic weight in that it indicates how I look at my source material and not necessarily or not only what type of source material I use.

The material itself was mostly found in archives, located in Paris, Ibadan, Evanston and Ann Arbor. This thesis, therefore, takes archival documents as its basis, augmented with both published texts produced by the GHA itself as well as independent published sources, such as autobiographies. That means that the narrative in this thesis is partly shaped by the archive itself in that I look at what historians working on the GHA are doing in the context of their work at UNESCO and mediated through UNESCO's archives. Although the archival materials to be found offline are more personal than the online materials, which contain the official and often published minute meetings, they still only indirectly narrate both the conviviality and the antimony of editing a work of historical scholarship over a timespan of nearly 35 years. These documents may illustrate the complexities of writing an eight-volume work of history and through that we may catch a glimpse of friendship or, conversely, animosity, but the relationships built during the lifespan of the GHA were perhaps more meaningful than an institutional archive can reveal. To augment this story, therefore, I look at more personal texts, such as personal reflections and autobiographies, which are subjective in how they mediate stories. Autobiographies contain information, not necessarily about actual events, but, more importantly, about the subjective way in which their authors experienced the process of writing and editing the GHA. I use the autobiographies of Bethwell Ogot, already referred to above, and Jan Vansina to gauge what both men, a Kenyan and a Belgian, thought it was like to work on the GHA and ask how they positioned themselves as historians of Africa, African or European, towards colleagues as well as outsiders. The point of this thesis, therefore, is not necessarily to dwell too much on the individual, but rather to illustrate the collec-

tive labour involved in the drafting of the *General History of Africa* as well as its collective identity towards others.

The largest part of the *General History of Africa's* archival deposit can be found at the UNESCO archives in Paris.[94] A majority of the official documentation, meetings, so-called secretariat documents, policy documents and published material, including the volumes themselves, can be found online. The physical archive, moreover, contains correspondence, including complaints, notes and minutes, and, importantly, peer review reports of various volumes. These reports contain detailed comments and judgments on individual contributions to the GHA and their authors made by GHA key figures. The GHA was in the habit of sending round first drafts of volumes to reading committees set up for the purpose of reviewing these drafts. They therefore contain information on the standards of scholarship that existed within the GHA and the way in which pieces were judged — including suggestions and ideas on how to improve a chapter. The UNESCO archive fortunately not only holds final reports collating all comments, but also contains individual and very detailed responses by GHA key figures. I also found these peer review reports in the archive of Jacob Ade Ajayi, which forms a part of the Jadeas Trust Library and which is housed in Ibadan, Nigeria, in the residence of Ajayi's widow, Christie Ade Ajayi. This particular archive has functioned as a valuable addition to the archive of the metropole. It contained reading reports by Ajayi himself for various chapters, but also some reports for volumes that are not located in the UNESCO archives. The Ibadan archive, moreover, in some cases houses the other part of correspondences found at UNESCO as well as new correspondence, for instance between Ajayi and Boahen. This archive, therefore, offers a glimpse of the international network of the GHA. Other personal collections could likely be found in other corners of the African continent that I was unable to visit. The archive has nevertheless helped me in constructing a chain of information between Paris and elsewhere. It reflects well, as I have already stated elsewhere and as has also been commented upon by Luise White, the

94 UAP, "Finding Aid to Sources in the UNESCO Archives on the *General History of Africa* (Focus on Phase I)," 7 March 2012, revised 29 May 2012, revised 9 September 2014, revised 16 December 2015.

eclectic aspect of the history of the GHA and postcolonial history in general, spread as it is over several continents.[95]

The thesis also makes use of some archival documents from the Jan Vansina papers at Northwestern University. Unfortunately, his professional correspondence has been locked away under embargo until 2047, but the archive still contains titbits of information and, most importantly, correspondence detailing Vansina's movements and scholarly habits. The last archival source base is that of Ali Mazrui's papers, located in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan. As with Vansina's papers, I have primarily used this to illustrate what Mazrui's working life looked like, what he did on a daily basis. The sources for this thesis are therefore spread over three continents. This is meaningful because the story of African historiography itself in large part follows that of its archival deposit. The final destination of these papers, created in different places and ending up in different places results from institutional change over decades. The institutional focal point of and power within African studies has equally shifted over these three continents, from Europe to Africa to finally land in the United States. The location of archival collections is no coincidence.

Besides archival materials and UNESCO's published sources, I have also made use of another type of published material, primarily to reflect on the GHA after it was published, which forms the third part of my thesis. My last two chapters focus on the way the GHA was received by both outsiders as well as insiders. I therefore look at a corpus of reviews written about the volumes as well as obituaries and other reflective pieces written by or about its main contributors. Through a close reading of these published but relatively short pieces, it becomes possible to form an image of the GHA as it existed in the minds of scholars, friend and foe alike.

I also want to spend a moment reflecting on my own position and the location from which I am working within this work of scholarship. Following from the assertion made earlier that whiteness can be studied as a distinct racial identity, moreover, Europe equally could be seen as a continent that is subject to analysis which takes into account

95 For a reflection on my time in both the UNESCO and Ajayi archives, see: Larissa Schulte Nordholt, "From Metropole to Margin in UNESCO's General History of Africa – Documents of Historiographical Decolonization in Paris and Ibadan", *History in Africa* 46 (2019): 403-412. See also: Luise White, "Hodgepodge Historiography: Documents, Itineraries, and the Absence of Archives" *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 309-318, 313-17.

racialisation and colonial history. That is to say, Europe, like Africa, can be decolonised. In fact, this is part of what Chakrabarty and, importantly, his critics, such as Frederick Cooper, have argued. Cooper, in response to Chakrabarty, makes the point that in order to provincialise Europe, one must actually *provincialise Europe*, that is, study terms such as 'Enlightenment' and 'capitalism' in their specific historical contexts in order to find out about their particularities, without universalizing those historical contexts.[96] For the same reasons other critics of postcolonial studies have noted that use of the term 'the west' is problematic precisely because it often functions as a rhetorical device without clear cut reflections in historical reality — which is why I have opted for 'Euro-American'.[97] Therefore, part of the escape from the colonial library, it seems, lies in a critical inquiry into the places that created that library in addition to a study of the places that were subjected to its logic.

Such an awareness of the need for a decolonisation (or deimperialisation) of Europe is important in this thesis precisely because it is being written by a white European (Dutch) author, without obvious ties to the history she discusses, situated at an institution with historic ties to the very colonial knowledge that was being criticised in the GHA.[98] I am, so to speak, part of the problem that the GHA wished to address. I encountered this history asking questions as part of my own (feminist) process of emancipation as a woman in academia: Who gets to speak for what past? Who gets to be part of 'national' histories? And how does that process of emancipation take place? Such questions of historical ownership speak to me because I myself have wondered

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96 Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 20-22. Of course, this particular sentence should be read in light of the history of postcolonial theory which has sometimes tended to paint with rather large brushstrokes. The enlightenment has of course been studied in its historical context. The point made here is that such studies have sometimes been used to generalise about the course of history and that in order for us to understand both enlightenment as well as, say, Indian history, we must not transport conclusions from the study of the enlightenment to understand Indian pasts, but neither should we disavow of the enlightenment entirely as if it itself were a monolithic historical occurrence.

97 Neil Lazarus, "The fetish of the "the West" in postcolonial theory" in *Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies*, eds. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 43-64.

98 See: Willem Otterspeer ed., *Leiden Oriental connections 1850-1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1989)

such things. I have also done so in part because public debate in the Netherlands, and throughout Europe and North America, is currently focused on the continuing legacy of a colonial past that we share, unequally, not just with each other and in the way our societies are made up of diverse groups, but with peoples across the globe. The study of the GHA here then, partly by virtue of my positionality, is also about Europe and knowledge creation about Africa in Europa as well as it is about African decolonisation on the ground. Does that mean that this thesis has nothing real to say about the development of African studies on the continent? I do not think so and simply wish to point out that the creation of African studies has an entangled history that includes Europe (as well as America) and that my writing of this study is part of that. Any real investigation into that history must necessarily take into account the questions that flow from it. My questions are focused on decolonisation and questions of identity in knowledge production because this seems important to me in the current historical moment as I experience it in European academic scholarship focused on non-European worlds, which increasingly concerns itself with the legacy of colonialism in knowledge production. I therefore want to follow Vansina's awareness of the role of subjectivity in historiography and apply it to myself.

Organisation of the thesis

The objective of this study is to investigate how formulated ideals of a decolonisation of African history were translated into practice within the GHA. In doing so, it will analyse what this might tell us about the establishment of African history within the humanities and as part of a process of decolonisation. I therefore lay no claim to reconstructing the history of the GHA in its entirety and focus explicitly on the practice of history making within the GHA and less so on the substance of the historiography or the content which the GHA produced.

In order to answer the questions posed in this introduction, the study is divided into three parts, preceded by a dramatis personae of the most important contributors to this study. The first substantive part examines the formulated ideals of African history and historians of Africa, be they African, European or other. What were the philosophical historical and political ideals upon which the *General History of Africa* was built and why were these ideals formulated as such? I will answer this question in three chapters. The first describes and

analyses the intellectual ideals that were formulated in opposition to the eurocentrism that had been present in African historiography until then and to which historians of Africa felt they needed to respond. The second chapter moves on from a response to eurocentrism to the formulation of epistemic and political ideals based on the pan-African idea that the GHA needed to be written, collectively, by Africans. The last of these three chapters focuses on the political emancipation that GHA envisioned and the role the volumes were to play in African postcolonial nation states and their position in the world order. It also discusses how the GHA wanted the volumes to be distributed, widely, around the continent, and its plan for educational dissemination of the works as part of its emancipatory ideals. It thereby becomes clear that the GHA was aimed at two audiences at once; Euro-American and African academics and the citizens of newly independent nation states.

Part two shifts the focus to the realities of the ideals discussed in part one. How did the historians working on the GHA try to bring their ideals into practice and what became of them during the long process of drafting the *General History of Africa*? Chapter 4 focuses on the editing of the GHA, and asks the question of how the GHA brought its anti-ideal of avoiding eurocentrism into practice. It analyses how standards of scholarship based on this anti-ideal within the GHA were negotiated when they clashed with ideals of political emancipation. Chapter 5, therefore, focuses on the realities of the ideals of African collectivity as discussed in Chapter 2, and the political ideals as discussed in Chapter 3. It takes a chronological approach and explains that, whilst at first the GHA was very successful at implementing its ideals of African collectivity and shared knowledge production, this became more difficult as funding dwindled due to changes in the political climate in Africa and the world at large. Chapter 5 also takes into account the realities of the day-to-day work of editing a multi-volume multi-authored project. Chapter 6 continues the exploration of African collectivity as a reality and zooms in on one specific matter of tension within the GHA: the paradoxical presence of white European and white American historians of Africa. It shows the far-reaching influence these Euro-American historians still had, as a result of the global politics of knowledge production about Africa during the Cold War and the resulting disparate material circumstances under which the work had to be carried out. It also discusses how different scholarly templates for African and Euro-American historians of Africa could subsequently emerge. Chapter 7 also focuses on Europe, but

this time as a historiographical presence rather than through the lens of individual scholars. It studies the realities of political emancipation as discussed in Chapter 3 and, as in Chapter 4, it also asks the question of when and how ideals of anti-eurocentrism, next to scholarly reputability as discussed in Chapter 1, conflicted with ideals of political emancipation. Whilst dealing with the history of colonialism on the continent, the GHA had no choice but to write about European influences on African history. Chapter 7, therefore, analyses how the GHA dealt with the history of colonisation in volume VII and decolonisation in volume VIII. Because the history of colonialism and its formal ending was very recent, the boundaries between scholarship and politics were less clear.

The third and final part of this study focuses on the retrospective perception of the GHA project in its final years and after it had been completed. It asks the question of how the project was reflected upon after it had been brought to a finish and how the ideals, as formulated in the 1960s, have withstood the test of time. Chapter 8 is a history of the reception of the GHA and focuses on how mainly American and British Africanists reflected on the project, because they formed the global centre for academic study of Africa at the time. The chapter offers an extensive analysis of the quite critical reviews written about the GHA and compares these to those written about its rival project, *The Cambridge History of Africa*. Chapter 9 is organised around the way the GHA was remembered — within its own ranks and more broadly on the African continent as a whole — as a project of public outreach instead of merely as series of academic tomes. It argues that this remembrance is full of nostalgia. It shows how the GHA was evaluated as a project of intellectual emancipation and returns to the observation that the GHA was essentially an anti-colonial project of the post-independence era.

Dramatis Personae

Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi (1929–2014)

Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi was the Nigerian editor of volume VI, which dealt with Africa during the 19th century, before the direct colonial occupation of the continent by Europeans. Ajayi was a very active member of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (ISC) and was one of the committee members who attended most of the meetings. He was also a part of the well-known Ibadan school of history in Nigeria and was an advocate for history in the style of the Annales school, opting to focus on historical continuity rather than events. In 1969, he wrote the seminal and influential essay *Colonialism: an episode in African history*, in which he argued for a focus on continuity in African history, stating that it should be understood on its own terms and not as an appendage of European history. His work focused on the writing of Yoruba history and the history of Christian missions in Nigeria. His academic career was spent mostly at Ibadan university, although he also became vice chancellor of the University of Lagos between 1972 and 1978, on top of several sojourns abroad. He and Adu Boahen were great friends. Ajayi was known by some of his students as 'the one who lies down to fight'.[1]

1 This anecdote was told to me during a meeting with Niyi Ade Ajayi, Ade Ajayi's son.

Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986)

Cheikh Anta Diop is perhaps the most well-known, out of all the GHA contributors. He was a historian, anthropologist and also a physicist who studied the origins of the ancient Egyptians. In his first seminal publication, *Nations nègres et culture* (1954), he came up with the controversial thesis that the ancient Egyptians had been black Africans. He also advocated for the cultural unity of the African continent in his 1959 monograph *L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire: domains du pariarcat et du matriarcat dans l'antiquité classique*. His work was immensely influential across disciplines and Diop became an important intellectual in Black American circles advocating an Afrocentric view of history. Afrocentric here meaning the exact reverse of eurocentrism (without capitalisation), the idea that civilisation had originated with the ancient Egyptians. In the *General History of Africa* Diop was no less controversial than outside; he reiterated his Egyptian thesis in volume II of the GHA and during a symposium in Cairo in 1974. Extensive debate on his work ensued.

Adu Boahen (1932–2006)

Adu Boahen fulfilled the role of president to the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a *General History of Africa* from 1983 until the completion of the work. Boahen was the Ghanaian editor of volume VII, which concentrated on Africa during the colonial period and in which the editor focused on resistance to colonial occupation. Boahen became the first Ghanaian to receive a PhD in history from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in 1959 and went on to work as a lecturer and later professor in history at the University of Ghana. He was an engaged scholar who even ran for president for the New Patriotic Party against flight lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings in 1992. This was partly a result of his public lectures on the history of Ghana between 1972 and 1987, later published as *The Ghanaian Sphinx: The Contemporary History of Ghana 1972–1987*. Boahen also wrote books on the history of West Africa, most notably his 1966 *Topics in West-African History*. He was a critic of Marxist historiography outside and inside of the *General History of Africa*.

Jean Devisse (1923–1996)

Jean Devisse was a French historian who, like Vansina, was at first specialised in Medieval history. From 1958 onwards he started focusing on Africa after a posting at the university of Dakar. He functioned as the *rapporteur*, or secretary, for the duration of the *General History of Africa* project. In that capacity he provided feedback on both content as well as organisational matters.

Ivan Hrbek (1923–1993)

Ivan Hrbek was the Czech assistant editor of the third volume of the *General History of Africa*, focusing on Africa from the 7th to the 11th century, alongside Mohammed El Fasi. In reality, however, Hrbek conducted most of the editorial work on the volume. Hrbek was also in charge of the reading committee for volume IV, dealing with Africa from the 12th to the 16th century. Both volumes dealt extensively with migrations and population movements, causing Hrbek and Djibril Tamsir Niane, the editor of volume IV, to have to deal with the so-called 'Hamitic Hypothesis'. Hrbek was a member and later the head of the African and Arabic Department and Oriental Institute at Charles University in Prague between 1953 and 1992. He had converted to Islam as a young man and translated the Koran into Czech.[2]

Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1922–2006)

Joseph Ki-Zerbo was the Burkinabé editor of the first volume of the *General History of Africa*, which dealt with the methodology of African history as well as its prehistory. As such, he wrote the introduction to the whole series in which he argued that African history had been distorted by a colonialist view. He was one of the very first African historians to produce a synthesis on the history of Africa in 1963: *Le monde africain noir: histoire et civilisation*. Ki-Zerbo was also an anti-colonial intellectual who was active in African student circles in Paris in the 1940s, where he became friends with Cheikh Anta Diop and who participated in the political decolonisation of French West Africa, creating a political party in 1957, *Mouvement de Libération Nationale* to advocate for a 'no' vote in the referendum created by Charles de Gaulle to

2 Maurel, "L'histoire Générale de l'Afrique de l'Unesco", 726.

create a Franco-African community. He remained active in the politics, but was also professor of history at the University of Ouagadougou from 1968 until 1973.

Ali Mazrui (1933–2004)

Ali Mazrui was the Kenyan director of volume VIII, which dealt with African history from 1935 until 1975. Decolonisation therefore played an important role in his volume. He was a political scientist rather than a historian in the strict sense of the word and according to Vansina was chosen because no suitable historian could be found, despite the fact that the GHA already had a Kenyan director. Mazrui was a postcolonial intellectual who often commented on international political affairs, developing a critical attitude towards American imperialism. His most important work is perhaps the triple Africa thesis; the idea that Africa has had three major influences: indigenous, Christian capitalist colonialism and Islamic. But Mazrui contributed to a myriad of different intellectual debates surrounding African identity, history and politics. He was perhaps the most prolific of the GHA scholars.

Bethwell Ogot (b. 1929)

Bethwell Ogot fulfilled the role of president to the *General History of Africa* from 1978 until 1983. As such the 'description of the project' which was adjoined to every volume was published under his name. He was also the volume director of volume V which dealt with Africa from the 16th until the 18th century, focusing on the continuing evolution of African states and cultures, including the increase of external trade and the consequences of the slave trade. Ogot is a Kenyan historian specialised in the study of oral traditions in non-centralised societies, who has written extensively on the history of the Luo, as well as African historiography. He spent most of his academic life at Makerere University in Uganda and as the chairman of the History Department at the University of Nairobi, although he also served in non-academic positions within the East African Community as well as UNESCO itself. Within the GHA he became increasingly important after taking on the role of president and was often critical of his colleagues' tendency to focus on centralised states.

Djibril Tamsir Niane (1932–2021)

Already mentioned above, Niane was the Guinean editor of the fourth volume of the *General History of Africa*. Like Hrbek, Niane was involved in trying to rid volume IV of the *General History of Africa* from references to various interpretations of the 'Hamitic hypothesis'. A cluster of interpretations surrounding the external origins of some African peoples which he vehemently opposed. He notably engaged in the collection of oral traditions by writing down the tale of Sundiata; founder of the Mali empire and became a political refugee as a result of the regime of Ahmed Sékou Touré.

Jan Vansina (1929–2017)

Jan Vansina was a Belgian pioneer in the study of oral traditions and perhaps the most important European participating in the drafting of the *General History of Africa*, which he professed deeply changed his views on African history. He wrote several chapters for the GHA but perhaps more importantly, acted as one of the most loyal committee members of the ISC, tirelessly working to complete the project from 1971, when he joined the committee, until 1998, when the last volume was officially published in French. Vansina spent most of his academic career at the University of Wisconsin. He had been recruited to come set up a graduate programme in African history there in 1960 by Philip Curtin, who would remain a lifelong friend as well as rival. Vansina also spent several years in the 1950s and 1960s conducting fieldwork in the Belgian Congo, later the Democratic Republic of the Congo, specifically spending time amongst the Kuba. During that period, he also taught the University of Louvanium in what was then Léopoldville. He returned to teach at the same university, renamed the national University of Zaire and later the University of Kinshasa, between 1972 and 1974. His most important work is undoubtedly his work on oral tradition, culminating in his 1990 *Paths in the Rainforest*. Other acclaimed books include *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (1966) and *Being Colonized: The Kuba Exoperience in Rural Congo, 1880–1960*. His work on oral tradition as historical source material revolutionised the historical discipline.

PART ONE

The Ideals of the *General History of Africa*

Introduction to part one

Why is it important to look at the ideals espoused by historians working on the GHA? One of the main goals of the *General History of Africa* was to redeem Africa's past as worthy of scholarly attention. Historians working on the GHA aimed to combat the European idea that Africa had no history to speak of. Creating new ideals tethered to African historical research, therefore, was the *raison d'être* of the project. For that reason, part one of this study looks into the ways that African historians and other historians of Africa shaped their ideals of African history. The point is not to say that ideals are necessarily the best way to understand the *General History* project, or any collaborative historiographical effort, but rather to show how important ideals were to scholars who were immersed in the reconstruction of African history and moreover, to show what the GHA aimed to accomplish. Chapters 1, 2 and 3, therefore, scrutinise the ideals connected to the project on various levels; historiographically and politically. Part one looks at the three guiding ideals, each corresponding to a chapter, which the GHA developed during its early phase: anti-eurocentrism, pan-African collectivity and emancipation. It connects these to the academic and political goals the *General History of Africa* set out to fulfil, to show what the historians working on the GHA had envisioned African history should be. Writing academic African history, from the 1950s onwards, became inextricably linked to political decolonisation and the anti-colonial movements for independence. Ideals in this context, therefore, are why the project came into being in the first place and explain why it took shape in the way that it did; as a pan-African collaborative project of emancipation that wanted to create scholarly standards of African history. Part one of this thesis therefore asks the question of what the historiographical and political ideals were upon which the *General History of Africa* was built and why these ideals were formulated in the way that they were?

CHAPTER ONE
Ideals and Anti-ideals in Reaction to eurocentrism

Introduction

The starting point of this first chapter on ideals is the problem that African historical studies were faced with in the immediate post-war era. A historian of Africa had to be persistent and willing to defy a host of racist ideas concerning the perceived lack of historicity of the continent, by which I mean the idea that the African past was part of a myth rather than history. They had to explain what merited historical interest in Africa proper, rather than interest in the history of Europeans in Africa. Chapter 1, therefore, describes and analyses the historiographical ideals that were formulated in opposition to the eurocentrism that had been present in modern European academic writing about the African past and to which historians of Africa felt they needed to respond.

As a result of this modern eurocentrism, these ideals were often conceptualised as anti-ideals: mistakes and undesirable convictions or attitudes to avoid — scholarly vices in other words. The chapter, therefore, draws on the study of scholarly personae to show how the GHA drew on ideas of scholars as critical producers of knowledge, whilst simultaneously constructing eurocentrism as the result of

shoddy scholarship connected to bias nestled in individuals.[1] The GHA did not totally reject historical scholarship as it had been developed in Europe, but wished to amend it and add new repertoires of scholarship, so as to expunge the existing eurocentric model when it came to the writing of African history. The subject matter to be engaged played an important role therein. In order to get away from eurocentric prejudice, the precolonial became an ideological recourse to place opposite the ideological space of colonialist history. This was the case even though 'precolonial' emphasised the change brought about by the colonisers. The chapter, therefore, shows that one of the three guiding ideals, next to pan-African collectivity and emancipation, of the *General History of Africa*, was that the work had to be in opposition to eurocentrism and eurocentric interpretations of history in order to create new standards of African history. This was an ideal that was mostly academic in nature, meant to establish African history as a reputable scholarly activity.

To analyse these anti-ideals, I will primarily make use of the GHA's positioning policy documents and some of the published pieces written for the project by its key figures. The documents, written during the GHA's early drafting phase, may help construct how the GHA historians positioned themselves opposite the figure of Europe and its historiography. It is during the drafting of goals and guidelines that the historians working on the GHA started to envision their ideal of African history. I will therefore look at documents and texts that show how the GHA envisioned that African history should be written on a daily basis; the rules and guidelines the GHA created for contributors and editors alike as well as the eventual publication, specifically the preface and the General Introduction to the GHA. These last two

1 I draw mostly on what Herman Paul has described as the meso level of research into scholarly persona. At that level scholarly personae are seen as regulative ideals or models of scholarly selfhood that specify abilities, attitudes and dispositions that are regarded as crucial for a specific mode of study, including habits, skills or competencies required for being a good scholar or, in this case, vices, habits and attitudes that signify bad – eurocentric – scholars. I have adopted such an approach because the GHA historians put their idea of a scholarly persona to work not by rejecting the European historical academy altogether, but by positioning themselves as a better, but not radically different, alternative of what it meant to study African history as opposed to that of the eurocentric historian. See: Herman Paul, "Introduction: Scholarly personae: what they are and why they matter" in *How to be a Historian. Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800-2000,* ed. Herman Paul (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 1-15, 3-6.

published sources are interesting because they more or less reiterated what had already been said in the positioning documents at much greater length — a testimony to the importance of and attachment to the historiographical ideals posited earlier. Consequently, what do these overarching goals and ideals of the *General History of Africa* as formulated in the projects' early positioning documents tell us about the agitation against Euro-American academia?

How not to be a historian of Africa. Inverse ideals of scholarly behaviour

The decision to draft a *General History of Africa* was made by UNESCO in 1964 at its thirteenth general conference.[2] However, the idea that the African continent needed an encyclopaedic historical account of its past to counter Euro-American visions of that past was older. 'The scholarly significance of the project has been emphasised in several meetings, including the 1st international congress of Africanists, organised in Accra, in December 1962, under UNESCO auspices', stated the introductory document of the 'committee of experts' meeting for the *General History of Africa* in 1966, which took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.[3] It was in Abidjan in 1966 that a precursor to the later International Scientific Committee was established, the so-called committee of experts. Both the 1962 congress of Africanists and the 1966 meeting of experts were presided over by the pioneering Nigerian 'father of history', Kenneth Onwuka Dike.[4] In 1962, moreover, the Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah had brought African historians from around the continent together and encouraged the creation of the GHA. Before that, Nkrumah had already invested in

2 UNESCO, *Records of the General Conference. Thirteenth Sessions Paris, 1964. Resolutions.* (Paris: UNESCO, 1965), 66–7.

3 According to Jan Vansina the Organisation of African Unity had asked UNESCO to create a General History of Africa at its founding meeting 1963. Jan Vansina, "Unesco and African Historiography" *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 337-52, 337 and UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Abidjan 31 August – 5 September, 1966, Introductory Document, 23 August 1966, 1 (hereafter: UAP, Committee of Experts 1966, Introductory document)

4 UAP, Committee of Experts 1966, Introductory Document, 3.

an Encyclopaedia Africana.[5] The editor of this project was the African-American sociologist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.[6] He had started it as early as 1909 and meant it to be an emulation of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. In fact, the 1962 Accra meeting had been a significant moment in the history of knowledge production about Africa. Here in independent Ghana concerns regarding the racial politics of that knowledge production were discussed and it was decided that knowledge production about Africa should be in African hands. Both the Encyclopaedia and the GHA were discussed in 1962 in Accra, yet seemingly without any interconnections between the two projects, except for Nkrumah's role in spurring the scholars on and perhaps some funding from UNESCO.[7] Both projects wanted to match and possibly even outdo European scholarship in brilliance and breadth.[8] The *General History of Africa*, then, aimed to provide the world with an alternative for European scholarship on Africa.

The Abidjan meeting was followed by another meeting of experts in 1969 in Paris, during which the 'content and spirit' of the GHA started to take shape. It was decided there that the GHA had to take a chronological approach and the history of Africa should be divided into five time periods. The five time periods had been established by a committee consisting of Gamal Mokthar, Jacob Ade Ajayi, Joseph

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5 In his autobiography Nkrumah professed himself a supporter of the American anthropologist Melville Herskovits, who theorised that African-Americans and Africans where still culturally connected. Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana. An Autobiography* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1957), 44. Ironically, it was also Herskovits who blocked the Nkrumah-backed Du Bois encyclopaedia from being finished in the USA. Jean M. Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall? A Meditation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968" *African Studies Review* 62:3 (2019): 6-39, 14.

6 One of the chapters of the GHA mentions Du Bois' interest in African history, but the author, Philip Curtin, does not mention the Encylopedia Africana's inception in 1909. He rather notes that Du Bois seems not to have had the opportunity to engage with his interest in African history until he finally settled in Ghana in 1961. Curint seems to have been unaware of Du Bois' earlier work on African history. P.D. Curtin, "Recent trends in African historiography and their contribution to history in general", In *General History of Africa I: Methodology and African Prehistory,* ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 54-71, 66.

7 Jean Allman, "Kwame Nkrumah, African Studies, and the Politics of Knowledge Production in the Black Star of Africa" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46:2 (2013): 181-203, 198-9.

8 Henry Louis Gates Jr, "W.E.B Du Bois and the Encyclopedia Africana, 1909-1963" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568:1 (2000): 203-219.

Ki-Zerbo, Jean Devisse, Cheikh Anta Diop, Bethwell Ogot and Raymond Mauny.[9] Except for Mauny all would play an important role in the drafting of the GHA. It was also decided that the GHA should be directed by an International Scientific Committee that would carry the intellectual and scientific responsibility of the project, whilst the task organisation and administrative support was to be given to UNESCO.[10] The decision to again divide the five time periods into eight volumes was finally made at the Addis Ababa meeting of June 1970.[11] The 1969 meeting also asserted that 'the History will have to avoid placing undue emphasis on *events* [my emphasis] and thus running the risk of giving too much importance to outside influences and factors' — thereby signifying the influence of the Annales school, to which we shall return in due course.[12] Combatting ignorance regarding African history was one of the primary goals of the *General History of Africa*, or as the Abidjan document stated: 'the development of knowledge on the generally little known history of Africa' would do away with 'prejudices and false or incomplete notions.'[13] What these 'positioning' documents show is that the GHA positioned itself in opposition to the existing historical academy, but, crucially, also as a part of it.

It was during the first few meetings of the GHA, in 1966 (Abidjan), 1969 (Paris), 1970 (Addis Ababa), 1971 (Paris again) and possibly the 1962 dinner at Flagstaff house in Accra as well, that these overarching ideals and goals of the GHA were determined and written down.[14] The same four main points were repeated in 1970 and again in 1971, based on ideas developed largely in Paris in 1969:

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9 UAP, SHC/CONF.27/1, Meeting of Experts on the Measures to be taken for Drafting and Publishing a General History of Africa, Unesco, Paris – 23-27 June 1969. Final Report, 6 August 1969. Translated from the French, 6-7. (hereafter: UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Final Report)

10 UAP, SHC/CONF.27/1, Meeting of Experts on the Measures to be taken for Drafting and Publishing a General History of Africa, Unesco, Paris – 23-27 June 1969. Introductory Document. 25 April 1969. Translated from the French, 8. (hereafter: UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Introductory Document)

11 UAP, SHC/MD/10, Meeting of Experts for the Drafting and Publication of A General History of Africa, Addis Ababa, 22 to 26 June 1970, Paris, 15 September 1970, 5-11.

12 UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Final Report, 5.

13 UAP, Committee of Experts 1966 Introductory Document, 1.

14 The dinner at Flagstaff house was perhaps more important as an image in Ogot's memory than in actuality.

> (a) Although aiming at a synthesis at the highest possible scientific level, the History will not seek to be exhaustive and will avoid dogmatism. In many respects, it will be a statement of problems showing the present state of knowledge and the main trends in research and it will not hesitate to show divergencies of doctrine and opinion. In this way, it will prepare the ground for future work.
>
> (b) Africa will be considered as a totality. The aim will be to show the historical relationships between the various parts of the continent too frequently subdivided in works published to date.
>
> (c) The General History of Africa will be, in particular, a history of ideas and civilisations, societies and institutions. It will introduce the values of oral tradition as well as the multiple forms of African art.
>
> (d) The History will be viewed essentially from the inside. Although a scholarly work, it will also be, in large measure, evidence of consideration by African authors of their own civilisation. While prepared in an international framework and drawing to the full on the present stock of scientific knowledge, it will also be a vitally important element in the recognition of the African cultural heritage and will bring out factors making for unity. This effort to view things from within could be the novel feature of the project and could in addition to its scientific quality, give it great topical significance. By showing the true face of Africa, the work could, in an era absorbed in economic and technical struggles, offer a particular conception of human values.[15]

The group of historians who were present (African and otherwise; the most important of whom were Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Jacob Ade Ajayi and Jean Devisse) and who wrote these four points essentially created a 'manifesto' for their envisioned *General History of Africa*. The 'manifesto' offers a tentative understanding of how the historian working on the GHA, and on Africa by extent, was to approach their work. The

15 UAP, SHC/WS/198, Guide for the Preparation of the General History of Africa. Paris 18 November 1971, translated from the French, 1-2.

'manifesto' after all, suggests a collective way of thinking, judging and working for a group of scholars, which Lorraine Daston and Otto Sibum suggest might signify the formation of a scholarly persona.[16] It was subsequently added to the 'Description of the project', which was published in every volume of the General and named Bethwell Ogot as its author. In reality, however, it was a collaborative effort. Chapter two will discuss the points in the manifesto that make it clear that the GHA was a collaborative pan-African project, such as a focus on the continent as a whole. Concurrently, this chapter targets those parts that show an opposition to historical standards perceived as eurocentric or at least as detrimental to a historical study of the African past.

Interestingly, the document started with an admonishment rooted in opposition to eurocentrism. The history was to avoid dogmatism and 'it will not hesitate to show divergencies of doctrine and opinion.' This was reiteration of a similar kind of comment made in the 'introductory' document for the 1969 meeting, in which it was suggested that 'the non-dogmatic expression of all points of view [...] can facilitate the constant revision of current opinion about research in African history.'[17] The warning surfaces again in a document entitled *Recommandations aux auteurs*, authored by the editor of volume IV, Djibril Tamsir Niane. Niane made clear that due to the controversial nature of some of the questions posed in his volume it was pertinent to avoid all forms of dogmatism.[18] Niane's volume deals with a time period that invited use of a cluster of interpretations surrounding the so-called 'Hamitic hypothesis', which Niane considered a dogmatic and colonialist interpretation of African history that viewed change and civilisation in African history as coming from outside the continent. I delve into this in more depth in Chapter 4, but it is important to note here the construction of dogmatism as connected to a history written from a perspective that constructs African history as being dominated by outside factors.

The desire or aim to avoid dogmatism could be seen as an aim to avoid a classic epistemological vice. In the Preface to the GHA, which was written by the Director General of UNESCO Amadou-Mahtar

16 Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum, "Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories" *Science in Context* 16:1-2 (2003): 1-8, 3-5.

17 UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Introductory Document, 7.

18 UAP, Cultural Studies and Circulation Division (hereafter CC CSP) 38, CS/5404, *Recommandations aux auteurs*.

M'Bow and also eventually printed in each of the eight volumes, the word surfaced again:

> We are indebted to the International Scientific Committee in charge of this *General History of Africa* [...] for having shed a new light on the African past in its authentic and all-encompassing form and for having avoided any dogmatism in the study of essential issues.[19]

Note again the pairing of multiple points of view, 'all-encompassing', with the avoidance of dogmatism. The word also surfaced in the introduction to the first volume, written by Joseph Ki-Zerbo, who noted that use of Marxist methodologies was permissible as long as it was not dogmatic.[20] It is not immediately clear what was meant with dogmatism in both these instances. It is possible that Ki-Zerbo wished to avoid being labelled as a Soviet ally, whilst aiming to reach across the iron curtain, as the GHA followed a non-alignment policy. The word dogmatism, moreover, has itself a deep history within the history of scholarship. The charge of dogmatism was an effective way to criticise opposing scientists and scholars as far back as the early European 17th century. It was an aspersion poured on rivals in order to accuse them of unexamined, impatient and most importantly here, prejudiced or presumptuous research.[21] Elsewhere, in 19th century orientalist circles, it was a vice associated with biased scholarship.[22] The GHA's wish to 'avoid dogmatism' and leave room for a plurality of different, but scholarly sound, opinions, points towards a grounding in the existing — European — academy. Moreover, the word carries

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19 Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, "Preface" In *The General History of Africa I: Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), xvii-xxi, xix.

20 The introduction was originally written in French. I have chosen to quote the English translation made by UNESCO here. J. Ki Zerbo, "General Introduction" in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 1-24, 15.

21 Sorana Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind. Boyle, Locke, and the Early modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 93-4, 98-9.

22 Christiaan Egberts and Herman Paul, "Scholarly Vices: Boundary Work in Nineteenth-Century Orientalism" in *Epistemic Virtues in the Sciences and the Humanities*, eds. Jeroen van Dongen and Herman Paul (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 79-90, 84.

an overt religious connotation, suggesting the 'manifesto' functioned almost as a creed. Most importantly perhaps, by placing the avoidance of dogmatism next to the assertion that African history needed to be viewed from the inside, it constructs eurocentrism itself as dogmatic and places the GHA opposite that vice. This is especially evident in Niane's comment on the avoidance of dogmatism. Simultaneously however, it is important to note that, whilst the GHA probably viewed all instances of eurocentrism as evidence of dogmatism, it did not equally view all instances of dogmatism as eurocentric. M'Bow was said to have repeatedly pressed this point of avoiding dogmatism during the seventh meeting of the Bureau in Paris in 1977, stating that the GHA had to be careful not to try to hide insufficiencies in research on African history.[23] He thereby suggested that the GHA should avoid dogmatism, even if it was not eurocentric but borne out of incomplete research. Dogmatism here then, it can tentatively be said was constructed as pertaining to a failure to admit insufficiencies in research, connected to bias and prejudice. Mostly this pertained to eurocentric or racist bias, eurocentrism had, after all, resulted in inaccurate, false, accounts of the Africans pasts with as its ultimate result, the idea that Africa had no history.

Historian non grata

The manifesto focused on the idea that 'a view from within' would show 'the true face of Africa.' The GHA clearly contested outside or eurocentric views of African history. Often, a eurocentric view meant a history of Europeans in Africa or of European influences on Africa as exclusively worthwhile of academic historical study. It constructed Europe not only as the centre of the world, but also perpetuated the idea that history could only emanate from that centre. Africa then, had no history because it did not conform to European ideas of what history was. As Chinua Achebe put it, Africa occupied 'in the European psychological disposition the farthest point of otherness.'[24] As a negative idea, the eurocentric vision of African history has a history of its

23 UAP, CC/77/CONF.602/2, Septième Réunion du Bureau du Comité Scientifique International pour la Redaction d'une Histoire Générale de L'Afrique, Paris, 18-29 Juliet, 1977, 34.

24 Chinua Achebe, *Africa's Tarnished Name* (London: Penguin Random House United Kingdom, 2018), 17.

own, which is often seen as having started with Hume's so-called racist footnote.[25] However, it had been etched into the collective consciousness of early Africanists by a rather infamous comment made by the Regius professor of history in Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper:[26]

> Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not deny that men existed even in dark countries and dark centuries, nor that they had political life and culture, interesting to sociologists and anthropologists; but history, I believe, is essentially a form of movement, and purposive movement, too.[27]

Countless references were made throughout the years to this comment made in a lecture series in 1963, later published as part of a book on Christianity in Europe, *The rise of Christian Europe*. It also appeared in the GHA. As Caroline Neale remarks offhandedly in her book *Writing 'Independent' African history*, every Africanist of the time seems to have quoted this particular passage by Trevor-Roper.[28] Jan Vansina also mentioned the passage as a rallying cry for historians of Africa. In a way, it was a signifier that the battle had already been won, that recognition for African history had already arrived.[29] Although written in de midst of decolonisation, Trevor-Roper's unfortunate diatribe partly functioned as a rhetorical echo of the past. Notwithstanding the

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25 For a short article on the racist footnote: John Immerwahr, "Hume's Revised Racism", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53:3 (1992): 481-6. For the construction of a denial of African historicity as having started with Hume, see: Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 225.

26 Elsewhere Chinua Achebe also mentions Trevor-Roper's egregious comment: Chinua Achebe, *An Image of Africa* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 2.

27 Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 9-11

28 Caroline Neale, *Writing "Independent" African history* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 8. For an example of this practice see: S.A.I. Tirmizi, *Indian Sources for African History* (Delhi: International Writers Emporium and UNESCO, 1988), VII.

29 Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1994), 123.

general consensus, within Africanist circles at least, that Trevor-Roper was wrong, the condescending statement caused for his name to become synonymous with eurocentrism and racist historiography within African history.

UNESCO's general conference made the decision in 1964 to draft a *General History of Africa*, the infamous remark that had equated Africa with darkness, was a fresh wound. Akin to what Valentin Mudimbe would argue later, African historians in the early 1960s had identified a long tradition of historical marginalisation of the African continent which they had to work against, dubbed the 'colonial library' by Mudimbe. As a result, they engaged in revisionist history and tried to shift the meaning of 'Africa' in the Euro-American academy to such an extent that 'Africa', as well as 'Africans' would come to signify not 'difference', but normality. African history was to become inherently integrated into the global communal past and its academic study.[30] As Mudimbe's work suggests, however, the problem of othering lingered. For years African historians, such as Adu Boahen, editor of volume VII, would place the Trevor-Roper remark within a long and insidious tradition of 'western' denial of African historicity.[31]

Trevor-Roper, following a Hegelian logic, envisioned a sort of progress in history that saw European societies as a teleological end point. He could not see African history because he was looking at it only through a eurocentric lens, using eurocentric ideas of what constituted, for example, history, states, politics and finally progress. For that reason, too, he saw the African past as only offering information for those studying present societies.[32] Historians linked the offensive Trevor-Roper comment to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy of history, or rather what he had said about Africa in his lectures on the philosophy of history.[33] The Hegel lectures, delivered at the

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30 Valentin Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 21-2.

31 A. Adu Boahen, *Clio and Nation-Building in Africa. An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ghana Legon, on Thursday, 28th November, 1975* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1975), 17.

32 Enocent Msindo, "Writing history beyond Trevor-Roper: The Experience of African History, with special reference to Zimbabwe", Keynote Address, the Zimbabwe Historical Association, 17-19 July, 2019.

33 See: Adu Boahen, "The Historiography of Anglophone West Africa in the 1980s", in *Africa in the Twentieth Century. The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), 625-636, 625.

university of Berlin between 1822–1823 and 1830–1831, were published posthumously. It should therefore be noted that these publications are only a reflection of what Hegel concretely delivered to his audience in so far as that the publications were redacted lecture notes and transcriptions made by Eduard Gans and his son Karl in 1837 and 1840.[34] Nevertheless, within post-independence Africanist circles Hegel became infamous for having stated, amongst other things, that 'in Africa proper, man has not progressed beyond a merely sensuous existence, and has found it absolutely impossible to develop any further.'[35] I quote this particular sentence because it was taken by some of the poets of the Negritude movement, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, as a badge of honour, a way to extol the qualities of the black man to connect to nature and emotions.[36] Jean-Paul Sartre would later call this attitude an 'anti-racist racism.'[37] Of course, Hegel also spoke more directly about the African continent as being devoid of history, and here we stumble upon another infamous and often quoted passage within Africanist circles:

> At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it — that is in its northern part — belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitionary phase of civilisation; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and

34 Hegel was apt to change details and inflection in his oral presentations. Tom McCaskie, "Exiled from History: Africa in Hegel's Academic Practice", *History in Africa* 46 (2019): 165-194, 169. McCaskie also points out that Hegel based his assertions on dubious source-material.

35 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 172.

36 Babacar Camara, "The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa" *Journal of Black Studies* 36:1 (2005): 82-96, 86.

37 Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir" *Présence Africaine* 6 (1949): 9-14, 11

> which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.[38]

I quote here the English translation, for that is the text that was quoted and critiqued by African historians and Euro-American historians of Africa. The point here being not to delve into Hegel's actual academic work, but to qualify how it was received by historians of Africa at the time. It is not about Hegel so much as it is about Hegel as a pervasive symbol for the historical discipline.[39] This text therefore is not interested in Hegel-as-Hegel, but rather in Hegel as he was perceived by the African historians and other historians of Africa who worked on the GHA.[40] Hegel, in that sense, was seen as having made a mistake vis-à-vis Africa and therefore became symbolic for the historical discipline's mistakes vis-à-vis Africa. Thus, Hegel as such was not rejected, but only as pertained to his comments on Africans and Africa.

The most well-known and relevant reaction to Hegel's assertion of the absence of African historicity for the GHA, however, was made by the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop.[41] Diop, partly in response to Hegel and working across disciplines, attempted to construct a universal history that would place Africa rather than Europe at the centre of historical conception. He argued for the existence of a black and decidedly African Egyptian antiquity, on which Greek antiquity and therefore European modernity, was based. It was an attempted reversal of Hegelian logic — the outcome of which was still a modern European state. Yet, for Diop, the focus on Egypt would eventually

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38 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 99.

39 In her book on Hegel and the Haitian revolution, Susan Buck-Morss too makes the point that the perceived burden of Hegelian historiography lies on us to contextualise and not enlarge eurocentric visions. His unfortunate Berlin comments may point to faults on his part, rather than towards a complete denial of African historicity in the European academy. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 2009), 73, 118.

40 For a good article on the Hegel's academic practice vis-à-vis Africa, see: McCaskie, "Exiled from History", 169.

41 As a result of his ubiquitous presence, moreover, many Africans have written back to Hegel, such as the above named *Négritude* movement, but also Frantz Fanon in his creation of an independent racial other and Mudimbe who turned against what he called 'Alterity politics', see: Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Seuill, 1952) and V.Y. Mudimbe, *On African fault lines : Meditations on alterity politics*. (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013)

unearth a federal African state that had, as it were, been waiting in the wings since Pharaonic Egypt had disappeared.[42] Given Hegel's assertion that Egypt was in fact not African, it became crucial for Diop to reclaim it for Africa. Cheikh Anta Diop contributed to volume II of the *General History of Africa*, which dealt with African antiquity. Chapter 4 elaborates further on his work for the GHA, for his view was far from unilaterally shared amongst the GHA historians — who often seemed to have preferred an Africa-centred history that placed Africa at the centre of the history of the continent itself, rather than at the centre of world history.

In the first volume of the *General History of Africa*, which appeared in 1981, both Trevor-Roper and Hegel made an appearance. The honour of naming them ironically befell two European historians who wrote overview chapters on African historiography for the first volume. John Fage, one of the earliest exponents of African historical studies in Britain, wrote the first chapter after the General Introduction on the development of African historiography. The chapter mostly concerned European historiography because it served as an explanation of eurocentric historiography about Africa. European historical writing concerning 'tropical' Africa, Fage noted, appeared at roughly the same time as the European penetration of the continent. Near the end of the 18th century, writing about Africa increased as growing controversy regarding the slave trade led some European historians to compile histories of African kingdoms and states, such as the British colonial official Archibald Dalzel's *History of Dahomey* (1793).43 Unfortunately, such interest and, by extent, acknowledgement of Africa's historicity, was quelled by an increasing emphasis on European history and European superiority. Interestingly, Hegel himself seems to have based his comments on Africa partly on the work of Dalzel, who was an anti-abolitionist and therefore had political stakes in portraying 'Africa' as a savage land.[44] Fage went on: 'European intellectuals

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42 Mamadou Diouf and Mohamad Mbodj, "The Shadow of Cheikh Anta Diop", in *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 118-35, 125. See also: Robbin Derricourt, *Inventing Africa: History, Archaeology and Ideas* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 110-114.

43 John Fage, "The development of African historiography" in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 25-42, 30.

44 McCaskie, "Exiled from History", 176

persuaded themselves that the purpose, knowledge, power and wealth of their society were so strong that it must prevail over all others; [...] history was the key to understanding.'[45] And it is here that Fage locates Hegel's role, even though he does not neglect to mention that Hegel did not have that big an influence on the actual writing of African History. Nevertheless, his articulation of European superiority in his philosophy of history came to 'represent part of the historical orthodoxy of the 19th century', which, in Fage's present day, had accumulated with Trevor-Roper.[46] Fage did not deem Trevor-Roper worthy of being named, referring to him instead as 'a recent Regius professor of Modern History at Oxford University.'[47] He did quote the egregious comment and this was apparently enough to conclude his argument regarding the European 19th and 20th century denial of African historicity. During the 19th century, the purpose of history had been to come to an understanding of European greatness, Fage argued. It was Trevor-Roper after all who stated that only European history had any kind of significance as it had been European ideas, values, civilisations, techniques, in short European history, that had come to dominate world history for the past 500 years. Fage argued that eurocentrism had become the *raison d'être* of the modern historical discipline.[48] The impossibility of studying African societies, moreover, had been further entrenched in the 19th century by the emergence of *Quellenkritik*, which made it impossible for oral societies to be inserted into the discipline.[49] Fage moreover added several more names to the list of those who had not done African history justice. A. P. Newton, for instance, had repeated the idea that there could be no African history because there was no writing in Africa.[50] Newton's name also appeared, here and there, next to Trevor-Roper's and Hegel's in African historical scholarship as 'historian non grata'.[51] Fage also mentioned C.G. Seligman, who although not a historian but an anthropologist, had also been guilty of 'bluntly' generalising scholarship regarding

45 Fage, "The development of African historiography", 30.

46 Ibid.

47 He did name him in a footnote, however. Ibid, 31.

48 Ibid, 30-31.

49 Ibid, 32.

50 Ibid, 33.

51 See: Boahen, "The Historiography of Anglophone West Africa", 625.

Africa in his work on the so-called 'Hamitic influence.'[52] However, despite the presence of African intellectuals throughout European history and especially during this time of disciplinary codification, Africans, such as James Africanus Horton, had been securely kept out of the discipline.[53]

The next chapter that mentioned Hegel (chapter eleven), was written by Dmitri Olderogge. Olderogge was a Soviet-based anthropologist of Africa, named the founding father of African anthropology and also African studies in the USSR and a testament to the GHA and UNESCO's commitment to bridging Cold War animosities.[54] He, too, placed the origin of the denial of African history by the Euro-American academy on 19th century German shoulders. In a chapter on migrations, he asserted that it was in Germany specifically that the African past had been relegated to the realm of ethnography. The first European inquiries into African languages took place in Germany and it was in Germany that ethnographic research into Africa ensued, with the establishment of a Colonial Institute in Hamburg.[55] Olderroge did not explain why this interest in Africa manifested itself in Germany and why an institute and academic research to go along with it, was established. The development is perhaps best understood in light of late 19th century German desires to conquer colonial territories of its own, alongside the simultaneous development of a new model of universities that we have now come to call 'modern' that could create knowledge on non-European worlds in order to substantiate claims of power.[56] The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 in this light serves as the political counterpart for the philosophical role played by Hegel in the *General History of Africa*. Olderogge argued that it was due to Hegel's earlier philosophical assertions regarding the nature of historical progress or evolution that research on Africa done in Germany steered

52 We shall come to speak of the 'Hamitic influences' in more detail in chapter four. Fage, "The development of African historiography", 5.

53 Ibid, 33.

54 Dmitri M. Bondarenko, "Dmitri Olderogge and his place in the history of Russian African anthropology", *Social Anthropology* 13:2 (2005-6): 215-20, 215.

55 D. Olderogge, "Migrations and ethnic and linguistic differentiations" in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory,* ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 270-86, 270.

56 Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism. A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 127-33.

towards the circular thought that Africa had no history to speak of because it was not a historical part of the world.[57]

'Africa has a history' is therefore tellingly the very first sentence of the whole GHA. The General Introduction, which was written by Ki-Zerbo, started with this observation, followed by the declaration that the history of Africa needed to be rewritten.[58] This assertion was made in defiance of and in reaction to the infamous quotes mentioned above: 'The history of Africa needs rewriting, for up till now it has often been masked, faked, distorted, mutilated by 'force of circumstance'. [...] Crushed by centuries of oppression, Africa has seen generations of travellers, slave traders, explorers, missionaries, governors, and scholars of all kinds give out its image as one of nothing but poverty, barbarism, irresponsibility and chaos.'[59] The creation of such distortions were the results of myths surrounding the racial inferiority of Africans, resulting in 'historical passivity' and 'congenital tribalism.'[60] The GHA therefore rejected 'racially prejudiced physical anthropology' and all other forms of racialism or racialised thinking.[61] UNESCO was one of the first organisations to deny the biological basis for racism when it created a committee to research the theoretical basis of human rights, which included the cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.[62]

In the General Introduction Ki-Zerbo never mentioned Hegel nor Trevor-Roper likely because he also pressed that it was not in interest of the GHA to engage in a 'mere settling of scores, with colonialist history backfiring on its authors.'[63] He was invested in the idea that African history could only be redeemed if it were scholarly sound: 'We must turn once more to science in order to create genuine cultural

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57 Olderogge, "Migrations", 271-2.

58 J. Ki Zerbo, "General Introduction" in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory* (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 1-2.

59 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 2.

60 Ibid, 5.

61 Ibid, 21 and J. Ki-Zerbo, "Editorial note: theories on the 'races' and history of Africa' in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 261-70.

62 "Unesco and the declaration", UNESCO, accessed 18 June 2018, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/human-rights-based-approach/60th-anniversary-of-udhr/unesco-and-the-declaration/

63 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 2.

awareness.'[64] Moreover, he wanted to redeem Africa and Africans as beyond a dichotomy between civilised and barbarous, the same and other. Like also Niane, Ki-Zerbo was invested in the idea of African history as part of the history of the world next to Europe and not in opposition to Europe. In other words; Ki-Zerbo seemed to have preferred an Africa centred history that placed Africa at centre within the history of the continent itself, rather than placing it at the centre of world history as an inverse eurocentrism.[65]

In M'Bow's Preface the same essential assertions regarding African history were made. African history had long been obscured: 'the continent of Africa was hardly ever looked upon as a historical entity.' Furthermore, source material had been pulled from outside the continent, so that the history of Africa had been judged by alien standards — by, for instance, comparing it with the European Middle Ages, suggesting Africa was literally backwards. As a result, 'African societies were looked upon as societies that could have no history [...] a great many non-African experts could not rid themselves of certain preconceptions and argued that the lack of written sources and documents made it impossible to engage in any scientific study of such societies.'[66] Like Ki-Zerbo, M'Bow referred implicitly to those historians who had denied Africa a history as a result of their prejudice. M'Bow, moreover, also referred to the emergence of racial thought as a key factor in the distortion of African history.[67] The denial of African historicity was the result of racism nestled in European society and expressed through its historians. European scholarship when it came to Africa, was to be viewed with scepticism and the GHA took it upon itself to amend that scholarship. Prejudice and preconceptions, for instance regarding the necessity of written source material, had to be avoided. Above all the GHA set out to deracialise African history.

The point of these opening overtures was to impress upon the reader that colonial historiography had been ideologically motivated.[68]

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64 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 2.

65 V.Y. Mudimbe et al., "Analyists" in *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987,* ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 382-403, 383.

66 Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, "Preface" in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: Heineman and UNESCO, 1981), XIX.

67 M'Bow, "Preface", XX.

68 A. Temu and B. Swai, *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique* (London: Zed Press, 1981), 20.

Essentially, the GHA made the point that errors had been made regarding Africa in historical scholarship and it wanted to correct those faults. Fage and Olderogge both linked the Hegelian grasp of African history to the emergence of the 20th century (historical) academy. Consequently, an attempt to write African history became part of a rebellion against that academy — or at least it was shaped that way by the reiteration that European history was the Hegel inspired history of Trevor-Roper and the likes. These names arguably functioned as signifiers within a specific context of what Steven Shapin has dubbed 'proverbial economies': 'a network of speech, judgement and action in which proverbial utterances are considered legitimate.'[69] Proverbs, moreover, have a unique and well-known history within African oral tradition as well. Take for instance the proverb 'until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter' — often attributed to Chinua Achebe. Toyin Falola reminds us that proverbs like these serve a function to criticise and admonish.[70] If we take the use of 'Hegel' and 'Trevor-Roper' and, crucially, the quotes, almost invariably used alongside the names as stereotypical language use, it may be possible to argue that it was through this usage that the knowledge produced by African history became legitimate as a form of proverbial criticism. Put differently, by constantly reiterating the same words African historians and historians of Africa tried to establish legitimacy. Hegel came to function as a symbol of the modern Euro-American academy's denial of African historicity.

Good historical scholarship, then, avoided racial prejudice and uncritical eurocentrism which equated history with a European presence or reference to European pasts, or which only made use of European source material. It, in order words, avoided the vices of 19th century European scholarship pertaining to Africa. The vices were classified as such because they were framed as political, subjective, prejudice, that needed to be avoided by historians of Africa who wished to produce sound historical scholarship on the continent. Ideals of African history were, inevitably, contrasted against and around the academic discipline of historical scholarship as it had been conceived by histori-

69 Steven Shapin, "Proverbial Economies: How an Understanding of Some Linguistic and Social Features of Common Sense Can Throw Light on More Prestigious Bodies of Knowledge, Science For Example." *Social Studies of Science* 31:5 (2001): 731-69, 735.

70 Toyin Falola, *Decolonizing African Studies: Epistemologies, Methodologies and Agencies* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, forthcoming), 17.

ans of Europe in the perception of the GHA. As part of a new field of history, the GHA needed scholars to define what it meant to 'do' African history and what it meant to be an African historian in opposition to what it had meant in the preceding historical context.[71]

The ideal of pre-colonial African history

The ailing historical discipline had been diagnosed with eurocentrism. The cure was a history written for Africa that would look at the African past from the African present — instead of the European present.[72] The medicine Ki-Zerbo presented was largely a focus on pre-colonial history as the chosen way to write a history of Africa from an Africa-centred perspective. The uses of the pre-colonial transcended the time period itself. By unearthing pre-colonial historical facts, more insight could be gained in the whole of African history. Research into the pre-colonial past came to denote a specific way of looking at African history by means of African actors and structures that had originated in the pre-colonial era, crucially, because this period had been without significant influence from Europeans. For instance, through a historical understanding of developments within certain regions and by explaining the past by referencing inter-regional political and social developments, new historical explanations for later time periods could also surface. Another internal approach explained African history by focusing on intra-African diffusionism, by looking at the diffusion of African cultural influences or political concepts. Thirdly, the pre-colonial could also be implemented in the history of colonial Africa by focusing on African resistance, resistance which had, the argument went, stemmed from pre-colonial socio-economic and political structures.[73] Pre-colonial history of African could lead to a deeper understanding of post-colonial history of Africa.

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71 21st century historians of Africa still quote Trevor-Roper, as well as Hegel, thereby carrying on the tradition of naming them 'historians-non-grata'. See: Ihediwa Nkemjika Chimee, "African Historiography and the Challenges of European Periodization: A Historical Comments", *TRAFO – Blog for Transregional Research* (blog), 31 July 2019, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/11518. and Jacob U. Gordon, "Toward an African Historiography", in *African Studies and Knowledge Production*, ed. Stephen Owoahene-Acheampong (Accra: Sub-saharan Publishers, 2013), 17-29, 26.

72 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 3.

73 Muryatan Santana Barbosa, "The African Perspective in the General History of Africa (Unesco)" *Tempo Niterói* 24.3 (2018): 1-14, 7.

In order to do this, African historians had to find a way around the historical disciplines' 19th century focus on written source material. It is no surprise, therefore, that the introduction makes explicit the importance of researching oral traditions in order to be able to analyse and document the pre-colonial African past.[74] As becomes clear from the manifesto as well, oral history had become the preferred new method with which to uncover the African pre-colonial past. To fill in the blanks of pre-colonial African history the tools offered by other disciplines, such as archaeology and linguistics, were invaluable.[75] The historicity of pre-colonial Africa, moreover, showed the inadequacies of only looking at the past through (archival) written documents. Interpreting oral traditions became the preferred way to research the lives and experiences of the colonised, rather than the colonisers. It seemed like a way to correct the arrogance of Euro-American historiography and colonial record-keeping in the post-colonial period.[76] Ki-Zerbo described these oral traditions as 'the most intimate of historical sources, the most rich [sic], the one which is fullest of the sap of authenticity.'[77] He thereby betrayed an essentialist view of both African history and the use of oral historiography. As Ki-Zerbo described it in the introduction, and as becomes evident from the manifesto and Preface as well, oral history was almost mythologised as method to decolonise history and to unearth the true African past. Like the pre-colonial itself, the possibilities of oral traditions as gateways to the African past were enlarged to such mythical proportions

74 In this thesis I will make us of the term 'oral history' when referring to the historical methodology dependent on the use of oral traditions as source materials. Oral traditions are unwritten narratives, often myths or chronicles, preserved in the collective memory of a society and transferred from generation to generation by word of mouth. Oral history as activity and oral tradition as a genre of source together I shall call 'oral historiography', following David Henige. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, oral history does not refer to the study of the recent past through the practice of interviewing subjects to gain a greater insight in historical events they have personally lived through. David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London: Longman, 1982), 2 and Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition. A Study in Historical Methodology*, trans. H. M. Wright (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 1.

75 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 16-7.

76 Luise White, "Hodgepodge Historiography: Documents, Itineraries, and the Absence of Archives" *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 309-318, 315-316.

77 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 7.

that it was almost impossible to live up to these from the outset.[78] As M'Bow put it in the Preface, oral history could be used to 'understand the African vision of the world from the inside.'[79] Of course, Ki-Zerbo did not neglect to list some of the problems with the use of oral traditions as historical source material — the weakness of its chronology, its tendency to mythologise, the necessity of context, the problem of various versions existing synchronously.[80] The point here is therefore not to unmask Ki-Zerbo as an ideologue, but to show in how far he and the GHA and Africanist historiography of the time generally, idealised oral historiography and the possibilities it carried.[81] It is of course also true that African historiography did contribute a hitherto unexplored methodology to the historical discipline as a whole in the form of oral history.[82]

It is important, however, to reflect for a moment on the use of oral history as historical methodology as well in order to scrutinise how essentialised ideals of oral historiography interacted, inside the GHA and also more generally outside of it as well, with the development of oral history as a methodological tool. Historians who practiced the methodology of oral history and who, moreover, developed it, were mindful of the demands levelled at source material from a Euro-American academic point of view. In order to conduct research into the pre-colonial past that would be academically sound, therefore, the ideal of oral history was also framed as a rigorous method of looking into the past. Within that development Jan Vansina was arguably the most famous as well as one of the earliest proponents of using oral traditions for the writing of history. His doctoral dissertation *De La Tradition Orale — Essai de Methode Historique* appeared in 1961. It was translated to English in 1965.[83] Vansina is often identified as the per-

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78 Ralph A. Austen, "Africanist historiography and its critics: can there be an autonomous African History" in *African Historiography. Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi,* ed. Toyin Falola (Harlow: Longman, 1993), 203-17, 205.

79 M'Bow, "Preface", XXI.

80 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 7-11.

81 Austen, "Africanist historiography and its critics", 205.

82 In his *Paths in the Rainforest,* Jan Vansina empathically makes the point that it is possible to write a history based on oral traditions. Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest. Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990)

83 Jan Vansina, *De La Tradition Orale. Essai de Methode Historique* (Tervuren: Annalen Koninklijk museum voor Midden-Afrika, 1961)

son who changed the historical discipline in the 1960s and more or less forced it to accept oral testimony as a source, albeit within a quite conventional framework of source-based analysis as it had been known in the historical discipline since the late-19th century.[84] Mudimbe describes his influence as a culmination of the acceptance of concepts such as subjectivity, the relativity of values and the questioning of the universality of the 'western' experience.[85] Vansina, in his autobiography, also identified the redemption of subjectivity as an academic tool in the second half of the 20th century which allowed for African history to be taken seriously by the Euro-American academy.[86] We see here an appreciation of subjectivity as a necessary part in admitting African history to the discipline of history generally. 'The concept of history metamorphosed itself, making it possible to restore the past of non-Occidental cultures', writes Mudimbe when referring to Vansina's influence.[87] In other words, the discovery of oral history as a valid methodology with which to uncover the past developed alongside and thanks to an increased sensitivity to the worth of cultures other than the west. It is no coincidence that these developments took place in the post-Second World War world, when Europe was in ruins. The fact that it was a European historian who opened up the historical discipline to the study of oral narratives is not all that surprising in that context either as it would have been easier to accept the intervention from a European scholar rather than an African, I suspect.

In 1961 Vansina stressed the rigorous source critique that oral traditions demanded and this was emphasised by the GHA as well. The GHA had organised a meeting in Niamey in Niger, from 18–25 September 1967, to discuss the importance of collecting oral traditions.[88] During the meeting, Vansina was quoted to have said that both written and oral source material demand the same kind of 'critical historical rules.' The overall report stated that 'the committee of historians which met at Abidjan stressed the point that the use of oral traditions as a historical source required, more than any other type of evidence,

84 David Newbury, "Contradictions at the Heart of the Canon: Jan Vansina and the Debate over Oral Historiography in Africa, 1960-1985" *History in Africa* 34 (2007): 213-254, 213-4.

85 Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, 21-22.

86 Vansina, *Living With Africa*, 99.

87 Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, 21-22.

88 UAP, SHC/CS/121/1 Meeting of Specialists on African Oral Traditions, Niamey, 18-25 September 1967. Working Paper, 16 August 1967, 1. (hereafter: UAP, Meeting of Specialists 1967 Working Paper)

a very strict method of evaluation.'[89] The meeting emphasised that researchers needed to have been trained in the critical historical method so that they could apply the same rigour to spoken texts as was the practice when encountering written texts.[90] It is not surprising therefore that epistemic virtues linked to oral source work are somewhat reminiscent of epistemic virtues linked to archival source work: perseverance, sacrifice, hard work and methodological rigour.[91] Vansina's methodological book on oral history is absolutely meticulous in its instruction towards readers.[92] Vansina insisted on taking the historical method of source-based criticism seriously and applying it to oral traditions as if they were written texts. By doing so he made it possible for conventional (European) historians to understand what he was trying to do, but he also applied a sort of straightjacket to the African orature he had encountered. As Vansina described in his autobiography, his conviction that oral tradition was history was based on the idea that the 'Bushong poems were just like medieval dirges.'[93] David Newbury explains that Vansina, 'sought to broaden the field of history by claiming that historical techniques of the day could be applied fruitfully to other classes, races, cultures and sources. But in so doing he had to accept the conventional techniques of historical analysis and associate himself with those very conventions.'[94] Harry Garuba describes this conundrum as follows: 'The ultimate postcolonial paradox in knowledge production: that the new producers coming on the stage sought the prestige of disciplinary validation and authority while the nature of their research and writing was undermining this authority and destabilising its foundations.'[95] As Newbury also identified, Vansina had a tactical reason to present oral historiography in the way that he did. In order for it to be accepted by the existing historical discipline,

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89 UAP, Meeting of Specialists 1967 Working Paper, 5.

90 UAP, SHC/CS/121/1 Réunion de Spécialistes en Traditions Orales Africaines, Niamey, 18 – 25 septembre 1967, Rapport Final, Paris, le 21 juillet 1968, 9.

91 Herman Paul, "Performing History: How Historical Scholarship is Shaped by Epistemic Virtues" *History and Theory* 50 (2011): 1-19.

92 Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 187-204. Unlike the French version, the appendix of the English translation contained a section with practical advice for the researcher.

93 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 17.

94 Newbury, "Contradictions at the Heart of the Canon", 215-216.

95 Harry Garuba, "African Studies, Area Studies, and the Logic of the Disciplines", in *African Studies in the Post-colonial University*, eds. Thandabantu Nhlapo and Harry Garuba (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2012), 39-54, 47.

he had to speak the language of that discipline and moreover, make use of the epistemologies available to him. In his later works, such as *Paths in the Rainforest*, Vansina developed a more complex understanding of the methodology of oral history, incorporating the influence of social determinants and cultural factors.[96] He slowly moved away from the 'documentary analogy' and became more openly sensitive to the context in which his source material was produced.[97] What this shows is a negotiation and eventual compromise within changing standards of historical scholarship. Vansina was a 'bricoleur' when he engaged in the theorisation of the methodology of oral history. He was more concerned with making sure oral traditions would be accepted as sources, than with the theoretical purity of what he was doing. This way of doing things, creating a bricolage of different methods and cultural influences, can be found at the heart of the *General History of Africa* as well. The project was operating between the conceptual space of 'Africa' and 'Europe' in an effort to create something new that would incorporate both. Likewise, it hoped to incorporate rigorous academic work with an investment in political realities and goals — such as the idea that reference to the pre-colonial by way of oral historiography could aid in the creation of nation states.

Of course, Vansina was hardly the only scholar engaged with oral methodologies and neither was he the only one interested in their historical value. At roughly the same time Vansina wrote and published his ground-breaking methodological innovations, Amadou Hampate Ba and Bethwell Ogot, to name two historians who were also active within the GHA, had been doing similar work — sometimes based off of what Vansina had written about oral methodologies.[98] Ogot became a key figure in expanding the methodological tools of the oral to in-

96 Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest*.

97 Henri Moniot, "Profile of A Historiography. Oral Tradition and Historical Research in Africa." in *African Historiographies. What History for Which Africa?* eds. David Newbury and Bogumil Jewsiewicki (London: Sage, 1986), 50-58, 52 and David Newbury, "Contradictions at the Heart of the Canon", 236-44.

98 Another East-African who was a part of the GHA and who pressed the importance of collecting oral traditions was Isaria Kimambo, Isaria N. Kimambo, "Historical Research in Mainland Tanzania" in *Expanding Horizons in African Studies*, eds. Gwendolen M. Carter and Ann Paden (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 75-90, 75-78.

clude non-centralised societies in East Africa.[99] The use of oral tradition to write history then, has been identified and idealised numerous times as a way to study the marginalised and oppressed.

Oral history, moreover, had the advantage of not having had a rich history of othering, unlike ethnography. Ki-Zerbo denounced ethnography as 'a discourse with explicitly discriminatory practices.' Unlike linguistics and archaeology, it was not to be used for the GHA. 'Its main presupposition was often linear evolution, with Europe, pioneer of civilisation, in the van of human advance, and at the rear the primitive 'tribes' of Oceania, Amazonia and Africa.' Ethnology had taken a perceived inherent and inherited difference between distinct peoples or even races as a starting point. Ki-Zerbo went on to argue that important anthropologists, like Bronislaw Malinowksi, had done a disservice to African history by denying African societies 'a historical dimension.'[100] Ki-Zerbo's critique was in line with the arguments later made by Mudimbe as well as Sally Falk Moore regarding ethnographic or anthropological narratives concerning Africa: the othering of the African.[101]

The need to avoid that which was seen as out of the ordinary and the subsequent focus on the ordinary was part of the GHA manifesto as well in that it wanted to be a history of ideas and civilisations. The GHA, moreover, wanted to show how African cultures had mutually influenced one another as well as the rest of the world.[102] The use of these words is of course not coincidental. Ideas and civilisations were perceived of as historical, rather than ethnographic. The manifesto, moreover, added to these that the GHA would be a history of

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99 Bethwell A Ogot, "Some approaches to African History" in *Hadith I, Proceedings of the annual conference of the Historical Association of Kenya 1967*, ed. Bethwell A. Ogot (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968) 1-10, 7, The Ibadan historian Adiele Afigbo followed in his footsteps in the 1980s. He reiterated that if Oral History was only used to study traditional centralised societies, through kingship lists for instance, historians were still denying some societies entry into 'the kingdom of Clio', A.E. Afigbo, "Oral Tradition and the History of Segmentary Societies" *History in Africa* 12 (1985): 1-10, 2-4.

100 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 13-14.

101 See: Sally Falk Moore, "Changing Perspectives on a Changing Africa: The Work of Anthropology" in *Africa and the disciplines: the contributions of research in Africa to the social sciences and humanities* eds. Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3-57, 3 and V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988)

102 UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Introductory Document, 2.

institutions and societies and linked this to oral traditions and art — forms of source material that would be more suitable for such a history. Ki-Zerbo ended his introduction by stating that the GHA would not be a '*histoire événementielle*, for otherwise it [the GHA] would be in danger of according too much importance to external factors and influences.'[103] The *General History of Africa* generally and Ki-Zerbo specifically were influenced by the Annales school of history developed in France under the auspices of Lucien Febvre and March Bloch, and later much influenced by Fernand Braudel.[104] Due to the fact that the Annales school criticised the 19th century historiography that was based on events and written history and aimed to expand the horizon of the historian to include social and economic history, it was a welcome tool for historians of Africa — even if it was European. [105] For the same reasons, some African historians were attracted to Marxism, for Marxism also carried within it the dual possibility of levelling a critique against Europe as well as expanding the kingdom of Clio beyond political history, based solely on written sources. The GHA then was not set against all ideas emanating from Europe, but simply those they perceived as unhelpful or detrimental to uncovering an African past. Moreover, a history focused on events would be likely to focus on those things that were out of the ordinary, such as the coming of Europeans, rather than detailing, for instance, the structure of a given society, its trade networks, political organisation, culture, philosophy and religion. The GHA had to become a problem driven history rather than an event driven history. Like many other points made in the General Introduction, Ki-Zerbo's admonishment regarding a *histoire* événementielle follows the line set out by the positioning documents.

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103 In the English version '*histoire* événementielle' had been translated to 'a history that is too narrative', which, I believe, confounds the point made that a history based on chronicling events that are out of the ordinary (IE: the arrival of Europeans) would allow for a greater focus on disturbances from the outside and, more problematic even, may obscure the intellectual influence of the Annales school. Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 22.

104 Fernand Braudel had written the preface to Ki-Zerbo's 1972 history of Africa, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire* (Paris: Hatier, 1972), see also: Adame Ba Konaré, "L'histoire africaine aujourd'hui", *Présence Africaine* 173 (2006): 27-36, 30.

105 See: André Burguière, *The Annales School. An Intellectual History*. trans. Timothy Tackett (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), Giuliana Gemelli, *Fernand Braudel*, trans. Brigitte Pasquet and Béatrice Propetto Marzi (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1995) and Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-2014* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015)

In 1969 the committee of experts had already argued that the GHA had to be a history of 'civilisations and ideas rather than a chronicle of events.' Or, somewhat more poetically: 'not so much a history of princes and battles as a history of societies and peoples, not just spectacular summits or peaks which awed the beholder, but the whole mountain range.'[106]

As a result of the focus on an African *longue durée*, therefore, precolonial history became preferred over history of the colonial period. The colonial era, it was argued, had only been an interlude during which Europeans had temporarily been in power. It was by looking at the continuity evident between pre- and post-colonial history that the 'true' history of Africa would really become visible — and could be made glorious as part of new national identities.[107] This specific argument was made most famously by Jacob Ade Ajayi, the editor of volume VI, who argued that colonialism had only been an 'episode' in African history, a mere interlude.[108] The main point of speaking of the African factor in history had become to emphasise how the African initiative was not just a reaction to Europeans and was not dependent on the presence of Europeans, but was in fact rooted in a longue durée.[109] The precolonial was, as a result, favoured by many of the early Africanists, a great number of whom also became a part of the GHA. The focus on pre-colonial history as meaning Africa from within was therefore, in large part, an effort to expel a eurocentric focus that had existed in history written about Africa by use of European source materials and largely through European eyes.

Conclusions

The *General History of Africa* had two clear goals: to establish African history as a scholarly sound and reputable activity and to contribute to the political emancipation of the continent. This chapter has focused on the first goal and analysed the ideals that were congruent to it.

106 UNESCO, SHC/CONF.27/1., Meeting of Experts on the Measures to be taken for Drafting and Publishing a General History of Africa, Unesco, Paris – 23-27 June 1969, Final Report, 6 August 1969. Translated from the French, 2, 5.

107 Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, 272.

108 J.F. Ade Ajayi, "Colonialism: an episode in African history", in *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960 Volume 1*, eds. L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 497-510.

109 Temu and Swai, *Historians and Africanist History*, 18-9, 22-3.

As a result of the overall European denial of historicity, the *General History of Africa* was mostly engaged in positioning itself opposite and against that denial, in an effort not only to be accepted by the Euro-American Academy, but also to improve it. The GHA, therefore, developed anti-ideals in reference to the creation of an Africa-centred history of Africa; historians had to avoid eurocentrism, which surfaced in the form of dogmatism, or an unmerited focus on the colonial over the precolonial past. In order to cement Africa as a suitable topic for historical scholarship, moreover, the GHA made it clear that it was not the historical discipline as a whole that they wished to retract from, but simply those parts and persons specifically that had denied Africa a history. Within Africanist circles specifically Trevor-Roper and Hegel became 'historians non grata', whose pronouncements on Africa were to be regarded as unscholarly because they had been prejudiced and had taken European superiority as a given. It was therefore the vices of the historical discipline that had to be shed and amended with new ideas, rather than its whole methodology, for the vices were the result of subjective and politically motivated ideological scholarship. The GHA then set out to decolonise African history through a deracialisation of African history; meaning it wanted to adopt existing historiographic rationality but without its racial prejudices by subverting and challenging methodologies.[110]

Ideally, historians of Africa would engage in a study of Africa in such a way that Europe would no longer be the focal point. They could do so by engaging primarily in the pre-colonial past through the use of oral traditions and other source materials that were not primarily written archival documents. As many historians have since noted, however, this mostly remained an ideal for the Africanist historians who were a part of the GHA as they ended up mostly writing history books that did engage in the colonial through the use of written archival material.[111] The point of this chapter therefore has been to emphasise that these ideals may not necessarily tell us something about the product that became the GHA, but, nevertheless show us how the historians working on the GHA envisioned a decolonised African histor-

110 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Siphamandla Zondi, "Introduction: The Coloniality of Knowledge: Between Troubles Histories and Uncertain Futures" in *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa*, eds. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Siphamandla Zondi (Durham: North Carolina Press, 2016), 3-24, 13.

111 Austen, "Africanist historiography and its critics", 205.

ical practice. They did so partly in opposition to what they perceived as existing eurocentric ideals. Most likely because doing as such was necessary in order to rhetorically position oneself as scholarly sound and reputable — a better and more academic alternative to existing historical writing about Africa.

CHAPTER TWO
Ideals of pan-African Diversity and Collectivity

Introduction

It was unmistakable from the very conception of the *General History of Africa* that the project would be pan-African in nature.[1] Ogot's reminiscence of the meeting at Flagstaff house hosted by Nkrumah placed the origins of the project squarely within a pan-African sphere of influence and the early advocates for the project had always envisioned it as a history that would encompass the entire continent. It, moreover, would be written collectively by Africans from across the continent and globe. These pan-African ideals underpinned the project's adherence to both political as well as epistemological goals; to establish Africa-centred history as a reputable scholarly activity and to contribute to the political emancipation of Africans on the continent by uniting them in a history that would be written by Africans themselves. This

1 I have chosen only to capitalise 'African' in pan-African, so as to not create confusion with the series of conferences organised by W.E.B. Du Bois from 1919 onwards. Given also that the GHA is less known as a pan-African project within the history of the many forms of pan-Africanism and is more easily associated with, for instance, the emergence of academic history on the continent than with the Atlantic congresses. See: Hakim Adi's, *Pan-Africanism a History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 4.

chapter, therefore, examines the ideal of pan-African collectivity as it functioned at the interface of politics and academia.

The chapter investigates some of the same positioning policy documents and published pieces as in Chapter 1, but moves on from a response to eurocentrism to the formulation of pan-African epistemic and political ideals. It first discusses how the GHA conceptualised pan-Africanism, before moving on to the ideal that the GHA needed to be written, collectively and primarily, by Africans. This ideal of Africanisation was epistemic as well as political because it spoke to the idea that different African perspectives on African history would help self-create a more truthful view of the African past, whilst paying homage to the idea of Africa as a pan-African unity with a shared history. If eurocentrism was dogmatic because it only allowed for the creation of one-sided knowledge, the solution was to invite multiple perspectives and envision pan-African knowledge production as welling from many sources. As such, by referencing perspectivity in history, the GHA placed itself within the tradition of historical scholarship as developed in Europe, whilst also decidedly positioning itself within a pan-African intellectual tradition and making use of its intellectual history regarding the need to move away from a European claim on universalism.[2] The GHA and the historians working on the project therefore navigated existing research standards of African history and the wish to construct new ones as well as the different perspectives that were to be included in the work.

The *General History of Africa* as a pan-Africanist project

The pan-Africanism at the heart of the GHA rationale was connected to the anti-colonial struggle for liberation and so was its aim to write a history of the continent based on pan-African ideals. The 1969 meeting had asserted the need for a continental approach and a facilitation of different points of view, whilst being mindful of the difficulties this could create for the work itself. Moreover, the final report of the meeting shows participants focused on such themes as 'historical connections', creating 'an introspective analysis of the development of

2 See: Carlo Ginzburg, "Distance and Perspective: Reflections on Two Metaphors" in *Historians and Social Values*, eds. Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 19–33.

Africa by the Africans' and 'Africa's contributions to the development of mankind.'[3] These ideas were further developed in the meetings that followed.

As a pan-Africanist project, the GHA was part of what Hakim Adi has indicated belongs to the second wave of pan-Africanism that emerged in the context of anti-colonial agitation, mostly after 1945, and which was foremost a political movement interested in the advancement of African nation states. This form of pan-Africanism stood in contrast to the Atlantic struggle of the 18th and 19th centuries which was connected to the period of trans-Atlantic enslavement and which was championed mostly by the African diaspora, yet, at the same time, it was its intellectual descendant. Both forms of pan-Africanism were interested in history and heritage, as well as the advancement of Africans across the globe. Yet, as the more recent form of pan-Africanism was inspired by anti-colonialism, it was more likely to include North Africa, as did the GHA in its emphasis on a 'continental approach.'[4] Moreover, in the introduction Ki-Zerbo noted that 'the history of Africa is not the history of one race', meaning, amongst other things, that the GHA included North Africa in its analysis.[5] Ki-Zerbo, following the positioning documents, reiterated that the *General History of Africa* would be a history dealing with Africa in its totality and not just a history of 'black Africa', 'Sub-Saharan Africa', 'Islamic Africa' or 'Atlantic Africa.' The GHA rejected the idea that only black people could be Africans and adhered to a pan-Africanist idea of continental and cultural unity amongst Africans. The total history that was therefore envisioned was not one that would be written along racial lines. The GHA also made it clear that it would move away from conceptions in historiography such as 'black' or 'tropical Africa', the continent excluding North and South Africa. Nevertheless, despite the continental approach the GHA took, in 1983 the manifesto had been amended slightly to also emphasise: 'Africa's historical connections with the other continents should receive due attention.'[6] By 1983, the

3 UAP, SHC/CONF.27/1, Meeting of Experts on the Measures to be taken for Drafting and Publishing a General History of Africa, Unesco, Paris – 23-27 June 1969. Final Report, 6 August 1969. Translated from the French, 5. (hereafter: UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Final Report)

4 Adi, *Pan-Africanism A History*, 3-4.

5 J. Ki Zerbo, "General Introduction" in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 21.

6 UNESCO, *preparation of a general history of Africa* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 4.

International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (ISC) had started drafting the volumes dealing with more recent history and therefore the diaspora likely became a more important historical factor.

One of the central figures of the post-1945 continental strand of pan-Africanism and a figure who functioned as a bridge between diaspora and continent, was Kwame Nkrumah, who, as we have seen, played a role in the creation of the GHA as well as the *Encyclopaedia Africana*.[7] In the editorial meetings for the Encyclopaedia Africana he had already made some of the same pronouncements the GHA historians would later make in their positioning documents. Not only did he use the word 'Afro-centric' to describe the project, he also emphasised the necessity of challenging the idea of Africa as a 'Dark Continent' and called for the work to be produced under the editorship of Africans, with a 'maximum participation of African scholars in all countries.'[8] Nkrumah supported both projects, as both underscored his pan-African vision and his insistence on combining the theory of pan-African liberation with practice, in this case the practice of writing history.[9] However, Nkrumah was not able to support the later stages of the GHA project as he was ousted in a coup in 1966. This distanced the project somewhat from its direct political beginnings during which Ogot and the other twelve 'cultural disciplines' had dreamt of a federal African state. Perhaps it meant that ideals of emancipation on the national level within a pan-African framework of solidarity displaced ideals of a pan-African political federation.

Writing history, nevertheless, could be a radical act. History had been espoused by the intelligentsia, the pan-African cultural nationalists of the late 19th and early 20th century, such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, as a key tool for African emancipation.[10] In the Francophone world, moreover, the journal started by the Senegalese Alioune Diop in 1947, *Présence Africaine*, was an important intellectual vessel through which such ideas on history were communicated. The journal

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7 Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 156.

8 First Annual Meeting: EAP Editorial Board Part 1: A Speech by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Encyclopaedia Africana Project, accessed May 13, 2019, http://www.endarkenment.com/eap/legacy/640924nkrumahk01.htm

9 Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 120-33.

10 Falola, *Nationalism and African intellectuals*, 223.

felt the need to develop a theory of history that would do away with the 'prejudice of whites.'[11] Like the GHA, *Présence Africaine* had a political as well as cultural goal; it ascribed to a French republican ideal of citizenship and simultaneously wished to promote African cultural longevity.

Although the GHA was most definitely motivated by the politics of building nation states in newly independent African countries, its pan-African politics were also articulated through an emphasis on culture. In that way it could combine a priority on the interconnections between different parts of Africa and their shared histories with a nationalist agenda. As Adom Getachew has argued, the anticolonial nationalists of the 1950s and 1960s not only saw nationalism and internationalism as compatible but also thought that independence from the global north could only be truly reached through an internationalist balance of power and therefore pan-African solidarity.[12] Similarly, the GHA aimed to combine nationalism and pan-Africanism. In that way it was a sort of historiographical counterpart to the Organisation of African Unity as it was constituted in Addis Ababa in 1963.[13]

Like other forms of continental pan-Africanisms, moreover, the GHA was indebted to the cultural pan-Africanism of diasporic scholars. It approached the history of Africa through a vindicationist paradigm. This meant that its primary goal was to validate the African past and prove white supremacist ideas on history wrong.[14] The *General History of Africa*, therefore, should be placed within a much older pan-African tradition: the idea that there existed a shared past amongst Africans and people of African descent in the Americas and elsewhere and that this shared past needed to be recorded to spur on

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11 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "*Présence Africaine:* History and Historians of Africa" in *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987*, ed. Valentin Mudimbe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 59-94, 74-6.

12 Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire. The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 170.

13 See: Kate Skinner, "A Different Kind of Union: An Assassination, Diplomatic Recognition, and Competing Visions of African Unity in Ghana-Togo Relations, 1956-1963" in *Visions of African Unity. New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, eds. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 23-48, 25.

14 Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "Introduction" in *Out of One, Many Africas. Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa*, eds. William G. Martin and Michael O. West (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 1-38, 19-21.

emancipation and independence from white Europeans, spearheaded by such figures as Marcus Garvey. The 1969 meeting made it clear that this had to be done by Africans themselves: 'the development of Africa by the Africans, the latter appearing no longer as mere objects, but as the subjects of history.'[15] In this way the vindication also lay in the claiming of an anti-colonial narrative of independence from European states.

Pan-African diversity as an ideal of knowledge production

In practice, within the GHA pan-Africanism was also expressed through African diversity in terms of authors and historians who would work on the project. From the very beginning it was stipulated that the GHA needed to be written and edited by a diverse collection of authors and editors. The first step towards making this a reality was through the installation of a 30- and later 39-member International Scientific Committee, each hailing from a different country in Africa or elsewhere.[16] This last stipulation sometimes created difficulties, resulting in committee members who did not have much experience as historians and sometimes were only academics in name. Some of the ISC members actually functioned primarily as university rectors or government officials.[17] The 1969 meeting had however also suggested that the International Congress of Africanists or the Association of African Universities could aid in suggesting committee members and ISC members could also function as editors.[18] The rules of procedure from 1971, however, had stated that the committee was to attract 'eminent personalities', partly in order to make it easier to promote the

15 UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Final Report, 5.

16 In the rules of procedure, the number thirty appears, yet in later documents the number increases to 39 with a reference to the same rules of procedure. In the volumes for the GHA the number of ISC-members listed is 39. It can therefore be concluded that the number was amended somewhere along the way. UAP, SHC/CONF.70/8 rev, First Plenary Meeting of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa. Unesco, Paris, 30 March – 8 April 1971. Paris 5 April 1971. Translated from the French. Rules of Procedure. 1 (hereafter: UAP, First Plenary Meeting 1971 Rules of Procedure) and UAP, DDG 3 52, CC/CS/71.04/memo, Directeur général á Maurice Glélé 2-03-1978.

17 "The African rediscovery of Africa by Roland Oliver", *Times Literary Supplement*, March 20, 1981.

18 UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Final Report, 11.

work.[19] Aklilu Habte, the Ethiopian committee member and briefly president of the Bureau, even succeeded in organising a meeting with emperor Haile Selassie during the 1970 meeting in Addis Ababa.[20] The Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity, moreover, was also present to address that meeting.[21] One important qualifying trait for committee members, however, was not their proximity to emperors and pan-African icons, or other prominent Africans, but their diverse Africanness itself. Two thirds of the members, it was stipulated, had to be from African countries or of African descent.[22]

Authors primarily also had to be African, Ogot stated in his description of the project: 'Preference is given to African authors [...] Special effort is also made to ensure, as far as possible, that all regions of the continent, as well as other regions having historical or cultural ties with Africa, are equitably represented amongst authors.'[23] It was moreover articulated, during the 1969 meeting and again in 1970, that authors had to be persons who 'evince a deep sympathy for Africa and its problems', this suggested that not all authors had to be African necessarily, but that they had to agree to the political and anti-colonial ideals the GHA espoused. Or as the report of the meeting put it 'the guiding principles which should inspire the General History of Africa', meaning the importance of African independence and pan-African solidarity amongst newly independent nations. Ascribing to these ideals was an 'indispensable condition and an absolute prerequisite' for authors. On the same page it was also stated that authors had to be politically independent, thereby underwriting the GHA's sometimes contradictory aims.[24] The project aimed towards a certain respectability within the international academic community and also wanted to remain neutral relative to the Cold War world order. The document also

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19 UAP, First Plenary Meeting 1971 Rules of Procedure, 1.

20 Haile Selassie became an important icon within the Rastafarian movement specifically, see: Monique A. Bedasse, *Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzania, and Pan-Africanism in the Age of Decolonization* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 1-2.
UAP, First Plenary Meeting 1971 Rules of Procedure, 1.

21 UAP, SHC/MD/10, Meeting of Experts for the Drafting and Publication of A General History of Africa, Addis Ababa, 22 to 26 June 1970, Paris, 15 September 1970, 2.

22 UAP, First Plenary Meeting 1971 Rules of Procedure, 1.

23 B. A. Ogot, "Description of the Project" in *General History of Africa I Methodology and African Prehistory,* ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), xxiii-xxv, xxiv.

24 UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Final Report, 10.

stated that the majority of the contributors and all editors should be historians.[25] An exception was made for Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan political scientist who became the editor of volume VIII because no historian could be found. He was therefore the second Kenyan to edit a volume. In general, the GHA, despite its aims to include committee members, editors and authors from all countries equally, was predominated by West and East Africans. These were all scholars from nations that became independent around the same time, the 'year of Africa' in 1960. They were therefore engaged in the parallel process of nation-building and as such they were keen on determining the direction of the GHA which had the potential to be an exceptionally useful project for them. At the same time, black South African authors were practically absent from the GHA.[26] Of course, UNESCO had nominally banned South Africa, but that would not have stopped the GHA from inviting scholars living in exile. As such, the pan-African nature of the project was subject to a particular interpretation in reality, to anticipate the second part of this thesis. This is revisited in more detail, in Chapter 5.

This was not for a lack of effort for, as is also noted in the annex detailing the structure of the GHA, Maurice Glélé kept meticulous track of the geographical spread of the authors contributing to the GHA. He tracked how many authors came from Africa and from what parts of Africa, and whether there were not too many Europeans, in order to ascertain whether various regions in Africa were sufficiently represented within the GHA. The *General History of Africa*, after all, had to be written from within, a story of the African past shaped and told by Africans themselves, rather than Europeans. Identity mattered for it influenced one's perspective on history generally and African history specifically. This was not only a political belief. The idea that one's geographic origins influenced historiography was epistemic as well in that it was believed that it could (rather than would) inherently change the way one saw the world and therefore interpreted history and its sources. The Bureau, the seven-member body that regulated the GHA in-between the biennial committee meetings, had to consist of at least four African members.[27] Lastly, the 1966 meeting in Abidjan stipulated that GHA meetings had to be held on the continent. The

25 UAP, Meeting of Experts 1969 Final Report, 10.

26 Leonard Ngcongco was a member of the ISC and did contribute a chapter, and so did Shula Marks, both were exiles.

27 UAP, First Plenary Meeting 1971 Rules of Procedure, 3.

location would rotate from one African region to the next, in order to promote research in Africa and attract young researchers from various countries.[28] Despite a preponderance of West and East Africans, pan-African diversity became a key organising factor and a leading ideal for the GHA. It was precisely this ideal that had to ensure the absence of dogmatism. Evaluating many ideas, histories and perspectives would make it possible to self-create African history — rather than have it defined by outsiders.

The inherent value placed on diversity, even if was a qualified diversity, was most likely influenced by the GHA's foundation in UNESCO ideology as well as pan-Africanism. In his *Race et Histoire* (1952) Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was part of UNESCO's committee on the theoretical basis of human rights, had argued that diversity was a value in and of itself.[29] Moreover, he focused on cultural and civilisational diversity, arguing that value was to be found in different societies even if that value did not align with the west as central point of comparison. Whilst the GHA was trying to move away from a universalism based on values developed in Europe, it was simultaneously embedded in and indebted to a rhetoric of one-worldism. Before that, in 1947 UNESCO had already asked the American anthropologist, and often named founder of African studies in the United States, Melville Herskovits to draft a statement on universal human rights.[30] Herskovits had argued that there were cultural connections between African-Americans and Africans, emphasising the strength of African cultural values throughout centuries.[31] In the statement on human rights he warned that human rights are at least partly culturally defined and that some ideas on universal values had in the past been used to justify colonial expansion and argue against diversity.[32] The statement has subse-

28 UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Abidjan 31 August – 5 September, 1966, Introductory Document, 23 August 1966, 5.

29 Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, "New Histories of the United Nations" *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008): 251-274, 258 and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race et Histoire* (Paris: Unesco, 1952).

30 Melville Herskovits, "Statement of Human Rights" *American Anthropologist* 49:4 (1947): 539-43.

31 See: Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 59-92

32 Caroline S. Archambault, "Human Rights" in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, eds. Hillary Callan and Simon Coleman (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2018)

quently come to be associated with anthropologists' stance towards cultural relativism. Anthropologists had come to connect cultural relativism not necessarily to moral or ethical relativism, but to objectivity in their professional practice as a method of investigation: the idea that one should approach other cultures from an objective point of view so as not to judge cultural practices simply for being different from your own.[33] Often, these ideas on cultural relativism and diversity, practiced by UNESCO as well, were connected to a commitment to combat racism and imperialism.[34] The White Man's Burden and general ideas on European cultural superiority, had been abused to rationalise intrusion into non-European lands. The idea that pan-African diversity was a value in and of itself because it could help in ameliorating rigid ideas on universalism and cultural value or civilisation as only stemming from Europe was part of early UNESCO ideology. Likely, it influenced the GHA — although it may equally be that the historians who would later come to work on the GHA somewhat influenced UNESCO.

It is anyway undeniable that the assertion that a plurality of opinions was a worthwhile intellectual good came from the realisation that eurocentric history had made the false claim that its knowledge was not situated or particular to Europe. The inclusion of a plurality of perspectives and opinions became the antidote to European universalism in anti-colonial contexts. In his lecture *Moving the Centre Ngũgĩ* Wa Thiong'O argues that moving away from a European centre to a plurality of centres is a necessary intervention for the humanities to flourish for all humans.[35] This 'pluriversalist' epistemology surfaced in the writings of Aimé Césaire as well — at least in readings by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe.[36] Mbembe explains Césaire's points as follows: Concern for Africa did not mean moving away from the world, or Europe, at large. Rather, it was an affirmation that the world was plural and Europe only a part of it. Césaire identified the entwining of the universal with Europe as a result of Europe-

33 Thomas H. Johnson, "Culture Relativism: Interpretations of a Concept", *Anthropological Quarterly* 80:3 (2007): 791-802, 791, 794.

34 See: Edgardo C. Krebs, "Popularizing Anthropology, Combating Racism: Alfred Métraux at *The UNESCO Courier*" in *A History of UNESCO. Global Actions and Impacts* ed. Poul Duedahl (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 29-48.

35 Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'O, *Moving the Centre. The struggle for cultural freedom.* (Woodbridge: James Curry, 1993), 6, 10-1.

36 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*. Trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 156-162.

an arrogance stemming from its successful colonial exploits: Europe had come to think of itself as so prestigious that it no longer needed input from elsewhere.[37] The unmasking of universalism as a European particularity is reminiscent of Chakrabarty's critique of political modernity as if it was European modernity. As a kind of answer and opposite the idea of rigid analytical Eurocentrism, Toyin Falola has also adopted a conceptualisation of pluriversalism.[38] Both Mbembe and Falola suggest the incorporation of multiple epistemologies and the intellectual autonomy of African indigenous knowledge as a way to further the decolonisation of African and global systems of knowledge production. The seeds of these ideas on pluriversalism are also recognisable in the intellectual tradition of the GHA, with its inherent emphasis on open mindedness and diversity. Although it should be noted that it was a very different pluriversalism from that espoused in the 21st century movements of decoloniality. Falola nevertheless identifies the historiography of the post-independence period as a first attempt at such a decolonisation along the lines of pluriversalism. The expansion of perspectives however, according to Falola, 'can add to diversity, but not necessarily to intellectual radicalism for the resultant liberation that many intellectuals expect.'[39] The GHA also did not have as its goal to rid the budding African historical academy of Euro-American influences altogether. The diversity of opinions they heralded included European perspectives, providing these perspectives could be placed alongside African perspectives, rather than superior to them.[40] Or rather, these European perspectives should possibly be made secondary to pan-African diversity. Any kind of pluralism within the GHA then, was borne out of a reaction against rigid descriptive eurocentrism which held there were no other truths about Africa than those emanating from a point of view located in Europe.

Collaborative African knowledge production was a guiding ideal in the drafting of the *General History of Africa*. In the project's description, Ogot detailed the process of editing and how the GHA empha-

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37 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 156-61.

38 Toyin Falola, *Decolonizing African Studies: Epistemologies, Methodologies and Agencies* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, Forthcoming), 277-317.

39 Falola, *Decolonizing African Studies*, 279.

40 Vansina asserted this as a general rule for Euro-American educated African historians, Jan Vansina, "Knowledge and Perceptions of the African Past", in *African Historiographies. What History for Which Africa?*, eds. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (London: Sage Publications, 1986), 28-41, 29.

sised the need for several editors and readers to review the chapters, a process which was necessary to insure 'scientific objectivity.'[41] In practice, this meant there was a need for dozens of eyes to go over chapters and for the International Scientific Committee to seamlessly work together: 'When the editor of a volume has approved texts of chapters, they are then sent to all members of the Committee for criticism. In addition, the text of the volume editor is submitted for examination to a Reading Committee, set up within the International Scientific Committee on the basis of the member's fields of competence. [...] The Bureau then gives final approval to the manuscripts.' This did not make the editing process any easier, although it did make it more democratic. Ogot rightly described the whole process of drafting the GHA, including its elaborate system of review as 'a gigantic task which constitutes an immense challenge to African historians.'[42] Yet, he also pressed the necessity of the process.[43] At a meeting in Ouagadougou in 1979, during which Ogot, Jacob Ade Ajayi, Jean Devisse, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Mazrui were all present, subjectivity in historical scholarship was discussed and here, too, the inclusion of different subjective 'viewpoints' was encouraged in order to rid the GHA of dogmatism — provided, Ogot asserted, that the reading committee would be 'extremely attentive.'[44] The GHA was a collaborative effort that valued knowledge as such and which did not shy away from differences of opinion — it even cherished such differences of opinion as fundamental to the creation of a well-rounded view of African history. At the same Ouagadougou symposium, moreover, Ade Ajayi acknowledged the difficulty of writing detached contemporary history and argued that the GHA's 'continental approach', by which he meant the inclusion of as many different African perspectives as possible, was a way to guard the 'sincere search for historical truth as distinct from

41 Ogot, "Project Description", xxiv.

42 Ibid, xxiiv

43 Ibid, xxiv

44 N.N., "Report of the meeting of experts on the methodology of contemporary African history", in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9. The methodology of contemporary African history. Reports and papers of the meeting of experts organized by Unesco at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 161-94, 168.

propaganda.'[45] Ajayi therefore restated an idea of detachment or objectivity — he used the two interchangeably — as connected to perspectivity. Objectivity was therefore constructed as including as many, sometimes opposing, perspectives as possible; a position that Thomas Haskell, reviewing an essay written by Carlo Ginzburg, notes is not foreign to the modern historical discipline as a whole.[46] This ideal of objectivity as best approximated through an inclusion of multiple not always aligning perspectives in order to create a more complete view of the past and the undeniable perspectivity, or subjectivity, of historical knowledge has partly been developed by the historical discipline as a result of, amongst others, postcolonial interventions in historiography — for instance in the inclusion of oral traditions as sound source materials.[47] The *General History of Africa* may be considered as part of that intervention.

Pan-African diversity was connected to the idea that the GHA needed to be written collectively, primarily by Africans. Objectivity, then, in this context, pointed towards a liberation from European points of view through an Africanisation of the historical discipline as it pertained to African history. It did not mean eliminating subjectivity, but rather, allowing for African subjectivity to enter the narrative. The ideal of pan-African diversity allowed for the inclusion of multiple subjectivities, or (historical) judgments. Yet, at the same time, this pan-African ideal of diversity largely excluded women. As the manifesto suggested, looking at the continent from 'within', was meant as a primer to allow giving African viewpoints equal or more weight when it came to African history than European viewpoints. Clearly, African viewpoints were understood in a particular way as referring mostly to the pan-African nationalist generation represented by male African scholars from countries that had won independence in

45 J.F. Ade Ajayi, "Problems of writing contemporary African history" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9. The methodology of contemporary African history. Reports and papers of the meeting of experts organized by Unesco at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 47-58, 50.

46 Thomas L. Haskell, "Review article. Objectivity: Perspective as Problem and Solution.", *History and Theory* 43:3 (2004): 341-359, 346. See also: Thomas L. Haskell, "Objectivity is not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick's That Noble Dream", *History and Theory* 29:2 (1990): 129-157.

47 See: John Tosh, *The Pursuit of history. Aims, methods and new directions in the study of history*. 6th edition (London: Routledge, 2015), 229-253.

the 1960s primarily. The GHA emphasised pan-African diversity, but it was a limited diversity. Nevertheless, this particular Africanisation ideal of moving away from European particularities such as universalism through a collective knowledge production was a positive ideal that was posed opposite the negative ideals elaborated in Chapter 1.

Conclusions

The GHA was a pan-African project that ascribed to ideals of continental pan-Africanism, but which was also inspired by earlier diaspora-led ideas. It aimed to combine African nationalism with pan-African internationalist solidarity. In terms of the imagined implementation of these ideals the GHA celebrated the inclusion of multiple perspectives as part of its adherence to a pan-African Africanisation of history. In opposition to eurocentrism, which is shown in Chapter 1 to have been framed as one-sided or even dogmatic, diversity of perspectives and the collective production of knowledge became a guiding ideal within the GHA. Africanisation of African history could only be established through a careful process of editing and inviting sometimes conflicting perspectives in order to do justice to the diversity of African and European voices in the creation of knowledge about the African past. This was framed as way to create objective knowledge, but it should be seen as an ideal of knowledge creation within the GHA that was at least partly rhetorical. It was also partly political because the inclusion of as many different African perspectives as possible equally worked towards the idea of pan-Africanism as a political goal in opposition to European might. At the same time, it also moved towards the epistemic goal of well-rounded historical knowledge on Africa. Political, cultural and epistemological goals within this ideal of pan-African diversity, therefore, were hard to separate.

CHAPTER THREE
Ideals of Political Emancipation

Introduction

The preceding chapters mainly analyse how ideals of anti-eurocentrism and pan-African diversity influenced the creation of knowledge within the *General History of Africa*, whereas this chapter focuses on the ideal of the GHA to contribute to political emancipation. Practical concerns occupied the editors and authors of the GHA alongside high-minded questions concerning the place of Europe within the history of Africa. The GHA wished to contribute to nation-building on the continent and, subsequently, to a widespread dissemination of knowledge about African history on the continent and across the globe in order to contribute to a greater understanding of Africa. The chapter shows that African history required an investment not just in the academic emancipation of Africa, but also in the political emancipation of the continent. Ideals concerning the reputability of the new field of history related to ideals of uplifting the people and creating educational emancipation, as well.

This chapter, the last of three on ideals, therefore, looks into the way the GHA envisioned African history should contribute to the political emancipation of Africans, rather than looking at the reali-

ty of whether it actually did contribute to political emancipation on the continent. It asks the question of why and how did the *General History of Africa* envision the volumes should and would contribute to political emancipation on the continent? The chapter shows in how far the GHA was a political project that aimed to contribute to anti-colonial nationalism and which saw political emancipation as a duty which was almost indistinguishable from the creation of African history as a scholarly endeavour of reputability.

The chapter first discusses the way in which oral historiography specifically came to function as a tool for building nation states through education and heritage conservation. Secondly, it analyses how the nationalist emancipatory and anti-colonial role the GHA set out to fulfil, expressed itself in the wish to spread knowledge widely. The creation of nationalist history would only have an emancipatory effect if there was also an effort to spread information and knowledge to as many Africans as possible. The GHA was set up to encompass the whole of Africa not only in terms of topics, but also in its reach. Lastly, the chapter details the way in which the GHA cared about its societal relevance as it played a role within the history of African studies. For instance, regarding critique levelled against nationalist history writing by Marxist-oriented historians in the 1970s.

Nation-state building through oral historiography

As already noted in Chapter 1, oral historiography came to be seen as a typically African and therefore possibly unique way to decolonise history. Historians working on Africa's past had increasingly come to challenge the idea that only written source material could be used to unlock the past. The treatment of oral traditions as legitimate source materials marked a pivotal change in the way history was done. Yet, within the GHA the archetype of oral historiography as specifically and truly African became susceptible to a myriad of myths and essentialisations. Oral source materials were envisioned to be able to reach a pre-colonial past which could then subsequently contribute to the political imagination by conjuring images of political independence and even greatness.

Oral history became such an important envisioned decolonising tool because it could contribute to emancipation. The collection and use of oral traditions for the writing of African history symbolised that all peoples had a right to historical memory because the use of

oral sources appeared to create an opening into hitherto unknown parts of the African past. This created the possibility of listening to voices that had previously been ignored, often from the pre-colonial period.[1] Pre-colonial Africa became synonymous with 'unspoiled' Africa. The 'true' African past was that which had not yet been 'distorted' by colonialism. One could escape to pre-colonial African history to catch a glimpse of African greatness and imagine what the future of Africa, under African rule, could look like. Pre-colonial Africa therefore offered repertoires for the political imagination of the post-independence period, for instance in the history of various empires, such as the Songhay, Mali and Ghana empires. Pre-colonial history became synonymous with a nationalist focus on the African factor as pre-colonial Africa was uniquely equipped to show that Africans could rule themselves and were capable of making their own history. As such, it functioned not only as an epistemological antidote to eurocentrism, as is explored in Chapter 1, but also as a nationalist and anti-colonial escape towards Nkrumah's much-yearned for political kingdom.

The *General History of Africa* therefore embraced the new methodology of oral history. The manifesto stated that it would introduce the values of oral tradition, presumably to the historical discipline. Oral history changed the way that African history was studied and vastly broadened the subject material available. As a result, oral tradition came to be seen as such an important carrier of African values that the language to promote this idea within the GHA was highly normative regarding the results that oral history was supposed to yield in terms of its capacity to decolonise history. Remember Joseph Ki-Zerbo's assertions, discussed in Chapter 1, that oral traditions were the most authentic African sources. For this chapter, it is particularly noteworthy that oral history came to function specifically as a tool of imagined political emancipation, whereas in Chapter 1, the point is epistemic, to assert that oral historiography was used to prove the existence of African historicity. In almost all of the positioning documents, UNESCO's efforts in collecting oral traditions from across Africa are highlighted, praised and stimulated — referencing, for instance, the project in the Niger Valley which took place in 1967–1968 or the need

1 Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 231, 233.

to collect oral material in Southern Africa and Ethiopia.[2] Oral tradition, it was imagined would give greater access to the African past, in more diverse ways. Of course, the local knowledge carried by these traditions is actually highly valuable in what they may tell us about the societies in which they function and functioned.[3] Yet, the way in which this almost instinctive idea was articulated within the *General History of Africa* sometimes hinged on the wishful.

It was through teaching oral traditions as history specifically that it was imagined new national citizens could be created. The creation of viable systems of education that could uplift that nation had been a central tenet of the independence period throughout the former colonies in Africa, Jacob Ade Ajayi wrote in 1982. Education was one of the pillars of the successful nation state.[4] The *General History of Africa* therefore felt a need to reflect on the educational development that had taken place after the attainment of independence and convened a symposium to discuss the theme of *Educational Progress and Historiography in Africa*.[5] During the symposium, which took place in 1982 in Dakar, Senegal, experts reflected on the educational inheritance from pre-colonial times, as well as the colonial legacy and the content of African history that had been taught.[6] Ade Ajayi reflected on the legacy and impact of 'western' style education on Africa, a theme he had already researched extensively in a Nigerian context for his book on Christian

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2 G.S.M, "The General History of Africa: A UNESCO Project" *Cahiers D'Histoire Mondiale* 13:4 (1970): 527-538, 529-31 and UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Abidjan 31 August – 5 September, 1966, Introductory Document, 23 August 1966, 1 (hereafter: UAP, Committee of Experts 1966, Introductory document)

3 Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture. The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 2-7.

4 J.F. Ade Ajayi and B.A. Ogot, "Introduction", in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9, Educational Processes in Africa and Historiography. Final Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 9-10, 9-10.

5 N.N., "Final Report of the symposium" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9, Educational Processes in Africa and Historiography. Final Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 129-44, 129.

6 N.N., "Contents" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9, Educational Processes in Africa and Historiography. Final Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985)

missions in that country in the 19th century.[7] In the piece Ajayi argued that although 'western' education had successfully created a new elite, it had not totally eradicated the indigenous systems of education.[8] It was through indigenous education that a sense of continuity, tradition, and therefore a sense of history, could be safeguarded, he argued. Oral traditions had therein played their role in creating consensus, emphasising periods of political stability and peace and fostering the idea that periods of conflict and gaps in good leadership were less important. Through oral tradition a sense of community was favoured over a sense of individualism. According to Ajayi the latter was the exact opposite of what 'western' education had come to stimulate in the new African elite.[9] In another paper for the same symposium, Ali Mazrui and Teshome Wagaw, from Ethiopia, also emphasised the importance of oral tradition in the indigenous education system in East Africa.[10] Mazrui, Wagaw and Ajayi called upon the restoration of indigenous systems of community, through the promotion of oral tradition. The colonial, traditional and also Islamic influences, would together provide for the replacement of colonial and pre-colonial logic with something new that would ultimately reflect the conflicting memories of the postcolonial moment.[11] In the postcolonial state, then, education would have to become a fusion of several practices, allowing for what Valentin Mudimbe has dubbed 'the promise of modern Africa.'[12]

In the final report of the symposium the theme of oral historiography resurfaced as a way to ensure a restoration of communality, and

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7 See: J.F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891. The Making of a New Élite* (London: Longmans Green and Co, 1965)

8 J.F. Ade Ajayi, "The educational process and historiography in contemporary Africa: background paper" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9, Educational Processes in Africa and Historiography. Final Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 11-21, 15-16.

9 Ade Ajayi, "The educational process", 17.

10 A. A. Mazrui and T. Wagaw, "Towards decolonizing modernity: education and cultural conflict in Eastern Africa" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9, Educational Processes in Africa and Historiography. Final Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 35-62, 40.

11 Ade Ajayi, "The educational process", 12-13 and Mazrui and Wagaw, "Toward decolonizing modernity", 60-61.

12 Valentin Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 144.

therefore tradition, in the educational system. Oral historiography had the potential to bring several strands of African relations with the past together. In African societies there was far less of a separation between history, memory and education as had come into being in the West, the meeting concluded. Therefore, there was no point in simply mimicking the 'western' way of doing history, Jean Devisse noted.[13] The symposium seemed to have framed the oral almost as carrying an African essence, which was imagined to hold the key to decolonising African education and history. What this symposium shows then, is how, at the time, Ajayi, Mazrui and others idealised oral traditions.[14]

Oral historiography within the GHA was mythologised and connected to an ideal of shared knowledge and shared community. It therefore needed to be safeguarded for future generations, as well as spread through history writing and education. Or rather, the indigenous values installed in oral traditions would be best disseminated through education. Moreover, the suggestion was made that oral sources were actually better than written sources because they were perceived to 'live' closer to the actual past, hence the use of the phrase 'living tradition' in Amadou Hampaté Ba's chapter title of volume I. This was partly a reflection on the malleability of oral sources and the ability of people to speak back to the historian collecting sources, whereas dead written documents obviously could not.[15] In Francophone West Africa, Hampâté Bâ became the most well-known figure amongst a group of collectors of oral traditions, such as Djibril Tamsir Niane and Camara Laye.[16] It was in an effort to keep knowledge

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13 N.N., "Final Report of the symposium", 136-7.

14 It should be noted here that Ajayi did emphasise the need to critically assess oral traditions before using them as pedagogical material, Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani, "Ade Ajayi and the Pedagogy of Teaching and Learning about African History" in *J.F. Ade Ajayi. His Life and Career*, eds. Michael Omolewa and Akinjide Osuntokun (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2014), 358-72, 360.

15 In an edited volume on fieldwork in Africa, Vaninsa noted that because oral traditions come from living people, they incorporate a larger number of viewpoints and subjectivities. In addition, in their reception they are sometimes subject to control from those living people as opposed to the study of 'dead' documents that never speak back. Jan Vansina, "Epilogue: Fieldwork in History." in *In Pursuit of History. Fieldwork in Africa*, eds. Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), 138.

16 Niane, who was also the editor of volume IV of the GHA, wrote down the epic of Soundjata. D. T. Niane, *Soundjata ou L'Épopée Mandingue* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960)

about the African past from disappearing that UNESCO and the experts working on the drafting of a General History became engaged in the collection of oral data, already mentioned above. Hampâté Bâ's famous adage was often invoked to describe the perceived situation: 'En Afrique, quand un vieillard meurt, c'est une bibliotheque qui brûle.' [Every time an old man dies in Afrique, it is as if a library burns down.] The idea being that some depositories of knowledge were about to disappear as elders passed away, whilst younger men became absorbed by an increasingly modernised, or some would say westernised, way of living. Of course, it should be emphasised here that oral traditions and oral knowledge was not just possessed by any old man, but, by specialised experts trained in the orature, often called 'griots' in a West African context. Griots traditionally performed a wide variety of roles, but also functioned as historians and storytellers across West Africa.[17] UNESCO feared the disappearance of local knowledge carried by these griots if it were not recorded or collected in some way. The 1966 Abidjan meeting of experts on the *General History of Africa* therefore ended with a statement on 'historical research work in Africa.'[18] UNESCO had by that time already implemented several archival studies throughout Africa in an effort to make knowledge about the continent's past more accessible. The experts recommended that a meeting of specialists on African oral traditions should be convened, in order to establish regional centres in West Africa for the collection and analysis of data, as well as the training of research staff. Two meetings were eventually organised, in 1967 in Niamey, as mentioned above and in 1968 in Ouagadougou.[19] The idea here was that through access to traditional and local knowledge, African cultural heritage, would not be lost for it allowed researchers to connect to layers of society that would otherwise elude them. In that way oral traditions were connected to an ideal of shared and communal knowledge of the African past. Perhaps it is not unsurprising that the GHA chose to emphasise the importance of oral history as an ideal given the importance of oral story telling specifically in West Africa and the pre-eminence of West Africans amongst the GHA's editors.

This necessity to salvage oral traditions, however, contains a par-

17 Patrick Corcoran, *Griot*, in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 [2005])

18 UAP, Committee of Experts 1966, Introductory document, 5.

19 G.S.M, "The General History of Africa", 527-538.

adox. The aim betrays a certain bias towards the written word, even whilst arguing for the validity and importance of oral material. This is also noticeable in Hampâté Bâ's famous dictum on burning libraries, the idea being that knowledge disappears if it is not written down. As Moradewun Adejunmobi explains: 'orality is obviously important [for Hampaté Bâ], but orality does not survive on its own in a world that has experienced colonialism.'[20] In this postcolonial world literacy has become the mode of understanding and preserving knowledge. In the historical context in which Hampâté Bâ operated writing had slowly started to supersede orality in the colonies and later post-colonies in which he did his research. He therefore uniquely emphasised the process of writing down spoken text.[21] In his chapter for volume I of the GHA, Jan Vansina moreover noted that the increasing availability of written history books and the increasing literacy of the population would make it harder for the historian to find uncontaminated oral accounts. Vansina argued that the times offered a unique and compelling chance to write down the orature of Africa and decolonise the writing of history about Africa.[22] Paradoxically it was this very imposition of colonial modes of knowledge production that would, eventually, make it possible for oral traditions to disappear. Heritage conservation in this instance, therefore, seemed to be conceptualised from a Euro-American perspective. Perhaps because this was the only perspective available that was also congruent with the narrative of internationalism as championed by UNESCO. Phrasing the necessity to safeguard oral traditions in a way that could be understood in terms of the internationalist rationale of the time was perhaps partly strategic rhetoric aimed to include African countries in the post-colonial world order.[23]

The idea, therefore, espoused within the GHA specifically, that oral traditions were a somehow pure historical source that could more or less transport the researcher to an African past and which held information about society on many different levels, was at least partly a utopia connected to the ideal of using a past of great value for the pur-

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20 Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Disruptions of Orality in the Writings of Hampaté Bâ." *Research in African Literatures* 31:3 (2000): 28-36, 31.

21 Adejunmobi, "Disruptions of Orality", 31.

22 J. Vansina, "Oral tradition and its methodology" in *General History of Africa I. Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 142-66, 162.

23 See: Marie Huber, *Developing Heritage – Developing Countries. Ethiopian Nation-Building and the Origins of UNESCO World Heritage, 1960-1980* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 144-49, 168-74.

pose of political anti-colonial emancipation and partly a rhetorical device in order to frame Africa as part of the international world order. The oral therefore functioned on multiple layers; as part of indigenous education that had to be salvaged in postcolonial times and which could shape the nation, as a way to connect to the pre-colonial African past, as a carrier of cultural knowledge that needed to be conserved for posterity and as a political tool on the global political stage. It was seen as a way to marshal materials from the past to legitimate new nations in the present and connect the, sometimes arbitrary, boundaries of these new nations with a (great) history. Oral historiography therefore functioned not only as a methodology or genre of source material that could be deployed in the argument against eurocentrism, but also, through education and conservation, as a carrier of the political ideology of the independence period. It was through its connection to the non-European pre-colonial especially that oral historiography became a carrier of the ideal of political emancipation.

The political ideal of 'reaching the widest possible audience'

For African cultural heritage, including oral traditions, to be recognised, it was necessary to assure the *General History of Africa* would reach a wide audience. The intellectual battle for nationalism could partly be fought through the writing of history if both audiences in Africa as well as elsewhere would read and come to believe the story of a past of great value.[24] During most of the period of nationalist historiography in the 1960s, when the goals and aims of the GHA were written down, historians sought to reveal the previously unknown African past to a general public in order to promote a global understanding of that African past and combat the colonial idea of Africa as a savage and war-torn place before the imposition of colonial 'order' and 'progress'. Nationalism therefore provoked a demand for history books.[25] As a result, funding was readily available for universities and

24 As such the GHA stood in a global but European-inspired tradition of history writing for nationalism, which is part of a larger nationalisation of the past, see: Stefan Berger ed., *Writing the nation: a global perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Ilaria Porciani and Jo Tollebeek eds., *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks, and Communities of National Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

25 Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, 181.

historians in the early years of the post-independence period when new nation states were flourishing, years which, consequently, overlapped with the most productive years of the new discipline.[26] Funding was readily available in part because education could be used to shape national citizens. Most of the African GHA historians, if not all, had been at least partly educated at Euro-American institutions and they wished to create new and sustain existing institutions of higher learning in their own countries to contribute to national independence. I will here focus on higher education and specifically the study of history as well as a widespread dissemination of the work to a general audience.

In the introductory document for the 1966 meeting of experts in Abidjan, it was first stated that the 'results of research should be used for teaching purposes; cooperation should be organised to that end between specialists in history and specialists in education, mainly in Africa.'[27] This idea was further expanded upon in the meetings that took place, 1970 in Addis Ababa and 1971 in Paris. The 1970 meeting, after presenting what would be general directives guiding the work, what I have dubbed 'the manifesto', set forth how the synthesis dictated by that manifesto was to be presented:

> The style of presentation [...], whilst making no concessions whatsoever, with regard to the level of scholarship, endeavours at the same time to reach the general cultivated public, retain the interest of the lay reader and stimulate a new interest in the history of Africa, both within and outside the continent. Low-priced paperback editions, special school version and translations in the major African languages should help the work to reach the widest possible audience and especially the students of African universities.[28]

Besides paperback editions, the document also introduced the plan to create abridged editions, that 'could constitute a cheap popular edition

26 Saheed Aderinto and Toyin Falola, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (Woodbridge: Boydell &Brewer, 2013) 24-6

27 UAP, Committee of Experts 1966, Introductory document, 2.

28 UAP, UNESCO/SHC/MD/10, 1970 meeting of Experts for the Drafting and Publication of A General History of Africa, Addis Ababa, 1970, 2. (hereafter: UAP, meeting of Experts 1970)

liable to very wide diffusion.'[29] The 1971 *rules of procedure*, which had been commissioned by the Bureau during an earlier meeting that year in Cairo, repeated these programs. The manifesto, then, was supplemented by the wish to actively contribute to the creation of a widespread awareness of African history, specifically throughout the continent in its secondary schools and universities, but also throughout the rest of the world. Certainly, the GHA was to become more than just an academic work of history. Ideally, it would come to occupy a position as a standard work of African history throughout the postcolonial world, or as the GHA put it: 'it would result in the publication of works that would be of immediate interest to the public not only in Africa but also elsewhere.'[30]

By endeavouring to become a standard reference work, the GHA was aiming to fill a void. As Toyin Falola states in his *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, the extensive production of historiography during the 1950s and 60s, the period immediately prior to that of the GHA, can be partly explained by the lack of textbooks on African history available to the many new students entering university at that time. The intellectual labour conducted during this period was enormous, because the need for nationalist history at newly established universities was enormous. The only works of African history that were available suffered from the prejudices that the new generations longed to get rid of. In the Nigerian university town of Ibadan, the history department, led by its pioneering and first African head, Kenneth Dike, produced a series of textbooks, the Ibadan History series, meant to dispute the Colonial Library. Dike and his peers and students were determined to recover pasts that had been obscured by colonial historiography about Africa.[31] The books that they produced were widely used by history departments throughout Africa.[32] Ibadan itself had become an independent institution in 1962. This was an important milestone because it meant a change in degree requirements. Before 1962 honours students were only required to take one course in African history, whereas they had to take several courses on British history.[33] The change in

29 UAP, meeting of Experts 1970, 3.

30 G.S.M, "The General History of Africa", 529.

31 Toyin Falola, "Nationalism and African Historiography" in *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, eds. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester: The University of Rochester Press, 2002) 209-236, 222

32 Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, 237-238.

33 Falola, "Nationalism and African Historiography", 221-222.

degree structure and the production of more material on African history from the nationalist or African perspective mutually reinforced one another. Both developments took place against the background of the Africanisation of staff. African universities at the time, especially in former British territories, were transitioning from entirely European institutions — complete with Oxbridge inspired high tables and Latin graces — to African interpretations of what higher education would come to mean in the new national contexts.[34] The Africanisation of universities took place against the background of the developing post-independence states, who were engaged in Africanising their civil service, for which they needed university trained personnel.[35] As Ndlovu-Gatsheni has noted however, these universities were African in their location, yet remained essentially westernised, or Euro-American, in their conceptions of both knowledge production as well as in education.[36]

Meanwhile the demand for a survey like the *General History of Africa* grew. At Ibadan, too, the history department was invested in the production of secondary school books and the creation of syllabi.[37] The need for a textbook that would provide an overview of African history and which could be widely used by students across the continent was substantial. School histories, moreover, were important because they offered such a large potential audience, as well as the opportunity that some students and pupils would take up further study of African history, thereby supplementing staff at the universities themselves.[38] The International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General

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34 R. Cranford Pratt, "African Universities and Western Tradition – Some East Africa Reflections" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3:3 (1965): 421-8, 421 and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (Oxford: Berghahn books, 2013), 191-4.

35 Mahmood Mamdani, "Introduction: The Quest for Academic Freedom" in *Academic Freedom in Africa,* ed. Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997), 1-16, 1-2.

36 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Imperative of Decolonizing the Modern Westernized University" in *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa,* ed. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Siphamandla Zondi (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2016), 27-45, 28 and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (Milton: Routledge, 2018), 161-3, 170-2.

37 Falola, "Nationalism and African Historiography", 224.

38 Caroline Neale, *Writing "Independent" History. African Historiography 1960-1980* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 26.

History of Africa (ISC) also made sure to emphasise that the GHA had to contribute to the academic study of African history at the highest level, calling for UNSECO to produce an 'exhaustive bibliography, in the form of a scientifically produced card index' alongside the volumes themselves. It would be 'an indispensable reference for research workers all over the world.'[39] Generally speaking, the decade after independence was marked by a need to incorporate African subjects into African universities so that new citizens of African countries could be adequately trained.[40] The GHA wanted to simultaneously be a work of rigorous academic scholarship on Africa as well as available and intelligible to a wide audience, including students. These were two somewhat conflicting goals, at once appealing to epistemological as well as political needs regarding the writing of African history.

It is not all that surprising, moreover, that the creation of historiography aimed at supplying these universities with a history curriculum was written under the auspices of UNESCO. As already remarked upon, internationalism as well as the geopolitics of the Cold War played a significant role in allowing African nation states to flourish in the decade of independence by opening up a so-called third pathway for new states to follow. The supranational organisation offered a way to engage in geopolitics and transcend new national boundaries, whilst establishing these new nations as legitimate. It cherished pan-African and international idealism. UNESCO, moreover, especially in the francophone countries, was invested not just in the GHA, but also in the expansion of higher education across the continent.[41]

As the positioning documents make clear, moreover, the *General History of Africa* strove to be accessible, in some form or other, to a much broader audience than university students as well. Africanisation was meant to stretch beyond institutions of higher learning to a general public. To this end, the 1970 meeting suggested that abridged versions of the volumes had to be created. The abridged versions would subsequently be translated into African languages, 'at the requests of governments' to ensure a 'very wide diffusion' of the

39 UAP, meeting of Experts 1970, 3.

40 J.F. Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma and G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Accra: The Association of African Universities, 1996) 75.

41 Damiano Matasci, "«Un rendez-vous africain.» L'Unesco, la fin des empires coloniaux et le plan d'Addis-Abeba (1945-1961)" *Histoire@Politique* 41 (2010): http://www.histoire-politique.fr/index.php?numero=41&rub=dossier&item=383

work.[42] Eventually the abridged volumes were translated into some of the most widely used African languages, Swahili, Hausa and Fula. These abridged versions can still be consulted online for free.[43] The unabridged editions were also translated into several non-African languages, including Chinese. Undoubtedly translation into a language such as Chinese was also made possible, as well as stimulated, by the fact that the project was created under UNESCO auspices. UNESCO had access to a large body of language specialists and strove to spread knowledge, through books and education, across the globe in an effort to promote international understanding.[44] During the 1981 meeting in Ibadan however, the ISC made it clear that its main priority would be to have the volumes translated in 'as many African languages as possible.' They expressed the need to invigorate languages that they thought were in danger of dying out, seeing the promotion of language use as a way to 'transform' the continent. Moreover, providing translation of the GHA could serve 'as a springboard in education'.[45] Meaning that translations of the volumes into local languages could serve as catalysers for more widespread use of those languages in schools and elsewhere. According to the official regulations, however, initiative for translation still needed to be taken by African governments themselves. Other criteria for translation that were considered, were the size of that language, its place in traditional education as well as the availability of qualified translators and publishers to support the effort.

Another idea that surfaced throughout the years in an effort to ensure a widespread dissemination of the works was the creation of series of comic books based on the GHA. A comic book, it was ar-

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42 UAP, meeting of Experts 1970, 3.

43 The abridged versions are also available in English, French and Korean. Some of the complete volumes have also been translated in Chinese, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, Spanish and Fulfulde. "Language version", UNESCO, accessed 9 February 2019, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/general-history-of-africa/language-versions/

44 Céline Giton, "Weapons of Mass Distribution: UNESCO and the Impact of Books" in *A History of UNESCO. Global Actions and Impacts*, ed. Poul Duedahl (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 49–72 and Thomas Nygren, "UNESCO Teaches History: Implementing International Understanding in Sweden" in *A History of UNESCO. Global Actions and Impacts*, ed. Poul Duedahl (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 201-230.

45 UAP, CC CSP 42, J.F. Ade Ajayi, 27.04.1987, Guidelines for the translation of the UNESCO General History of Africa into various African languages.

gued, could reach an illiterate public and could be an innovative way to spread knowledge about the history of Africa throughout the continent. Although the idea did not make it into any of the early reports, what I have dubbed the positioning documents, it was mentioned in the report for the Ibadan meeting which took place in 1981. During this meeting, which was the fifth plenary session of the ISC, the various language editions as well as plans for the abridged versions were discussed, and so were comic books. The report even suggests that, by then, various steps had already been taken to bring the plan to create comics based on the volumes to fruition, or as was reported: 'Contacts have been made with various specialists with a view to preparing a strip-cartoon version of the History on the basis of the abridged versions.' The comics were 'aimed at children or adults or, as seems likely, at both (where adults are concerned, thought should be given to barely literate adults.)' The comics were, moreover, meant for a worldwide public, although, as was the case for the volumes themselves, they were 'intended to appeal first and foremost, to African readers.'[46] The comic books based on the abridged versions were never actually published, most likely due to lack of funding, although the idea was mentioned again in 1994 during a presentation of the project at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.[47] Ali Mazrui, moreover, suggested creating a series of photobooks to be published alongside volume VIII, which dealt with 20th century Africa. That idea was rebuffed by the ISC who did not want to treat volume VIII differently from the other volumes. The idea of creating a history of Africa in pictures, however, was not entirely abandoned and Mazrui rewrote his proposal to include all of African history. During the Brazzaville meeting, which took place in 1983, the plan was discussed again and it was even suggested a televi-

46 UAP, CC CSP 33.1, UNESCO, fifth plenary session of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Ibadan, Nigeria, 20-31 July, 1981.

47 UAP, Division of International Cultural Cooperation, Preservation and Enrichment of Cultural Identities (hereafter CLT CID) 50, Présentation de l'Histoire General de L'Afrique. Quelques suggestions à l'attention du Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique en vue de la relance de la recherche historique en Guinée, 1994. In 2019 UNESCO created an interactive webpage on 'Women in African History', including several comic strips, in both French and English, aimed at a general audience. "Women in Africa", UNESCO, accessed 18 May 2021, https://en.unesco.org/womeninafrica/

sion series could be created based on such a picture history.[48] Although the *General History of Africa* under UNESCO auspices never brought this plan into actualisation, Mazrui himself did create a television series about the history of Africa. 'The Africans' became a widely watched BBC series in the 1980s.[49] Even though the GHA never realised most of the above ambitions pertaining to public outreach, it is unmistakable that the idea was a part of their strategy for the GHA. It was to be a work of history meant for both the general public as well as academics. Why that was and the context in which that ambition came to be is the topic of the next section.

History for whom? The contested relevance of nationalist history writing

What use historical knowledge of Africa might be and for whom was a topic of debate throughout the 20th century. The Ibadan school, of which the GHA is often considered a part, was criticised for being too far removed from the everyday concerns of Africans. In the 1970s especially the liberal Ibadan school was increasingly criticised by the nationalist turned Marxist-oriented Dar es Salaam school. Although this critique is itself not a part of the creation of ideals within the GHA and although I do not wish to entirely identify the GHA with the Ibadan school, it does provide context for the creation of ideals within the GHA. It is therefore important to spend some time detailing what it was about, in part because it retrospectively began to lead a life of its own in publications such as *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique: Post-Colonial Historiography Examined* by Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai (1981). The ideal of emancipation, I argue, was an essential part of the GHA, despite what later commentary and later historiographical developments might suggest.

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48 UAP, CC CSP 36, ANNEX II 14th meeting bureau and 6th meeting ISC Congo Brazzaville: Proposed photo-volume for the project. Revised proposal from Editor of Volume VIII. Brazzaville, 20 July 1983.

49 Mazrui also created a companion book: Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: a triple heritage* (London: BBC Publications, 1986). The series was criticised for being 'anti-western', a testament to the political climate in the United States under Reagan and the controversy Ali Mazrui carried in his wake, rather than the series itself. John Corry, "TV VIEW; 'The Africans': An Attack On Western Values", *New York Times*, October 26, 1986.

The ISC, as well as some of the other contributors to the *General History of Africa*, were attuned to the value of their academic work outside of the academy and seemed to have felt it was a duty to contribute to the spread of knowledge about African history. In that light, the spread of knowledge itself was seen as emancipatory.[50] The historians working on the GHA were often public intellectuals, and sometimes political figures, in their respective countries. They took part in discussions regarding their country's social and political issues and felt a responsibility to contribute to postcolonial nation-building. One ideal of scholarship that emerges from the various efforts to create a free flow of information regarding African history is that of the public academic who is firmly grounded in the society he (rarely a she) served. The ideal GHA historian seems to have valued both emancipation of African history within the academy and the emancipation of the people through the creation and spread of knowledge. Both were essential tasks of African historical scholarship. Of course, it was most certainly not the case that all of the ISC members would have valued these goods in equal measures. Nor is it useful to pretend that all members of the ISC agreed upon the positioning documents in equal measures. It was indubitably a compromise of some sort, as is detailed in Chapters 4 to 7.[51] Yet, it is clear that questions of dissemination of the work and who it was written for played an important role in the creation of the GHA. The editors and authors of the GHA were concerned with creating volumes that were more than academic monographs, but that could be extended to reach, educate and inform a much broader part of the population. As becomes clear from this, there was a certain tension between the various proposed audiences for the GHA that aligns with the tension between its goals; both to be accepted within the Euro-American academy and to contribute to the political emancipation of new nations on the continent.

Yet, despite these ideals, nationalist history was long critiqued for being too elitist. This had more to do with the content than the intent of its historiography. Frantz Fanon had criticised the post-independence generation of historians for creating a false bourgeois national

50 Within UNESCO books themselves were seen as emancipatory, both in a cultural and economic sense, Giton, "Weapons of Mass Distribution", 50, 52.

51 This is especially noticeable regarding the dispute that emerged between Cheikh Anta Diop and the other members of the ISC regarding the origins of the ancient Egyptians, which is detailed in chapter four.

consciousness, deeming the process Africanisation simply a replacement of one elite by another.[52] The more Marxist-oriented historians of the so-called Dar es Salaam school equally came to critique the idea of writing history for building nation states, if such a nation state was only to serve the new national, so-called western-educated elites. Tanzania's turn towards African socialism after the Arusha Declaration of 1967 had become the basis for such critique on 'bourgeois historiography designed to meet the needs of an embryonic national bourgeoisie.'[53] The University of Dar es Salaam, which was officially founded in 1970 after having functioned as constituent college of the University of London from 1960 to 1963 and the University of East Africa from 1963 to 1970, became a centre for dependency and materialist historiography. Nationalist historiography as it had been produced at Ibadan, Ghana Legon, and Dar es Salaam itself, in the early 1960s, was criticised for its theoretical and methodological poverty, but, more strikingly, it was argued that the style of historiography marshalled by Dike and others was too focused on kingdoms and great states and underplayed the wounding influence of colonialism. Dar es Salaam became the home of a collection of revolutionary thinkers who were invested in African and black resistance, such as Walter Rodney and its first professor of history, Terence Ranger, under whose leadership the school was able to flourish.[54] Within the GHA, Bethwell Ogot had voiced similar criticism. His commentary stemmed from his own experience with researching decentralised societies in East Africa. Ogot noticed that the focus of nationalist historiography was towards centralised states — pasts that could be made to function as inspiration for nationalist movements. Nationalist historiography it was argued, moreover, did not succeed in providing a thorough critique of colonialism because it failed to analyse its structures and impact in favour

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52 Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Maspero : paris, 1961), 144-91. See also: Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing the university: New directions." *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15:1 (2016): 29-45, 33-4.

53 I.N. Kimambo, *Three Decades of Production of Historical Knowledge at Dar Es Salaam* (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993), 8-9 and Henry Slater, "Dar Es Salaam and the Postnationalist Historiography of Africa", in *African Historiographies. What History for Which Africa?* eds. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (London: Sage Publications, 1986), 249-60.

54 Gregory H. Maddox, "The Dar es Salaam school of African History" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African historiography: Methods and Sources*, ed. Thomas Spear (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.314

of studying local initiatives and resistance. It was accused of simply mirroring the imperialist historiography it tried to fight by using concepts and languages that had been developed in Europe.[55] As Paul Tiyambe Zeleza put it, the nationalists had failed to provide their own 'problematic' by simply reacting to the issues posed by the imperialist historians who came before.[56] Ibadan school style historiography may have been useful for the promotion of nationalism, but it was thought it fell short when it came to offering solutions or explanations for the problems of neo-colonialism. This problem of (economic) dependency on the west increasingly reared its head in the 1970s. The publication of Walter Rodney's seminal *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* in 1972 only served to emphasise the shortcomings of work done in the years previously. In other words, nationalist historiography did not provide for ordinary Africans due to its obsessions with statehood and political superstructures rather than looking for economic historical explanations of Africa's plight. 'The people', or lower classes, had not been studied adequately according to the new wave of Marxist historiography and in that way the nationalists had fallen into the same trap as the colonialists before them. [57] It could be argued that both groups were caught in the conflicting colonial memories that produced a system of binaries, modern-traditional, African-European, nationalist-Marxist, which did not find its reflection in the postcolonial reality. Neither the nationalists nor the Marxists extensively questioned the system of knowledge production upon which they based their epistemological claims.

As Ogot had mentioned in another paper for the symposium on education, moreover, the socialist method of historical scholarship in Tanzania, followed patterns of historical production as they had taken place in other continents. Presumably he meant Europe. African history, Ogot went on, had not yet succeeded in evolving an autonomous body of theoretical thinking that went beyond 'Western' theoretical interventions. As already mentioned above, the usable past practiced

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55 Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai, *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique: Post-Colonial Historiography Examined* (London: Zed Books, 1981), 41, 49, 52 and Terence Ranger, "Mirror Images – *Modes of Thought, Essays on Thinking in Western and non-Western Societies*. Edited by Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan. Faber and Faber, 1973. Pp. 379", *The Journal of African History* 15:1 (1974): 147-149

56 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crisis* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997) 91.

57 Temu and Swai, *Historians and Africanist History*, 5-11

in Dar es Salaam was not so different from the Marxist history as it was written in Europe. 'We have struggled hard to reject a conceptual framework which is Western both in its origins as well as in its orientations.'[58] The idea that African historians needed a new way to analyse the lasting impact of European epistemology also appeared in *Présence Africaine:* Joseph Ki-Zerbo argued that the 'nature' of expression used by African historians needed to change. He wanted to create a kind of history that would analyse why Europeans had come to look at Africa and Africans the way they did. It was the only way to be able to move forward and write 'our own history.'[59] Both these GHA authors, in other words, formulated the need for mental or historiographical decolonisation alongside a political decolonisation of the content of history. The realisation that the very epistemological basis of history was European, however, was hard to bring into historical practice because it was political in and of itself.

It becomes clear therefore that the rationale and theory behind Africanist historiography was a topic of discussion throughout the entire period of drafting the GHA, despite what later critique may suggest. Perhaps as part of this, the GHA also aimed to incorporate new brands of African historiography as they entered the 1970s. The ISC successfully invited Rodney to contribute, as well as Isaria Kimambo, a Dar es Salaam-based historian of Tanzania. The GHA, then, was concerned with critique levelled against the Ibadan school and other early producers of African historiography. And so were Ibadan historians and other nationalist historians themselves, both by amending their focus and by arguing that the post-independence moment had demanded a certain close-mindedness in terms of topic.[60] Nationalist historiography, after all, had been concerned primarily with simply justifying historical research of Africa and Africans, as Ade Ajayi himself explained in a letter defending 'his' school. In the letter he complained that the belligerent, Peter Ekeh in this case, had forgot-

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58 B. Ogot, "Three decades of historical studies in East Africa: 1949-77" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9, Educational Processes in Africa and Historiography. Final Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 63-79, 76.

59 Joseph Ki Zerbo, "Histoire et conscience nègre", *Présence Africaine* 16 (1957): 53-69.

60 Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni has also made the argument that nationalism as reaction to colonialism, among others, informed later counter-discourse on Eurocentrism. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality*, 187-8.

ten that in order to study the impact of colonialism, one must also know and understand what came before. Ajayi moreover noted that too much focus on the colonial impact failed to acknowledge the agency of Africans themselves and was therefore even somewhat eurocentric.[61] Paul Lovejoy as well as Adiele Afigbo, an Ibadan scholar himself, argued, moreover, that the Ibadan school had in fact studied 'the people' and had paid attention to class struggle, although not in the Marxist terminology of dependency that was favoured by the Dar es Salaam school.[62]

The GHA then was deeply concerned with its impact on Africans — even if this impact was envisioned to be nationalist. Congruent with the optimism of the historical moment in which the GHA came into being, they envisioned nation-building to be relevant for a broad swathe of the population. One of its guiding ideals was that the GHA should contribute to the political emancipation of the continent in its totality, as well as African peoples worldwide. The idea was that this could be done partly by reaching a large audience and by making sure knowledge of the African past was widely available, as also becomes evident through the GHA's efforts to collect oral materials. This was supplemented to the idea that the history needed to focus on those parts of the African past that would encourage the recognition of African greatness and which would contribute to nation-building. The history of colonialism and its impact was therefore made less important, but not necessarily out of a bourgeois disregard for 'the people'. Rather, the GHA believed in uplifting African populations through education.

Conclusions

What this chapter makes clear is the GHA's awareness of the civic potential of history. The GHA did not believe in historical scholarship which was far removed from the everyday lives of what they imagined were the citizens of the postcolonial nation states for whom they were

61 Jadeas Trust Library Ibadan (hereafter JTLI), J.F. Ade Ajayi papers (hereafter JAAP), Box 77, J.F. Ade Ajayi to Peter Ekeh, 02-02-1981.

62 Paul Lovejoy, "The Ibadan school of historiography and its critics" in *African Historiography Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, ed. Toyin Falola (Harlow: Longman, 1993) and Adiele Afigbo, "The Ibadan School of History: A comment" in *Myth, History & Society, The Collected Works of Adiele Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006), 495-504.

writing history. This was one reason why the idea of making the GHA available to as many people as possible, students first amongst them, and the need to reflect on educational practices both played a significant role in the positioning documents as well as the studies produced later on. These documents, after all, were meant to stipulate a programme for the GHA to follow. The historians working on the GHA were acutely aware of the importance and need of their work and the necessity to find new ways of communicating the history of Africa to both European and African audiences. It was essential for African historians to be aware of the responsibility they carried when they were writing African history. Lofty ideals of historiographical emancipation were therefore accompanied by a focus on education and an engagement in the wider societal value of the volumes. The task of the historian incorporated these dual goals.

The GHA was somewhat caught in the conflicting legacy of colonialism, however. Meaning that it was still in the process of translating Euro-American historical practices to suit the continent, and had yet to successfully incorporate the different legacies impressed upon the postcolonial moment. Ideals of community, which were connected with the ideal of oral historiography, were discussed alongside the need for a widespread dissemination of the volumes in written form. Questions of audience (for who was the GHA written?) were entangled with questions of its educational value (how could the GHA contribute to history education on the continent) and societal relevance (how could the GHA contribute to African nations?). Questions of audience were directly related to questions of theory: how to discover a way of 'doing' and writing African history that would work synchronously with the lived reality of its people? How to incorporate the political need for nation-building with the academic need for epistemologically sound work on the African past? Could both goals be achieved simultaneously? The GHA was, if anything, a deeply plural project in its epistemic outlook. It incorporated so many different historians, from an equal number of different cultural and post-colonial contexts, reducing its practices to one identifiable goal somewhat confuses its history. Still, the GHA set out to be a political project from its very start. At the same time, it also highly valued academic standards. Yet, in order for an academic narrative about Africa to come into existence, political advocacy was necessary. The GHA used politics as a means of resistance because it seemed the most effective tool in the toolbox with which to neutralise epistemic colonisation. This could

not be separated from emancipation more broadly, however. The *General History of Africa* therefore came to believe that the work they were doing should contribute in some way to the political emancipation of the continent. What that meant exactly, differed between individuals and was susceptible to change over time as well as practical complications. Chapters 5 and 7 look at this, in far greater detail.

Conclusions to Part One
IDEALS

The GHA had three foundational ideals that were conducive to the creation of African history as a scholarly reputable activity as well as the political emancipation of Africa through the writing of history:

1. The ideal of anti-eurocentrism
2. The ideal of pan-African collectivity
3. The ideal of emancipation

The GHA aimed to write an Afrocentric history in opposition to previous eurocentric accounts of the continent because it would prove that the African past was a subject worthy of academic historical interest, rather than ethnographic or anthropological interest. This first ideal was political as well as epistemic simply because advocating for African history to be taken seriously was a political act — and possibly still is. All history is in some ways political. The GHA, secondly, aimed to write that history from a continental perspective and collaboratively by as many different African historians as possibly for both epistemic as well as political reasons. The epistemic rationale pertained to the idea that different African perspectives would allow for a more complete and therefore objective image of the African past. The political reasons were connected to the idea that through the inclusion of many different African voices the GHA could contribute to the political emancipation of those historians and their countries. The GHA

wanted to create space for African historians to write African history. Moreover, the inclusion of a pan-African amalgamation of African voices and histories in the GHA would itself be a political act. The last ideal of political emancipation was obviously political in nature and almost entirely congruent with the GHA's wish to contribute to emancipation of Africans worldwide. Yet, this ideal also could be seen as epistemic as well in that the advocacy inherent in African history was only seen as such because it was African. The idea that historical scholarship should in some way contribute to nation building and emancipation was not so foreign to the 19th century European academy either. Moreover, through a widespread dissemination of the volumes the GHA aimed to widen the academic historical horizon as well. The wish to decolonise African history education, moreover, could not be seen as separate from dreams of epistemological decolonisation of method and theory.

These three ideals, therefore, are entangled and intertwined and mutually influence one another. All three ideals were congruent to both political and academic goals in some way. Politics and academia can, of course, not be neatly separated. In a way, the GHA was activist to its very core, and in a way all scholarship is, in how it always aims to change the world through observation. By changing the order of knowledge about Africa, the GHA aimed to change the way the continent was regarded.

PART TWO

The Realities of the *General History of Africa*

Introduction to part two

The second part of this thesis deals with the realities of the ideals discussed in part one. How did the historians working on the GHA bring their ideals into practice and what came of them during the long process of drafting the *General History of Africa* between 1971 and 1998? It dives into the heart of the matter of what it meant to write African history with a decolonising or Africanising agenda, during and shortly after the period of political decolonisation. It shows the differences of opinion that inevitably followed from diverging interpretations of the different ideals the GHA had conceived of, that the GHA had to be anti-eurocentric, collaborative, pan-African and should contribute to political emancipation. These debates surrounding the best way to subvert European imperialism and racism in historiography were a necessary part of the process of drafting the *General History of Africa*. The following four chapters offer case studies with different interpretations and realities of what it meant to bring the *General History of Africa* to fruition, based on the ideals set out in the positioning documents in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Chapter 4, the first chapter of part two of the dissertation on realities, corresponds mostly to Chapter 1. It focuses on the editorial process of the GHA to ask what reality corresponded to the ideal of anti-eurocentrism. Chapters five and six describe and analyse what the realities of both the ideal of pan-African collectivity as well as the ideal of political emancipation were. Chapter seven, lastly, examines how the ideals of anti-eurocentrism and political emancipation became intertwined in their realities.

CHAPTER FOUR
The Reality of Writing African History from Within. Defining Research Standards of Africa-Centred History

Introduction

The first ideal of the GHA was to write a history of Africa that would get rid of eurocentrism. Or, put differently, that would move away from a focus on the influence of extra African factors on African history. Whilst drafting the GHA, however, it turned out to be difficult to bring this ideal into practice, in part because political imperatives and research standards were not always congruent. Particularly emblematic of the tensions between political and academic imperatives within the GHA were the debates surrounding Cheikh Anta Diop's chapter, because Diop argued that the ancient Egyptians had been black Africans by, amongst other things, making use of racialist ideas on the origins and identities of peoples. He thereby argued that Egyptian influence on the rest of the continent would have been African rather than European. Diop's most important point, therefore, had been pan-African. He simply wished to ascertain that the ancient Egyptian civilisation had been African and was therefore part of African his-

tory and culture, which he perceived of as consisting of one unity.[1] Because Diop made use of race as an explanatory category, however, he transgressed GHA rules on acceptable scholarly analysis. Diop and other ISC historians had different interpretations of GHA ideals. The salience of the debate on ancient Egypt hinged on political questions of identity and belonging. Who could create knowledge about Africa and to whose advantage, using what methodology?

This chapter illustrates why Diop's contribution was perhaps the most contentious issue within the GHA. It first analyses how the GHA sought to rid itself of erroneous historical explanations that referenced outside factors, most prominently the 'Hamitic hypothesis'. The lingering acceptance of this 'Hamitic curse', needed to be exorcised from a serious and Africa centred history of the continent. The 'Hamitic hypothesis', in its various different often racialised interpretations, generally supposed that progress or development in Africa was the result of invading peoples from northern Africa. Secondly, the chapter analyses how the GHA aimed to negate eurocentrism through language policies, banning words such as 'tribe'. As part of the GHA's focus on internal African history, the GHA stipulated that the history should not include language that had been invented outside the continent and which only served to make Africans into 'the other'. It sought to rid the volumes of racist and colonial terminology — the view from outside. Thirdly, the chapter focuses on Diop's contribution, the one issue of contention that created the most drawn-out discussions and which shows that it was not always straightforward what it meant to write 'African history from within' or how to rid the history of outside references. Diop's chapter for the second volume of the GHA, on the origin of the ancient Egyptians caused extensive discussions on the methodology of African history and the question of 'race' therein.

To analyse and describe how the GHA came to implement what it meant to decolonise African history, I will make use of archival source material to illuminate the minutiae of the discussions, debates and eventual decisions that were made behind the scenes. The chapter focuses on the GHA's system of internal review, to analyse how different strategies of moving away from what was perceived as imperialist and eurocentric, historiography, were debated within the GHA. Unfortu-

1 Mamadou Diouf and Mohamad Mbodj, "The Shadow of Cheikh Anta Diop", in *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947–1987*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 118–35, 120.

nately, not all peer review reports, called reading reports within the GHA, for all volumes can still be found in the various archives I visited researching the GHA. The UNESCO archives in Paris contain reading reports relating to volumes I, II, IV and V. Moreover, the private archive of J.F. Ade Ajayi in Ibadan, Nigeria, the Jadeas Trust library, contains additional material pertaining to volumes I and II, as well as volumes VI and VII. For the purpose of discussing the debate surrounding Diop's contribution, the article will also look into the report of the 1974 Cairo meeting during which it was heavily debated.

Implementation of ideals through the regulation and reviewing of chapters became one of the most important occupations of the International Scientific Committee. Through an analysis of the reading reports it becomes clear once more what the guiding ideals of the GHA were. This chapter, therefore, also functions as a bridge between part one of the thesis (on ideals) and part two (on the lived realities of those ideals). The reading reports were meant to allow a multitude of experts and committee members to exercise a certain amount of quality control over the various chapters. Each volume was not only assigned an editor, but also a reading committee, including a *rapporteur*, who was in charge of collating the arguments made by the rest of the committee. Moreover, various symposia were organised to further discuss the historiographical issues that would invariably later show up in the reading reports. By looking at the reading reports, I primarily analyse how disagreements on such fundamental issues as eurocentrism were dealt with internally and, therefore, how an attempted decolonisation of history took place in scholarly practice — the everyday writing and reading, editing and correcting, from behind a desk (presumably).

Combatting external influences

When GHA authors received praise within the GHA's system of peer review, it was usually because they had avoided explanations that depended on external influences on African history. They would subsequently be congratulated on being objective or impartial, and capable of producing a well-rounded view of African history.[2] Conversely, when chapters were criticised, the criticism often started with the as-

2 JTLI, JAAP, Box 75, Comments by Bethwell A. Ogot on UNESCO History of Africa, Volume I: Introduction and African Prehistory, 10-7-1975, 3.

sertion that the content had an 'external orientation.'[3] The GHA, as was stipulated in its policy documents, was engaged in an effort to rid itself of negative theories, concepts and ideas that originated from outside the continent.[4] In practice, this meant its editors and the reading committee members were mostly concerned with and constantly engrossed in disproving the idea that change stemmed from outside the continent and that there had been no historical developments to speak of on the continent itself — not even the introduction of cattle or agriculture. Engaging in problems of eurocentrism or colonial ideas underlying conventional historical analysis of Africa became the core business of the GHA system of review. The most problematic of colonialist theories, or rather the one most difficult to get rid of, was that of the Hamitic curse or hypothesis.[5] Use of or reference to 'Hamites' quickly became associated with such an 'external orientation' and was therefore antithetical to writing African history from the inside. In the introduction to volume IV, the editor of the volume, Djibril Tamsir Niane, wrote that the word was banned; it 'was used to describe certain white pastoral peoples, the so-called "bearers of civilisation"':

> These presumed pastoralists, whose reality or historical existence has never been demonstrated, are supposed to have wandered hither and thither through the continent, bringing culture and civilisation to black agriculturalists. [...] The way to decolonise history is precisely to knock down these false theories and all the prejudice raised by colonialism in order to establish the system of domination and exploitation

3 UAP, CLT/CID/89, Chapter 1, Vol V. The Main Characteristics by M. Malowist and UAP, CLT/CID/89, General History of Africa – Volume V. First Readers Report. Rapporteur J. Vansina and JTLI, JAAP, Volume VII – Chapter 2, 1.

4 UAP, SHC/WS/198, Guide for the Preparation of the General History of Africa. Paris 18 November 1971, translated from the French, 1-2.

5 The Hamitic hypothesis could be seen as 'Eurocentric' as part of the postcolonial argument in that it makes use of European analytical categories on differences, but not in the actor's category of 'eurocentrism' in that it does not necessarily posit European history as the centre of the world, nor does it necessarily understand African history from a European point of view. Rather, it understands African history from a colonial point of view. It is therefore a colonial category of understanding because it resulted from European colonial inabilities to understand African realities on their own terms.

> and to justify a policy of intervention. These pseudo-scientific theories are still to be found in many works and even in our school textbooks. It is important here to bring some precision to history.[6]

As becomes clear from these comments in the introduction, Niane — and the GHA, by extension — argued that to decolonise history was to increase its scientific calibre — as already argued in Chapter 1. Avoiding explanations based on an iteration of the Hamitic hypothesis was partly to stress that colonial perspectives were unscientific. Niane claimed that the GHA was more accurate than previous historical narratives.

The Hamitic hypothesis, in its various incarnations, could be seen as amongst the most fundamental assertions of European disdain for Africa within historiography. Niane, moreover, argued that the Hamitic hypothesis had primarily served a political purpose. The thesis essentially could be seen as arguing for the absence of indigenous African states, suggesting European invaders were justified in their colonial conquests. The term 'Hamitic hypothesis' refers to a cluster of interpretations that have appeared in various areas of African history, linguistics and physical anthropology over the years. One of its defining characteristics was in fact its chameleonic nature. According to Adiele Afigbo it was an entirely colonial invention.[7] In its historiographic incarnation, introduced into the collective consciousness of Africanists by C.G. Seligman in 1930, it usually supposed that a people designated by scholars as 'Hamites' had invaded from the Middle East, via Northern and North-eastern Africa, into central, Eastern and Western Africa. One iteration of the hypothesis suggested that these people had supposedly spread the practice of rearing cattle as well as ideas and institutions of monarchy into Africa, specifically through a process of diffusion from the ancient civilisation of Egypt, thereby placing

6 I have here made use of UNESCO's translation from the French. D. T. Niane, "Introduction", in *General History of Africa IV Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, ed. D. T. Niane (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 1-14, 13-14.

7 A. E. Afigbo, "Colonial Historiography" in *African Historiography. Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, ed. Toyin Falola (Burnt Mill: Longman, 1993), 39-52, 43-6.

Egypt at the centre of African historical development.[8] These various forms of Hamitic myths were and, sometimes still are, tenacious explanatory narratives that have come to impress upon African histories and societies a logic from outside.[9] Often, as Edith Sanders demonstrated already in 1969, as a result of colonial and imperial concerns in an effort to transform African history in such a way that would render it intelligible to European outsiders.[10] The Hamitic hypotheses came to be reconciled with 19th century race-thinking and served to classify peoples into different racial groups. The classification system widely used in Eastern and Southern Africa was that of 'Bantu' for 'African' peoples and 'Hamites' when referring to groups that were perceived of as connected to a 'non-African' heritage. In the Rwandan context, the physical, economic and social difference that European missionaries and scholars perceived between the 'Tutsi' royal court and the 'Hutu' peasantry, became essentialised into these categories, with devastating consequences.[11] In the words of J.J. Carney: 'the Hamitic thesis combined the biblical narrative of the 'curse of Ham' [...] with the scientific racialism of the late 19th century.'[12] In that way, the Hamitic hypothesis served as a layered ethnographic narrative meant to explain African differences to European invaders, often resulting in the enhancement or creation of systems of hierarchies between groups of people.[13] The idea that through understanding the world, Europeans could own and control it, as has been discussed by, amongst others,

8 T.C. McCaskie and John D. Fage, "Western Africa", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020), https://www.britannica.com/place/western-Africa. See also: C.G. Seligman, *Races of Africa* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930)

9 The hypotheses have taken on various forms over the years and find part of their origins in 19th century linguistics. As a result of fieldwork in the Nile region after the Napoleontic claim on Egyptian antiquities, Hamitic languages were conceptualised as a language family that could connect Egyptian, Coptic, Ethiopian with Berber and even Khoisan languages. Floris Solleveld, "Lepsius as a linguist: fieldwork, philology, phonetics, and 'the Hamitic hypothesis." *Language & History* 63:3 (2020): 193-213, DOI: 10.1080/17597536.2020.1760066

10 Edith Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective." *The Journal of African History* 10:4 (1969): 521-32, 528.

11 J.J. Carney, *Rwanda Before the Genocide. Catholic Priests and Ethnic Discourse in the Late Colonial Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10-15.

12 Carney, *Rwanda Before the Genocide,* 11.

13 J.P. Chrétien, "Mythes et strategies autour des origins du Rwanda (XIXe-XXe siècles)" in *Histoire d'Afrique : les enjeux de mémoire,* eds. J.P. Chrétien and J.L. Triaud (Paris: Karthala, 1999), 281-320.

Edward Said and Valentin Mudimbe, may be most overtly demonstrated through the way this cluster of interpretations here denoted as 'Hamitic hypothesis', manifested itself in African historiography.[14]

The term 'Hamites' itself stems from the Hebrew Bible, from the story of the dispersal of Noah's three sons. The descendants of one of these sons, Ham, were cursed, his son Canaan in specific. This particular biblical narrative has often been abused, from the 16th century onwards, to justify and condone slavery and racism, as in that specific iteration of the story Canaan's descendants became to be conceptualised as black.[15] The 'Curse of Ham' eventually shifted towards the Hamitic hypothesis and was used by European scholars, mostly anthropologists, to explain why the Ancient Egyptians had not been black upon the Napoleonic discovery of Egyptian remains — although this was always contested by African-American intellectuals, such as Du Bois.[16] 'Hamitic' in 'Hamitic' hypothesis therefore references this explicitly racialist interpretation of biblical stories that was meant to position Egyptian civilisation as white.[17]

It was clear that the GHA wanted to get rid of the Hamitic hypothesis and its various derivatives altogether. How this was to be done, was less apparent and differed between different members of the ISC, as well as amongst the different members of the various reading committees for the volumes. In the reading report for volume IV, Niane expressed a very definite aversion to what he saw as use of plural Hamitic Hypotheses when he wrote, cementing the GHA view:

> *Il est nécessare de combattre les nombreuses theories dont celle de Seligman sur les Chamites, cette théorie anti-scientifique prétend que des pasteurs blancs (les chamites) ont répandu la civilisation chez les populations noires depuis la vallée du Nil jusqu'aux Lacs*

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14 Moreover, variations of this theory were espoused all across the continent by colonial European writers. For instance, the idea that Great Zimbabwe was built by Phoenicians. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)

15 David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham. Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

16 See: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa. An Inquiry into the part Africa has Played in World History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946) 98-9.

17 Robin Law, "The "Hamitic Hypothesis" in Indigenous West African Historical Thought" *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 293-314, 295-7.

> *africains.*[it is necessary to combat the many theories, including that of Seligman about the Hamites, which is an anti-scientific theory that claims that white pastoralists (the Hamites) spread civilisation amongst the black populations from the Nile valley to the African lakes.][18]

Niane's referral here to 'multiple' Hamitic theories reflects the fact that the idea of 'Hamites' had come to refer to an array of different explanations in African history. The hypothesis appeared in different forms in the *General History of Africa*. This caused Ivan Hrbek, co-editor of volume IV, to exclaim in exasperation, whilst editing a chapter:

> When will there be an end with all these strange hybrid and mixed peoples coming from Arabia, Egypt and other parts of the world and crossing the Sahara to and back founding states and dynasties and then changing their colour, names, customs, religions, languages so that nothing is left? [...] Why the Africans could not have African origins, why always look somewhere else for their coming and progress? Let us finish once forever with all this even if some traditional accounts tend to support it.[19]

As these two quotes show, within the *General History of Africa* referring to explanatory narratives that placed the origin of African civilisations somewhere in the Middle East became suspect, as it placed emphasis on outside influences within the history of Africa which was reminiscent of politically motivated colonial knowledge production, whereas the GHA was bent on avoiding that particular pitfall. Niane repeatedly warned against the attribution of external influences and theories developed elsewhere as explanations of historical facts in Africa:

> '*La tendance est souvent manifeste chez les uns et les autres d'attribuer une influence par trop grande aux influences extérieurs et aux recherches des écoles historiques extra-africaines*' [There is

18 UAP, CC/CSP/38, Lettre sur l'Histoire Generale de l'Afrique. Volume IV: Directeur de Publication: D.T. Niane, 19.

19 UAP, CC/CSP/38, Report of the Reading Committee 1977, 23.

> often a tendency amongst some to attribute too much weight to external influences and to the research of non-African historical schools.][20]

In these reading reports, both Niane and Hrbek were reviewing volume IV on Africa, from the 12th to the 16th century, which seemed to attract the use of various 'Hamitic hypotheses' due to its focus on migration and the spread of civilisations across the continent. For them tracing these migrations and the origins of African civilisations to Arab or other origins became synonymous with bad historical scholarship. Crucially, however, they did not deny that there had been outside influences on African civilisations during this period, but wanted to emphasise that this did not mean that Africans had passively absorbed these influences or that they had only developed and changed as a result of these influences. They simply wanted to make sure that such assertions were based on sound historical research rather than eurocentric or racist misinformation. As Niane also wrote in his introduction: 'Indeed it was a very special period, in which Africa developed its original culture and assimilated outside influences, whilst retaining its own individuality.'[21] As Hrbek noted in the reading report for volume IV: 'It is true that some statements in the introduction and conclusion seem to be rather idealising, but Prof. Niane's purpose was to point out the positive aspects of African history as against the stress on negative ones found in the colonialist historiography.'[22] Niane, in other words, was following the GHA historiographical dictum of avoiding eurocentric and colonialist bias in African history and was thereby righting a wrong.

Specifically questions of origin that gave too great an influence to the outside then, did not always seem pertinent or scholarly to historians working on the GHA. As Hrbek explained Vinigi Grottanelli's view on the origins of Swahili cultures in another reading report: '[he] considers the question [...] whether the Swahili civilisation was African or brought by strangers from outside as a false one.'[23] Grotta-

20 UAP, CC/CSP/38, Lettre circulaire Niane á Messieurs les Membres du Comité de lecture du Volume IV de l'Histoire générale de l'Afrique, 7 July 1977.

21 Niane, "Introduction", 1.

22 UAP, CC/CSP/38, General History of Africa Volume IV. Second Supplement to the Report of the Reading Committee. Rapporteur: Ivan HRBEK, 2.

23 UAP, CC/CSP/38, Grottanelli on Vol. IV, 6-7.

nelli, an Italian member of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (ISC), who had joined the GHA in 1971 and became quite active in several reading committees even though he never wrote a chapter for any of the volumes, argued that Swahili culture was evidently mixed, influenced by a multitude of different peoples. Establishing its origins was somewhat beside the point. Crucially, researching origins may have seemed eerily similar to researching race, something which the GHA wished to move away from entirely. Nonetheless, Hrbek added the following note to these comments: 'in view of the well known [sic] fact that for long time European historians and other scholars considered the East African civilisation as Arabic and as work of non-Africans it is necessary to fight against the non-scientific theories and proclaim once for ever the African origin of this civilisation!'[24] More so than Grottanelli, it seems, Hrbek believed that historians of Africa needed to be extra wary of the multiple 'Hamitic hypotheses' floating around. More interesting even is Hrbek seeming scepticism towards the idea that Swahili culture could also have been Arabic, if Arabs were considered 'non-African', and his implicit claim that Swahili culture had one single origin rather than many. Given the interconnected history of the wider Indian ocean world, and also Niane's comments in the introduction of the volume, this is somewhat curious.[25] Moreover, it is a testament to Hrbek's aversion of what he perceived as erroneously attributed outside influences on African history — all the more interesting given Hrbek's conversion to Islam.

A focus on the influences of Arabic traders or Islamic culture beyond Hamitic interpretations was sometimes also seen as 'external', and thereby suspect. This may have been a result of a perceived connection between the Middle East and Hamitic interpretations. In his review of Chapter twenty, volume VI dealing with Africa in the 19th century, Henry Slater, a historian who was located at the University

24 UAP, CC/CSP/38, First Supplement to the Report of the Reading Committee. Rapporteur: Ivan Hrbek, Prague, 7 July 1977, 8.

25 See: Philippe Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean. Volume 2: From the Seventh Century to the Fifteenth Century CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear, *The Swahili. Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985)

of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and had a materialist approach towards history[26], wrote:

> the writer approaches his analysis from an Islamic standpoint. [...] this has led to the development of a view of the African past which locates the dynamic of its historical development in an external force — the universalist religion of Islam. There was apparently only 'ignorance' in west Africa until the arrival of Islam. [...] One wonders whether this is the kind of progressive 'Africanist' viewpoint the editors had in mind when they embarked upon the UNESCO project. Is it not dangerously close to becoming a variant of the kind of colonialist view of Africa's history which the editors, and I'm sure the author, are trying to bury once and for all?[27]

Although this time pertaining to West Africa, too much influence given to Islam was received with scepticism by Slater. In the same vein, Ogot also argued that too much influence had been attributed to Islam in the history of Madagascar in Chapter twenty-four of volume IV. Jan Vansina suggested that its focus was too narrow as a result of a 'total lack of critical approach.'[28] Here, too, the suggestion was that a so-called extra African focus was the result of uncritical biased scholarship, even if what constituted 'extra African' was defined in different ways. In the editing of volume V, moreover, on Africa from the 16th to the 18th century, Ogot, who was the editor, had also been sceptical towards what he perceived was an excessive focus on Islam in the history of the Sudan.[29] As a Luo historian working to include the narrative of

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26 Gregory H. Maddox, "The Dar es Salaam School of African History" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Historiography: Methods and Sources*, ed. Thomas Spear (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.314

27 JTLI, JAAP, box 67, I.N. Kimambo to Maurice Glélé, comments chapter 20, reader Dr. Henry Slater, 2.

28 UAP, CC/CSP/38, A General History of Africa Volume IV, Report of the Reading Committee – Ivan Hrbek, 10 may 1977, 36.

29 UAP, CLT/CID/92, Yusuf Hasan to Bethwell Ogot, 12 August 1986, UAP, CLT/CID/92, Bethwell Ogot to Yusuf Hasan, 15 April 1981, UAP, CLT/CID/92, Bethwell Ogot to Maurice Glélé, 24 September 1982.

non-centralised histories of Nilotic peoples in Eastern Africa, Ogot was hyper-aware of such dynamics.[30]

The problem of undue emphasis on outside factors resurfaced throughout the reading reports and was often identified as bad scholarship. Readers either thought questions regarding origins were beside the point (i.e. Grottanelli), or they were simply fed up with the explanation and thought it had lost its power (i.e. Hrbek). Even perceived eurocentrism, however, did not automatically lead to an agreement amongst readers considering the quality of a chapter. In the reading report for volume V, Adu Boahen rejected a chapter entirely on what he saw as its eurocentrism and emphasis on external factors. Or, as he put it: 'spirit and Eurocentric stress run counter to the spirit of this history. [...] External factors are too strongly causes of decline or stagnation in Africa.'[31] The author, Slater, already mentioned above, had a completely different view of the chapter, stating that 'Africa's place in the world is masterful.'[32] This difference in judgment can be explained by referring to the vastly different historiographical and political outlooks of the two commenters. Whilst Boahen was firmly grounded in a nationalist Africanist focus on Africa-centred history, Slater adhered to a more materialist view in which more emphasis was placed on the influence of colonialism and European economic interventions in Africa.[33] Seeing as the chapter dealt with African socio-economic and political structures from the 16th to 18th century, it was rather broad in its scope to begin with and, therefore, its author chose to compare and link structures in Africa to those in Europe. In a reading report that followed, however, the rest of the committee — unsurprisingly, given the GHA's overall outlook — seemed to share Boahen's view that the chapter was problematic due to its perceived eurocentrism.[34]

A tension existed between Africa's global contexts, both in the Indian Ocean world and with reference to European expansions, and the need to treat the history of Africa with reference to the unicity of the

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30 Bethwell A Ogot, "Some approaches to African History" in *Hadith I, Proceedings of the annual conference of the Historical Association of Kenya 1967*, ed. Bethwell A. Ogot (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 1-10, 7.

31 UAP, CLT/CID/89, General History of Africa – Volume V. Fifth Reader's Report: June 24 1984. Rapporteur: J. Vansina, 2. (hereafter: Fifth Reader's Report)

32 UAP, CLT/CID/89, Fifth Reader's Report, 2.

33 UAP, CLT/CID/89, I.N. Kimambo to Dr. Maurice Glele, 26 march 1981, 1

34 UAP, CLT/CID/89, Revised Reading Rapport after Brazzaville, date unclear, 36.

historical processes which took place on the continent itself.[35] However, the charge of an external explanation, based on ideas that could be connected to eurocentrism or colonialist historiography, usually meant that scholarship was incompatible with the UNESCO *General History of Africa*.[36] Or, at the very least, it meant discussion surrounding Africa's place in global history was sure to erupt. What the above reading reports show then, specifically in reference to the Hamitic hypotheses, is that the GHA was engaged in the framing of standards around historical research in reaction against prejudiced and what they framed as unscientific scholarship that had come before. Its stipulation that the GHA had to be written from within was seen first and foremost as an epistemic standard to refer to — even if that could sometimes mean overemphasising inter-African historical factors in preference of Africa's wider connection to the world. As pressed in previous chapters however, in a multi-authored and multi-edited work such as the GHA, it is easy to overstate the coherence of its editing team and, although the above was certainly true for some of the GHA's key figures, it should be noted that it did not necessarily hold true for every historian involved — as the discussions highlighted above also make clear. ISC member Philip Curtin, for instance, argued that it was not in the interest of the GHA to overstate African factors either.[37] Nor is the case that all references to 'outside factors' or even 'Hamites' were successfully banished from the GHA. In Chapter ten of volume II of the GHA, for instance, the author, J. Lecant, spoke of 'Hamitic pastoralists with an undoubted strain of black blood.'[38] It remains unclear how this comment managed to slip through the net of the reading committee for volume II. The editorial process was perhaps at times somewhat haphazard.

A much more infamous case regarding references to Hamitic features was in Chapter two of volume II, however, in which Cheikh Anta Diop argued for the African origins of Egyptian civilisation with recourse to theories that hinged on an interpretation of African history

35 Joseph C. Miller, "The Wisconsin School of African History" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Historiography: Methods and Sources*, ed. Thomas Spear (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2019)

36 JTLI, JAAP, Bethwell Ogot to Maurice Glélé, 26 March, 1981, 2.

37 UAP, CC CSP 67, Philip Curtin to Maurice Glélé, 13-12-1977.

38 J. Lecant, "The Empire of Kush: Napata and Meroe" in *General History of Africa II. Ancient Civilizations of Africa*, ed. G. Mokhtar (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 278-298, 282.

that included the salience of Hamitic hypotheses, albeit in reverse. We shall get to this particular controversy and the eventual compromise that was brought into effect to salvage Diop's chapter for the GHA, in the last part of this chapter. First, it is of importance to look in more detail at why it was that certain words irked the GHA to such an extent that they were banned and how, as a result, the GHA tried to realise its ideal of anti-eurocentrism through specific language policies.

Language

One way to rid the history of stereotypes and an undue emphasis on extra African factors seemed to be to change the terminology used to refer to historical facts in Africa. It was decided early on, during the 1973 2nd plenary session of the ISC in Lusaka, Zambia and in reference specifically to Chapter eight of volume III, that the GHA would avoid using the word 'tribe' or *'tribu'* to refer to groups of people in Africa.[39] During the Ouagadougou seminar on the methodology of contemporary history in 1979 the rule was repeated once more: 'the committee had outlawed the use of the word 'tribe' and that decision could not be reversed.'[40] This decision was an unsurprising intervention in the effort to change the narrative regarding Africa. The language surrounding Africa was — and is — distorted in a variety of different ways and carries within it a series of stigmas and images which inevitably shape our understanding of the continent, past and present.[41] The distortion of images and language surrounding Africa was one of the key misrepresentations the *General History of Africa* sought to change. It lay at the heart of its agenda because changing language carried within it the promise of changing the very system upon which the oppression of Africa during colonial times had been

39 UAP, UNESCO, SHC.73/CONF.602/4., International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 2nd Plenary Session, Lusaka, Zambia, 21-26 May, 1973, Paris, 3 August 1973, 8.

40 N.N., "Report of the meeting of experts on the methodology of contemporary African history" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9. The methodology of contemporary African history. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organized by Unesco at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979.* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 161-194, 177

41 Apptly satirized by Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write About Africa" *Granta* 92 (2005)

based.[42] It had been for this very reason that Frantz Fanon had undertaken a dissection of language in an effort to produce a narrative of the black self.[43] By trying to change the language and the terminology used to refer to Africa, the GHA was aiming to change the power relations underlying the organisation of language itself.[44]

In a document entitled *recommandations aux auteurs*, Niane, when he referred to the political organisation of groups of people wrote: *'Ce qu'on appelait autrefois "nation" en Europa n'est pas different de ce qu'on appellee tribu en Afrique. Il s'agit d'enlever la charge péjoratif.'* [That what was called a 'nation' in Europe is no different from that what is called a 'tribe' in Africa. It is about removing the pejorative charge.][45] 'Tribe' was banned because it only referred to African societies and not to European societies.[46] Where 'race' applied to the broad category of all of those who were (and are) different, tribe was similarly and simultaneously used to differentiate between all those who had been put into the racial category of difference and therefore served to cement that difference ever further.[47] It was seen as urgent to use language that was not exclusively used to denote perceived African difference from Europe.

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42 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*. Trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 52.

43 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 52-53 and Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 33-52.

44 The history of the effort to change language as part of an emancipatory movement is long. Often the changing of language is closely linked to changing perspectives on (self-)identity. In the African-American case, the changing of racial labels has functioned as a way to shape and regulate black consciousness and emancipation. By changing racial labels, the African-American community not only meant to rid itself of racial slurs, but also attempted to emphasize positive aspects of their identity. Tom W. Smith, "Changing Racial Labels: From "Colored" to "Negro" to "Black" to "African American"" *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 56:4 (1992): 496-514.

45 UAP, CC/CSP/38, Histoire Generale de L'Afrique. Volume IV : Directeur de Publication : D. T. Niane, Directeur de la Division des Sciences Sociales Secrétariat d'Etat à la Recherche Scientifique, Conakry, R. Guinée, 17.

46 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "The Myth of Tribe in African Politics" *Transition* 101 (2009): 16-23, 17.

47 Peter Skalnik, "Tribe as colonial category" in *South African Keywords. The uses & abuses of political concepts*, eds. Emile Boonzaier and John Sharp (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 68-78, 68 and Jean-Loup Amselle, "Ethnies et espaces: pour une anthropologie topologique' in *Au cœur de l'ethnie: ethnies, tribalisme et État en Afrique*, eds. Jean-Loup Amselle and Elikia M'Bokolo (Paris: La Découverte, 1985), 11-48, 14-15.

Ogot shared Niane's aversion to the word in the report he send in for Niane's volume, stating that the word tribe had been 'over-used [...] even where it is unnecessary e.g. "tribal names", "movements of the numerous tribes" and "tribal groupings".'[48] Ogot kept reporting any and all uses of the word throughout his work for the various reading committees, mentioning its use in Chapters three, twenty-seven and thirty of volume I, for instance.[49] In an interim reading report for volume V, the problem of using 'tribe' as a way to describe political organisation was summed up as follows: 'to speak of Arab "tribes" without there [having been taken] into account what goes beyond the segmentary model, namely the long term confederations [...] including the city hence reducing these "tribes" to illogical groups of people as in paragraph 2, p.4, where the violent nomad has only one rationality: to plunder.'[50] It was suggested that '*ethnie*' or 'ethnic' was preferable over '*tribu*' or 'tribe.[51]

The ISC's ban of the word 'tribe', therefore, was meant to cut off any negative associations future readers might have with the word, negative associations that were often linked to colonialism and the idea that African political systems were primitive. Tribe, it was suggested, had come to denote a stage in human development that was closer to organisation of family and kinship and based on feeling rather than rational thinking. It referred to segmentary societies that were therefore suggested to be primitive or even savage.[52] In 1970, the anthropologist Aidan Southall published a groundbreaking essay 'The Illusion of Tribe' in which he stated that 'the tribal' had been equated with the primitive within anthropology and, as he put it, 'barbarism and savagery', which together constituted the primitive or tribal condition. Equally damming, 'pre-literate' had also become an alternative for 'tribe'. He therefore argued 'tribe' should be replaced by 'ethnic group'

48 UAP, CC/CSP/38, Bethwell A. Ogot to Niane, Hrbek, Devisse, 29-3-1977 and to the Bureau, 2-6-1977, 2.

49 JTLI, JAAP, Box 75, UNESCO History of Africa. Volume I: Introduction and African Prehistory, Comments, Bethwell A. Ogot, 10-7-1975, 2,3, 7, 8.

50 UAP, CLT CID 89, Interim Report, vol 5. Ch. 5, 9, 17, 18 and chapter 2. J Vansina. 15-1-1984, 3.

51 UAP, CLT CID 89, General History of Africa, Volume V, First Readers Report, Rapporteur J.Vansina, Juin 1982, 44.

52 Niane, "Introduction", 13.

so as to not affront African researchers.[53] As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o wrote as recently as 2009 regarding the word 'tribe': 'Tribe — with its clearly pejorative connotation of the primitive and premodern — is contrasted with nation, which connotes a more positive sense of arrival at the modern [...] The history and usage of this one English word, tribe, has had negative effects on the evaluation and self-evaluation of Africa, for African intellectuals have internalised this divisive inheritance of colonialism.'[54] The idea that tribalism was a colonial invention was also propagated by contributors to the *General History of Africa*. In 1985 Jean-Loup Amselle and Elikia M'Bokolo, the latter also wrote a chapter for volume V, published their *Au coeur de l'ethnie: ethnies, tribalisme et État en Afrique* in which Amselle stated that '*il n'existait rien qui ressemblât à une ethnie pendant la période précoloniale.*' [There was nothing that resembled an ethnic group during the pre-colonial period.][55] Evidently, 'ethnic group', at least in French, was no good either. Tribalism and its pejorative connotations with primitivism and a lack of rational state formation, therefore, was considered a purely colonial invention by these scholars.[56] It suggested the absence of rational state-building in Africa and also dovetailed with historical explanations hinged on the despised Hamitic hypothesis, classifying groups along ethnic lines.

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53 Aidan Southall, "The Illusion of Tribe" *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5:1-2 (1970): 29-50, 31-32, 46-47.

54 Thiong'o, "The Myth of Tribe", 17,22.

55 Amselle, "Ethnies et espaces", 11-48, 23.

56 The idea of 'tribe' as a colonial invention has a rich historiography. It is generally agreed upon that tribal identities were indeed imposed upon a variety of people during especially the periods of British colonial administration, as well as at least partially in the case of the Rwandan Hutu's and Tutsi's. Aidan Southall identified a difference between 'supertribes', that were purely a colonial invention and 'tribes' or 'ethnicities' generally that had some kind of basis in pre-colonial history, but that still might have changed during colonial times. Mahmood Mamdani, moreover, sees the imposition of tribal identities as a part of the colonial bifurcated state and, as such, as an effort to control colonial populations. See: Southall, "The Illusion of Tribe", 35-36, John Iliffe, *A modern history of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 324-325, Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa. Two Thousand Years of History*, trans. Scott Straus (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 50-1, Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Archie Mafeje, "The Ideology of 'Tribalism'" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 9:2 (1971): 253-61.

The fact that Trevor-Roper had also referred to African history as the 'meaningless gyrations of barbaric tribes' did nothing to rehabilitate the word.[57] In fact, the word was part of the legacy of racialist European academic research, specifically anthropology. It was used, like the Hamitic hypothesis, by Europeans to categorise and make sense of a world they could not understand on its own terms, often in service of the larger colonial project, consciously or not.[58] Slater referred to Trevor Roper whilst warning against the perpetuation of tribal stereotypes, as part of his commentary on Chapter thirteen of volume V, written by Christophe Wondji from Côte D'Ivoire, who was also the co-editor of volume VIII. The chapter, he wrote, presents 'the overall picture [...] of regional sub-categories and ethnic sub-categories, so that by page 22 the reader has been presented with a particularist picture of confusion which is almost recognisable as Hugh Trevor-Roper's "unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes".'[59] The reference to Trevor-Roper here is striking. As argued in Chapter 1, Trevor-Roper had become an anti-persona, historian non grata, whose likeness was to be avoided. By provoking this spectre, Slater painted a clear picture of what kind of allusions should absolutely be avoided. He recognised certain stereotypes haunting African history and aimed to warn the *General History of Africa* against them.

'Tribalism', lastly and equally important, was not just pejorative; it also had the possibility of being in conflict with the ideal of creating a pan-African reference work of African history that was meant to support emerging nation states on the continent. For it endangered the integrity of the newly created postcolonial nation states in Africa in which there was no room for tribal loyalties. As Leroy Vail observed, the nationalist paradigm within African studies of the 1950s and 1960s tended to cause researchers to be averse to explanations within

57 J. Vansina, "Population movements and emergence of new socio-political forms in Africa" in *General History of Africa V. Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. B.A. Ogot (Paris: Heinemann/UNESCO, 1992), 46–72, 47.

58 It is certainly the case that the idea of tribe has deeply influenced anthropological research in the past in its connection to the colonial state, especially in Britain. Sally Falk Moore, "Changing Perspectives on a Changing Africa" in *Africa and the Disciplines. The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, eds. Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O'Barr (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3–58, 8–10.

59 UAP, CLT/CID/89, I. N. Kimambo to Dr. Maurice Glele, 9-1-1984, 5.

historical scholarship that hinged on tribalism.[60] The word tribe, Niane therefore announced in the introduction to volume IV, was banned, alongside words such as fetishist. The GHA wanted to refer to African political organisations as nation states or 'peoples'.[61]

In the General Introduction to the GHA Joseph Ki-Zerbo did use the word tribe, however, but using inverted commas, to suggest it held no real explanatory power, and only when referring to the way European invaders saw other people.[62] He thereby emphasised the word 'tribe' as an outside intervention into African history. Ivan Hrbek and Mohammed El Fasi also used to word in reference to medieval 'Germanic tribes' in a chapter about Africa in world historical context from the 7th to the 11th century, which is an interesting inversion of its use.[63] Strikingly, however, the word 'tribe' surfaces throughout the entire volume as well as volume II when referring to Arab, Berber or other North African groups of people. The ISC's ban on the word tribe apparently did not actually result in its absolute absence from the volumes themselves. It seems like the pejorative meaning was not as unfavourable as elsewhere, for instance when it referred to Arab groups, who, along with Hamitic interpretations, could be associated with extra-African origins

In another document in which he expanded on this earlier statement, Niane added that the use of the words '*clan*' and '*lignage*' should depend on each author's discretion.[64] Both words referred to family-based organisational structures as a basis for state formation. As terms they were closely related to both 'tribe' and 'ethnicity' and indeed are also discussed by Amselle, M'Bokolo and Southall. 'Ethnicity' emerged as a central object of study and a political issue in the era of decolonisation.[65] The problem with such words like 'clan', 'ethnicity',

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60 Leroy Vail, "Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History" in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (London: James Curry, 1989), 1-19, 1-2, 7. See also: Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 187-90.

61 Niane, "Introduction", 13.

62 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 1-2, 13.

63 M. El Fasi and I.Hrbek, "The coming of Islam and the expansion of the Muslim empire" in *General History of Africa III. Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, ed. M. El Fasi, assistant ed. I. Hrbek (Paris: UNESCO, 1998), 31-55 31.

64 UAP, CC/CSP/38, Djibril Tamsir Niane to Messieurs les Membres du Comité de lecture du Volume IV de l'Histoire générale de l'Afrique, 7-7-1977, 1

65 Amselle, "Ethnies et espaces", 15-17, Carola Lentz, "'Tribalism' and ethnicity in Africa. A review of four decades of Anglophone research." *Cahiers de sciences humaines* 31:2 (1995): 303-328 and Vail, "Introduction", 1-19.

'ethnic groups' or even 'peoples' was that they could just be used as 'tribe' under a different name, without seriously challenging the underlining colonialist logic. For this reason, whereas the word 'tribe' had been outright banned, there were a multitude of other words as well as phrases that were disputed within the GHA, at least according to some of the readers. Or, as David Chanaiwa put it in the reading report for volume V: 'no native, no pagan, no tribe.'[66]

Moreover some readers also objected to the use of the phrase 'dark continent' — which had at various times been used to deny Africa a history.[67] Ogot, for instance, referring to the introduction of volume IV noted that the phrase 'Dark Continent should be omitted.' Ogot further commented that use of the word 'natives' was offensive and also objected to 'Bushmen' and 'animism [...] — an unwanted prejudice' and a 'derogatory way of referring to African religion'.[68] In the reading report for volume I, Ogot connected 'animism' to another concept he thought was problematic, namely the idea of African time. In the General Introduction Ki-Zerbo had argued that Africans espoused a different kind of time, more focused on the rhythm of nature and the tasks of the day.[69] Ogot was completely against this conceptualisation. The 'myth of an African concept of time' wrote Ogot, was meaningless. 'Our difficulties with chronology should not persuade us into accepting [it].' All societies had once counted time in cyclical ways, Ogot argued. A phrase which connected 'African animism' with 'African time', stating that within African animism, 'time is an enclosed space', therefore, was meaningless according to Ogot.[70] He did not think Africa should be treated as 'special' within the historical discipline. He sought to move away from the difference bestowed on the continent, difference which could lead to prejudice and misunderstandings.

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66 Chanaiwa also objected to the use of the phrase 'ferocious paganism', UAP, CLT/CID/89, General History of Africa, Volume V, First Readers Report, Rapporteur J.Vansina, Juin 1982, 21, 31, 32, 47. See also: Afigbo, "Colonial Historiography", 42.

67 Thiong'o, "The Myth of Tribe", 20.

68 The comment on Bushmen was also made by Vansina, Hrbek and Fage, who added that 'Hottentot' should also be left out as a term of description. UAP, CC/CSP/38, Bethwell A. Ogot to Niane, Hrbek, Devisse, 29-3-1977 and to the Bureau, 2-6-1977, 1 and UAP, CC/CSP/38, General History of Africa, Volume V, Report of the Reading Committee, Ivan Hrbek, 10, 40.

69 Ki-Zerbo, "General Introduction", 18.

70 JTLI, JAAP, Box 75, UNESCO History of Africa. Volume I: Introduction and African Prehistory, Comments, Bethwell A. Ogot, 10-7-1975, 1-2.

Conversely, the term Medieval or '*Moyen*-âge' did not serve GHA historiographical purposes either because the periodisation had no real meaning in African history, Niane argued.[71] It only served to designate the period between the end of the Roman age and the renaissance in European history and Europe did not play a global role during that time and did not significantly influence Africa during that time either. It was absolutely necessary, he wrote, to start using African terms more and more to describe essentially African occurrences.[72] In this regard then, Africa was different, or rather, Europe was falsely put forward as universal reference point. Similarly, Aléxis Kagame wrote that the GHA had to get rid of the term 'the West', since 'after all, Europe is not situated to the west of Africa, as far as we are concerned, the term the West is no more than a literary cliché with no real meaning.'[73] Like the effort to get rid of the Hamitic curse, such linguistic interventions were meant to create an explanatory narrative 'from the inside'.

To sum up, steering authors away from problematic language and conceptualisations had become one of the main tasks of the reading committees. In a document detailing the role of the reading committees, readers were urged to read carefully 'from the point of view of style' and 'propose new drafting for any passage considered inadequate or incomplete or at least to point out bibliographical references.'[74] Evidently readers took their task more seriously than this as in most cases they did much more than check for linguistic errors. They were generally aware of the main task the ISC had set for the GHA; to write a history of Africa that would place Africans at the centre and would do its utmost best to shy away from explanations based on racist ideas of intellectual and historical inferiority of Africans. However, given the fact that some errors remained (see above), the thoroughness with which contributions were read apparently varied. 'Tribe' was nevertheless nominally banned because its use suggested

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71 Interestingly François-Xavier Fauvelle in his book *The Golden Rhinoceros* does use the term 'middle ages' to designate a specific period of African history with the aim of emphasizing its interconnectedness and a 'distinctive way of being global', François-Xavier Fauvelle, *The Golden Rhinoceros. Histories of the African Middle Ages*. Trans. Troy Trice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 11.

72 UAP, CC/CSP.38, Djibril Tamsir Niane to Monsireur Maurice Glele, 2-06-1977, 1-3.

73 The translation here is the one made by UNESCO for ISC-members, JTLI, JAAP, Box 75, Report on the Manuscript of Volume I, Abbé Alexis Kagame, 1

74 UAP, CC/CSP/33, Preparation of the Manuscript of the Volumes of a General History of Africa. Role of the Reading Committee.

the absence of historicity and change, but, also because it was not a description that originated in Africa, just like 'Middle Ages.' As the Malian historian Sékénia Mody Cissoko had stated during the 1982 meeting on education and historiography in Dakar, African scholars had to 'use terminologies derived from African societies and cultures' and should 'discontinue, except for purposes of comparison, the use of concepts borrowed from European cultures', so that the rest of the world would follow.[75] In the stipulation to avoid external language and stereotypical depictions of African history, then, the GHA's political and epistemic goals aligned or rather, could not be separated conceptually.

The necessity, moreover, to combat stereotypes and problematic language suggest that, although the GHA aimed to be first and foremost a history for the African continent itself, the ISC and readers were very much concerned with how the history of Africa would be perceived. The wish to move away from a Euro-American bias, articulated by Ogot and others, shows a genuine longing to write African history on its own terms. At the same time, the very need to move away from that bias proves it to be potent still. The various reviewers for the reading committees had made it clear that they were aware of the need to present African history in such a way that stereotypes would not be perpetuated. Herein we recognise clearly the ideal as articulated in Chapter 1: anti-eurocentrism. Yet, it took more than just a strict language policy to rid the GHA of references to outside factors — such as race, that ultimate signifier of difference. The following section will detail an extensive compromise which shows that racialist, or Hamitic-related, and therefore external, explanations were not always avoided within the GHA when it brought into conflict the GHA's goal of political emancipation and the creation of scholarly standards within African history. It shows the controversy and debate that surrounded Cheikh Anta Diop's contribution to the GHA in the form of a chapter on the origins of the ancient Egyptians.

75 N.N., "Final Report of the symposium" in *UNESCO Studies and Documents 9. Educational Processes in Africa and Historiography. Final Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 129–144, 134.

Reclaiming Egypt

As discussed above, another way to address the question of 'external orientation' in African history was by reclaiming ancient Egypt for Africa, which was the path taken by Cheikh Anta Diop, as well as Théophile Obenga. A discussion of their position within the GHA will show how the GHA dealt with outlying positions such as Diop's. Through an exploration of the (ongoing) controversy surrounding Diop's contribution to the GHA, I will therefore explore the tension between political imperatives geared towards the emancipation of Africa and the development of research standards within African history.

Diop's and Obenga's interpretation of ancient Egypt, namely that it had been a black, but more importantly, African civilisation, dealt with questions of identity head on, by arguing that one of the most important ancient civilisations, at least according to European standards, had in fact been African rather than Middle Eastern — as various Hamitic interpretations would have it. They largely based their arguments on elements of physical anthropology and race science that had become outdated and that were rejected as racist by some.[76] It was not, as we have seen, Cheikh Anta Diop who first set out to proof the racial origin of the ancient Egyptians, but 19th century European scholars who were invested in the idea that ancient Egypt was the origin of European civilisation. For them the Egyptians, for political and ideological reasons, could not be 'negroid' but had to be white.[77] Racialism itself was an external intrusion of African history as it was a European invention. Yet, these ideas clearly left their mark on African historiography as well. It is interesting to note here that, Ferdinand Braudel, for instance, whom we have seen inspired the African historians within the GHA, held essentialised and racialised notions of African history. Specifically, he conceptualised the northern part of Africa as white and sub-Saharan Africa as black and argued that civilisation spread from north to south, the precise sort of delineation the GHA

76 For a good discussion on the historical context of Diop's work, see Robin Derricourt, *Inventing Africa. History, Archaeology and Ideas*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 110-5.

77 Nigel Eltringham, "'Invaders who have stolen the country': The Hamitic Hypothesis, Race and the Rwandan Genocide" *Social Identities* 12:4 (2006): 425-446, 425-7 and Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis", 524-6.

wanted to move away from and to which Diop responded.[78] Some of the early Africanist academic historians, moreover, amongst them John Fage who played a part in the GHA as well, had also made use of various elements of the Hamitic hypotheses in the 1960s to argue that institutes of 'divine kingship' had originated in Egypt and spread throughout the rest of Africa, specifically the West African Sahel.[79] As has become clear in Chapter 1, Fage later came to entirely denounce Seligman and any derivatives of the Hamitic hypothesis.[80] Heated debate concerning the origins of ancient Egyptian civilisations, therefore, and the question of who could lay claim to its history lay at the core of the debate on the chapter Diop wrote for the GHA.[81] They prompted equally heated debates concerning the origin of 'Western' civilisation — centred on the well-known Black Athena controversy. To discuss this particular multifaceted academic debate is beyond the scope of this chapter. But, the Black Athena controversy, like the work of Cheikh Anta Diop within the *General History of Africa*, essentially

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78 Steven Feierman, "African Histories and the Dissolution of World History" in *Africa and the Disciplines. The Contributio of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, eds. Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 167-212, 174.

79 Law, "The "Hamitic Hypothesis", 294. It was not the case that only white historians argued as such. The idea, for instance, that the Yoruba and their mythical king Oduduwa were somehow connected to the upper Nile regions played an important role in the works of early Christian Nigerian historians as well, such as Samuel Johnson. This version of the same story had most likely entered Nigerian thought through West African Islamic historiography rather than European, as in some versions of the story Oduduwa was a descendent of a Meccan king. Law, "The "Hamitic Hypothesis", 301-13 and Philip S. Zachernuk, "Of Origins and Colonial Order: Southern Nigerian Historians and the 'Hamitic Hypothesis' c. 1870-1970" *Journal of African History* 35:3 (1994): 427-55, 441-2.

80 J.D. Fage, *To Africa and Back* (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, 2002), 199. This, however, did not stop Chinweizu, a Nigerian anti-colonial intellectual, to denounce Fage as colonialist: Chinweizu, *Decolonising the African Mind* (Lagos: Pero Press, 1987), 80-81.

81 A recent example of academic work which still refers to some elements of Hamitic interpretations is Dierk Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: Africa-centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspectives* (Dettelbach: J.H. Roll, 2004), see also: Wim van Binsbergen, "Chapter 2. Key note – Rethinking Africa's transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory" in *Rethinking Africa's transcontinental continuities*, ed. Wim van Binsbergen (unpublished conference proceedings 2018), 59-101 and Dierk Lange, "Chapter 12. The Assyrian factor in West African history. The founding of Ancient Near Eastern successor states in sub-Saharan Africa" in *Rethinking Africa's transcontinental continuities*, ed. Wim van Binsbergen (unpublished conference proceedings 2018), 269-302.

resolved around culturally and politically significant debates concerning citizenship and identity.[82] The question of the origin of Ancient Egypt clearly transcended the academic realm.

Diop's chapter for the GHA in which he made the argument for a black Egyptian civilisation was published in the GHA's second volume. The volume dealt with the ancient civilisations of Africa, until about the 7th century BC. The volume was edited by Gamal Mokhtar and dealt mostly with ancient Egypt, Nubia and the kingdom of Kush. Diop's chapter was effectively a reiteration of his earlier work and specifically the tome he had published in 1954: *Nations, nègres et culture: de l'Antiquité nègre égyptienne aux problems culturels de l'Afrique noire d'aujourd'hui.*[83] The GHA chapter was a technical and interdisciplinary account, concerned with anthropological, biological, linguistic and archaeological evidence. It was of the utmost importance to strictly stay on 'scientific' grounds and use 'objective language' so that it would not be possible for others to reproach the work and denounce it as ideological, Diop stated in the chapter itself as well as the introduction to his 1967 follow up to the 1954 tome, *Antériorité des Civilisations Nègres.*[84] Diop also used classical sources, referring to Herodotus, Aristotle and the Bible, amongst others, to make his case.[85] He, moreover, appealed to ideals of cultural unity amongst people of African origin as well — a pan-African sentiment that he shared with the GHA.[86]

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82 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic roots of classical civilization. Vol. 1 The fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987) and Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Black Athena revisited* (Chapel Hill: University of North Caroline Press, 1996), See also the African-American debate on Afrocentrism: Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia. The roots of African American popular history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) and John Cullen Gruesser, *Black on Black. Twentieth-Century African American Writing about Africa* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000)

83 Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations, nègres et culture: de l'Antiquité nègre égyptienne aux problems culturels de l'Afrique noire d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1954); Cheikh Anta Diop, *Antériorité des Civilisations Nègres: mythe ou vérité historique?* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1967) and Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality,* ed. and trans. Mercer Cook (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974)

84 Diop, *Antériorité des Civilisations Nègres,* 10 and Cheikh Anta Diop, "Origins of the ancient Egyptians" in *General History of Africa II. Ancient Civilizations of Africa,* ed. G. Mokthar (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 27-57, 49.

85 Diop, "Origins of the ancient Egyptians", 36-43.

86 Cheikh Anta Diop, *Unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960)

Diop showed he was aware of the standards and values upheld and appreciated in the existing Euro-American academy. He knew that his work would only be taken seriously to some extent if articulated in a language that could be understood by those who guarded the gate to epistemic trustworthiness and, moreover, he was himself invested in the idea of African civilisation as inherently rational. Diop, who was trained as a chemist and physicist, worked within a tradition of positivist historical scholarship most associated with 19th century European thinkers — in the words of Jean Devisse. As a testimony to his multifaceted interest in the production of knowledge, moreover, he set up the radiocarbon laboratory of the *Institut Fondamental d'Arique Noire* in Dakar in 1966 and functioned as its director until his death. His confidence in positivist rationality then, was partly informed by his interdisciplinary outlook on academia.[87]

Within the ranks of the GHA his work was not appreciated by all. His chapter included an editorial note: 'The arguments put forward in this chapter have not been accepted by all the experts interested in the problem.'[88] The chapter was annexed by the report of the symposium of *The Peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script*, so that readers would be able to follow the discussion preceding the publication of Diop's chapter.[89] This annex is by itself noteworthy. It provides the reader of the work with background discussions to the chapters and, therefore, serves to underline the GHA's focus not just on transparency but also on intellectual diversity.

The symposium itself took place in Cairo from 28 January to 3 February 1974. Only some of its participants were active members of the GHA community, such as Devisse, Grottanelli, Théophile Obenga, Diop, Mokhtar and Maurice Glélé. Whether the ancient Egyptians could be counted as a 'white' or 'black' civilisation became a point of contention during the symposium. Diop and Obenga both presented papers in which they argued for the black origins of Egyptian civilisation. The other contributors mostly disagreed with their points of view on the basis of methodology, disputing, for instance, the 18th and

87 The French academic establishment only reluctantly rewarded him with a doctorate in 1960, even though he had finished his doctoral work in 1954. Jean Devisse, "DIOP Cheikh Anta – (1923-1986)" in *Encyclopedia Universalis* (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1987), https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/cheikh-anta-diop

88 Diop, "Origins of the ancient Egyptians", 36-43.

89 Ibid, 4.

19th century sources on which Diop had based some of his findings and, moreover, arguing that a purely black African Egyptian population could not be reconciled with Egyptian iconography.[90] Opponents of his work argued that the Egyptians were inherently a culture of multiple mixed elements. They did come to a general consensus that the Egyptians could not have been 'white' in the same way that Europeans were. None of these statements amounted to the denial of the inherently African nature of Egyptian civilisation. But, to most symposium attendees skin colour alone was not a good measurement for being African.[91] Moreover, some participants advocated for an outright 'outlawing' of terms such as 'Negro' and 'black', on the grounds that there should be no place in modern scholarly discourse for the concept of race. Discussions on biological race made some of the participants uncomfortable. In volume I Ki-Zerbo had already stated that there was no place for explicit racialism in the GHA.[92] Glélé reassured the experts present at the symposium that UNESCO was, as always, 'committed to the cause of promoting international understanding.'[93] UNESCO explicitly adhered to an anti-racist and anti-racialist point of view and had scientifically dismissed the concept of biological race.[94] Diop's work, however, was based on explicit racialism. The group did not reach a consensus.

They did not, because the methodological disagreements were the result of fundamental differences of opinion on research standards regarding the concept of biological race as a category of analysis. The symposium simply did not adhere to the very premise from which it had begun: namely that the skin colour of the ancient Egyptians was something that mattered. The report of the symposium, moreover,

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90 N.N., "Symposium on the Peopling of Ancient Egypt. A report on the discussions" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 2. The Peopling of ancient Egypt and the deciphering of Meroitic script. Proceeding of the Symposium held in Cairo from 28 January to 3 February 1974* (Paris: UNESCO, 1978), 73-103, 73-4, 86.

91 N.N., "Symposium on the Peopling", 74, 96, 99.

92 Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "Editorial Note: theories on the 'races' and history of Africa" in *General History of Africa I. Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. Joseph Ki-Zerbo (London: UNESCO/Heineman, 1981), 261-70, 266-9.

93 N.N, "Symposium on the Peopling", 94.

94 A. Montagu, *Statement on race: an annotated elaboration and exposition of the four statements on race issued by the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972) and M. Brattain, "Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public" *The American Historical Review* 112:5 (2007): 1386-1413.

stated that UNESCO would, regarding race, rather focus on studies of racial discrimination in an effort to combat its effects, than racial classification. Although the report also stated that it thought the History needed to use those words that 'readers were already accustomed' too (IE 'negroid'), it nevertheless showed that most participants did not think it was good scholarship to fixate on race.[95] The difference of opinion, then, was based on a different outlook on how to best contest eurocentrism and racism within scholarship.

In the reading report for volume II, unsurprisingly, similar issues surfaced. Diop had written his chapter for volume II after the Cairo symposium, but without changing his views substantially. The rapporteur for volume II was Vansina, other reading report members included Diop himself, Hrbek and Alexis Kagame. Like in the report for the symposium, the readers were divided over the use of 'race' as a category of analysis. Hrbek and Vansina thought that the conception of race in the Diop chapter was 'outdated.' Vansina stated that 'it was a long while since the colour of the skin, the form of the hair, the nasal index and measurements of the length and width of the cranium had been considered as the main indices, or even as the best indices among so many others for the classification on human types.'[96] It seemed, therefore, that Vansina, like the Symposium participants, did not want to focus on racial categorisation in a way that was reminiscent of and similar to 19th century European racialism.[97]

The last reading committee member, the Rwandan Alexis Kagame, conversely, thought the chapter was 'remarkable and a very convincing exposition.' He was the only reader who approved of the chapter, wholeheartedly. Kagame's deviation from the other reading committee members can be explained by providing some context as to who he was and it is important to do as such here so that it becomes clear that support for Diop's point of view was itself rooted in an adherence to interpretations of African history that favoured a focus on racial classification and also some version of a Hamitic hypothesis. Abbé Alexis Kagame was a Rwandan historian and a Catholic priest. He mostly wrote official Rwandan court histories.[98] He became very influential

95 N.N., "Symposium on the Peopling", 95.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid, 74

98 Claudine Vidal, "Alexis Kagame entre mémoire et histoire", *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 493-504, 497.

during the formative years of Rwandan post-colonial state-formation and managed to almost identify the history of Rwanda with the history of its royal courts.[99] As a result of this view, Kagame was focused on projecting the image of a unified Rwanda back in time.[100] Kagame adhered to the idea that pastoralist 'Hamites' had invaded the country sometime in the pre-colonial period and had left cultural and genetic traces and had intermingled with the existing population.[101] The presence of Hamites in ancient Rwandan history connected them to antiquity.[102] To him, therefore, the idea of a peoples invading from the north and influencing what had come to be known as Rwanda was an important part of national history. Diop's work on the ancient Egyptians served to cement these views. It was therefore unsurprising he supported Diop's chapter within the GHA. In his autobiography Ogot described a scene in which Kagame proclaimed himself to be a Hamite when the GHA had decided to rid the GHA of the 'Hamitic myth.' Ogot's response was telling: 'As President [of the GHA] and a specialist on the history of the Great Lakes region, I did not mince my words: I dismissed his claim with the contempt it deserved.'[103] It seems clear that Kagame was somewhat of an outlier regarding Hamitic historiographical explanations.[104] The reading report for volume IV, written by Hrbek, serves to cement the difference of opinion between Kagame, Ogot and others further. Kagame heavily critiqued Ogot's chapter on the Great Lakes region from 1200–1500 for its failure to include references to Hamitic influences. He accused both Ogot and Vansina — on whose work Ogot had based part of the chapter — of having written a political pamphlet. Hrbek however, ended the dis-

99 David Newbury and Catharine Newbury, "Review Essay. Bringing the Peasants Back In: Agrarian Themes in the Construction and Corrosion of Statis Historiography in Rwanda." *The American Historical Review* 105:3 (2000): 832-877, 854.

100 Gillian Mathys, "Bringing History Back In: Past, Present, And Conflict in Rwanda and the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo", *Journal of African History* 58:3 (2017): 465-87, 472.

101 He also tended to identify Rwandan precolonial history with the 'feudal stage' of European history, see: Vidal, "Alexis Kagame", 498.

102 Alexis Kagame, *Un Abrégé de L'Ethno-Histoire du Rwanda. Tome Premier* (Butare: Éditions universitaires du Rwanda, 1972), 30-1.

103 Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisimu: Trafford Publishing, 2003), 389.

104 It is possible that he was nevertheless invited to be a ISC-member because of the GHA's wish to include prominent historians from all African countries.

cussion. He agreed with Ogot and moreover referred to debate to the Bureau, which had the final say in such differences of opinion.[105]

Besides the official reading committee, other GHA historians also commented on Volume II. Ajayi suggested more proof was needed to solidify Diop's arguments.[106] Boahen was more definite in his dismissal of Diop's thesis: 'This is the usual Diop hobby horse', he wrote.[107] The solution to the different opinions regarding the Diop chapter was finally given by Curtin. He argued that since Diop's views did not reflect the view of the majority of scholars dealing with Africa — as he put it — it might be a good idea to offer several points of view to the readers. From this he constructed a general rule regarding such instances: 'it seems to me that, if these volumes are to stand up with the respect of the scholarly world in Africa and outside it, that alternate readings should be presented on points of conflict like this one where neither side has yet succeeded in mustering a consensus from the scholarly community.'[108] Curtin's solution was deemed satisfactory and implemented as the symposium proceedings were finally added to the chapter.[109] This was, moreover, completely in line with the GHA's ideal of a pan-African plurality of different views. Simultaneously it had become clear that most readers were not comfortable with the focus on race that was necessitated by Diop's methods. A certain tension

105 UAP, CC/CSP/38, First Supplement to the Report of the Reading Committee. Rapporteur: Ivan Hrbek, Prague, 7 July 1977, 13. In yet another set of comments on Ogot's chapter 20 for volume IV, Kagame complained that Ogot had misrepresented his views, to make him much more categorical regarding bantu and hamitic groups than he had actually been regarding the history of Rwanda. Kagame here also accused Vansina (on whose work Ogot had based his own) of unscientific behavior in terms of his dating techniques. All in all Kagame spent twenty-one pages detailing why he disagreed with Ogot and Vansina's work. The underlying complaint was that neither Ogot nor Vansina could really write the history of an area they were not native too or familiar enough with – a strange accusation given Ogot grew up near the shores of Lake Victoria. UAP, CC/CSP/39, A. Kagame á Monsieur le Sécretaire du Comité Scientique, Butare, le 23 Juin 1977.

106 JTLI, JAAP, Box 75, Comments J.F. Ade Ajayi on UNESCO General History of Africa: Volume II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa, 1 and UAP, CC/CSP/67, Comments by Professor B.A. Ogot, 15-7-1975, 1.

107 UAP, CC/CSP/67, Volume II. Comments by A. A. Boahen, no date, 1.

108 UAP, CC/CSP/67, Philip Curtin to Maurice Glélé, December 6, 1977.

109 This solution was suggested once more by Curtin regarding the controversy over the numbers in the trans-Atlantic slave trade – a controversy in which he had skin in the game himself, see: JTLI, JAAP, Box 78, Philip Curtin to Maurice Glele, 22 May 1985.

therefore existed between the wish to include different perspectives and the wish to be included in respectable academic society. Diop was a very prominent and important historian of Africa, moreover, and had also been involved with the GHA from its beginning. He served on the Bureau from 1975 until 1983. It would have been near impossible to exclude his chapter from the volume without insulting him and causing an uproar.

Diop's work inhabited the intersection between academic research and political power. In a reflection on Diop's work in the newspaper *Le Monde diplomatique* in 1998, in which several Senegalese historians were interviewed, such as Mamadou Diouf and Ibrahime Thioub, the UNESCO GHA symposium in Cairo in 1974 was mentioned as a turning point in the dissemination of Diop's ideas. Even if most attendants did not wholly agree with his ideas, they did agree on one fact, namely that ancient Egypt had been African. Diop had thereby unmistakably changed the way that the Egyptological establishment thought about the historicity of African civilisation, but not by proving that the Egyptians were black. Rather, he had made the point that they were African. Diop's work, the article stated, had often been ignored because of its focus on race, its Egyptocentrism and its political nature: '*Bref, son oeuvre resterait trop empreinte d'Idéologie.*' [In short, his work remained too imprinted with ideology.][110] But, Diop had simply used the same weapons as his adversaries. If he was racist, it was because he was responding to racists. Yet, despite this, the importance of his work for Egyptology and the restoration of African dignity, was unmistakeable. Devisse too recognised, in 1986 before Diop's death, that Diop had made him change his mind and had made him realise that he was prejudiced, even if he still disagreed with a number of Diop's more controversial points.[111] It, moreover, could not be said that his racism had had the same devastating effect as the racism he responded to in terms of the structures of power it conceived, Mamadou Diouf stated.[112] In another piece Diouf wrote with Mohamad Mbodj in a volume edited by Mudimbe he had already developed that thought,

110 Fabrice Hervieu Wané, "Cheikh Anta Diop restaurateur de la conscience noire", *le monde diplomatique*, January, 1998, 24-25, 24.

111 Jean Devisse, "Apport de l'archéologie à l'historien de l'Afrique" in *L'archéologie du Cameroun, Actes du premier colloque international de Yaoundé, 6-9 Janvier 1986*, ed. Joseph-Marie Essomba (Paris: Karthala, 1992), 14-34, 14.

112 Wané, "Cheikh Anta Diop", 25.

stating that Diop never meant to reverse the polarity of racism and that he had meant to formulate a speculative pan-African philosophy of history that ran parallel to Hegel's conception of modern European statehood.[113] Diop attempted to construct a universal history that would place Africa rather than Europe at the centre of historical conception. It was an attempted reversal of Hegelian logic — the outcome of which would eventually unearth not the modern European state but a federal African one that had, as it were, been waiting in the wings since Pharaonic Egypt had disappeared.[114] Given Hegel's assertion that Egypt was in fact not African, it became crucial for Diop to reclaim it for Africa. The GHA however generally seemed to have preferred an Africa centred history that placed Africa at centre within the history of the continent itself, rather than placing it at the centre of world history. For a long time Diouf added, it had been near impossible to conduct critical academic discussions on Diop's work because it was so closely connected to questions of African emancipation, as well as race. Diop himself knew this too and he knew that he could not 'yield an inch' or else he would lose the political effect he aimed to create. To engage with Diop meant engaging in race, but disavowing his ideas entirely meant taking a stance that was unpatriotic from a pan-African point of view.[115] Race, moreover, in its non-biological conception, could be marshalled for the purpose of emancipation and so could Diop's work. Essentially, the debate remained unresolved as a result of the tension between the development of reputable research standards in African history and the political causes in which African historians and Africanists also engaged.

In another more recent reflection on Diop's work Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch more or less draws the same conclusion. Without condoning Diop's methods, we should place them in a context of racialist science and the Afrocentric reaction to that science. The fact that almost no one has produced a neutral reflection of his work is telling according to Coquery-Vidrovitch and she identifies a colour bar in

113 Diouf and Mbodj, "The Shadow of Cheikh Anta Diop", 130-1; Jewsiewicki called it a 'Hegelian move against Hegel', Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "African Historical Studies Academic Knowledge as 'Usable Past' and Radical Scholarship", *African Studies Review* 32:3 (1989): 1-76, 4.

114 Diouf and Mbodj, "The Shadow of Cheikh Anta Diop", 125. See also: Derricourt, *Inventing Africa*, 110-114.

115 Diouf and Mbodj, "The Shadow of Cheikh Anta Diop", 118, 129.

these responses.[116] The emancipatory worth of Diop's work then was unmistakable for the African historians who were engaged in the GHA and it is precisely in his function as an intellectual who upset the status quo of African history that they appreciated him. Diop's work had an unmistakably pan-African nationalist goal to revalue the African past and that was part of the reason that the Egyptological establishment rejected it wholeheartedly at first.[117] After Diop died in 1986, Boahen remembered and honoured Diop as someone who had fought for the 'authenticity of African history' in an internal UNESCO letter to Maurice Glélé.[118] It was his contribution to the acceptance of African history as a valuable epistemic undertaking that Boahen praised. Like the historians in *le monde* had observed, the very point that ancient Africa had been recognised and was now seen as essentially African instead of European — a move away from an external point of view — was the contribution that Diop had made that was of lasting worth for Boahen and others. Coquery-vidrovitch concluded that his message had been militant, but necessary.[119]

Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the historical explanations that were deemed permissible in reference to the *General History of Africa's* larger stipulation that African history needed to be Africanised. Specifically, it has concentrated on its paramount mission to rid the GHA of European bias in terms of historiographical and terminological content. The necessity of highlighting the indigeneity of African historical achievements and the parallel urgency to correct historians who sought exogenous origins for African historical events illuminates a strong adherence to the ideal of writing African history 'from within', not just on the level of authors and perspectives, but in terms of explanations as well. The conviction that African history could only be sufficiently explained by reference to inside factors using language

116 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Cheikh Anta Diop et l'Histoire Africaine", *Le Débat* 208 (2020): 178-190, 181.

117 Ferran Iniesta, "À propos de l'École de Dakar Modernité et tradition dans l'oeuvre de Cheikh Anta Diop" in *Le Sénégal contemporain*, ed. Momar-Coumba Diop (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2002), 92-107, 93, 104-5.

118 UAP, CLT/CID/137, Prof. A. Adu Boahen to M. Glélé, 5-3-1986.

119 Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Cheikh Anta Diop", 190.

that would do justice to such an idea constituted a systematic idea of what African history should be.[120]

The GHA had adopted an emancipatory and regulative ideal of how African history could change political and epistemic realities, as we have seen in the first three chapters. In order to implement this ideal, it had to contest ingrained ways of explaining the African past. Connected to these explanations, was the language that kept it afloat. Terms and concepts that emphasised the particularity and inferiority of Africa in academic research had to be got rid of. Rather, the GHA would emphasise what it saw as neutral or positive language and indigenous concepts. It succeeded at doing so with only moderate success. Discussions surrounding the Hamitic Hypothesis throughout the GHA, moreover, make it clear that the way the GHA tried to implement its general aim to rid African history of eurocentric bias, including Hamitic Hypotheses, was by no means entirely uncontested. It had become clear what the main goal of the GHA was, but it was not always clear or easy to agree which methods could best be utilised to reach this goal or how political and scholarly imperatives could be combined and integrated. For instance, as this chapter has shown, a focus on race as an explanatory factor in historical arguments was frowned upon by a majority of the members of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (ISC), but not all. As it turned out, there were serious differences of opinion on what the ideals discussed in part one actually meant in scholarly practice.

The debate surrounding Diop's contribution to the *General History of Africa*, moreover, shows the existing tensions between political, emancipatory and scholarly aims espoused by the GHA. His message that Egyptian civilisation should essentially be seen as African was so important that his seemingly defunct methods based on European race science were, at least partly, tolerated. The critique of eurocentrism here seemed to require the redeployment of the tools of eurocentrism, which is a recurring trope within black and African responses to the history of eurocentrism in the emancipatory effort the revaluate blackness.[121] Whilst the GHA was creating new research standards for the writing of African history, it was also deeply concerned with the

120 Which aligned with Ajayi's insistence that African history should be studied with reference to continuity.

121 I am indebted for this phrase to Adom Getachew, 22-01-2021.

political emancipation of both Africans and African history. It was not the case that the GHA necessarily always denounced arguments that they perceived as unsound scholarly work, but rather that within the GHA their scholarly standards had developed in such a way that explanations that referenced eurocentric or colonialist ideas or theories, were seen as bad historical work. Avoiding eurocentrism meant avoiding explanations which placed the primacy of African history outside the continent, based on outdated and disproved theories, whilst being mindful of outside influences that did withstand the test of sound historical source work. It also meant avoiding explanations that hinged on race as an explanatory factor. Yet, Diop's contribution withstood the test of peer review, even if many GHA historians did not agree with the substance of Diop's argument, precisely because it dealt with questions of meaning within African history that could not be avoided: in arguing for the African origins of Egyptian civilisation, Diop made the very basic recognition that African history was African. The solution for this problem was twofold. Firstly, the GHA included the work as part of its ideal of diversity. Secondly, and more important, the argument that ancient Egypt had been an African civilisation fit with the overall emphasis on writing African history from within and even if it used biological race, it marshalled the concept in an emancipatory fashion.

This chapter has found that the UNESCO *General History of Africa* engaged in debates over the standards of African history, thereby establishing that historiographical and emancipatory demands were sometimes, but not always, incongruent. It has shown that it was sometimes difficult to decolonise the writing of African history because it was not always clear how a politically engaged move away from eurocentrism and towards Afrocentrism could be combined with detached scholarship. Evidently the GHA was a rich breeding ground for substantive debate regarding the idea and goal of African history. It provided a forum for enriching debate on identity and historiography, amongst others, and allowed for the growing of the sub-discipline of African history. Of course, this did not take place without internal struggle and strive. The next chapters will further explore various differences of opinions, as well as practical problems and divergences of perspectives and identities.

CHAPTER FIVE
Everyday Realities in the Creation of the *General History of Africa*

Introduction

In 1975, in the midst of one of the busier years in the drafting of the *General History of Africa*, Jacob Ade Ajayi wrote a somewhat annoyed letter to the UNESCO secretariat, of which Maurice Glélé was in charge. 'I can complain about the way the last meeting of the Bureau at Fez was handled.' Ajayi wrote:

> Fez is a delightful place, but not easy to get to. You fixed a meeting of the Bureau there during term time without prior consultation. I agreed to visit. Then I had a crisis in my University and I offered a full Professor to go at my University's expense as an observer to answer questions when my volume is discussed as he collaborates with me on the work. You refused his coming and insisted I should come even if for only two days. To get to Fez, I had to travel by car across the Nigerian/Dahomey border to Cotonou, to catch a plane at 6 a.m. Go via Abidjan to Paris, change Airports by taxi in Paris and arrive Rabat at 9 p.m. In spite of my messages, no

> arrangement was made for me to get to Fez. I was to sleep at Rabat, and go on to Fez to arrive around noon on the last day of the meeting. I chose instead to try to get to Fez that night, by train at very great inconvenience to myself. I lost my luggage in the train and had to start going round the train before I located it fourth coach to where I left it. I had to stand all the way in the train. I arrived at Fez at 2 a.m.[1]

Suffice it to say, it took some commitment to the project from Ajayi to finally reach the meeting. Uncomfortable, long and arduous travel to reach meetings was not the exception within *The General History of Africa*. The project had always tried to hold meetings in various African countries, alternating between Western, Eastern, Southern, Northern and Central Africa.[2] Although the aim of this was to spread knowledge equally and help enthuse local academics and the public, it also caused practical difficulties for ISC members. Other problems that frustrated the work included slow responses from authors, postal strikes in various countries and political obstacles that made it impossible for some ISC members to travel.[3] The international character of the GHA made the work exceptional, but it also caused trouble.

The early years of the GHA had coincided with a period of tremendous optimism in the African academy, the so-called 'Golden Era'.[4] It had been a time when full Africanisation of universities and African control of knowledge produced about Africa had seemed possible and

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1 This was at a time that Ajayi was the Vice-Chancellor of the university of Lagos. UAP, CC CSP 31, J.F. Ade Ajayi to Maurice Glélé, 10-04-1975.

2 UAP, UNESCO, Committee of experts on the General History of Africa, Abidjan, 31 August – 5 September 1966, Introductory Document, 5 and UAP, SHC.73/CONF.602/4, International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 2nd Plenary Session, Lusaka, Zambia, 21-26 May, 1973, 18. (Hereafter: UAP, 2nd Plenary Session, Lusaka 1973)

3 UAP, SHC.75/CONF.601/3, Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 5th meeting, Fez, Morocco, 5-11 February 1975, 2 and UAP, CC-78/CONF.607/3, Final Report of the Eight meeting of the Bureau and Fourth Plenary Session of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 30 March-8 April 1978, 36.

4 Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, "African Historiography and the Crisis of Institutions" in *The Study of Africa. Volume I. Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters,* ed. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2006), 135-67, 142.

the project of nation-building was still in full swing.[5] For a brief moment during the 1960s African universities could function as epicentres of global intellectual life. Problems that have since arisen in the academy for African academics were not always as considerable as they have become in the 21st century, in terms of visa requirements and funding. From the 1970s onwards funding for universities in Africa dwindled as a result of worldwide financial and African political crises and disillusionment.[6] David Scott has argued that from the 1970s onwards, new problems arose as neoliberalist policies emerged and the liberationist ideals of the post-war world began to wane. Correspondingly, postcolonial questions concerning the discourse rather than the political materiality of colonialism emerged as it had become clear that national independence alone was not enough to achieve liberation from Europe.[7] The decline of funding for African studies, moreover, went hand-in-hand with its orientation shifting from the African to the American continent.[8] The interdependent way the GHA functioned made it difficult to adapt to these changing circumstances. The emphasis on pan-African collectivity as a guiding ideal was deemed so important and so crucial for an Africa-centred writing of African history, that the goal to complete the work in time was sacrificed for it.[9] Therefore, and because the project was largely funded from outside the continent, by UNESCO, the GHA struggled to grow used to the changing demands of the time.

The chapter is concerned with the materiality of the GHA, meaning it asks how the work operated in practice and how this changed

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5 Jan Vansina, "Foreword" in *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa. Paradigms of Development Decline and Dilemmas,* ed. Michael O. Afoláyan (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007), xi-xiii, xii.

6 Michael O. Afoláyan, "Introduction" in *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa. Paradigms of Development Decline and Dilemmas,* ed. Michael O. Afoláyan (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 1-16, 5 and Mahmood Mamdani, "Introduction: The Quest for Academic Freedom" in *Academic Freedom in Africa,* eds. Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997), 1-16, 3.

7 David Scott, *Refashioning Futures. Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 12.

8 Brizuela-Garcia, "African Historiography and the Crisis of Institutions", 152

9 It had originally been envisioned that the work on the GHA would be finished within the ten year period between 1965-1975, but the last volume was not published in both languages until 1998, UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Paris 23 August 1966, original French. Introductory Document, 1.

over the years. It therefore details how ideals of collective pan-African knowledge production and the wish to contribute to political emancipation were brought to fruition. The chapter secondly explains that, whilst at first, the GHA was relatively successful at implementing these ideals, this became more difficult as time wore one as a result of financial and political changes on the African continent. The last part of the chapter investigates the everyday hassle and the day-to-day work that was necessary to complete the eight-volume GHA, such as the sending and receiving of an endless stream of letters in order to organise meetings and conferences across three continents. It also asks what high-minded ideals of emancipation looked like in terms of organisation and operationalisation. As such, it focuses on the *Alltagsgeschichte* of the GHA and the question of how ideals of knowledge production that transcended the purely epistemic, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, worked in practice, as is evident from the everyday, sometimes mundane, activities of those working on the GHA. [10]

Balancing the numbers amongst changing circumstances

The economy of knowledge production in the *General History of Africa* was aimed towards emancipation and further decolonisation of the continent. These aims were framed with the ideal of collectivity in mind. Collectivity was both an ideal as well as a necessity for other ideals connected to it: plurality and diversity, as discussed in Chapter 2. By economy of knowledge production, here, I mean the economic choices, where to spend money, on whom and to what end, that were made as a result of what was deemed 'good' or desirable within the social microcosm of the GHA. For instance, the GHA insisted on organising most of its committee and bureau meetings on the continent itself in order to (financially) stimulate the African historical academy. As mentioned above, meetings of the Bureau and Committee took place either somewhere on the continent or, if necessity required it, in Paris. Whereas the first official plenary meeting of the committee

10 Inspired by studies like: Steven Shapin, *Never Pure. Historical Studies of Science as if It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 8 and Jo Tollebeek, *Fredericq & Zonen. Een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2008), 22-27

in 1971 took place in Paris, the second meeting was in Lusaka. The third took place in Cotonou, the fourth in Nairobi, the fifth in Ibadan, the sixth meeting in Brazzaville and only the seventh meeting in 1985 brought the ISC back to the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The ISC intended for the meetings to have an emancipatory effect and explicitly held them in what they perceived as globally underrepresented regions. It also provided young African researchers with extra funding to attend.[11] Meetings were frequented not only by the 39-member committee and the UNESCO secretariat of around five people, but also, as guests, by representatives from various historical associations from around the continent, liberation movements, such as ZANU PF and (African) publishing houses.[12]

A committee meeting for the GHA was an exciting event for the many relatively new history faculties and institutes around the continent. One historian working in Ibadan, Simon Ademola Ajayi (not related to the editor of volume VI) remembered the time the committee came to the university of Ibadan in Nigeria in 1981. 'That was the first time that I was privileged to meet many of the big names of African history.'[13] An emeritus professor of history at Ibadan, Obaro Ikime, similarly remembers the meeting, and the project itself, as an important watershed in African historiography.[14] The fact that so many giants of African history had travelled to Ibadan was meaningful to Ikime.

The GHA, moreover, used the meetings to keep track of its aim to include 'the largest possible number' of young African researchers. During the meetings the selection of authors was discussed extensively. This was one of the reasons various associations of African history were invited to committee meetings. The committee hoped

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11 UAP, SH-71/CONF.38/2, Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Cairo, 23-27 November 1971, 3-4.

12 See for instance: UAP, CC CSP 33, R.C. Hove Deputy Sec. for External Affairs Z.A.N.U. Zimbabwe African National Union to Maurice Glélé, Division of Cultural Studies UNESCO. 14-06-1979

13 Interview by the author conducted on 30-7-2018 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, with Simon Ademola Ajayi.

14 Interview by the author conducted on 15-08-2018 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, with Obaro Ikime. Ikime is best known for producing: Obaro Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980)

that they would be able to supply the GHA with possible names.[15] Like with the choice of location for the meetings, regional representation was taken into account when it came to authors too and this demand was taken beyond just Africa.[16] Ogot, for instance, supposedly selected the Polish historian Marian Malowist over Philip Curtin to write the first chapter of his volume V on trade for reasons of geography and diversity— even though the criterion of including as many Africans as possible was not at play here.[17] The reason for this may have been a letter by the Soviet historian A. Letnev. Letnev complained that Ogot's volume did not include enough authors from socialist countries and suggested Malowist.[18] Since the GHA aimed to include authors from both sides of the Cold War divide it is likely that this was part of the reason Malowist was eventually selected over Curtin. Maurice Glélé, moreover, produced a plethora of lists for the ISC in which he kept track of the geographical regions from which the authors of various volumes stemmed. In one document of an unknown date, he concluded that 2/3s of the authors were African and 1/3 from outside, in another he checked the geographic spread for volume IV.[19] Keeping track of numbers, counting the presence of Africans as well as researchers from other parts of the world, became a key practice within the GHA. And, as the example with Malowist shows, diversity was about more than just African diversity. As Chloé Maurel has noted, however, few researchers from the Eastern bloc were eventually included in the GHA, even if Hrbek played an important role.[20] The GHA attempt to

15 The members of the committee were all asked to send in "the greatest possible number of curricula vitae of prospective authors", after which the committee and bureau would select two possible authors for each chapter. Decisions were then made based on written correspondence with the volume editor. UAP, 2nd Plenary Session, Lusaka 1973, 8.

16 UAP, Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Rwanda 17-23 July 1972, 12-13 (Hereafter: UAP, Meeting of the Bureau Rwanda 1972) and UAP, CLT CID 103, Geographical spread.

17 UAP, CLT CID B7S2.23, Volume V author choice report and UAP, CLT CID B7S2.23, B.A. Ogot to Dr. Augustin Gatera, Division of Cultural Studies and Circulation, UNESCO, 10-01-1977.

18 UAP, CLT BS7S2.23 104, A. Letnev to Monsieur le Président du Comité Scientifique International pour la rédaction d'une Histoire générale de l'Afrique, 20-02-1973.

19 UAP, CLT CID 103, Répartition Géographique pour la rédaction d'une Histoire Générale de L'Afrique ; UAP, CC CSP 45, Maurice Glélé á M. E. Pouchpa Dass, directeur CC/CS, 30-04-1980, handwritten scribbles on last page detail the geographic spread of a specialist colloquium for the GHA.

20 Maurel, "l'histoire Générale de l'Afrique de l'Unesco", 726-7.

bridge the divide between East and West was therefore not entirely successful. This might have had something to do with the relative insularity of Soviet African studies.[21]

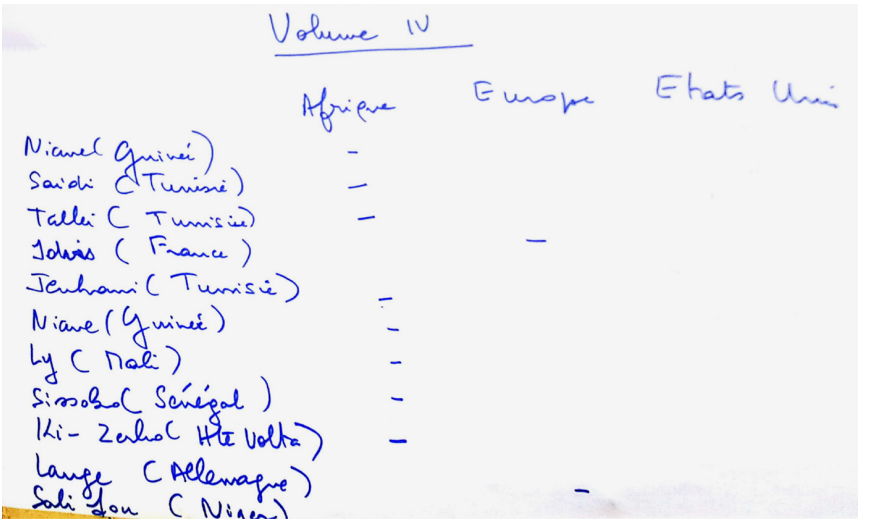

Fig 1. Geographic spread, handwritten note by Glélé, date unclear. Apparently, there were so many authors from the United States, that this warranted its own category. [22]

It may also have been the case that the GHA historians wanted to avoid being labelled as Marxists and, as a result, seen as having taken a stance within global Cold War politics. As also noted in Chapter 2, Marxist historical analysis, although not completely absent, did remain somewhat on the periphery of the GHA. This may also explain why South African historians in exile never became an important part of the project, for historical materialism became an increasingly important part of South African scholarship from the late 1960s onwards.[23] Ki-Zerbo, as noted in Chapter 1, added a sort of disclaimer

21 Irina Filatova, "Anti-Colonialism in Soviet African Studies (1920s-1960)" in *The Study of Africa. Volume 2: Global and Transnational Engagements*, ed. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2007), 203-34, 203.

22 UAP, CC CSP 38, handwritten note Répartition Géographique Volume IV.

23 Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, "Radical History and South African Society" in *History from South Africa. Alternative Visions and Practices*, ed. Joshua Brown, Patrick Manning, Karin Shapiro, Jon Wiener, Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 3-25.

about potential dogmatism in relation to Marxist scholarship in his introduction to the GHA. Ogot, too, was critical about the ability of Marxist analysis to fundamentally transcend European frameworks, as discussed in Chapter 3. Fundamentally, the GHA, although anti-colonial in nature, was a project that eschewed overt radicalism. This was, in part, thanks to those scholars who engaged in it the most, namely Ajayi, Ogot, Ki-Zerbo, Vansina, Devisse, Diop and Boahen.

Nevertheless, the GHA did organise a meeting on the decolonisation of southern Africa in 1978 and published the results as part of its *Studies and Documents* series in 1981. The meeting took place in Poland and it is therefore unsurprising that a good number of its participants were interested in Marxist analysis. Marxist historical analysis was discussed amongst them: 'For some experts, the method of Marxist analysis was most appropriate [...] For others, more aware of the balance of power, Marxist analysis was of political importance and fostered political commitments but did not bring out the sequence of events as obviously and necessarily as for the first group.' The volume editor, in this case Ali Mazrui, who was also known to be somewhat sceptical towards Marxism during this period suggested 'that modern imperialism was perhaps a child of the modern nation-state system rather than a child of capitalism as such.'[24] Except for this comment the report does not note who said what. It is not hard to guess however. Only a few ISC members were present, Ajayi most notably, as well as Devisse. It is likely that especially Ajayi did not think Marxism was the best way to analyse African history. The GHA, moreover, did invite African liberation movements to attend its meetings and it did also include scholars such as Walter Rodney and Shula Marks. The report on the discussion on Southern Africa also notes that the participants praised the USSR for its anticolonial support. More tellingly, the report ends by stating that due to the presence of scholars 'who are also militants [...] the discussion took on an ideological and political turn, rather than remaining purely historical.'[25] This is a remarkable description given also the GHA's anticolonial and thereby political roots. It is clear that the GHA aimed to steer away somewhat from

24 N.N., "General Discussion" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 5. The decolonization of Africa: southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.* (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 143-6, 143-4.

25 N.N., "Southern Africa" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 5. The decolonization of Africa: southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.* (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 147-51, 149-50.

certain types of political engagement, whilst remaining committed to others, such as nation-building. It is entirely possible, therefore, that some more radical scholars were themselves reluctant to fully engage in the GHA. Perhaps it was not the GHA who sometimes eschewed Marxists or radicals, but rather the other way around. Or, at the very least, the feeling was mutual.

Mazrui, moreover, was concerned with involving more women with the GHA and provided the committee with a list of names for his volume, including Jacqueline Ki-Zerbo, who was married to Joseph Ki-Zerbo.[26] None of these women made it into the final volume, however. Nor was the question of gender discussed in any detail within GHA circles. Apparently, some forms of diversity were less important than others. In fact, Mazrui was the only GHA scholar who even tried to put this issue on the agenda. The reason for this may have been that gender issues were not a priority within African nationalism.[27] Given the emphasis on the GHA placed on the inclusion of as many different African perspectives and its engagement in the question of 'who gets to write history?', this is remarkable.

Nevertheless, the result of the GHA's absorption with this question has been that the majority of authors contributing to the GHA were in fact Africans from all corners of the continent and beyond — although a considerable number of Europeans and Americans also contributed to the volumes.[28] The GHA also included Afro-descendants from the diaspora into their definition of 'African'. As illustrated in Figure 2, volumes I through III had more non-African than African authors. Most of the non-African authors, moreover, were Europeans and although volume II included fourteen African authors, six of them were Egyptian, hinting towards that volume's somewhat Egyptocentric approach. The volumes dealing with more recent history, however, included more Africans and Afro-descendants — although the vast majority were continental Africans. It seems as if it was harder to contract African historians for the volumes dealing with more distant pasts. Even in the case of the earlier volumes, however, the GHA was doing much better in terms of representation of Africans than many other academic projects. Vansina, moreover, described how difficult it

26 UAP, CLT CID 137, Concerning Authors for Volume VIII of the UNESCO General History of Africa, Received by the Secretariat on 16 July 1979.

27 Bozzoli and Delius, "Radical History", 23.

28 In the end, 57% of authors were Africans or of African descent. See Figure 2.

had been to find African historians throughout the project because the pool of candidates to choose from was so small given that the GHA wanted candidates who were academically trained.[29] To redress the imbalance the ISC employed the reading committees as became clear during the Bureau meeting in Rwanda in 1972: 'reading committees would make it possible to restore the balance at the African regional, international or interdisciplinary level in case where it had been unsatisfactory at the time when the authors were designated.'[30] This also serves to underscore the GHA's epistemic commitment to the African voice as reading committee lists were not published. Attracting African academics then, was about more than just (re)presentation.

Balancing the numbers was one of the reasons the GHA was so adamant about organising meetings on the continent itself. And by providing a platform for historical scholarship on the continent UNESCO's GHA seemed to genuinely be satisfying individual governments' wishes as well. Both the Republic of Zaire and Côte D'Ivoire contributed to the committee meetings by providing extra funding.[31] Often, a committee meeting would be opened with a speech from the minister of education of the host country, signalling the appreciation for the project and often including some sort of promise that the ministry would make use of the volumes once they had been published. A myriad of countries also provided practical assistance in hosting the ISC or Bureau meetings. The government of Libya especially contributed a large sum of 1.2 million dollars towards the completion of the work in 1977, when the original 10-year period budgeted by UNESCO during which the project should have been completed had passed.[32] Its then president, Moamar Gaddafi aimed to promote the inclusion of Libyan national history into the GHA, but also subscribed

29 Jan Vansina, "Unesco and African historiography", *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 337-52, 337-8.

30 UAP, Meeting of the Bureau Rwanda 1972, 12-13.

31 UAP, CC CSP 36, Makaminan Makagiansar á Monsieur Ministre de la Cóoperation République du Congo, October 3rd 1983, UAP, CLT CID 159, Monsieur le Directeur Générale de l'UNESCO á Monsieur le Professeur Pierre Kipre, Ministre de l'Education nationale Côte d'Ivoire, 15 March 1996 and UAP, CC CSP 36, Théophile Obenga to Maurice Glélé, 03-06-1983.

32 UAP, CLT CID 159, contract between the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organisation. 8-11-1977.

to the kind of pan-African unity that would include North Africa.[33] It is not surprising that the ISC's Libyan member, Idris El-Hareir, subsequently demanded more inclusion of Libyan history in the GHA. This was only reluctantly granted by the rest of the ISC.[34] The GHA, after all, wished not to be influenced by governments, although repelling such outside influence must have become harder as funding became more precarious. Nevertheless, regional cooperation and greater inter-African unity as a means of stimulating socioeconomic progress on the continent have been on the minds of African scholars and policy makers continually ever since independence. This was the case even if agreement on how to achieve such cooperation has sometimes been lacking.[35] The pan-African-oriented GHA likewise involved governments and people across the continent.

	AFRICANS	**NON-AFRICANS** (European or American, unless otherwise mentioned)
V1	10	20
V2	14	15
V3	14	19 *(1 Iraqi and 1 Singaporean)*
V4	13	13
V5	21	10 *(1 Israeli)*
V6	23 *(1 Jamaican)*	11 *(1 Singaporean)*
V7	24 *(1 Guyanan, 1 Brazillian)*	12
V8	31 *(1 Jamaican)*	11

Fig. 2 Numbers of African and non-African authors within all eight GHA volumes.

33 As a result of the contribution a special seminar on the history of Libya was organised by the GHA. UAP, CLT CID 159, Agreement between the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation and The Socialist Peoples Libyan Arab Jamahirya, 7 November 1977 and N.N., *The general history of Africa. Studies and documents 11. Libya Antiqua. Report and papers of the symposium organized by Unesco in Paris, 16 to 18 January 1984.* (Paris: Unesco, 1986)

34 UAP, CC CSP 43, Makaminan Makagiansar to Directeur Général, 6-05-1983.

35 Guy Martin, *Africa in World Politics. A Pan-African Perspective* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2002), 123-4.

However, as Gaddafi's contribution of funds to the GHA shows, financial difficulties increasingly began to surface from the late 1970s onwards. Whereas the early years had been characterised by a relatively easy flow of funds towards the project, the latter years were defined by a lack of funding.[36] This was largely due to the fact that the project was taking much longer than the ten years that had been anticipated in 1964, when UNESCO had agreed to the undertaking. UNESCO had originally budgeted $100,000 per biennium, but by 1970 it was already clear that not all eight volumes would be published by 1975 and the timeline was therefore deferred until 1978, including the biannual funding.[37] The extra funding that kept the project afloat after that came from so-called extra-budgetary funds, including those provided by the Libyan government. Other governments also contributed. In order to have volume VIII translated into French, UNESCO send out several letters to African governments, commercial companies (including one Champagne producer) as well as all the committee members in an effort to raise funds to finish the French version.[38] In the end the governments of France and Cote D'Ivoire contributed for such a translation, as well as the empress of Iran and the Vatican.[39]

Financial difficulties for UNESCO increased further when the United States withdrew their membership in 1984. The withdrawal was partly due to what they perceived as financial mismanagement at the hands of UNESCO director general Amadou Mahtar M'Bow. Partly it was also because the US government under President Reagan did not like the ideological direction the agency had taken under M'Bow's guidance. UNESCO's pro-Palestine stance was one of the

36 UAP, Meeting of the Bureau Rwanda 1972, 14 and UAP, CLT CID 140, Christophe Wondji á Madame Coffi-Studer, 19-01-1995.

37 UAP, 85 EX/10 Rev. Executive Board. Eighty-fifth Session. Paris 6 October 1970, 5.

38 UAP, CLT CID CW/95.01, Christophe Wondji á Monsieur le Secrétaire général de la Commission française, 3-10-1996 and UAP, CLT CID 141, Edem Kodjo, Premier Ministre de la République Togolaise á Christophe Wondji, 12-07-1994.

39 UAP, CLT CID 159, Directeur général to Monsieur le Professeur Pierre Kipre, Ministre de l'Education nationale Côte d'Ivoire, 15-03-1998; UAP CLT 159, Directeur général a Christophe Wondji and Ali Mazrui ed. and Christophe Wondji, ass. ed., *Histoire Générale de L'Afrique VIII. L'Afrique depuis 1935* (Paris: UNESCO, 1998), cover page.

biggest disputes.[40] During the latter years of the project, therefore, the UNESCO secretariat as well as the committee became increasingly involved in fundraising in order to finish the project and with success, given the financial aid the GHA received from various governments. Nevertheless, committee members responded to fundraising queries by pointing towards the overall financial difficulties on the African continent. Adu Boahen expressed his inability in helping the GHA in writing. 'I have not reacted to it till now because I did not know what to say. You must be very much aware of the economic plight of virtually every African country.'[41] Boahen's response speaks volumes in regards to the way the financial climate for projects such as the GHA had changed in the twenty years after independence.[42] Although the GHA had been conceived of in the 1960s, in the wake of political independence and widespread optimism over the future of Africa, the project was brought to fruition in the 1970s and 1980s, during a period when optimism seemed to dissolve into pessimism.

The financial climate for African history had worsened throughout the lifespan of the GHA. Already in the 1970s African universities, and especially humanities faculties, had started to contend with funding problems and increasing mismanagement as the economies of some countries started to nosedive, whilst politicisation elsewhere led to increasing restrictions on research. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, 'Zairianisation' or nationalisation of universities caused the universities to become subordinated to political ideology and biased management, resulting in a complete detachment from societal needs or academic ideals, be they colonial or Congolese.[43] Even if 'Zairianisation' suggested the opposite and seemingly aligned with the interests of African historians in its goals to revalue indigenous

40 N.N., "Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow", Your Dictionary, accessed 08-12-2020, https://biography.yourdictionary.com/amadou-mahtar-m-bow. See also: Roger A. Coate, *Unilateralism, ideology and US foreign policy: the United States in and out of UNESCO* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1989) and Mark F. Imber, *The USA, ILO, UNESCO and IAEA: politicization and withdrawal in the specialized agencies* (London: Macmillan, 1990)

41 UAP, CLT CID 141, Adu Boahen to Doudou Diene, 12-10-1994.

42 Boahen's Ghana became the first country to undergo Structural Adjustment Programmes, Justin Williams, "The Rawlings Revolution' and Rediscovery of the African Diaspora in Ghana (1983-2015)" *African Studies* 74:3 (2015): 366-87, 368.

43 René Devisch, "The University of Kinshaha: From Lovanium to Unikin" in *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa. Paradigms of Development, Decline and Dilemmas*, ed. Michael O. Afoláyan (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007), 17-38, 19-26.

culture over colonial influences in a politics of authenticity invented by Mobutu, its practical effects were such that academic research suffered because academic freedom suffered at the hands of an autocratic government.[44] Across the continent, moreover, the humanities were generally considered of much less importance for economic development than technical and financial degrees, resulting in the overall deprecation of many universities, causing history as a discipline, and by extent the GHA, to suffer.[45] This happened also at the University of Kinshasha, or UNIKIN, which had once been a part of the University of Leuven as Louvanium, and where Jan Vansina had once taught classes on the Kuba in the 1950s to groups of hostile students who did not wish to hear about African history from a white Belgian teacher.[46]

Budgetary crises across Africa as a whole, moreover, constrained government ability to spend on higher education, forcing governments to turn to foreign investment and aid, of which structural adjustment and shock therapy were a part. As Mahmood Mamdani has put it, the World Bank came into many African countries with both a 'carrot and a stick', they injected financial aid but not without demanding academic 'relevance.'[47] Increasingly seen as elitist, African history as a scholarly endeavour did not seem to be able to deliver on the promises of independence and thereby lost societal relevance.[48] Governments, furthermore, in line with these IMF imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes, generally also tended to cut public funding of higher

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44 This paradox has been explored in great detail by Mudimbe: V. Y. Mudimbe, *Autour de "la nation": leçons de civisme: introduction* (Kinshasa: Editions du Mont Noir, 1972), see also: Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, *V. Y. Mudimbe. Undisciplined Africanism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 52-9. See also: Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (Milton: Routledge, 2018), 176.

45 See various chapters in: Michael O. Afoláyan, ed., *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa. Paradigms of Development, Decline and Dilemmas* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007) and J.F. Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma & G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Accra: The Association of African Universities, 1996), 144-66.

46 Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 72-73.

47 Mamdani, "Introduction: The Quest for Academic Freedom", 3.

48 Brizuela-Garcia, "African Historiography and the Crisis of Institutions", 150.

education in order to focus on other forms of education.[49] As Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Olukoshi have noted, this tended to work in favour of authoritarian regimes who benefitted from a clipped academic class.[50]

Since the 1980s African universities have also had to contend with a brain drain as a result of the developments described above — which included some of the ISC members, such as Mazrui who exchanged Makerere university in Uganda for the university of Michigan in the United States as a result of Idi Amin's regime.[51] One example of decline, and resulting brain drain, is the fate of history as a discipline in Nigeria. In an article for *History in Africa*, published in 2006, Olutayo Adesina placed the *General History of Africa* itself in a larger narrative of decolonisation, the emergences of new elites and the eventual fading to the background of history as an academic discipline in the Nigerian academy. Adesina placed the blame of this decline with the instability created by a succession of military regimes and the Structural Adjustment Plan adopted in 1986. The latter especially introduced what Adesina called a 'widespread cynicism about the utilitarian value of history.' Students, who had become infected with the same logic of utilitarianism, increasingly opted for diplomas that seemed more practical and lucrative, such as management, accountancy, business and Law. The early dreams of Africanists of mental liberation

49 Lynn Hewlett et al., "Key Features of Student Protest Across Historical Periods in Sub-Saharan Africa" in *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa,* ed. Susan Booysen (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 330-334, 332.

50 Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Olukoshi, "Issues and Perspectives in the Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa" in *Between Liberation and Oppression. The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa,* eds. Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Olukoshi (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1995), 1-20, 4.

51 Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals,* 214 and Claude Ake, "Academic Freedom and Material Base" in *Academic Freedom in Africa,* eds. Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997), 17-25, 18-20. Jan Vansina also commented on the increasing difficulty of conducting long-term fieldwork in Africa as a result of changing political conditions, Jan Vansina, *Living With Africa,* 203.

and emancipation, Adesina concluded, only seemed viable in times of economic optimism.[52]

As a result of these crises, moreover, ideals of widespread dissemination and the wish to facilitate the spread of knowledge, highlighted in Chapter 3, turned out to be difficult to realise.[53] Prices set for volumes I and II by non-African publishers, such as Heinemann or UNESCO itself, proved unfeasible on the continent.[54] As Ogot noted in a report of the Ibadan meeting in 1981 written for M'Bow, the prices, such as at 22 naira per volume in Nigeria, were too high, especially for students. 'It was clearly paradoxical and outrageous that the work should sometimes cost twice as much in Africa as in Europe or the United States, when its primary function had been intended to be to help Africans to recover their past.' Ogot also noted, however, that this was not solely to be blamed on publishers, given the economic crises in several African countries. The committee, he reported, hoped that UNESCO could come up with a comprehensive pricing policy, partly in the form of allowing free circulation of the work.[55] No one was going to even consider buying the volumes, however, if they did not

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52 Olutayo C. Adesina, "Teaching History in Twentieth Century Nigeria: The Challenges of Change" *History in Africa* 33 (2006): 17-37, 23, 27-33. Regarding student protests in Nigeria as a result of SAP as well as autocratic university administrators, see: Isaac O. Albert, "University Students in the Politics of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria" in *Between Liberation and Oppression. The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa,* eds. Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Olukoshi (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1995), 374-393.

53 In 2021, it seems the English version of the volumes is much better represented across libraries worldwide, at least according to Worldcat. For instance, the English edition of the first volume can be found in 119 libraries, whereas the French version is only available in 39. Patrick Manning found a much wider discrepancy even, with 915 libraries having the English edition of volume I and only 57 French editions. I suspect this may partly be a result of Worldcat's methods and bias towards the English language. The discrepancy between my finds and Mannings' might be a result of the different years in which the searches were conducted. Chloé Maurel, "L'histoire Générale de l'Afrique de l'Unesco. Un projet de coopération intellectuele transnationale d'esprit afro-centré (1964-1999)" *Cahiers d'études africaines* 215 (2014): 715-737, 733.

54 UNESCO itself was not always as inclusive of African contexts as would have been ideal for the project. For example, the paper size specified in the *Guide for the Preparation of the General History of Africa* was 'unobtainable in Ibadan', as one clerk informed UNESCO in 1974, UAP, CC CSP 40, A.F.C Ryder to Acting Director Department of Studies, Development & Dissemination of Cultures, UNESCO, 22-03-1974.

55 This eventually did happen in the form of online publications via UNESDOC, UAP, CC CSP 33, Bethwell A. Ogot to Mr. M'Bow, 30-08-1981, 4.

hit the shelfs of bookstores. The 1981 Ibadan meeting established that volumes I and II were almost impossible to find in Liberia, Zambia or Zaire, for example.[56] Moreover, during the 1983 ISC meeting in Brazzaville 'the committee members present in Brazzaville found ample evidence that the work was not on sale in the city and that very little was known about it there.'[57] The committee again hoped that UNESCO would remedy the problem. This time they advised establishing contacts with international, national, regional and private agencies in order to 'provide maximum publicity at the time of publication of the volumes.'[58] In a testimony to the pressing nature of the problem, earlier recommendations had been made towards this goal in 1975, 1981 and 1982.[59] In 1984 UNESCO did indeed promise to launch a campaign to promote volume I and II, although it is unclear what came of this.[60]

The GHA relied on UNESCO to keep the project running financially, administratively and through its policies. The organisation was for a long time capable of keeping up this work. It flew contributors and committee members across the continent and the world and facilitated meetings. It was a testimony to the organisation's commitment — specifically, certain individuals within it, such as M'Bow — to African epistemological growth, Africanisation and independence.[61] UNESCO, however, was not hampered in the same way by the economic and political predicaments of many humanities departments on the continent, at least not until 1984.[62] Promoting broad education on the continent,

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56 UAP, CC CSP 33, Bethwell A. Ogot to Mr. M'Bow, 30-08-1981, 4.

57 UAP, CLT/83/508/3, Sixth plenary session of the international scientific committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Brazzaville, 1-3 August 1983, 4. (Hereafter: UAP, Sixth Plenary Session)

58 UAP, Sixth plenary session, 4

59 Ibid and UAP, SHC/75/CONF.613/3, International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 3rd plenary session, Cotonou, Benin (Dahomey), 8-13 September 1975, 18-9.

60 UAP, CC CSP 37, CLT/84/503/2, Seizième reunion du Bureau du Comité scientifique international pour la redaction d'une Histoire Générale de l'Afrique. Paris, 9-18 juillet 1984, Information Note, 4.

61 Casper Andersen, ""Scientific independence", capacity building, and the development of UNESCO's science and technology agenda for Africa." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 50:3 (2017): 379-394, 383-5

62 For an insightful overview of contemporary funding challenges in African higher education see: Dantew Teferra, "Funding Higher Education in Africa: State, Trends and Perspectives" *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 11:1 (2013): 19-51.

both lower and higher, moreover, had always been a primary concern of UNESCO.[63] UNESCO allowed for continued agency for global south actors, even amidst neoliberal policies, and whilst SAP's changed the intellectual landscape in Africa. This is not to say that the individual committee members were not suffering from the relative lack of funding within the African academy, or that flying to different meetings and seminars did not take its toll upon their personal and academic lives.

In fact, as is evident already from the first page of this chapter, committee members often complained. 'Your staff in Cotonou in charge of travel arrangements were charming and well-meaning, but I regret they were not always thorough. I wish someone had told me that there was a Pan-American flight from Lagos to New York on Sunday, 14 September.' Wrote Mazrui to Glélé on 24 September 1975.[64] Aklilu Habte, who attended the same meeting complained about the delay with which his ticket had been delivered, causing him to have to pay for the airfare himself.[65] Moreover, Ajayi and Mazrui both wrote numerous letters asking for the dates of meetings to be changed because they could not be made to fit their individual schedules — in which Ajayi also joked about not wanting to stay in Paris during winter.[66] Mazrui especially mentioned that the dates for meetings changed too often for his taste, making it impossible for him to arrange his schedule around the GHA meetings.[67] Frequent travel by ISC members for various academic jobs also caused letters, and sometimes people, to cross and thereby miss each other. This happened for instance when Ajayi tried to reach Emmanuel Pouchpa Das, director of Culture and Communication at UNESCO, from London rather than Lagos in preparation for the Ibadan meeting.[68]

Simultaneously and alongside these complaints, however, ISC members also used UNESCO to get around. Mazrui, for instance, on occasions used meetings in Paris as a stopover between Detroit and Mombasa and had UNESCO pay for the airfare.[69] In a letter he wrote 'I have

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63 Damiano Matasci, "Assessing Needs, Fostering Development. UNESCO, Illiteracy and the Global Politics of Education (1945-1960)" *Comparative Education* 53:1 (2017): 35-53.

64 UAP, CC CSP 31, Ali Mazrui to Maurice Glélé, 24-09-1975.

65 UAP, CC CSP 31, Aklilu Habte to Maurice Glélé, 21-10-1975.

66 UAP, CC CSP 32, Jacob Ade Ajayi to Gerard Bolla, 28-04-1976

67 UAP, CC CSP 32, Ali Mazrui to M. Bammate, 20-10-1976.

68 UAP, CC CSP 33, Ade Ajayi to Pouchpa Das, 05-02-1981.

69 Ibid.

discovered that I have not charged you for my airfare for 1982!! No wonder I am always broke!'[70] Fernando Augusto Albuquerque Mouraõ, member of the ISC from Brazil, similarly used the opportunity provided by ISC meetings to extend his visit to Europe and fly to Rome and Lisbon on UNESCO's dime.[71] On another occasion Boahen wrote he was 'a little disappointed by [the] postponement of the April meeting. I need so many things such as tooth paste, toilet roll, soap which I had hoped to purchase, not to mention some tyre and spare parts for my Car (Peugeot 505). I will try and survive till July.'[72] At the time, Ghana suffered from a drought as well as a migration crisis, as Nigeria had sent home some 1.5 million migrants. A simultaneous disastrous economic programme was introduced by the military government led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, causing Boahen to suffer from a lack of amenities.

What these examples show is both the value that UNESCO had in ISC members individual lives as well as the economic difficulties that various members had to content with throughout the project. It, moreover, shows how multifaceted and international the life of a professor of African history was, in the late 20th century. In February 1982, for instance, Mazrui send a circular letter to his colleagues, including Glélé, informing them of his calendar for the academic year. The letter emphasised that he had lectures 'on five continents' and would have two academic postings that year, in Jos, Nigeria and at the University of Michigan, in the United States.[73] Ogot, Vansina as well as Philip Curtin and John Fage equally emphasised the international character of their work in their autobiographies.[74]

The practices that became a part of life as an ISC member, the continual, sometimes uncomfortable, travel and the need to visit several academic centres for one's research and career, were not only a necessity of academic life, but also a part of the optimism of the

70 UAP, CC CSP 36, Ali Mazrui to Maurice Glélé, 01-06-1983.

71 UAP, CC CSP 33, Gustave López, Représentant de l'Unesco au Brésil á Maurice Glélé, 18-12-1980.

72 UAP, CC CSP 36, A.A. Boahen to Maurice Glélé, 21-03-1981.

73 UAP, CC CSP 35, circular letter Ali A. Mazrui, February 1982.

74 See: Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), Philip D. Curtin, *On the Fringe of History. A memoir* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisumu: Ayange Press Limited, 2003) and John Fage, *To Africa and Back: memoirs* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham. Centre of West African Studies, 2002)

post-independence period. Travelling across the world was a part of accepting the legacy of that post-independence period. It was a way of claiming Africa's rightful place in the postcolonial academic, as well as political, order. Throughout the lifespan of the GHA, however, this optimism had begun to wane. In the 1970s and the 1980s it became apparent that political representation was not enough to wrest free from economic and mental control by 'the west'. Intellectual attitudes towards nation-building and the related production of historical memory changed drastically, as Joseph Ki-Zerbo explained in a paper from 2003, reprinted in 2005.[75] The goals of emancipation had changed. As a result of this development postcolonial criticism began to flourish — the first text that drove this point home was Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, as David Scott observes.[76]

Scott's analysis of the moving goalposts of the post-independence period can be applied to the GHA and, in part, explain why the project increasingly started to struggle from the 1970s onwards and simultaneously, somewhat paradoxically, played the role of lifebuoy for some ISC members and contributors.[77] UNESCO had functioned as a facilitator from the start of the project, but the responsibilities conferred upon the agency increased throughout the 1970s and 80s.[78] Synchronously, the working conditions of the historians working on the project deteriorated whilst they also became busier. The academic and institutional momentum of the 1960s gradually disappeared during the decades the GHA was written. Nevertheless, the GHA persisted to adhere to a collectivist pan-African nationalist vision of history. And it was partly due to these ideals that some of the financial difficulties became really pressing. The ISC and the secretariat would rather spend time writing fundraising letters to champagne farmers, than try to cut some of the expenditure. For instance, by dividing the work over a

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75 Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "African intellectuals, nationalism and pan-Africanism: a testimony" in *African Intellectuals. Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, ed. Thandika Mkandawire (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 78-93, 80-8.

76 Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 10-15.

77 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 201.

78 In her study on UNESCO's world heritage programme in Ethiopia, Marie Huber concludes that it was also during these decades that UNESCO expanded its operational capacity and evolved from a more intellectual into a more operational organisation. Marie Huber, *Developing Heritage – Developing Countries. Ethiopian Nation-Building and the Origins of UNESCO World Heritage, 1960-1980* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 168.

smaller number of academics. The next section will detail how important the ideal of collectivity and including as many academics as possible actually was. Although, as time and money became more pressing, more and more meetings were indeed organised in Paris, which would have cut some costs. It may have been that rising political tensions on the continent made it harder to travel between African countries. As a result, some ideals, such as collectivity, became more expedient than others, such as meeting on the continent itself.

Why, moreover, did the GHA cling to such ideals rather than change its way of working? It had partly been the result of UNESCO's universalist and cosmopolitan outlook. The idea that peace, in a post-World War II world could be best secured through not only political international cooperation, but also through intellectual and moral solidarity became part and parcel of UNESCO's raison d'être.[79] It had therefore become possible for a network of intellectuals connected to the GHA to establish itself and leave traces of African historiography as well as UNESCO's presence not just in the official UNESCO archives but also elsewhere. In Ibadan, for instance, there is a small three room private-archive the owner of which is Christie Ade Ajayi, the late Jacob Ade Ajayi's wife.[80] This archive still contains numerous documents pertaining to UNESCO and the GHA. It is likely that there are a multitude of such private archives containing UNESCO materials around the continent, a testimony to the amount of travelling GHA historians did.

UNESCO held on to dreams of one-worldism and universality when they had slowly began to lose appeal elsewhere in the academy and despite ardent critique.[81] It was this commitment that contributed to the eventual bringing to fruition of the GHA and, later on, other General History projects.[82] In his 1994 autobiography Vansina made a similar point regarding the value of UNESCO and the GHA:

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79 Fernando Valderrama, *A History of UNESCO* (Paris: UNESCO, 1995), 308, 317, 328, 348, 374 and Glenda Sluga, "UNESCO and the (one) world of Julian Huxley." *Journal of World History* 21:3 (2010): 393-418, 393-4.

80 Larissa Schulte Nordholt, "From Metropole to Margin in *UNESCO's General History of Africa* – Documents of Historiographical Decolonization in Paris and Ibadan" *History in Africa* 46 (2019): 403-412.

81 Lynn Meskell, *A Future in Ruins UNESCO, World Heritage and the Dream of Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 223.

82 As well as its world heritage list for which it is so well-known today.

> The situation [regarding the decline of African studies on the continent] would have been worse were it not for UNESCO and especially the *General History of Africa* project. Not only were African scholars such as Jacob Ajayi, Adu Boahen, Bethwell A. Ogot, and Joseph Ki-Zerbo leading figures in the activities, and not only did meetings of the committee or its bureau provide regular occasions for such leaders to meet and confer, but the project spawned the realisation of smaller projects. [...] The UNESCO project has therefore been a major catalyst in the historiography of the field.[83]

The GHA was perhaps most important not for its actual output, but for the connections and activities it engendered that allowed for African history to be led by African historians.[84] Measured by the yardstick of its own success, the GHA did perhaps not always do well. However, when moving away from the actor's perspective, the GHA may very well have contributed substantially to the development of African history as a scholarly endeavour, both inside and outside the continent.

'Slow progress', 'recalcitrant authors' and 'continual delays'

Despite the eventual completion of the GHA, the project dealt with a lack of engagement and an excruciating slow pace of work throughout most of its existence. By looking at the mechanics of these issues as well as the response from some of the projects' pioneers and their attempts at solving the problem, this section offers a description of the daily regime of the GHA when it comes to work ethic and explains how the ideal of collectivity was made so important that practical needs were sometimes sacrificed for it.

One very basic, albeit often difficult, requirement was that authors would make their deadlines. Another was the expectation that ISC and Bureau members would show up to their respective meetings and, crucially, engage in the work that had to be done both during as well as in-between sessions. Scholars were required to provide the editors

83 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 201-2.

84 A prime example of this is the 1974 Cairo meeting during which Diop's work was discussed. The meeting seems to have worked as a catalyst for new discussions within African history and Egyptology.

of the volumes with names of possible authors and to respond with critique to written chapters. This important, but cumbersome, collaborative work ethic, however, caused delay after delay. After all, if the whole committee of 39 members spread across four continents was supposed to respond to every communication, it was bound to take a while before decisions could be made. Delays therefore became the main annoyance of the GHA. The problem of the slow pace of work was inherently linked to a lack of engagement from some key contributors, which in turn was often connected to their extremely and, after 1970, increasingly busy schedules as part of the small new intelligentsia of the post-colonial nations of Africa. Whilst some ISC members, such as Ajayi, literally went the extra mile to make the project into a success, others were swept away by other responsibilities.

How to solve the problem was a matter of discussion. In a letter send to Glélé on 3 February 1983, Vansina complained about the slow pace with which the work was progressing, sparking a small debate amongst ISC members:

> I am very concerned by the delay which, once again, had built up over the past two months. [...] The delays are becoming intolerable and I feel it is time new measures were proposed, in addition to those adopted some years ago, to speed up the whole process. What I propose is that any new chapter, or major revision concerning Volume III, IV and V be henceforth entrusted to a member of the Committee [...], and preferably to the Volume Director. [...] I know this proposal has its drawbacks. But these are less serious than the continual delays which are having a very harmful effect on our project. My proposal would at least eliminate the problem of contributions that are long overdue — authors seem to be almost incapable of keeping their word [...] I would be grateful if you could put this proposal to all the members of the Bureau and see what their reactions is [sic]. [...] I am convinced that we shall be forced to adopt measures of this kind after the month of August if we do not do so earlier. If we wait until then members will first of all go on vacation, after which they will settle in to work until October and then — thanks to the academic year — go into hibernation once more. But the time has come to take these problems serious-

> ly. We only have to look at the small amount of new work which has actually been done since the meeting at the end of July 1982 to realise this. At this rate it will be two or three years before we have finished, and by that time we shall have to write the work all over again if it is not to be outdated before it is published. [...] The proposal that our own group should do as much of the work as possible would enable me and my colleagues to draw up a realistic timetable and to know when a special effort will have to be made. If we are criticised because too many chapters have been drafted by the Volume Directors and the members of the Committee, our reply will be that if we had depended on recalcitrant authors we should still be waiting for the work to be finished.[85]

Vansina's main concern was with 'recalcitrant authors' who did not deliver their chapters on time. But, overall, he was exasperated with the way the work had progressed, or rather, lacked progress and he identified the collaborative nature and the insistence that as many academics as possible be involved as the reasons for it. Given the fact that he had been involved with the GHA since 1970, thirteen years, during which only two of the eight proposed volumes had been published, this is not all that surprising. At the second plenary session of the ISC, in Lusaka, in 1973, a timetable was adopted in which volumes I and II would be ready for publication in November 1974.[86] However, both volumes were only published in 1981. The final volume was not published in both English and French until 1998.[87]

In the meanwhile, the project had suffered from a lack of engagement from the majority of the ISC members. As a result of the slow progress of the work, moreover, meetings sometimes had to be cancelled.[88] Although the committee consisted of 39 members, the project was de facto brought to fruition by only a handful of them. Maurice Glélé kept track of the activity of committee members and how often

85 UAP, CC CSP 36, Jan Vansina to Maurice Glélé, 03-02-1983.

86 UAP, 2nd Plenary Session, Lusaka 1973, 4

87 Chloé Maurel notes that translations of the volumes between French and English often slowed the work down considerably. Maurel, "L'histoire Générale de l'Afrique de l'Unesco", 730.

88 UAP, CC CSP 46, Bethwell A. Ogot to Emmanuel Pouchpa Dass 06-07-1978.

they replied to letters.[89] A 'state of consultations for the preparation of volumes I to VIII' was attached as annex to the report of the 7th meeting of the Bureau, which took place from 18–29 July 1977 in Paris. During that meeting problems with the functioning of the committee and bureau were discussed. 'Despite the reminders issued at Lusaka and Cotonou, there has been no improvement in the participation of its members in the activities of the Committee. [...] The work is still being carried out by a few people. [...] The situation is becoming disturbing.' The meeting emphasised, once again, that the Committee carried a joint responsibility.[90] Generally speaking, less than half of the committee members replied to circular letters asking for consultations on tables of content and suggested authors and often it was less than a third. Glélé had also tracked who had never once replied. Amadou Hampaté Ba was on the list, as were Musa Galaal, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Cheikh Anta-Diop. However, the latter did attend almost all meetings and fulfilled an important job as reading committee member for volume II. Diop was therefore on the list of three members who had 'regularly attended all the meetings', alongside Jean Devisse and Jacob Ade Ajayi.[91] The key members that did the brunt of the work, not just in the writing of chapters, but by providing the daily academic and practical input necessary for the work to be completed, were Jan Vansina, Jacob Ade Ajayi, Jean Devisse, Adu Boahen and Ivan Hrbek, and, despite his failure to respond to circular letters, Jospeh Ki-Zerbo. Bethwell Ogot, moreover, was also of great importance, although he only became seriously involved after about 1975 and even more so after 1978, when he became president of the committee.[92]

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89 Ali Mazrui is not included in this tally because he was not officially a member of the ISC. This did not keep others, such as Adu Boahen, from complaining about his absence from certain meetings. UAP, CC CSP 42, Adu Boahen to Maurice Glele, 23-01-1987.

90 JTLI, JAAP, Box 73, Seventh Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Paris 18-29 July 1977, 6-7.

91 JTLI, JAAP, Box 73, Seventh Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Paris 18-29 July 1977, Annex A, State of Consultations for the Preparation of Volumes I to VIII and UAP, Meeting of the Bureau Rwanda 1972, 19.

92 During two meetings it was explicitly stated that the committee 'regretted the absence of Professor Ogot'. Gradually however, Ogot came to engage with the project more and more. UAP, Meeting of the Bureau, Cairo, 1971, Annex I, 18 and UAP, CLT CID 140, Christophe Wondji á Madame Coffi-Studer, 19-01-1995.

Most likely the lack of engagement from some members of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (ISC) was brought on by the fact that the *General History of Africa* was a project taken on by Committee members on top of their already taxing full-time engagements as professors, teachers, administrators and sometimes politicians — a problem which was perhaps even more dire for those situated at African rather than Euro-American institutions. Given the fact that the GHA had aimed to attract eminent personalities to their ISC, it is not all that surprising that some turned out to be too busy to actually engage in the work. For some, it seems, the GHA may have been a prestige project. In 1977, Percy Stulz, who was the head of the cultural heritage division at UNESCO, made the same observation, and added sickness and old age to the list of reasons why the ISC was not functioning as well as it should.[93] He also suggested unresponsive members of the ISC needed to be replaced.[94] This did happen on occasion, but generally speaking only on a voluntary basis.

Vansina's solution to the slow-paced problem, moreover, demanded more, rather than less engagement from the ISC and Bureau members who already had a considerable workload. Maurice Glélé responded quickly and in agreement. 'The authors have been known to take six months to a year to reply, if indeed they reply at all.'[95] Ki-Zerbo, Kimambo, El Fasi and Grottanelli also agreed with Vansina's plan.[96] Ajayi was less enthusiastic. He was concerned that Vansina's plan to have the committee take up more of the work was only going to exacerbate the problem, as most of the active committee members were

93 And he was not wrong, Mekki Shibeika, for instance, cancelled several meetings as a result of a heart-condition and a heart-attack in 1979. A year on, he had died. UAP, CC CSP 33, Mekki Shibeika to Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, 14-08-1979.

94 UAP, CLT CID 103, Percy Stulz to Maurice Glélé, 23-03-1977.

95 UAP, CC CSP 36, Maurice Glélé to Jan Vansina, undated.

96 Somewhat ironically, however, Ki-Zerbo took three and a half months to reply. UAP, CC CSP 36, Joseph Ki-Zerbo á Maurice Glélé, 26-05-1983; UAP, CC CSP 36, I.N. Kimambo to Maurice Glélé, 24-03-1983; UAP, CC CSP 36, Mohammed El Fasi to Maurice Glele, 14-03-1983 and UAP, CC CSP 36, Vinigi Grottanelli to Maurice Glélé, 21-03-1983.

already overworked.[97] The editors worked as hard as they could, Ajayi pressed. He was not amused at the suggestion that they, or he, did not.[98] During the meeting that followed Vansina's complaint measures were discussed to speed up the process. Although Vansina's ideas were not taken up, it was decided, as Ajayi had suggested, that volume editors would spend some time at UNESCO in Paris to complete their volumes. It was also decided that the rapporteurs of the reading committees would be asked to take part in the meetings of the Bureau in order to further smoothen the process of editing the chapters.[99] At the 19th Bureau meeting in Paris in 1987, finally, the group decided that chapters needed to be approved of during the meeting itself if the volume under discussion of that time, volume VIII, was to be finished.[100] The necessity of solidarity amongst those working on the GHA was underlined at several meetings and, on occasion the reports even stated that there was a 'moral compact [sic]' between UNESCO and the committee members or spoke of 'moral obligations' on the part of authors.[101] Evidently, this moral contract was not enough to overcome certain practical difficulties.

The collaborative aspect of the GHA was both an asset to the *History* as well as a liability. Whilst solidarity and an open attitude geared towards the sharing of knowledge were ideals of importance within the GHA, these ideals simultaneously seemed to cause 'intolerable' delays. The historiographical wish to emphasise (African) diversity was

97 In 1985, when the situation had not changed significantly, Adu Boahen made another list of suggestions in which the various editors of the work had to take action. In a reply to this specific letter, Vansina noted that the delays were indeed 'endangering the whole enterprise' UAP, CC CSP 37, Adu Boahen to Maurice Glélé, 20-03-1985 and UAP, CC CSP 37, Jan Vansina to Adu Boahen, 05-04-1985. Boahen himself, however, at times also seemed to be guilty of a lack of engagement as the committee complained that Boahen had been absent during two meetings in 1979. UAP, CC CSP 33, Emmanuel Pouchpa Dass to Mr. B. Atepor Deputy Permanent Delegate of Ghana to UNESCO, 24-07-1979.

98 UAP, CC CSP 36, Jacob Ade Ajayi to Maurice Glélé, 29-03-1983.

99 UAP, UNESCO Sixth Plenary Session of the International Committee, Brazzaville 1-3 August, 2-3.

100 UAP, CLT CID 154, 19th Bureau meeting, Paris, 21-25 September 1987, 5.

101 Most likely, 'compact' here is supposed to read 'contract'. UAP, CC-79/CONF.609/1, Report of the Extraordinary Plenary Session of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Paris, 30-31 July 1979, 5 and UAP, SHC.75/CONF.601/3, Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 5th meeting, Fez, Morocco, 5-11 February 1975, 11.

translated into a practice of circular letters and endless consultations. Every committee member had to have an opinion on whatever author was proposed or however the table of contents for a volume was supposed to look like. As a result, an almost endless stream of documents, reports, annexes and letters was produced and mailed across the world. This also caused an increasingly heavy workload to land on the shoulders of UNESCO's employees, such as Glélé, as noted in 1979.[102] The GHA would come to rely on UNESCO for supporting work in growing amounts throughout its lifespan.

Regardless of all the problems, Vansina's proposed solution for the sluggish pace at which the GHA progressed was not taken on board. His solutions, to centre the work on a smaller number of individuals, did not suit the principles of the GHA. The project, after all, wanted to be collaborative. The collective responsibility of everyone involved was constantly emphasised, for instance in the reading committee system.[103] At the 9th bureau meeting in 1979 the decision was made to add a note to the beginning of each volume, underlining once more the collective responsibility of the committee.[104] Moreover, several chapters across volumes were attributed to up to five authors, sometimes adding the phrase 'in collaboration with.'[105] Disagreements were settled through debate, followed by diplomacy and, failing that, the adding of statements of disagreements at the ends of chapters — as was done with Cheikh Anta Diop's chapter in volume II. Being disagreeable, it seems, was a vice that was tolerated, whereas deviating from the ideal of collectivity was not.

This need to exude the kind of scholarship that valued the collaborative effort, moreover, stressed the importance of a scholarly perso-

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102 UAP, CC CSP 33, Memorandum submitted by the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee to the Director-General of Unesco, July 1979.

103 See for instance: UAP, 2nd Plenary Session, Lusaka 1973, 21-26 May, 14 and UAP, SHC/75/CONF.613/3, International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 3rd plenary session, Cotonou, Benin (Dahomey), 8-13 September 1975, 9.

104 JTLI, JAAP, Box 73, Ninth meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Paris, Unesco, 11-24 July 1979, 38.

105 See: Majhemout Diop in collaboration with David Birmingham, Ivan Hrbek, Alfredo Margarido and Djibril Tamsir Niane, "Tropical and equatorial Africa under French, Portuguese and Spanish domination, 1935-45" in *General History of Africa VIII. Africa since 1935*, ed. Ali A. Mazrui, ass. ed. C. Wondji (London: Heinemann Educational, 1993), 58-75.

na actively engaged in the idea of knowledge production as a shared endeavour. This idea is somewhat different from the Romantic figure of the individual author as a genius, which has been rather influential throughout the history of Euro-American scholarship.[106] A difference that is only in degree rather than essence, since the GHA still identified individual scholars as authors.[107] Individual scholarship, then, was still praised and made meaningful within a constellation of other scholars in which solidarity was a key epistemic and moral virtue to adhere to. Given the anti-colonial and political nature of the work undertaken, the centralisation of solidarity as a moral value is hardly surprising. Within the history of emancipatory movements, inside and outside of intellectual debate, solidarity has always been emphasised as key in order to achieve victory and this was most definitely the case for anti-colonial movements, at least rhetorically.[108] For, by the 1970s many anti-colonial nationalist movements in the West and East African countries that had come to dominate the GHA were no longer as revolutionary as they had been previously. Many West and East African countries had become one party states.

The emphasis on collaboration, moreover, did not mean there was no unequal distribution of work, as Glélé's tally from 1977 makes abundantly clear. Rather, it is a testimony to the commitment made to the project and its ideal of collaboration by those who did the brunt of the work. As such, it is a testimony not to the absence of inequality, but, rather, to the attempt of ridding the work of such inequality.

Conclusions

When it came to practical difficulties, the *General History of Africa* was troubled by both external factors as well as its own refusal to let go

106 Christine Haynes, "Reassessing "Genius" in Studies of Authorship. The State of the Discipline" *Book History* 1:8 (2015): 287-320, 287-291.

107 See for instance Travis E. Ross' work on *The Works of Hubert H. Bancroft*, another large-scale 20th century work of history, in which individual authorial identities were erased in an effort to strengthen the brand. Ross argues that the reason behind this was the single author as a recognizable and therefore sellable entity for a larger public. Travis E. Ross, "Fixing genius: the Romantic man of letters in the university era" in *How to be a Historian. Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800-2000*, ed. Herman Paul (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2019), 53-71.

108 Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire. Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019), 23, 333, 342-3.

of some of the early ideals of the project. The early years of the project, moreover, were marked by an abundance of opportunity: in the 1960s and 1970s, African historians had opportunities that have since disappeared and that were novel at the time as well. In fact, there were so many opportunities that many historians embarked on perhaps too many projects at once — there were perhaps too many possibilities resulting in a lack of sustainable growth for African studies on the African continent. Later on, the project increasingly had to look for outside funding as the original UNESCO funding ran out, whilst contending with shifting political climates, the results of which impacted the historians working for the GHA. Contributing to emancipation through a widespread dissemination of the GHA became more difficult as political interest, and therefore also funding, dwindled. Yet, despite all this, the GHA was finished in part because UNESCO offered a political as well as financial safe haven. The GHA increasingly came to fulfil a function not just as a project of historiographical change, but as a network of intellectuals. At the same time, the ISC's insistence on widespread dissemination and other grand plans shows at least some sort of financial illiteracy or unwillingness to contend with changing realities. Following Scott's analysis on the moving goalposts of emancipation, moreover, it is safe to say that UNESCO existed somewhere between the post-independence ideal of political emancipation and nation-building and post-colonial critique geared towards mental liberation. The following chapters will delve deeper into this conundrum in an analysis of the role of Euro-Americans within the project as well as the dynamic of political activism that becomes apparent in historiographical debates concerning the role of colonialism in African history.

The economy of knowledge production within the project, moreover, was geared towards the inclusion of as many African historians as possible, as stressed in part one of this chapter. During meetings solidarity and the sharing of academic responsibility was emphasised, whilst detachment and the centralisation of decision-making were discouraged. The rules had made this clear in the positioning documents. What this chapter has shown, is that the emphasis on collaboration was important enough to allow the work to take much longer than was originally intended. Despite considerable delays, the GHA mostly stuck to its original ideals of a collaborative work ethic and diversity of authors. The solution to the problem was sought in bringing the work to meetings rather than leaving it with individual committee

members, and by pressing the importance of solidarity, rather than making a substantial change in the process of creating the work itself. In this way an academic atmosphere of mutuality and debate was created. This was in line with the activist and pan-African ideals of shared knowledge production with which the GHA had started out. Yet, this ideal jeopardised the ideal of political emancipation during the period of nation-building. By the time the GHA volumes started appearing, political concerns had shifted considerably.

CHAPTER SIX
Positionality and the Global Politics of Knowledge Production within the *General History of Africa*

Introduction

What was the role of Euro-American historians within the GHA? This chapter continues the exploration of African collectivity as a reality and concentrates on one specific matter of tension within the GHA; the paradoxical presence of white European and white American historians of Africa. It shows how these Euro-American historians — largely men rather than women, who were not very present in the GHA — became increasingly important throughout the lifespan of the project as a result of growing inequalities in the global production of knowledge about Africa, as already commented upon in the last chapter. This chapter, however, focuses not so much on the African side of this equation, but contrasts the global south and north. As such, the chapter analyses why ideals of pan-African collectivity were difficult to translate into practice given the increasing predominance of some Euro-American authors as time wore on and connects this predominance to the geo-politics surrounding African studies. The chapter therefore explores how positionality within the global system

of knowledge production influenced the production of African historiography within the GHA.

The presence of Euro-American historians of Africa has remained problematic ever since the inception of the sub-discipline of African history, in specific, and within African studies, in general. The continuing imbalance regarding the study of Africa as situated within North America and Europe rather than on the continent itself has been the norm rather than the exception, over the past century, as commented upon by scholars such as Paul Tiyambe Zeleza.[1] As such, the *General History of Africa* with its relatively successful focus on African history as written by Africans has been somewhat of an outlier within African historiography. It nevertheless stumbled upon problems of Euro-American epistemic dominance. Although the presence of Euro-American experts had been foreseen from the very start and, to an extent, welcomed, it did sometimes interfere with the main goal of the GHA. Indeed, some complaints about the predominance of non-Africans within the project were voiced throughout the years. Moreover, despite the clear and constant stipulation that the GHA had to be written primarily by Africans, Europeans, such as Jan Vansina, played pivotal and cherished roles within the GHA and exerted their influence on the project. They were active and valued members of the GHA community. Their curious position within a project of African anti-colonial liberation and their presence within the GHA and the field of African history deserves scrutiny.

The chapter begins by discussing the position of Europeans within the project and the instances in which the European presence caused internal disruptions and debates for the GHA. In what way, if at all, did the presence of Euro-American scholars adversely affect the ideal of pan-African collectivity? This first section discusses how the global politics of knowledge production influenced the GHA as a result of the Cold War, specifically in regards to the development of African studies in the United States. The chapter, secondly, explains why Euro-American historians were able to take on such important roles within the GHA, arguing that it was the result of disparaging material circumstances.

Thirdly, the chapter elaborates on the public self-fashioning of both African and Euro-American historians within the GHA, as a result

1 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997), 61.

of the dynamic described in previous sections. Within the GHA, Ali Mazrui formulated what could be seen as a response to the reality of a European presence in African knowledge production at the time. He explained how he thought African historians should fashion their scholarly selves given the challenges of their situation. Mazrui argued for an insider–outsider perspective as a virtue to strive towards. This virtue lay at the core of what African history writing was all about. It is of illustrative importance to contrast Mazrui's insider–outsider perspective with how Euro-Americans presented themselves and how they asserted their authority as academics and professionals. The difference illuminates how global power structures and the resulting disparaging material realities translated in the practice of public self-presentation. This part of the chapter, therefore, concerns the scholarly self at the micro level, through individual conceptions of what it meant to be a historian of Africa and how to convey this to the outside world.[2]

The power of the European voice and the politics of global knowledge production

The prevailing concern within the GHA concerning Euro-American historians of Africa was that the presence of too many could endanger the projects' original goals and ideals. As Jean Devisse remarked in a reading report for volume IV:

> *Trop de chapitres sont attribués à des non-Africains et, aussi, à des francophones. Il faut absolument que nous respections les règles que nous sommes fixées à nous-mêmes.* [Too many chapters have been given to non-Africans, and Francophones, as well. It is imperative that we should respect the rules we have set for ourselves.][3]

One of the GHA's positioning ideals of African collectivity and thereby the ideal to write African history from 'within' was in danger of

2 Herman Paul, "Introduction. Scholarly Personae: what they are and why they matter." In *How to be a Historian. Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800-2000*, ed. Herman Paul (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 1-14, 3.

3 UAP, CC CSP 39, Observations Jean Devisse, date unclear.

being subverted and Devisse therefore reiterated the GHA's assertion that there needed to be an even spread of authors from different countries and between Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone areas. By 'non-African' Devisse in all probability was referring to what I have dubbed 'Euro-American' authors. The term non-African here, and elsewhere in the primary source material I have quoted, served almost as a euphemism to refer to white scholars from North America or Europe since there were very few Asian or other scholars involved in the project. At the same time, it may also have served as a way to centre the narrative on Africa, rather than Europe. However, in practice non-Africans within the GHA were almost always Euro-American scholars. Volume IV ended up with an equal amount of African and non-African authors.

Centring the narrative on Africa instead of Europe remained an issue throughout the lifespan of the GHA. A letter from ISC member since 1975 Phares M. Mutibwa, a Ugandan professor of history at Makerere University and a specialist on Madagascar, written on 16 March 1979 to Amadou Mahtar M'Bow illustrates this point. It shows what its author thought the consequences of such a Euro-American preponderance could be, especially regarding the GHA volumes that dealt with the history of colonialism. It also makes clear in what way the Cold War influenced the global politics of knowledge production. Mutibwa worried that European points of view and European political and epistemic concerns would come to dominate the History in favour of the African centred perspective the ISC had set out to embody. As Mutibwa wrote:

> The African voice should really be heard more effectively. [...] This point became more apparent to me at the last meeting of the Committee held in March–April 1978 in Nairobi when, largely because of the absence of several key scholars, the majority of the participants tended to be non-African. Partly therefore as a result of the somewhat predominant presence of non-African members, the Committee has tended to be involved in matters which, while they may be crucial to non-Africans, are not all that important for our own side of our history. Perhaps an example is called for in connection to this. At our last meeting in Nairobi there was some heated discussion of whether the Ethio-

> pian war of liberation during World War II was against fascist Italy or against Mussolini's Italy. Apparently there were some non-African members who objected to the use of the term 'fascist' to describe Italy. In other instances, there are quite often squabbles of ideological terms as well as terms affecting Colonialism in Africa in general. This is because we have on the Committee members from both capitalist and socialist camps who tend to see issues along ideological lines. I do not wish to suggest, Your Excellency, that ideologies are not important; but my point is that there is no reason why, in writing our own history, Africans should be involved in discussions that are raised by some members who just happen to come from different ideological camps. In this connection, one could perhaps cite Professor Philip D. Curtin's letter of 30 January 1979 to Dr. Maurice Glélé, in which, while commenting on Professor Mazrui's revision of volume 8, he referred 'a potential ideological split' if the organizational problems of chapter 26 overtly remained an ideological rather than a geographical division. Indeed, for us Africans the issues of chapter 26 may not be geographical but ideological ones. This is not to criticize Professor Curtin but merely to underline the sort of problems which we are involved in, which may reduce the effectiveness of our work. In other words [sic], the presence on the Committee of so many scholars from 'ideological areas' undermines Africans' efforts to reconstruct their — or, in this case our — history as we see it rather than as others see it.[4]

Mutibwa clearly did not want the GHA to be bogged down by discussions that seemed essentially centred around Euro-American sensibilities, such as Cold War ideologies or questions of terminology that pertained to European history and that were thus external to the concerns of the GHA. Mutibwa saw the concerns of 'non-Africans' as clearly deviating from the Afrocentric ideal the GHA had originally espoused. What the letter makes clear moreover is that pertaining to the history of more recent pasts, it was perhaps easier to confound po-

4 UAP, CC CSP 33, Phares M. Mutibwa to Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, 16th March 1979, 3-4.

litical and epistemic concerns seeing as the distance between the past and the present was less profound. African and non-African concerns may consequently have diverged somewhat more clearly regarding contemporary history. Resultant political and ideological differences in worldview were especially irksome when 'non-Africans' assumed that their position was the universal one and which thereby tended to overwhelm African perspectives. The fact that he specifically named Philip Curtin, an American, is telling. The 'ideological areas' Mutibwa refers to pertain to the bipolar world order that had emerged as a result of the Cold War.

The Cold War extensively influenced African politics and how one related to it politically certainly mattered within the politics of the GHA. Worldmaking for African nations had on several occasions been swayed by Cold War politics and related interventions by international powers, the most chilling example of which is the Congo Crisis.[5] In his autobiography Bethwell Ogot also commented on the presence of the Cold War within the GHA as something which tended to confuse priorities of perspectives between African, Soviet and Euro-American historians working on the project. He unsurprisingly ascertained that authors from either of the two superpowers or their allies could be overly concerned or cautious with matters that did not seem as pertinent to them or to other African ISC members.[6] The Cold War interfered in African's ability to centre knowledge production on Africa because it tended to force African academics to take a side in the global conflict. This was perhaps also the reason that GHA tried to avoid an undue emphasis on Marxist historiography. According to Frank Gerits and Mateo Grilli, moreover, it has recently started to become clear that perhaps it was the Cold War that limited the ability of new nationalist African leaders to build strong states in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than the legacy of colonial exploitation, as postcolonial studies scholars have argued.[7] The Mutibwa letter makes clear that this Cold War dynamic also played its part in sometimes derailing conversations

5 See: Alanna O'Malley, *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation: America, Britain and the United Nations During the Congo Crisis 1960-1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018)

6 Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of time* (Kisumu: Ayange Press Limited, 2003), 390.

7 Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, "Introduction" in *Visions of African Unity. New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, ed. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 1-20, 12.

within the GHA. It was, as it turned out, difficult to create an African centred history of Africa so long as one was part of the bipolar world order. Moreover, as long as authors from either block, broadly understood, were part of the GHA or even the ISC in particular, it was hard to rid the GHA of discussions and differences of opinion that were not strictly epistemic or related to African (political) realities, but instead linked to the Cold War. This was the case specifically because the GHA was a part of UNESCO and therefore had to position itself within the global political climate of the United Nations.

The Cold War, moreover, extensively influenced funding of African studies in the United States of America. American institutions of higher learning poured money into African studies programmes as part of their Cold War policies. The United States thereby aimed to shift the power balance within the global politics of knowledge production about Africa to make it fit with US political requirements. This inpour of American dollars created a decidedly unequal Africanist scene. As William Martin has shown in his analysis of the history of African studies in the United States, during the 20th century, the academic historical study of Africa slowly became to be centred on white institutions in North America, after having briefly resided in Africa in the 1960s and before that, for a much longer time, in north-western Europe.[8] White British scholars especially had been part and parcel of the period in which academic African history was on the rise in the 1960s. As Anthony Kirk-Greene writes, the British Africanist of the 1960s were almost all involved in the creation of departments of history at African institutions.[9] They often spent several years teaching in soon to become or recently independent African countries, before returning to Britain to build centres of Africanist study there.[10]

In the United States the African Studies Association was founded in 1957. It marked the beginning of Africanist scholarship there, although not the beginning of academic research into the African past. For a long time, this went largely unacknowledged by the ASA itself. In 1958 Melville Herskovits had stated that American Africanists

8 William G. Martin, "The Rise of African Studies (USA) and the Transnational Study of Africa." *African Studies Review* 54:1 (2011): 59-83, 60, 75.

9 Anthony Kirk-Greene, "The Emergence of an Africanist Community in the UK" in *The British Intellectual Engagement with Africa in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Douglas Rimmer and Anthony Kirk-Greene (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), 11-40, 11-2.

10 John McCracken, "African History in British Universities: Past, Present and Future", *African Affairs* 92:367 (1993): 239-53, 241.

could benefit from a 'heightened degree of objectivity' because the United States had no obvious political connection to the continent, thereby conveniently forgetting America's history of slavery.[11] Curtin had moreover claimed, in 1971 and again in a diluted manner in 1995, that the United States had had no real or 'serious' academic study of Africa before the Second World War.[12] Yet, before the white American discovery of Africa, a pan-African inspired academic study of the continent had already taken place at historically black institutions, such as Howard, since at least the late 19th century.[13] In the 1960s the programmes of African studies that had existed at these historically black universities, slowly lost funding, only to see it refocused on traditionally white northern schools.[14] This 'vindicationist' and 'transcontinental' tradition, led by the likes of W.E.B. Dubois and William Leo Hansberry, that had come into being since the late 19th century was closely related to the same brand of African history that was part and parcel of the GHA. As also discussed in Chapter 2, vindicationist history aimed to ascertain the authenticity of the African past to prove that white supremacist ideas on the absence of Afro-history were wrong. It sought a pan-African connection across the globe between different African peoples.[15] After World War II, however, predominantly white institutions became interested in Africa as well. These new Africanists sought a separation between the study of continental Africa and the (African-American) diaspora and related issues of race and identity — a separation which the GHA did not necessarily seek, even if it was also focused on the continent. In 1968 the systematic denial of African American interest in the African past within the American academy led to an altercation and eventual breach within the ASA as

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11 Jean M. Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall? A Meditation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968", *African Studies Review* 62:3 (2019): 6-39, 6.

12 Philip D. Curtin, "African Studies: A Personal Assessment." *African Studies Review* 14:3 (1971): 357-68, 358 and Philip D. Curtin, "Ghettoizing African History" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (1995). Recently, however, Jean Allman declared that #Herskovitsmustfall in the 2018 ASA presidential lecture, thereby criticizing the narrative that African studies in the USA was started by Melville Herskovits rather than W.E.B. Du Bois and 'meditating' on the whiteness of African studies in the US. See: Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall?", 7.

13 Martin, "The Rise of African Studies (USA)", 70.

14 Ibid, 76-7.

15 Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "Introduction" in *Out of One, Many Africas. Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa*, eds. William G. Martin and Michael O. West (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1999), 1-38, 19.

black scholars pushed for recognition. Yet, within the GHA African American scholars never claimed their place and it was Curtin who served as one of its most important American ISC members. As noted above, the post-1945 American interest in Africa was spurred on by the USA's Cold War motivated need for expertise on the continent, as funding was made available to allow for Americans to come to a better understanding of the so-called third world in order to claim it over the USSR. This somewhat embroiled African studies in the United States with the country's foreign expansion across the globe as well as with anti-communist tendencies. Moreover, even though these policies were created in the 1950s and 1960s and American African studies programmes suffered from budget cuts in the 1970 and 1980s like others across the globe, the result was that the study of Africa in North America became centred on historically white institutions — as Jean Allman eloquently articulated in a self-implicated indictment of the ASA during her presidential lecture in 2018.[16]

It is obvious that predominantly white American research universities benefitted from increased funding after World War 2.[17] African studies, as a result, became a more mainstream academic endeavour, pushing out the historically black colleges and universities. Pearl T. Robinson argues that this cannot be seen as existing separately from the State Departments Cold War fuelled concerns concerning the loyalties African Americans given the way they were treated in the United States and simultaneous fears over the domestic impact of Soviet anti-imperialist rhetoric.[18] As such, the intellectual pursuit of the African past was not left untouched by the country's history of racism and segregation. A continuing racial divide plagued the study of Africa in the United States especially, creating a gap between Euro-American, Afro-American and African inquiry into the continent in North America.[19] Once the global study of Africa became more consolidated around historically white North American centres, it moved away from some of its more radical pan-African roots. African history prac-

16 Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall?", 9-10.

17 Pearl T. Robinson, "Area Studies in Search of Africa" in *The Politics of Knowledge. Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (Berkeley: University of California, 2004), 119-183, 119-20.

18 Robinson, "Area Studies in Search of Africa", 143.

19 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Perpetual Solitudes and Crises of African Studies in the United States" *Africa Today* 44:2 (1997): 193-210, 193.

ticed as an area study in the United States, moreover, became divorced from African American studies in the mid-20th century. This may also be why African American scholars did not play key roles within the GHA. It, moreover, as Zeleza has argued, created a situation wherein knowledge about Africa was largely produced by white males in American institutions and centred around mostly English language journals. African produced knowledge on Africa eventually became the periphery.[20]

Given this context and the role the Cold War played in establishing it, it is unsurprising that it was relative to the Cold War that differences in perspective surfaced within the GHA, specifically because Mutibwa's complaint pertained to Curtin. That Curtin seemed to have thought that Chapter twenty-six, on 'Africa and the Capitalist countries', of volume VIII should be depoliticised was a testimony to his removal from what African historians' thought should be the key concern of African historiography. Chapter twenty-seven would concurrently deal with 'Africa and the Socialist Countries.' According to Ogot, the point of these chapters was to position Africa as neutral within the Cold War.[21] As a result of Africa's geopolitical position in-between two superpowers and as inhabitants of mostly newly independent nations, it may have been that African historians of Africa were more attuned to the ideological nature of the bipolar world system as opposed to Euro-Americans who were generally part of one of two poles — and this was the case specifically for Americans. Curtin seemed to have failed, at least in the eyes of Mutibwa, to reflect sufficiently on his own geopolitical position as American vis-à-vis his African colleagues. According to Mazrui, African historians of Africa, as insider–outsiders, may have been more likely to be aware of the fact that they were speaking from a point of view that was not inherently universal as a result of their historical position as outsiders. Mazrui berated European scholars who were unable to transcend their own

20 This has been disputed by, for instance, the authors of *Africa and the Disciplines*, cited elsewhere in this work. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Introduction. The Internationalisation of African Knowledges" in *The Study of Africa. Volume 2 Global and Transnational Engagements*, ed. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2007), 1-26, 2.

21 Ogot, *My Footprints*, 390.

cultural context.[22] I will return to Mazrui's ruminations at the end of this chapter.

To provide one further illustration of this position of Africans within the global system of knowledge production and diverging Euro-American and African ideas on what African history should be I want to turn to Ogot's autobiography again. Ogot remarked upon the positions of white scholars in Kenyan universities. For the purpose of Africanising the universities in his country these white scholars had to eventually leave. Unsurprisingly not all of them went willingly, but, Ogot noted, oftentimes, expatriate staff also made reaching the goal of Africanisation harder because they had different ideas on what a good university should be, how the Kenyans were to get there and were often removed from the concerns of the society they were to serve.[23] They had substantially different ideas on what good African scholarship meant and what the role of politics, specifically nation-building therein, should be.[24]

Disparate material circumstances

The GHA, then, had to deal with the problem of Euro-American perspectives and concerns presented as universal, often as part of the Cold War, and moreover, as threatening to push aside African perspectives, even if this happened without intent. Negating this had, in a way, been the very reason the GHA had come into being in 1964. Why then did so many European voices still interject as Devisse and Mutibwa had complained? A return to Mutibwa's letters provides one explanation why the GHA had to deal with squabbles over terminology and political sensitivities that were in some way external to African concerns:

> Perhaps to emphasise the predominance of non-African historians on many of the Committee's work (which is a result

22 Mazrui himself explicitly stated that he reviewed books with 'an African bias' in a letter. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter BHL UM), Ali A. Mazrui papers (hereafter AMP), box 8, Lectures, seminars and talks, Ali Mazrui to Dennis G. Duerden, 17-01-1963.

23 Ogot, *Footprints on the Sands of time*, 118-123.

24 Carol Sicherman, "Building an African Department of History at Makerere, 1950-1972" *History in Africa* (2003): 253-282, 255.

> of non-attendance of African scholars) I should mention the fact that the ISC's report which was adopted in Nairobi on Saturday afternoon, 8 April 1978, was attended only by 16 members of whom only 6 were Africans. I do appreciate the tremendous contribution which non-Africans have made to the research and writing up of African History and only a few people would begrudge non-African of this great achievement. I am also mindful of the fact that up to now the non-African scholars are more equipped than Africans themselves to contribute to the writing of African History. But while all this remains true, we cannot escape from the fact that we, Africans, are writing our own history. [...] In short, while we should have as contributors non-African historians, who moreover have greater resources than we ourselves have in carrying out research and even writing, the new General History of Africa should principally be written by Africans regardless of the paucity of their experiences and resources.[25]

The growing preponderance of Euro-Americans within the GHA was at least partly the result of the absence of African committee members, which in itself was a result of the issues within the African academy discussed in the last chapter. Gradually, therefore, Euro-Americans, such as Vansina, Curtin, Hrbek and Devisse, moved into positions of greater importance as a result of the institutional and material privilege they had and which African committee members seemed to lack, a consequence of global funding inequalities.

African ISC members cancelled their attendance at meetings more often than Euro-American ISC members, judging by the letters found in UNESCO's archive. They did so for various reasons. Cheikh Anta Diop, for instance, skipped a meeting in October 1979 because he was being detained by the Senegalese government and had to await a trial date preventing him from travel.[26] In 1983 Boahen too struggled with the political situation in his country and asked UNESCO to present him with an official invitation to the next ISC meeting because he

25 UAP, CC CSP 33, Professor Phares M. Mutibwa to His Excellency Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, 16th March 1979, 4-5.

26 UAP, CC CSP 15, Cheikh Anta Diop to Maurice Glélé, 10-10-1979.

would not otherwise be allowed to travel and obtain a new passport, which had been impounded. 'We are living in very difficult times indeed. But we shall overcome.'[27] Mazrui, moreover, cancelled meetings on multiple occasions citing, for instance, teaching commitments or guest lectureships as the reason.[28] Ki-Zerbo also cancelled a meeting citing previous commitments that clashed with the GHA.[29] As Claude Ake has noted, and as Mutibwa suggested also in his letter, African academics had to contend with greater demands on their time as a result of a heavier teaching load and more administrative duties as well as a lack of facilities, such as poorly stacked libraries and a general lack of equipment.[30] Moreover, as becomes clear from the letters discussed above, some academics had to deal with travel restrictions for political reasons. Mobility has played an important role from the 19th century onwards in the epistemological shaping of the African continent. Who could travel and bring knowledge to and from Europe and Africa determined how the continent was regarded.[31] Increasingly throughout the 20th century and especially in the 21st travel has become a privilege that is awarded more easily and frequently to researchers situated in North American and European institutions.

Ogot, moreover, took on a myriad of different tasks and duties after finishing his PhD. The decolonisation of British Kenya directly impacted the educational institutions that he studied and worked at and he identified with the struggle and successes of those institutions as well as that of the nation as a whole. As a result, national victories often felt like personal victories, and vice versa. He fulfilled an almost endless number of public duties for both the nation, as well as the continent. From 1965 onwards, Ogot became a university administrator

27 UAP, CC CSP 36, Adu Boahen to Maurice Glélé, 18-01-1983.

28 UAP, CC CSP 32, Ali Mazrui to Maurice Glélé, 14-03-1977.

29 UAP, CC CSP 33, Telegram Ki-Zerbo to Maurice Glélé.

30 Claude Ake, "Academic Freedom and Material Base" in *Academic Freedom in Africa,* eds. Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1994), 17-25, 21.

31 Haytem Guesmi argues that this, combined with the amount of funding available for Americans vis-à-vis other scholars within African studies, has led to a gentrification of African studies. Haytem Guesmi, "The Gentrification of African Studies," Africa is a Country, last modified December 12, 2018, https://africasacountry.com/2018/12/the-gentrification-of-african-studies. Emily Callaci has made a similar argument, relying on Guesmi to state that privilege and mobility are inherently intertwined within African studies and academia in general. Emily Callaci, "On Acknowledgements" *The American Historical Review* 125:1 (2020): 126-131, 128.

and joined the University of East Africa council as well as the University Development Committee and the Working Party on Higher Education in East Africa. He was part of a group of academics and civil servants that set up the university of Nairobi and worked to achieve Africanisation in universities throughout East Africa.[32]

Overcommitment combined with deteriorating material and political circumstances then, made it difficult for African ISC members to focus on the GHA work — although this is not to say they did not do their utmost best to finish the volumes. The decrease of funding for African universities in the 1970s coincided with the increase of funding for African studies in the United States, thereby undermining efforts to Africanise (or even decolonise) African history. The GHA simply could not escape the wider context in which African universities experienced severe cuts in funding, whereas the funding of African studies in the United States increased as a result of Cold War geopolitics.[33] Of course not all Euro-Americans were situated at American institutions and not all Africans were located on the continent. In fact, African academics increasingly moved towards North America, which I have also commented on in the last chapter. Yet, generally speaking, it was because of the privileged positions most Euro-Americans enjoyed that they were able to stick with the project up until the end. Euro-Americans played crucial roles, despite the fact that this predominance was not in accordance with the epistemic and political goals of Africanisation within the GHA.

A set of letters between Ali Mazrui and Omare Kokole in 1987 allows for some further insight into the difference between institutional life in the global south and north.[34] In the letters, Mazrui and Kokole discussed whether Mazrui had been more productive whilst working for the University of Michigan, an American institution, or when at Makerere, in Uganda. Kokole was of the opinion that the environment in which Mazrui conducted his work mattered, juxtaposing a 'northern infrastructure' with a 'lack of facilities in African schools.'[35] Mazrui argued against the suggestion that he had been less productive

32 Ogot, *My Footprints*, 193-380.

33 Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall?", 10.

34 Omari Kokole later edited a volume on Mazrui: Omari Kokole ed., *The Global African. A portrait of Ali. A. Mazrui* (Trenton: Africa world press, 1996)

35 BHL UM, AMP, Box 7, folder Mazrui Biographical Materials, letter, Omari Kokole to Ali Mazrui 13-04-1987

at Makerere than in Ann Arbor, disputing whether it was even possible to measure productivity. Both agreed, however, that if Mazrui had been less productive it was because 'the USA is technologically ahead of Uganda.'[36] Mazrui, however, thought that a 'more interesting point' would be made if Kokole could point out that 'in spite of the poor technological facilities of Uganda and my much heavier administrative burden there, I was as prolific during my Uganda years as I have been during my American.'[37] The letters show that Mazrui and Kokole were both aware of the institutional privileges one gained when moving to the United States and of the factors inhibiting research by academics employed at African universities. It is indeed true that many of the first-generation African historians did not produce new fundamental research after their PhD theses, instead focusing on the production of textbooks and works of overview — like the GHA itself.[38]

The issue of productivity was commented upon by Boahen in a lecture for the Canadian African Studies association as well. He argued that the lack of new monographs and research done by his generation was not to be blamed on their lack of commitment or the paucity of their work, but was rather the result both the need to produce previously non-existent textbooks on African history as well as increasingly heavy workloads. Moreover, he noted that perhaps the expectations put upon Ogot, Ajayi and, indeed, himself, were too high:

> It is absolutely true that the Dikes, the Biobakus, The Ajayis, the first academic historians, did not live up to expectations. [...] because right from the beginning, they were all saddled with such heavy administrative responsibilities that made it impossible for them to embark on any new original piece of research. As is well-known, soon on their return home, Dike became the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan

36 BHL UM, AMP, Box 7, folder Mazrui Biographical Materials, letter, Ali Mazrui to Omari Kokole, 15-04-1987

37 Ibid.

38 Jacob Ade Ajayi is a good example of this. Although he produced, by all accounts, an excellent PhD-thesis and was very productive in terms of administration, teaching and authoring and editing textbooks and works of overview, such as J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, *History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), he never published another single-authored volume based on original research.

> [...] while Ajayi, became first, Head of the Department of History at the University of Ibadan, and then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos. The present writer who is himself a contemporary of the Dikes and Ajayis himself became head of the History Department of the University of Ghana four years after his appointment as lecturer.[39]

Boahen argued that many of the first-generation historians of Africa were swept in up their own success. There was an absence of a sustainable pace of growth for the academic discipline of African history in African countries.

Vansina too experienced these disparities between working in the United States and on the African continent. In 1971 Vansina, then 41 years of age, left Wisconsin for Louvanium in the Congo. By his own admission because he held hopes to 'decolonise both African history and Louvanium.'[40] He felt his talents were best used there, rather than in Wisconsin.[41] He also expressed an identification with the cause of African liberation during the early- and mid-20th century and wished to support it and provide service to the African academy. The disparities between Louvanium and Wisconsin, however, became apparent when the situation in Louvanium started to deteriorate for Vansina. In letters to Morton Rothstein, who was the chairman of the department of history at Wisconsin at the time, Vansina described the deteriorating situation at Louvanium in terms of political instability and uncertainty and a resulting lack of basic goods.[42] He therefore asked to return to Wisconsin.[43] It is very telling that Rothstein's response emphasises that he will 'do everything possible to ensure that you do

39 Adu Boahen, "The Historiography of Anglophone West Africa in the 1980s" in *Africa in the Twentieth Century. The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), 625-36, 631-2.

40 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 161.

41 Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies (hereafter: HLAS), Jan Vansina papers (hereafter: JVP), PERSONAL, PERSONELL FILE: 4 FILES, 1969-1974, Box 134, folder 6, Irvin G. Wyllie to Robert Clodius, 01-02-1965.

42 HLAS, JVP, PERSONAL, PERSONELL FILE: 4 FILES, 1969-1974, Box 134, folder 7, Jan Vansina to Morton Rothstein 12-06-1971 and, ibid, Jan Vansina to Morton Rothstein, 21-09-1971

43 HLAS, JVP, PERSONAL, PERSONELL FILE: 4 FILES, 1969-1974, Box 134, Jan Vansina to Morton Rothstein, 21-09-1971.

not suffer financially.'[44] Even if Vansina wanted to use his position and talents in a way subservient to the larger ideal of decolonisation, he was overtaken by the material and political realities surrounding him and the access to academic and professional mobility he possessed — although he can hardly be blamed for it.

To return to Mutibwa's letter: It exemplified a change within the GHA and was written during a time in which Europeans and North Americans began to take more important positions within the GHA. Although Vansina wrote in his autobiography that African scholars continued to dominate the GHA meetings at least up until 1983, it becomes apparent from the mass of letters, the attendance of meetings and the reading committee memberships that Vansina's own role grew considerably in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[45] Other European scholars, such as Ivan Hrbek, also became more prominent as time wore on. From that time onwards, moreover, the reading committees, were increasingly staffed by Europeans, despite the GHA's intention to balance a lack of African authors in some of the early volumes with more Africans in the reading committees. Following Mutibwa's reasoning this change was a problem in and of itself. Yet, the Euro-Americans, such as Vansina, who joined the reading committees may have done so out of sense of duty and a wish to be subservient to the project. They, after all, had the ability to stick to project and carried out tasks such as reading committee membership despite getting relatively little in return in terms of recognition and money.

Vansina, moreover, reflected on the racial prejudice towards African history and the African academy and what that meant for the position of African scholars therein in a journal article detailing his time as a ISC member. He identified scepticism towards the project at its beginning which he thought was partly based on scepticism pertaining to whether the project was feasible. UNESCO had never before attempted to head a publishing project with more than a few authors that was not connected to a prestigious European or American university. According to Vansina many officials doubted whether the GHA could be pulled off partly because it had to be pulled off in newly in-

44 HLAS, JVP, PERSONAL, PERSONELL FILE: 4 FILES, 1969–1974, Box 134, Morton Rothstein to Jan Vansina, 01-10-1971.

45 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 201.

dependent countries in Africa.[46] Crucially, moreover, Vansina attested to the perseverance of especially Africans in bringing the project to fruition: 'the project was saved by the determination of the African member countries at every UNESCO general conference, the stubbornness of M. Glele and the disbelief within UNESCO waned and finally turned to enthusiasm.'[47] Vansina seemed to have been keenly aware of the differences in privilege that resulted from the different positions inhabited by Africans and Europeans. In *Living with Africa*, Vansina noted that African historians of Africa did not possess the same freedom to express their 'intellectual disagreements' with the 'western' world of scholarship. During a conference on African history in 1957 at the School for African and Oriental Studies in London, Vansina remembered the attitude of European academics. They were 'happily surprised that Africans could be rigorous academic historians, but still unaware of the constraints of a colonial situation.'[48] Vansina thereby unearthed some of the racism of early years of professional African history and identified that African historians of Africa and European historians of Africa were not always on equal grounds — a lingering problem. Material differences in circumstances translated into a greater influence for Euro-American scholars, which in itself perhaps created a hierarchy of perceived importance regarding the contributions of Africans vis-à-vis Euro-Americans. The racial politics inherent therein, recognised by Vansina and others, however, were the result of a system of colonial racism rather than a problem nestled in individuals. Euro-Americans such as Devisse could involve themselves in safeguarding the principle of African collectivity, whilst being chided for adopting a patronising tone towards African colleagues — as happened in a 1981 letter to Glélé send by a Nigerian historian.[49] The point here, then, is not to say that Euro-Americans were necessarily individually set against the GHA ideals, but that they were part of a racialised system within academia that privileged Euro-Americans over Africans, even as many recognised this and resisted it. In practice this meant that the historians working on the GHA, African and

46 Jan Vansina, "UNESCO and African Historiography" *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 337-352, 341.

47 Vansina, "UNESCO and African Historiography", 342.

48 Vansina, *Living With Africa,* 52.

49 UAP, CC CSP 45, G.O. Olusanyo to Maurice Glélé, 30-12-1980.

Euro-American, had to navigate a habitat of racial and postcolonial politics with considerable diplomatic skill.

Within the GHA then, differences between African and Euro-American researchers manifested themselves in the material circumstances in which both groups could, generally speaking, conduct their research. In his letter Mutibwa added a sentence in which he emphasised that he did not want to be racist, but that positions simply differed. Equally, the reason why Devisse thought it absolutely necessary to stick to the rules the committee had fixed for itself was because a preponderance of Euro-American scholars endangered the epistemic and thereby also political goals of the GHA.

The insider–outsider view

Given the realities of the material differences between the global north and south, it is worthwhile to explore how these differences manifested themselves in the public self-fashioning of GHA historians. How were African historians of African history supposed to position themselves vis-à-vis these realities? And how did Euro-American historians of Africa position themselves? The difference was at least partly a result of the fact that Africans entered the academic discipline in the 1950s and 1960s coming from a continent whose history had been neglected and denied until well into the 20th century. African historians of Africa were forced to come to terms with their position within the discipline in a very different way from Euro-American historians of Africa. This position emerged from the racial politics Mazrui and countless other African and black intellectuals have described as existing between worlds, as discussed in Chapter 2. African scholars, at least within the GHA, had to position themselves opposite the system of eurocentrism they were trying to undo as becomes clear from Mutibwa's letter. The GHA was part of African research as existing 'betwixt and between the tensions and possibilities of interconnecting global and local hierarchies', to quote Francis Nyamjoh.[50] As a result, Euro-Americans could overwhelm African voices even if they were not the majority. It was precisely this hierarchy within the politics of knowledge production that Mutibwa had complained about.

50 Francis Nyamnjoh, *Drinking from the cosmic gourd: how Amos Tutuola can change our minds* (Mankon: Langaa Research &Publishing CIG, 2017), 1.

Out of the necessity then of navigating the reality of African historical studies in the 20th century there arose an insider–outsider ideal constructed by Mazrui. Mazrui was himself somewhat awkwardly positioned within the GHA, as he was never included in the ISC, yet did edit the last volume of the series. His ideal was therefore never adopted by other ISC members. It is important to include it here because it shows a particular understanding of the positionality of African historians during the period in which the GHA came into traction that aligns with African and black intellectual traditions. This section will discuss Mazrui's ideal and how it supposed the GHA could combine an ideal of Africanisation, or pan-African diversity, with the need to become incorporated into the Euro-American academy. It also discusses how Vansina and Curtin publicly understood and conveyed their roles as historians of Africa and what this tells us about positioning and scholarly self-fashioning of Euro-American historians. To do so I use the autobiographies of the two men. Memoirs are powerful tools to present oneself towards others scholars as well as the outside world. They therefore inform us how individuals displayed their public self and may be used to investigate what constituted scholarly personae for those individuals.[51]

Mazrui became the editor for volume VIII and he was chosen because no historian could be found, but also because volume VIII dealt with recent events — as Ajayi explained in a GHA-commissioned paper on contemporary history, calling Mazrui an outsider to the GHA.[52] In 1979 the committee organised a special meeting in Ouagadougou for Mazrui's sake to discuss contemporary African historiography and methodology. During this meeting the persona of the historian was discussed alongside other methodological issues. Mazrui presented a paper in which he ruminated on the position of African historians vis-à-vis the Euro-American academy.

He started his paper by slaying the usual eurocentric dragons. He argued that Trevor-Roper was subjective in his denial of the existence

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51 Julia Dahlberg, "Gifts of Nature? Inborn Personal Qualities and Their Relation to Personae?" in *Gender, Embodiment, and the History of the Scholarly Persona. Incarnations and Contestations*, ed. Kirsti Niskanen and Michael J. Barany (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 181-214, 184, 192-3.

52 J.F. Ade Ajayi, "Problems of writing contemporary African history" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9. The methodology of contemporary African history. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organized by Unesco at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 47-58, 47

of African history and that this was 'evidence of cultural arrogance.'[53] Mazrui used the figure of Trevor-Roper to illustrate his point: Trevor-Roper's fault lay in his inability to transcend his own cultural context. This epistemic virtue, or competence, that allowed a historian, or rather an academic or scholar, to overcome his or her own culture, Mazrui argued, was of especial relevance for a historian. It was precisely because of this that it was of pertinent importance to include more Africans than Europeans in the GHA because these men and women had already learned to transcend their own culture by virtue of being enmeshed in a Euro-American system of academia. Mazrui linked debates concerning this 'outsider view' to social anthropology. Anthropologists thought, Mazrui explained, that it was dangerous to describe a society from within. It was a danger that could lead to oversights and 'excessive ethnocentrism.' An outsiders' view would allow for the uncovering of certain mores and institutions that would otherwise be taken for granted. However, Mazrui argued that these maxims weren't applicable to historians in the same way as they were applicable to anthropologists and that for African historians both historical and anthropological virtues were of importance. African historians, and Mazrui took the example of an Igbo historian, possessed both the insider as well as the outsider view. And this insider–outsider view, which is my designation, lent them an advantage when it came to scientific assessment of the historical societies they studied. The Igbo historian studying the Igbo past would have already undergone the culture shock that is necessitated by anthropologists for good cultural research. 'The very initiation into Western academic culture, and the power of comparative observation linked to this familiarity with both the West and his own society, provide the requisite exposure to discover salience and appreciate significance in Ibo society' — as Mazrui put it.[54] Any African historian would possess both the view from within, as they were part of an African society, and the view from without, by virtue of being part of a 'western' system of academia, making him or

53 Mazrui also mentioned Hegel. He argued that Kwame Nkrumah had perhaps been the first to withstand Hegel's arguments. Ali A. Mazrui, "Dilemmas of African historiography and the philosophy of the Unesco *General History of Africa*" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and Documents 9. The methodology of contemporary African history. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organized by Unesco at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984) 15–26, 17

54 Mazrui, "Dilemmas of African historiography", 20.

her perfectly situated to explore the African past. Now that Africa had produced 'modern historians', the time had come for African historiography, 'embodied in the perception and techniques of African historians.'[55] It only made sense that African history, situated between the African past and the 'western' — what I have dubbed Euro-American — academy, would be written by historians who were equally situated between the two.

This idea of being between two worlds has been theorised by many black and African scholars, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Albert Memmi, as well as more contemporary thinkers such as Achille Mbembe, Kwame Anthony Appiah, but also black feminist thinkers.[56] Although these thinkers and theorists do not necessarily frame the ability to refer to multiple epistemic frameworks as a virtue, it could be seen as such. Mazrui argued that the insider–outsider position allowed for clarity as researcher. 'Having a double-consciousness', the famous term that was coined by Du Bois in 1905, was framed as an indictment towards the dominant culture, something that black folk in the United States or a colonial subject anywhere had to have in order to survive everyday life.[57] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, in reference to Du Bois, equally describes the phenomenon of double consciousness as a form of mental colonisation and alienation.[58] Chakrabarty's discontent with the expectation that historians of non-European pasts are supposed to self-evidently acquaint themselves with European history, whereas the reverse expectation is almost never levelled, stems from the same idea of having to navigate two epistemic environments at once as an injustice — although not necessarily a disadvantage. Chakrabarty called this 'asymmetric arrogance.'[59] Yet, in Mazrui's paper for the *General History of Africa*, double consciousness by use of the academic context of the insider–outsider ideal had become an embodied epistemic virtue

55 Mazrui, "Dilemmas of African historiography", 23.

56 See: Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 85 and Kimberlé Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality* (New York: The New Press, 2017)

57 W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1903), 2.

58 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Imperative of Decolonizing the Modern Westernized University" in *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa,* ed. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Siphamandla Zondi (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2016), 27-45, 34.

59 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 28.

or even advantage.[60] It, moreover, was part of the self. Mazrui argued that it could be an epistemic virtue to be able to look at the African past from multiple angles, by referring to epistemic virtues identified by anthropologists for doing their work. Mazrui therefore linked African history to anthropology, acknowledging how the former was rooted in the latter — and unintentionally acknowledging the GHA's rootedness in UNESCO as well.

Mazrui wrote the article in 1979 for a meeting which was specifically organised to reflect on the philosophy of the *General History of Africa* and as such, it could be seen as Mazrui's reconsideration or reflection on the positioning documents — as he had not been involved in drafting them. His insider–outsider ideal could be seen as a tentative answer to the realities of African historians navigating the unequal territory of the Euro-American academy. The duality inherent in navigating between African and European positionalities on history in the 1960s and 1970s was aptly captured by Mazrui in this paper on the virtuous position of Africans for the creation of knowledge within historical scholarship dealing with Africa. Throughout his career Mazrui was engaged in the construction of African identities. His own complex identity led him to investigate the importance of subjectivity. One of the results of these inquiries was his famous triple heritage thesis, which was itself inspired by others such as Nkrumah and Blyden. The point had been to highlight the many-sided nature of African identities as a result of many historical trajectories, including Islam, indigenous African religions and Christianity. Mazrui's triple heritage thesis and his insider–outsider ideal were closely related, both weaving together European and African traditions.[61] His ideas on the multifocal African condition therefore aligned with that of the GHA. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the importance of these multiple strands of identity for historical research seem not to have travelled much farther than the 1979 Ouagadougou symposium and were not adopted by the rest of the ISC as angle from which to approach the position of African historians within the GHA.

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60 Appiah too has called Africa's intellectuals, who navigate Africa's cultural presence in the rest of the world in European languages, 'Europhone'. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House. Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4.

61 Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialisation and Decolonization* (Milton: Routledge, 2018), 116-25.

In their autobiographies, Curtin and Vansina convey their scholarly identities very differently. Curtin's memoir is a self-portrayal focused on masculinity, as Jan-Bart Gewald has put: 'unashamedly a book for a man's kind of man.'[62] Adventure was therefore a key ingredient. In 1959 Curtin took a yearlong trip through Africa, starting in Morocco and driving all the way to Kenya.[63] His portrayal of this trip is not devoid of stereotypical descriptions also to be found in travel reports from the 18th century onwards. Here, the 'seeing-man' — a white European male — often plays the role of passive and neutral observer. Landscapes and the natural environment, including 'natives', play a big role in the travel accounts this 'seeing-man' produces.[64] Curtin described friendly villagers (who appear 'out of nowhere'), perilous river crossings, and of course the 'physical beauty' of places visited.[65] The line between travel writing and academic memoir is often blurred. Curtin alternates between comments on the waning colonial regimes and observations about what may attract (white American) tourists to a place. This perhaps illustrates the lingering imperial ideology connecting academic research into colonial and post-colonial territories with the exoticism of travel writing about Asia and Africa.[66] Curtin was aware of the dual roles he and his wife played as travellers through Africa. They functioned as both researchers as well as tourists and seemed to have had no problem switching between these roles. How Curtin described his journeys was specific for a white outsider and seems aimed at a white American audience. When explaining what drew him to the study of African history, Curtin mentions the adventure that came along with travelling to Africa and 'the fact that Africa was the least explored historically of the world's major culture areas', a statement that betrays a degree of eurocentrism because it takes into account only Euro-American historiography and only Euro-American

62 Jan-Bart Gewald, "On the Fringes of History: A Memoir," by Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Today* 53:2 (2006): 115-117, 117.

63 Philip D. Curtin, *On the fringes of History: A Memoir* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 102-26.

64 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 9

65 Curtin, *On the Fringes*, 113, 117, 121.

66 Not uncommon in American memoirs written by academics studying cultures other than their own, see: Cynthia G. Franklin, *Academic lives memoir, cultural theory, and the university today* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 88.

ideas of what history is.[67] In fact, the use of the word 'explored' is itself telling, as the exploration of non-European 'culture areas' was part of the rationale behind the colonialist expansion of the European continent. Curtin, knowingly or not, emulated some earlier ideas of (white) colonial exploration and knowledge creation. He alternatively drew on the persona of an explorer, tourist or researcher.

Vansina too emphasised adventure when seeking to explain on a personal level why he was attracted to African history as a vocation. He started his autobiography by referring to 'the flesh and blood of that adventure that African history was and is [...].'[68] He later identified his need for 'high adventure' as a reason why a research position as an anthropologist in 'Belgian Africa' seemed attractive at the start of his career.[69] Unlike Curtin, however, Vansina spent a considerable amount of time living and working in various African countries and regions, from Kuba country in the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, to Rwanda and Kinshasa. This was a lived experience which he valued so much as a researcher, he made it into a required part of the curriculum for graduate students in African history at Madison. Vansina adopted some of the methodologies and métier of the anthropologist and applied it to African history. For Vansina one could only become a historian of Africa through extensive and intensive contact with the people one wanted to write history about. This need to experience the country one wrote about through field work was an epistemic virtue partly borrowed from anthropology and it is also reflected in Mazrui's ruminations. Through a focus on and celebration of fieldwork, Vansina consciously agitated against the image of the historian as a stuffy drawing-room intellectual.

The focus on fieldwork, moreover, was a way to try to negate justifiable critique levelled against Euro-Americans studying a continent they only knew as outsiders. In a reflective chapter, entitled *Fieldwork in History*, which was published after his memoir, Vansina explains that fieldwork is a 'sine qua non' for every aspiring historian of Africa and almost mythologises its function: 'Is it not an esoteric training procedure, similar to an initiation, which endows fledgling historians

67 Curtin, *On the Fringes*, 70.

68 Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), IX.

69 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 7-8.

with the unchallenged authority of personal experience?'[70] Throughout the piece, Vansina emphasised that one of the crucial aspects of fieldwork is the experience one gains whilst conducting it. Fieldwork 'usually encompass [sic] about five years of the life of every non-African scholar' and, moreover fieldwork enables the researcher to learn more about the language, landscape, historical imagination and habits of the people he or she studies.[71] Therefore, Vansina continued, 'Foreign-born historians of Africa especially need to learn such fundamentals and acquire them best through fieldwork.'[72] Fieldwork was, it seems, most beneficial to Euro-American scholars of Africa, who needed to be trained in subjectivity to reflect on their own positionality — be made to realise what position they inhabited. It, Vansina wrote, had something essential to offer the historian especially due to the necessary subjective nature of interpretation that is a vital part of the discipline of history.[73] The 'experience' gained through fieldwork was vital because it could allow researchers to 'translate' between the Euro-American context of the academy and the different contexts of their chosen culture of study.[74] Vansina used fieldwork, at least rhetorically, to argue why and how he would do the work necessary in order to subvert the difference between himself and African researchers. Although he attempted to demonstrate that fieldwork was not just the foray of Euro-American scholars, but that it was also conducted by Africans, taking Kenneth Dike as an example, he nonetheless creates the impression that the very notion of fieldwork implied an outsider looking in. The racial politics presents in the field, moreover, are seemingly glossed over by Vansina. Carol Sicherman has noted that for East African students from Makerere in Uganda, for instance, it was not always as easy to collect oral traditions as it was for white scholars as they tended to be subjected to the cultural traditions and rules that Euro-Americans could supersede. African graduate students could be accused of impertinence in their attempts to collect narratives from

70 Jan Vansina, "Epilogue: Fieldwork in History" in *In Pursuit of History. Fieldwork in Africa,* eds. Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), 127-41, 127.

71 Vansina, "Fieldwork in History", 134.

72 Ibid, 136.

73 Ibid, 137

74 Ibid.

specialised elders, whereas white scholars or dignitaries were not, in that specific context.[75]

Where Curtin wrote about travelling to the continent looking for archival collections and holiday fun, Vansina fit himself more into the persona of an ethnographer. Lyn Schumaker has noted that such self-fashioning was not uncommon for the first few generations of anthropologists in southern Africa either, legitimising their status as experts through demonstrations of intimate knowledge with 'the field.'[76] Vansina, nevertheless, seems to have been aware of the different positionality Euro-American researchers brought to the study of Africa as opposed to African researchers of Africa.[77] In their reflections on an inside or outside position and the importance of subjectivity, moreover, Mazrui's and Vansina's ideas seem to overlap, both in their reference to anthropological repertoires of scholarly selfhood as well as in their recognition of a distance between the Euro-American academy and African realities. They thereby negotiated the material, historic and geopolitical differences that manifested themselves in the practice of African history; in Vansina's case by emphasising the importance of learned subjectivity and in Mazrui's case through the persona of the Insider-outsider. Both ideas could have existed as mechanisms to deal with the changing circumstances and resulting inequalities within the GHA.

Conclusions

The problems with the presence of European voices that arose for the *General History of Africa* as described in section one of this chapter were the result of geopolitical power structures, most notably the Cold War, and how these influenced funding worldwide. As a result of inequalities in global funding structures Euro-American historians of African gained the upper hand within the global economy of knowledge production about Africa. Such changing epistemic and

75 Sicherman, "Building an African Department of History", 265.

76 Lyn Schumaker, *Africanzing Anthropology. Fieldwork, networks, and the making of cultural knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 44.

77 In chapter seven for volume I of the GHA, Vansina also wrote briefly about the experience of field work and here emphasised that even the historian who studies his own society must "rediscover his own culture", Jan Vansina, "Oral tradition and its methodology" in *General History of Africa I. Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 142-66, 162.

material positions taken up by Euro-American historians vis-à-vis African historians affected who was able to exert influence on the project. A difference in material privilege developed along a geographical north–south divide, making it easier for some to contribute rather than others. This difference partly played out along racial lines and could result in boosting Euro-American voices over African ones. As a result, Euro-American historians of Africa could and would play crucial roles within the GHA despite the ideal of African collectivity and sometimes against their better judgment. This did not go unnoticed within the GHA itself as ISC members sometimes complained about the preponderance of European voices.

Because Euro-American and African historians of Africa came to inhabit such different positionalities and flowing from the realisation that European points of view were (and are) not universal, reflection on one's own position became imperative, moreover. This was a realisation that came as a given for African historians of Africa. As the last section of this chapter argues, however, the public scholarly self-fashioning of Euro-American historians and African historians within the GHA could differ markedly. Nevertheless, both Mazrui and Vansina made use of scholarly repertoires taken from the discipline of anthropology to shape how they understood the role of either African historians of Africa, or, as Vansina put it, 'foreign born' historians of Africa.

Within the *General History of Africa*, consequently, most scholars worked towards the same goal: the Africanisation of history. What this meant and how this should be accomplished differed greatly between scholars. One's position and identity impacted what various scholars thought a new history of Africa was to look like. The tensions that emerged as a result of a shifting power balance between Euro-American and African points of view since the project had started in 1964, becomes more apparent when looking at historiographical discussions on colonialism and subsequent decolonisation internal to the *General History of Africa*. This is discussed in the next chapter, which shows some of the differences of scholarly opinion that resulted from differences in background.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Defining the Political and the Place of 'Europe' within the *General History of Africa*

Introduction

How did the *General History of Africa* deal with the influence of Europeans on the history of Africa? How, in other words, was the GHA to account for the history of colonisation and decolonisation? This was a specifically pertinent question in terms of its political assignment of emancipation from Europe. Chapter 6 deals with the positioning of Euro-Americans within the GHA, whereas this chapter delves into the historiographical presence of Europe within the GHA.[1] Volumes VII and VIII, respectively, discuss the history of colonialism and subsequent decolonisation on the continent, whilst the GHA had no choice but to write about European influences on African history. Moreover, because the history of colonialism and its formal end was very contemporary and contentious, the boundaries between scholarship and politics, sometimes, became blurred. This chapter, therefore, researches how the ideals discussed in Chapter 3 about how the GHA

1 Historiographical here refers to the way the history of European presence in African has been dealt with in various historical accounts of the past.

should strive to contribute to political emancipation, operated in historiographical reality and explains the resulting tensions regarding the boundary between scholarship and politics.

Writing the history of colonisation and decolonisation meant writing a history of political emancipation. As a result, political and scholarly ideals and realities were hard to separate when it came to the history of (de)colonisation. Since the question of Europe within the history of Africa existed on the apex of emancipation, it was here that tension between scholarship and politics came once more to the fore.[2] How were perceptions of political partisanship or, conversely, impartiality, aligned with the pursuit of intellectual goals closely connected to nationalism and the emancipation of Africans? Who could decide what 'good' academic African history was and what the role of politics was therein — or what even counted as overtly political?

In a way, the GHA owed its existence to the colonial subjugation of Africans by Europeans and the subsequent reaction to that subjugation: the achievement of independence in the form of national states. European colonisation of Africa had been justified and made possible by a denial of African history and agency, and now it was up to the GHA to justify the creation of national African states through a reappraisal of African historicity. This assignment was nowhere more pronounced than in the writing of the history of (de)colonisation. If we want to know how the GHA Africanised African history, we must ask how it did so in the two volumes that had to deal explicitly with Europe. In these volumes the GHA could no longer keep Europe out of sight, as it had done in previous volumes and that meant that the political assignment the GHA had given itself became more prominent in these volumes.

This chapter, therefore, contextualises 'impartiality' within the GHA as a political-epistemic virtue or vice. Impartiality as opposed to political partisanship is a well-known historical virtue to aim towards, researched by, amongst others, Lorraine Daston, Herman Paul,

2 The controversy surrounding Diop, of course, also hinged on the clash between political emancipatory imperatives and scholarly standards, but, in that case, Diop was outlier who was eventually included in the GHA, partly for political reasons, whereas, in the case of the history of Europe in Africa there emerged a clash within the GHA that was more profound.

Kathryn Murphy and Anita Traninger.[3] All have richly contextualised this virtue in the context of European historical scholarship in the 18th, 19th and 20th century, and often contrasted it with the more modern ideal of 'objectivity'. They have shown that who was seen as impartial was dependent on moral as well as political considerations and contexts, whether one had been trained in the method of source criticism or was able to consider different (political) points of view.[4]

The chapter first discusses volume VII, entitled *Africa under Colonial Domination 1880–1935* and edited by Adu Boahen, to research how he and the GHA dealt with the history of colonisation. Next, the chapter examines volume VIII, entitled *Africa since 1935*, edited by Ali A. Mazrui. The ISC spent years discussing the title and table of contents for the last volume, a testament to the difficulty of writing the history of decolonisation whilst it was still underway, specifically in Southern Africa. The third part of the chapter, consequently, draws the conclusion that scholarly and political activism within the GHA was closely entwined with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion within scholarship and the question of who could write the history of Africa and from what African perspective. The chapter, therefore, uses the last two volumes as a case study to investigate the relationship between politics and academic history writing in the GHA.

Volume VII: Where does history end and politics begin?

Volume VII dealt with the violent encounter between European imperialism and African peoples. Contrary to most of the material treated in the previous six volumes, this meant volume VII explicitly dealt with history that had also been interpreted and written by European colonial historians who, according to the Boahen, had completely ignored the actions of Africans.[5] The point of volume VII was to pro-

3 Lorraine Daston, "Objectivity and Impartiality. Epistemic Virtues in the Humanities" in *The Making of the Humanities III: The Modern Humanities*, eds. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat and Thijs Weststeijn, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 27-42 and Kathryn Murphy and Anita Traninger, *The Emergence of Impartiality* (Leiden: Brill, 2014)

4 Herman Paul, "Distance and Self-Distanciation: Intellectual Virtue and Historical Method Around 1900" *History and Theory* 50:4 (2011): 104-16.

5 Adu Boahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge" in *General History of Africa VII Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, ed. A. Adu Boahen (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 1-19, 9.

vide a counter-narrative, not to prove that there was a narrative to tell in the first place. As will become clear on the following pages not everyone agreed with the instrumentality of history that was attached to this mission. How did various contributors to the volume respond to Boahen's interpretation of what it meant to create useful history? The following pages will first explain exactly how and with what goal in mind Boahen edited and directed his volume, before detailing one particular moment of tension that hinged on different interpretations on the use of history.

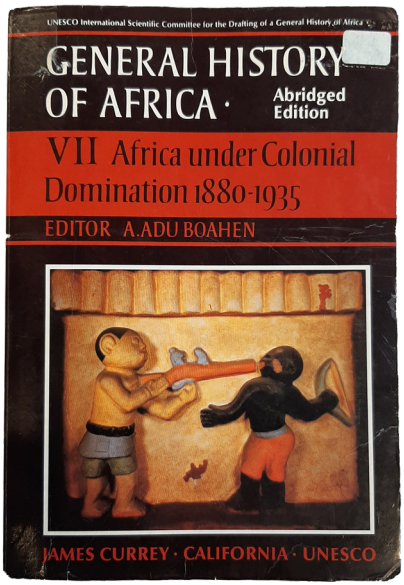

Fig.3 Dust jacket of Volume VII, English abridged edition.

The image portrayed on the dust jacket of volume VII is illuminating. (See Figure 3.) It depicts a relief of an African and a European, taken from one of the palace walls of Dahomey in Abomey. The European threatens the African with a gun, whilst the African holds only a bow, thereby emphasising the unequal relationship between the two. The cover portrayed an obvious political message. One that seemed to signify that Europeans had come to Africa to wage unfair and bloody war against Africans during the 20th century.[6] In the first chapter of

6 For a similar discussion on this jacket-cover, see: Casper Andersen, "UNESCO's General History of Africa, memory and the quest for relevance" in *Essays in Memory of Jan-Georg Deutsch*, eds. Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, Moritz Mihatsch and Michelle Sikes (Melton: James Curry, forthcoming 2022)

the volume, however, the editor of the volume explains that the dust jacket also conveyed a positive message. With it, he aimed to portray that Africans, against great odds, managed to survive and even thrive during the colonial period, and meant to signify that the volume dealt with African initiative and resistance in the face of terrible colonial conquest. Boahen wanted to show that Africans had bravely resisted the imposition of colonial rule. Boahen's point was that it was not due to any inherent weakness of African societies that Europeans had managed to conquer nearly the entire continent in the late 19th and early 20th century, but, that it was simply due to technological advancements in Europe.[7]

Boahen espoused an idea of African society as united through a common resistance to colonialism and simultaneously emphasised that the colonial period was only a short interlude between two periods of state-formation. However, 'Africa did face a very serious challenge', Boahen wrote, 'the challenge of colonialism.'[8] What mattered, and what the volume would be about, was how Africans responded to that challenge. Or, as Boahen put it: 'What was the attitude of the Africans themselves to the establishment of colonialism, involving as it did such a fundamental change in the nature of the relationships that had existed between them and the European over the preceding three hundred years?'[9] Boahen underlined the importance of bringing to light African responses and resistance to colonialism by quoting Prempeh I of Asante, Wobogo, King of the Mossi as well as Menelik of Ethiopia in their refusal to relinquish lands or control to European colonialists, be they British, French or Italian. Volume VII of the GHA had as its task, he continued, to bring to light these African resisters because their actions had been 'grossly misrepresented or entirely ignored' by colonial historians. The editor did not miss the opportunity to name and shame the historians he had in mind, such as Lewis Henry Gann, Peter Duignan and Margery Perham, quoting the latter at length. He balked at her use of the term 'pacification', calling it, 'Eurocentric.' In the early 1970s, Gann and Duignan had published a five-volume series

7 Boahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge", 10 and Andersen, "UNESCO's General History of Africa"

8 Boahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge", 3.

9 Ibid.

A History of Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960.[10] Gann specifically had previously been sympathetic to colonialism and it is therefore not surprising that Boahen aimed his dissatisfaction at him, amongst others. 'It is to correct this wrong interpretation of the colonial school and to redress the balance and highlight the African perspective that we have devoted as many as seven chapters [out of thirty] to this theme of African initiatives and reactions.'[11]

'Pacification' was not the only word that Boahen perceived as eurocentric and colonial. He was careful not to condemn Africans who worked with Europeans in order to safeguard their independence, grasp economic opportunity or simply the safety of their people. He therefore banned use of the word 'collaboration', stating that African rulers who were painted as collaborators had been 'grossly misunderstood.' 'We are opposed to the use of this term collaboration not only because it is inaccurate but also because it is derogatory and Eurocentric. [...] only those historians who are really ignorant of or hold very simplistic views about the political and ethno-cultural situation in Africa on the eve of the European partition and conquest would use that term.'[12]

As a result of his focus on African initiatives and perspectives, Boahen could be seen as a near-perfect representative of the nationalist school of African historiography, which had an important influence on the *General History of Africa* as a whole, even though it should not be identified entirely with just this group of African historians.[13] Although the nationalist historians had a preference for pre-colonial

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10 Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960 Vol. 1-5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969-1975)

11 Boahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge", 9.

12 Ibid, 11-12.

13 Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 228, 231, 239. The most famous examples of the nationalist school are the Ibadan history series, edited by Kenneth Dike as well as his 1950 PhD on *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885*. The symbolic significance of this book was considerable and Dike has since often been called the father of African historiography because he analysed Africans and Europeans on equal ground, as different actors within the same historical context. When I spend some time in 2018 interviewing historians who had been part of the Ibadan school, many of them named Dike's book as a turning point in their own career because it proved academic African history could be written and produced by Africans taking Africans as rational actors within the narrative. It was published in 1956. K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956)

subjects, Toyin Falola describes how this first generation of African historians expanded their scope beyond the pre-colonial to write the history of European imperialism in as far as it concerned Africa to include 'the African response to European penetration' as well as 'the brilliance of Africans in adapting to changes.'[14] This was exactly what Boahen did in volume VII.

The African national perspective guided Boahen throughout his editorship of volume VII. Boahen was born in 1932 in Oseim, in Ghana's eastern region.[15] He first took a degree in history at Ghana Legon before obtaining a PhD at SOAS in 1959. He then returned to Legon in Accra and had, by then, come to believe that African history needed to be Africanised and decolonised. He pursued this through the GHA and in his role as lecturer and educator at Legon, writing several textbooks on the history of West Africa. Boahen's analysis of colonial Africa had a clear political purpose, because for Boahen there was no obvious contradiction between being a historian and a political activist.[16] To ignore that history was political, was to be disingenuous. For history had an important role in post-colonial nation-building. Volume VII, with its focus on African resistance and initiative was therefore wholly Boahen's project in that he drew lines between resistance to colonial rule and the rise of nationalism throughout the volume.

African resistance to European conquest and colonisation had, by the 1970s, when the volume was written, become an important and contested issue in African historiography, with books on the Maji Maji and on Samori Ture, amongst others, as result.[17] Frederick Cooper has written that Boahen's concept of resistance to colonialism reflected the first generation of post-independence Africanist scholarship that was mostly concerned with nationalism and sovereignty of the state. This period was then followed by a focus on differentiation within Af-

14 Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, 227.

15 Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, "A. Adu Boahen", in *The Dark Webs. Perspectives on Colonialism in Africa*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 379-99, 387.

16 Toyin Falola, "Adu Boahen: An Introduction" in *Ghana in Africa and the World. Essays in Honor of Adu Boahen*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), 3-18, 10-11.

17 E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo, "From African Historiographies to an African Philosophy of History" in *Africanizing Knowledge. African Studies Across the Disciplines*, ed. Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings (New Brunswick; Transaction Publishers, 2002), 13-64, 17.

rican society and underdevelopment, brought over from Latin America and associated with Walter Rodney, amongst others. Dependency theory resulted from a disillusionment with independence in the 1970s.[18] Even though the GHA also dealt with the crisis of the 70s, the African perspective remained the most important historiographical orientation.

The seven chapters Boahen mentioned all more or less delivered what the introduction had promised in their description of the African initiative. Each chapter covered a different geographical area and meticulously detailed different forms of resistance to colonial conquest and rule. Chapter four, for instance, told of the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, but from the perspective of resistance leaders, such as Colonel Ahmad Urabi (1839–1911), a famous anti-colonialist. It also described the Mahdist revolution and risings in the Sudan and covered the Azande leader Yambio's attempts to play off two colonial powers against one another.[19] Chapter five, on North Africa and the Sahara, follows Boahen's lead as well, this time in denouncing colonial historians who 'knowingly distort the facts.'[20] Chapter six emphasises that resistance to European impositions had started long before 1900, as had been estimated in previous accounts.[21] All the chapters mentions anti-colonial nationalist resistance as leading forces against colonialism.

The chapters mentioned above follow the introduction so closely because Boahen took his role as editor seriously and reviewed chapters extensively. In cooperation with Jacob Ade Ajayi, who was the reading committee rapporteur for the volume, he made the chapters align with his idea on how colonialism should be interpreted and often made

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18 For an overview of African historiography on resistance see: Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History" *The American Historical Review* 99:5 (1994): 1516-1545.

19 H. A. Ibrahim, based on a contribution by the late Abbas I. Ali, "4. African initiatives and resistance in North-East Africa" in *General History of Africa VII. Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935,* ed. A. Adu Boahen (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 63-86, 65, 73-80, 81.

20 A. Laroui, "5. African initiatives and resistance in North Africa and the Sahara" in *General History of Africa VII. Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935,* ed. A. Adu Boahen (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 87-114, 89, 105.

21 M'Baye Gueye and A. Adu Boahen, "6. African initiatives and resistance in West Africa, 1880-1914" in *General History of Africa VII. Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935,* ed. A. Adu Boahen (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 114-148, 129.

authors change their terminology.[22] One of the reading reports for volume VII bears testimony to this. Concerning Chapter four, it states that the chapter 'was heavily criticised for being Euro-centric', but that it had now been revised and had become 'coherent.'[23] Chapter nine, which deals with *African initiatives and Resistance in Southern Africa*, by David Chanaiwa, too had 'improved.'[24] In a letter to Chanaiwa, dated 19 December 1978, Boahen pressed the author to focus more on the 'Afrocentric perspective' in relation to Zulu resistance at the battle of Isandhlawana.[25] In other letters, for instance to Godfried Uzoigwe or Phares Mutibwa, Boahen too asked for more material on 'the African dimension' or concluded that 'a more Afrocentric approach is called for.' In the latter case Boahen explained that he wanted more on the reactions of the non-elite and the impact of colonial rule on both the state and the people.[26] Boahen and Ade Ajayi thus worked together to create a volume that would truly show their idea of 'Africa from the inside' and created a close personal friendship in the process. They visited each other regularly and kept an extensive professional as well as personal correspondence.[27]

Ade Ajayi too had studied the colonial period and specifically colonial historiography. In 1969 he produced a seminal essay on the question of the colonial history of Africa, entitled *Colonialism: an episode in African history*, for an edited volume on Colonialism in Africa, which was edited, ironically, by Gann and Duignan. They would be castigated by Boahen for being eurocentric years later.[28] In the seminal chapter, Ajayi makes a case for African history to be treated on its own terms and not just as an extension of European history. According to Ajayi, the history of West Africa, for instance, was more than the history

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22 UAP, SHC/75/CONF.613/3, April 1976, Third Plenary Session, Cotonou, Benin (Dahomey), 8 – 13 September, 1975, 9.

23 JTLI, JAAP, Box 77, Third Report of the Reading Committee on Volume VII. By J.F. Ade Ajayi, 5.

24 Ibid, 8.

25 UAP, CLT CS 7, Adu Boahen to David Chanaiwa, 19-12-1978, p. 2.

26 UAP, CLT CS 7, Adu Boahen to Godfried Uzoigwe, 9-01-1980 and UAP, CLT CS 8, Adu Boahen to Phares Mutibwa, 19-12-1978.

27 I have based these sentences on personal conversations with Christie Ade Ajayi, the widow of the late Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi, in the summer of 2018.

28 J. F. A. Ajayi, "Colonialism: an episode in African history" in *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960. Volume I The History and Politics of Colonialism 1870-1914,* ed. LH. Gann and Peter Duignan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 497-510.

of the slave trade. African initiative, moreover, had to be researched as worthwhile in and off itself and not just as part of a reaction to European deeds. Ajayi argued that the influence of colonialism had been overstated and, moreover, that it could not be understood without reference to pre-colonial history, thereby placing Africans rather than European concerns at the centre of the history of colonialism. 'This is why the colonial impact cannot be fully understood or assessed except in the context of African history' Ajayi wrote. In other words; rather than see colonialism as an extension of European history, Ajayi chose to see it as a part of African history that happened to contain Europeans. Colonial historians, according to Ajayi, had impressed a teleology on African history by proposing the Christian imposition of European rule on Africa as a fulmination of a biblical world history. He proposed a different view of history and historical scholarship on Africa that would emphasise continuity over disruption to see the colonial era for what it was; a relatively short interlude of less than a century in a history that contained millennia.[29] Underneath Ajayi's work on volume VII, therefore, lay a well-thought-out idea of how the history of colonialism should be approached. This idea, moreover, overlapped with Boahen's to a great extent and moreover, with that of the GHA as a whole.[30]

It was this idea of emphasising the continuity in African history from an Afrocentric perspective that underlay the editing of volume VII. One of the reading reports of volume VII explains that the first chapter had originally been drafted by Sylvanus John Sodienye Cookey, a Nigerian.[31] The Bureau was not happy with it, stating that it was 'not sufficiently in line with the general philosophy of the project as defined by the Scientific Committee at its 1971 session.' During the seventh meeting of the Bureau in Paris, in 1977, it became clear that the chapter, and indeed the volume, were not yet in line with the 'decisions [...] taken by the Committee, with particular reference to the need to write a history dealing with the continent as a totality, and to write it, 'viewed essentially from the inside.' The Bureau made it clear that 'ambiguous expressions and historical clichés which convey impressions derogatory of African life and historical achieve-

29 Ajayi, "Colonialism: an episode in African history", 497-510.

30 Partly inspired, as suggested in chapter one, by Ferdinand Braudel.

31 JTLI, JAAP, Box 77, Third Report of the Reading Committee on Volume VII. By J.F. Ade Ajayi, 1.

ments should be avoided.'[32] Boahen rewrote the chapter, extensively. The opening chapter thereby became a template for the whole volume which so clearly came to carry Boahen's influence. In the end, Cookey's name was removed all together. Generally, then, the Bureau, Boahen and Ajayi were all in agreement as to what message the volume and its chapters should carry and how this reflected the general philosophy of the GHA. That message combined a political and historiographical purpose regarding African history. It showed how the ideals of the GHA had to come to fruition in the actual work of historical scholarship that became volume VII. It also showed that Boahen, supported by the Bureau it seems, did not always draw a clear line between history and politics.

How political exactly that volume was going to be and what kind of politics it would espouse, however, became a point of contention for some. Boahen believed that the role of history was not only to create knowledge of the past, but also to build for the future. History should explicitly contribute to nation-building and for that purpose colonial history needed to be reinterpreted to show how Africans had resisted their European colonial oppressors, but also that they had been engaged in state-building. In the concluding chapter for volume VII, moreover, Boahen emphasises that African leaders would do well to study the impact of this chapter on contemporary society in order to 'redress its shortcomings and failures', a closing statement that underscored the political importance of the volume.[33] However, not all authors completely agreed with Boahen's view of history, as some of the correspondence between the editor and his authors shows. The line between politics and history could be drawn in a myriad of different ways, as could the question what the purpose of history was.

An exchange between Boahen and the well-known historian of nationalism as well as African resistance, Terence Ranger became especially heated, partly due to a different perspective on the history of colonialism in Africa. Ranger had originally been commissioned to write a historiographical overview on African resistance to colonialism, in 1973, and Boahen at first had reacted positively, stating only

32 UAP, CC-77/CONF.602/2. Paris 30 September 1977. Seventh meeting of the bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Paris, 18-29 July 1977, Final Report, 23.

33 A. Adu Boahen, "30. Colonialism in Africa: its impact and significance" in *General History of Africa VII. Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935,* ed. A. Adu Boahen (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 782-809, 809.

that Ranger had to provide more background information for the lay reader, if his chapter was to fit with the general aim of the GHA. In 1978, however, Boahen wrote Ranger again, asking him to completely revise the chapter, pointing towards 'the general psychological approach' which needed correction:

> The Bureau took particular exception to [...] the notion that some states were new and therefore lacked legitimacy and consequently could not resist Europeans. [...] It appears to me now that many historians, including you, have considered African reactions to the imposition of colonial rule from the 1880s to the 1940s and 1950s as essentially a *simple phenomenon* [my emphasis] [...] And as for the terms collaboration and collaborators, I, as an African, abhor their use.[34]

Ranger angrily replied to Boahen on 4 January 1979: 'I seek to be cooperative man but I can do very little of the things you suggest in your letter.' His first point of contention was the amount of time that had passed between Boahen's original editorial comments and his most recent letter, 'it is certainly true that because of the very long delays in publication my chapter [...] now reads as out of date.' Secondly, Ranger simply did not agree with the Bureau's comments on the legitimacy of African states, writing:

> it is unclear to me why the Bureau took particular exception to the idea that some states lacked the legitimacy required for effective resistance. Do they merely dislike the thought? Or are they prepared to say on scholarly grounds that it is unfounded? To my mind the idea of an important aspect of making African historiography fully mature as well as true in fact. [...] Moreover, this emphasis is one which characterizes a great deal of recent, radical work on African resistance by both black and white scholars. It is in no sense part of the psychology of colonialism or neo-colonialism.[35]

34 UAP, CLT CS 7, A. Adu Boahen to Terence Ranger, 19-12-1978.

35 UAP, CLT CS 7, Terence Ranger to A. Adu Boahen, 04-01-1979.

In Ranger reading of Boahen's letter, then, he had been accused of neo-colonialism and he did not take that accusation lightly, having been an active member of the anti-colonial nationalist movement in what was then Rhodesia.[36] As he explained, his intention was for African history to be treated seriously, with the same rigour as European history. It seems the Bureau's brand of nationalist history no longer fit the mould of historiographical maturity according to Ranger. Thirdly, Ranger took exceptional injury at Boahen's suggestion that his account of African resistance had been too simple. He intimated that perhaps it was Boahen who oversimplified matters in his analysis of colonialism. Ranger ended the letter by stating that it was 'absurd' to ask him to make substantial changes to the chapter, at such a late stage.[37]

Boahen in turn responded equally angrily in a very short letter. He took offense at Ranger's use of the word absurd: 'I never expected that one could use such a word in a letter to a colleague, even if that colleague happens to be an African.'[38] Twice, therefore, did Boahen emphasise his identity as African in his letters to Ranger, more or less accusing the latter of racism in the process. In a letter to Glélé, Boahen suggested scrapping Ranger's contribution altogether. But, as the final volume bears witness, this did not happen, for Glélé did not think it was a good idea — a testament to his influence on the GHA.[39] The altercation between Boahen and Ranger rested on two very different interpretations of the function of African history and resistance within that history.

Terence Ranger, whose Dphil supervisor, incidentally, had been Trevor-Roper, had come into the study of African history through a focus on African initiatives, making use of innovative archival research methods that aimed to look for the African perspective.[40] By 1978, however, Ranger had come to take a critical position towards the connection between pre-colonial movements, which he had previously dubbed 'primary resistance', and modern mass political movements. He criticised the idea that 'primary resistance' as such could be mapped

36 As a result of his anti-colonial activities there, he eventually lost his residence permit and was forced to leave the country. Megan Vaugh and Luise White, "Terence Ranger", *Past & Present* 228 (2015): 3-14, 6.

37 UAP, CLT CS 7, Terence Ranger to A. Adu Boahen, 04-01-1979.

38 UAP, CLT CS 7, A. Adu Boahen to Terence Ranger, 30-01-1979

39 UAP, CLT CS 7, Maurice Glélé to A. Adu Boahen, 15-10-1979.

40 Vaugh and White, "Terence Ranger", 6-7, 9.

onto nationalist movements as well as the semblance of too much unity within African groups, emphasising the inherent elitism in some nationalist movements.[41] He also connected the endeavour of history for nation-building to what he called, following Frantz Fanon, bourgeois history and argued that the role of African nationalist history had purely been to contribute to cultural nationalism.[42] Not all African resistance was directed towards Europeans. For the bulk of the people, Ranger surmised, European colonialism only meant a change of political overlord, rather than a loss of sovereignty and resistance could therefore also be understood as resistance to local elites. Ranger, moreover, had founded the Dar es Salaam school of history in 1963, after he had left Rhodesia, which also came to house Rodney. Originally Dar es Salaam had, under Ranger's leadership, come to focus on resistance, but it later turned from a nationalist orientation to a Marxist one and, as a result, became more and more concerned with theory.[43] The school came to self-criticise for a failure to engage in the implication of colonialism and global interactions.[44] Ranger also came to believe that his previous writings on African resistance needed to be corrected and that African history needed to become more relatable to a larger section of the population to prove Trevor-Roper wrong 'that the emperor of African historiography had no clothes' because its only purpose was nationalist pride.[45] 'African historiography has been important in Africa for reasons of pride because it could not possibly have been useful for anything else. [...] There are many reasons for this. One of them has been the largely political emphasis of most African historical writing and a consequent emphasis on state structures rather than on local realities', Ranger wrote in 1976.[46]

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41 Terence Ranger, "Review: The People in African Resistance: A Review." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 4:1 (1977): 125-146 and Cooper, "Conflict and Connection", 1520.

42 Terence Ranger, "Towards a Usable African Past", In *African Studies since 1945. A Tribute to Basil Davidson,* ed. Christopher Fyfe (London: Longman Group United, 1976), 17-29.

43 Michael Twaddle, "Historians and African History" In *The British Intellectual Engagement with Africa in the Twentieth Century,* eds. Douglas Rimmer and Anthony Kirk-Greene (London: MacMillan Press LTD, 2000), 138-155, 144-5.

44 Atieno-Odhiambo, "From African Historiographies", 17.

45 Ranger, "Towards a Usable African Past", 23.

46 Ibid.

Ranger had thus come to take a critical position to the kind of historiography Boahen espoused, although he never quite committed to a materialist stance either.[47] The difference between the two ideas on (African) history were essentially differences in what it meant to create a 'usable past'. What was the purpose of (African) history? For Boahen it was important to focus on state-building and African resistance through nationalism. He saw colonialism chiefly as imposition on African indigenous rule and saw historical scholarship as part and parcel of the nationalist project. Ranger, on the other hand, increasingly came to favour history that would focus on African agency and that would be relatable to the local realities. Both wanted to be relevant towards society, however.

Although it is important to note that both were concerned with the political aim of writing history, for Ranger that also seemed to mean making the discipline of African history more academic and more rigorous. This was equally a political action in and off itself and a goal shared by the GHA as well. Boahen, nevertheless, had less use for Ranger's specific type of politics as he saw them as obstructing the main goal of African history, namely to provide for historical narratives for new states. Importantly, Ranger was not the only one who disagreed with Boahen on the importance of the 'state' as an analytical category within African history. Bethwell Ogot too had come to call for an approach to African history which would move beyond a focus on the state in an effort to counter the critique levelled against nationalist history. Yet, he did not think that nationalist history was necessarily bourgeois and believed that the Marxist or dependency schools gave too much weight to capitalism and colonialism. He therefore called for African history develop its own autonomous approach to history.[48] In the readers report for volume VII, moreover, Curtin wrote: 'While recognising that one intention of the *General History of Africa* is to redress the balance and to correct past distortions of African history, that objective is not really accomplished by simply reversing the polarity of "good guys" and "bad guys"'. Curtin then, believed that the colonialist historiography was not simply redressed by mimicking it. He also noted that too much emphasis had been put on political and military history, echoing earlier critique by Isaria Kimambo, also from Dar es Salaam, that the history was too focused on 'Kings and Wars'. Curtin

47 Vaugh and White, "Terence Ranger", 7-8.

48 Twaddle, "Historians and African History",146-7.

too referenced Trevor-Roper to argue that it would not do to simply meet his standards of 'good history'.[49] The wish to correct eurocentric historiography, therefore, could also be taken too far to produce politically desirable, but historiographically flawed accounts of the African past.[50]

Boahen himself, moreover, went through a development during the period of time that elapsed between his first and last letter to Ranger. He changed his mind about use of the word 'collaborator' halfway through the editing of volume VII, for instance. When the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (ISC) and Boahen started work on volume VII, it was 1973. Boahen started accepting the first drafts in 1975 with limited criticism. By 1978, he had developed his thoughts on the history of colonialism and African resistance, specifically its terminology, and started writing to authors again in a plea to update their final chapters — often to these authors' chagrin.[51]

The time lapse between Boahen's first editorial remarks in 1975 and the second series in 1978, which so irked Ranger, was the result of his connection to a series of political upheavals in Ghana. Boahen was sent to prison for several months by Ignatius Kutu Acheampong's military regime on account of his involvement as co-founder in the *People's Movement for Freedom and Justice*.[52] He had therefore developed first-hand experience with political insurgency of some sort and may have developed his view on African resistance as a result of that too. Perhaps it was because of this experience with autocracy that he also started to look beyond the importance of the state himself, for instance in his comments to Mutibwa. It had, however, not been Boahen's final

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49 JTLI, JAAP, Box 77, P.D. Curtin. Reader's Report on Volume VII, Chapter 6, 4th version (October 1981), 1. Elsewhere in the reading report allusions were made to Hegelian influences as having corrupted the history of Africa. UAP, CC CSP 38, General History of Africa Volume IV. First Supplement to the Report of the Reading Committee. Rapporteur: Ivan HRBEK, 2.

50 This has been noted as well by Finn Fuglestad, "The Trevor-Roper Trap or the Imperialism of History. An Essay" *History in Africa* 19 (1992): 309-326.

51 Godfried Uzoigwe also replied to Boahen's letter from December 1978, in which the latter asked for revision, by stating that he would only comply with his requests out of friendship, given that the demands were absurd. UAP, CLT CS 7, Gofried Uzoigwe to Adu Boahen, 31-01-1979.

52 N.N., "Acheampong, Ignatius Kutu (1931-1979)" in *Dictionary of African Biography Volume I: Abach-Brand,* eds. Emmanuel K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates, JR (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78-9.

foray into politics proper with a capital 'P'. In 1992 he made national headlines again by running for president, causing Ali Mazrui to jokingly write to Monique Melcer Lesueur, a UNESCO official, that it was perhaps Boahen political campaigning that was 'partly to blame for the uncertainty!!' regarding new bureau meetings.[53] Mazrui, moreover, referred to Joseph Ki-Zerbo as well, who had just returned out of political exile in Senegal to Burkina Faso and became politically active once again. 'If he and Professor Ki-Zerbo become presidents of their respective countries, I would be tempted to consider changing my own career as well!!!' — Mazrui wrote. Although Mazrui was evidently joking, given his generous use of exclamation marks, his comments, as well as those made by Ranger and others, do betray some sort of hesitance vis-à-vis historians becoming politicians proper.

In combination with Ranger's specific reflections on the politics of African history, and his critique of nationalist history writing, it seems that what was and was not the right kind of politics for the history of colonialism in Africa in general and the GHA in specific was in the eye of the beholder and subject to change over time. The question of and the need to position the GHA vis-a-vis 'Europe' within the history of colonialism in Africa brought out these political-epistemic tensions. Where then did historical scholarship end and political activity begin?

Volume VIII: How to write contemporary history of Africa

Concerns over the importance of colonialism for African history and related questions of political engagement lingered during the drafting of volume VIII on decolonisation, which the committee envisioned as encompassing cultural changes as well as the struggle for political independence.[54] The last volume, therefore, because it dealt with contemporary history, functions as an ideal case study to investigate how the ISC and Mazrui as editor, thought politics and history should be balanced in the writing of contemporary history. The volume editor espoused a broad idea of what decolonisation had meant for the

53 UAP, CLT CID 99, Ali Mazrui to Monique Melcer Lesueur, 3-08-1992.

54 N.N., "General discussion" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 5. The decolonization of Africa: southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.* (Paris: Unesco, 1981), 143-6, 145.

continent that went further than purely giving historical meaning. It had awakened Africans to a pan-African consciousness and it was for that reason that the dust jacket of this volume depicts the nations of Africa together at the Organisation for African Unity[55] (see Figure 4). Mazrui, unlike Boahen, was quick to point towards European influences on Africa, and, crucially, African influences on Europe. 'What about the reverse impact of Africa upon the West?'[56] He asked. 'What emerges from the story of this period is, in part, how Africa helped to re-humanise Europe, and how Europe helped to re-Africanise Africa', Mazrui wrote, capturing one of the GHA's guiding ideals of Africanisation.[57]

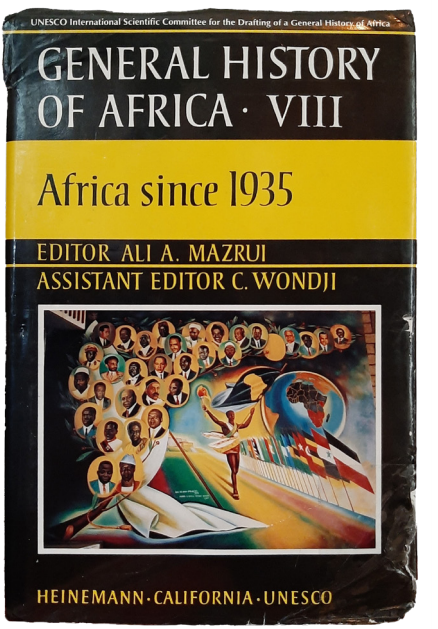

Fig. 4: The dust jacket of volume VIII of the GHA, English edition.

As Priyamvada Gopal has shown in her *Insurgent Empire: Anti-colonial resistance and British Dissent*, it was often anti-colonial thinkers who emphasised the false paternalism present in European colonialism. Anti-colonial movements were not only inspired by values, such

55 Dust jacket, *General History of Africa VIII. Africa since 1935.* ed. Ali A. Mazrui, ass. ed. C. Wondji (Paris: UNESCO, 1993)

56 Ali A. Mazrui, "Introduction" in *General History of Africa VIII. Africa since 1935,* ed. Ali A. Mazrui, ass. ed. C. Wondji (Paris: UNESCO, 1993), 1-25, 9

57 Mazrui, "Introduction", 7.

as liberty and democracy, as they had come to be shaped in Europe, but also taught Europeans in ways that not only expanded upon existing ideas but created new ones, she argues.[58] Mazrui emphasised a similar reversal of the flow of ideas in the introduction to his volume. Liberation in volume VIII therefore was not just political liberation from Europeans, but also a liberation from the idea that freedom and democracy were solely European inventions. In a move away from what most of the GHA had emphasised throughout its lifespan, Mazrui did not want to ignore the contact between Africa and Europe during the colonial period and was of the opinion that it had mattered for both continents. That meant that colonialism had mattered for African history, but in a different way than the colonial historians so beleaguered by Boahen had argued. For Mazrui, the colonial period had not determined African identities, but added on to them and the same was true for Europeans.[59] In reaction to colonial conquest and imperialism the resisters to colonialism shaped new political realities that both shaped and mutually influenced the history of the metropole.[60] Mazrui repeatedly pointed towards the importance of entangled histories between metropoles and colonial territories, between Africa and Europe. Mazrui's view on decolonisation thus pointed towards a rejection of the colonial relations between Africa and Europe. Mazrui's interpretation was not any less political than Boahen's or the Bureau's, but simply different in how Mazrui wanted to operationalise history to identify problems in African societies rather than for the purpose of nation-building. The rest of this section will detail in what way Mazrui's view on the writing of contemporary history differed from that of the rest of the ISC.

The difference of opinion between several ISC members and Mazrui on how important Europe had been for post-colonial and colonial Africa and therefore in what way contemporary history had to be approached, lay at the heart of a drawn-out debate about the table of contents for volume VII. The political dimensions of the last volume made it exceedingly difficult to agree on a table of contents, as Glélé explained during an opening speech for one of the symposiums that

58 Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire. Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso Books, 2019) 10-27.

59 Mazrui, "Introduction", 25.

60 Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 452.

had been organised to discuss the volume.[61] The first version of the table of contents had been created in 1970 during the first plenary session of the ISC, but the debate did not commence until much later, in Fez in 1975, during the fifth meeting of the bureau.[62] The reason for this being that proper drafting of Volume VIII did not start before that time. During the Fez meeting the Bureau discussed the table of contents as it had been proposed by the volume editor, Mazrui. The Bureau did not like Mazrui's comparative approach and thought it infringed upon the GHA's wish to treat Africa as a whole, stating that chapters surveying the whole of Africa were needed.[63] The Bureau thought Mazrui had neglected to follow the GHA guidelines and proposed 'radical alterations.' It 'hoped that the Volume Editor would endeavour to treat the questions handled there from a more African point of view rather than from a purely post-colonial one.' Mazrui was perhaps more interested in drawing wider implications from the history of African decolonisation, whereas the rest of the committee, or at least as it spoke through its reports, wanted to focus on Africa itself. Although the Bureau did not want to rule out a comparative approach altogether, they favoured an approach where continent-wide chapters would introduce each section.

The continental approach, moreover, was a way to safeguard the GHA's wish to include many African perspectives. As shown in Chapter 2, the inclusion of as many diverse African perspectives as possible was seen as a way to make sure that through an inclusion of different viewpoints an objective whole could be constructed from many parts. During a seminar that was organised for the benefit of volume VIII, Ajayi acknowledged the difficulty of writing detached contemporary history and argued that the GHA's 'continental approach', by which he meant the inclusion of many different African perspectives, was a way to guard the 'sincere search for historical truth — as distinct

61 Maurice Glélé, "Appendix I: Speech by the representative of the Director-General of Unesco" in *the general history of Africa. Studies and documents 5. The decolonization of Africa: southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.* (Paris: Unesco, 1981), 159-161, 161.

62 UAP, SHC/MD/10, Meeting of experts for the drafting and publication of a general history of Africa, Addis Ababa, 22 to 26 June 1970, Final Report, 10-11 and UAP, SHC-75/CONF.601, Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 5th meeting, Fez, Morocco, 5-11 February 1975, 4-9. (Hereafter: UAP, Meeting of the Bureau, 5th meeting, Fez, 1975)

63 UAP, Meeting of the Bureau, 5th meeting, Fez, 1975, 5-6.

from propaganda.'[64] Ajayi therefore restated an idea of detachment or objectivity — he used the two interchangeably — that reaffirmed the GHA's focus on emancipatory history that would include all.

Another more serious point of contention were Mazrui's 'references to the colonial past', however.[65] In September 1975, a few months after the Fez meeting, at the third plenary session of the ISC in Cotonou, the volume was discussed again.[66] The Bureau and Mazrui debated whether 'his' volume should be based on colonial watersheds in history, rather than a logic of Africa 'from the inside'. But, as noted above, for Mazrui the difference made between these two perspectives was perhaps a false one. Mazrui also wanted to 'give greater prominence' to contemporary African problems that had not been discussed in previous volumes. The Bureau largely accepted Mazrui's outline during the meeting, but not without changing the titles of many chapters in the proposed table of contents, often to include more countries or territories in Africa or to create more 'general overview' type chapters.

A matter in which Mazrui and the Bureau did agree surrounded the title for the whole volume, however. Although the title that was finally chosen was *Africa since 1935*, the Bureau and Mazrui seriously considered a title that included the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. During the Cotonou meeting they decided on *Africa since the Ethiopian War*.[67] The invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 had been a watershed in anti-colonial history and the development of pan-Africanism.[68] It was described by Nkrumah as a defining moment in his own path towards nationalist insurgency.[69] The GHA explained their initial choice of title by explaining that for Africans the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 marked the beginning of the Second World War. It awakened such

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64 J.F. Ade Ajayi, "Problems of writing contemporary African history" in *The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 8. The methodology of contemporary African history. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organized by Unesco at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 47-58, 50.

65 UAP, Meeting of the Bureau, 5th meeting, Fez, 1975, 7.

66 UAP, SHC/75/CONF.612/3, International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 3rd plenary session, Cotonou, Benin, 8-13 September 1975, 11-19. (Hereafter: UAP, 3rd plenary session 1975)

67 UAP, 3rd plenary session 1975, 55.

68 P. Olisanwuche Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism. The Idea and Movement. 1776-1963* (Washington D.C: Howard University Press, 1982)

69 Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana. The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: International Publishers, 1971[1957]), 27.

fierce reactions in Nkrumah and Africans across the globe because it constituted the fall of the last independent African state at the time. The attendant absence of a response from other European nations marked a reification of all Africans and African states as subjugated and 'less than'. It therefore signified a cognitive shift in the history of pan-Africanism and national struggles for independence. The invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 was about Euro-African relations, or rather the lack of recognition of such relations by Europeans.[70] The GHA chose to recognise this moment explicitly by starting the last volume in 1935 — the African start of World War Two.

Nevertheless, the discussion on the importance of colonialism for volume VIII was not over. Discussion on the volume continued properly in 1978, in Nairobi, during the eighth Bureau meeting and the fourth plenary ISC session. Here the whole ISC could weigh in on decisions. The title was changed again, this time to *Africa in a decade of world conflict*. 'Ethiopia' as part of the title was definitely dropped here. Perhaps in an effort to draw less attention to a single event and rather, in the vein of the GHA, focus on Africa as a whole. Most importantly, the ISC reached a decision on the importance of colonialism, at least with reference to the section on independence struggles: 'a clear-cut choice was made by the Committee, in that references to the former colonial powers were deleted.'[71] That this was a momentous decision did not go unnoticed, as the report states: 'The Committee having thus deliberated, the earth shook in Nairobi, on Wednesday 5 April 1978, at 9 p.m.'[72] It is important to note here that this decision did not mean that the committee wanted to ignore colonialism altogether, as they did impress upon Mazrui and future authors that 'study should be made of all relevant factors in the former colonial structures which cast light on some of the situations which continued to exist after independence.' For Mazrui this may have been a central issue rather than an aside. Like in volume VII, however, overall, the committee decided that the importance of the impact of colonialism should

70 Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 318-28.

71 UAP, CC-78/CONF.607/3. Paris June 1978. Final Reports of the Eighth Meeting of the Bureau and Fourth Plenary Session of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 30 March – 8 April 1978, 38. (Hereafter: UAP, Final Reports Eighth Meeting of the Bureau and Fourth Plenary Session 1978)

72 UAP, Final Reports Eighth Meeting of the Bureau and Fourth Plenary Session 1978, 38.

be minimalised as far as possible. Implicitly the decision suggested that the ISC did not see the colonial period as an important historiographical marker, but, along with Ajayi, as an 'episode' in African history.

Although Mazrui carried out the committees' wishes, he did not wholeheartedly agree with them. In a working document for the volume sent to the GHA secretariat on 16 July 1979, more than a year after the decision had been made, Mazrui could not help but comment:

> Did the Nairobi meeting go too far in the shift from imperial categories to geographical categories? Particularly controversial may have been the Nairobi decision to exclude Mozambique and Angola from Southern Africa. [...] Would this decision unduly complicate work on chapters 8, 9 and 10? Chapters 8 and 9 would have to deal with three linguistic areas [...] instead of two. Chapter 10 would be unilingual (Anglophone) but at the cost of splitting the frontline states. [...] The new geographical regions of Section II are more complicated than the imperial regions recommended in the previous outline of the volume as presented at Nairobi.[73]

Recent political events influenced Mazrui's thinking about the appropriate organisation of the volume, as the frontline states were an anti-apartheid alliance, including Angola and Mozambique. It seems Mazrui wanted to emphasise the unity between these states. From this particular passage it also seems that Mazrui's complaints bore directly on the practical costs of deemphasising the colonial impact on Africa. 'Nairobi' became quite the headache for Mazrui. Throughout the working document he constantly referred to the difficulties of finding authors who could deal with two or more 'imperial languages', implicitly making the point that the colonial period had made an impact on post-colonial Africa — if only linguistically.[74] The introduction that was finally published in the volume certainly suggests that Mazrui was of that opinion and that he was interested in questions pertaining to

73 UAP, CLT CID 137, Concerning Authors for Volume VIII of the UNESCO General History of Africa. (Working documents prepared by the Volume Editor) (Received by the Secretariat on 16 July 1979), 1

74 UAP, CLT CID 137, Concerning Authors for Volume VIII of the UNESCO General History of Africa. (Working documents prepared by the Volume Editor) (Received by the Secretariat on 16 July 1979), 3.

the impact of colonialism for Africa. Nevertheless, the final table of contents was organised along thematic and continental lines and decidedly not 'imperial' regions, whereas that had been the case pre-Nairobi. For instance, before the Nairobi meeting, the table of contents spoke of chapters on 'The British Colonies', 'The French Colonies' and others, whereas afterwards it read: 'North Africa and the horn", "Equatorial West Africa", "Southern Africa since 1945" etc.[75]

It was not the last difference of opinion regarding volume VIII, however. Nor was it the last time Mazrui was accused of deviating from GHA guidelines. Mazrui was a polemicist and advocate for various causes. Although other GHA scholars could also be classified that way, Mazrui was particularly outspoken.[76] When UNESCO tried to remove the name of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic from Chapter nineteen, for instance, on *the development of modern literature since 1935*, Mazrui wrote an impassioned letter of protest. He spoke of a breach of African sovereignty, stating that 'this censorship violates not only the author's own academic independence. It also violates the whole philosophy of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* as an African interpretation of African history.'[77] Mazrui was motivated, it seems, by anti-colonial commitments. It was the Polisaro Front which had named the state Sahrawi Arabic Republic, arguing that the land had been colonised by Morocco. His argument was that the organisation of African Unity had recognised the state by what Mazrui and other more radical anti-colonialists' thought was its proper name, even if UNESCO had not. 'I thought the whole UNESCO History of Africa was partly intended to let Africa tell its own history according to how Africa saw it. Now you want us to tell the African story according to how UNESCO sees it.'[78] Evidently, 'how Africa saw it', was not a singular point of view and Mazrui seems to have been adamant to again underline the connection between anti-colonialism and

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75 UAP, CC CSP 33, Volume 8 Africa Since the Ethiopia War. 1935-1975. Editor: Ali A. Mazrui. Revised Table of Contents for Approval by Nairobi Meeting, 1978 and Ali A Mazrui, ed. and Christophe Wondji, ass. ed. *UNESCO General History of Africa VIII. Africa since 1936* (Paris: UNESCO, 1993) v-vii.

76 Chaly Sawere, "The Multiple Mazrui: Scholar, Ideologue, Philosopher and Artist." In *The Global African. A portrait of Ali A. Mazrui.* ed. Omari H. Kokole (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998) 269-90 and Seifudein Adem, "Ali A. Mazrui, the Postcolonial Theorist", *African Studies Review* 57:1 (2014): 135-152, 141.

77 UAP, CLT CID 99, Ali Mazrui to Monique Melcer Lesueur 20-07-1992.

78 Ibid.

the GHA. By the time volume VIII was being drafted, largely in the 1980s, the original political connections of the GHA, to Nkrumah for instance, had been diluted or severed altogether. The GHA was no longer an anti-colonial torchbearer in the 1980s. Mazrui insisted that because the OAU had recognised the state, 'Africa' had, and the name should therefore be in the volume.[79] He triumphed this time and the name was printed in volume VIII, although between parentheses, as a note, added to the name 'Western Sahara.'[80] It seems that he felt a somewhat greater need to incorporate current continental issues within the GHA, something to which some of the GHA historians tended to have allergic reactions as they were trying to proof that African history could be a detached scholarly endeavour. Yet, the idea that the GHA needed to incorporate current political problems did appeal to at least a part of the ISC, including Boahen, who also did not draw as sharp a line between politics and history as some others within the GHA. That there where different ideas on judging what was and was not too political and what history should and could be used for, became evident within the debate between Ranger and Boahen as well. Different stakes were involved for the two men and in that regard their background mattered. A similar dynamic suggests itself in an argument surrounding a possible postface to be added to the French translation of volume VIII.

Because the GHA ran out of its original UNESCO sponsored funding halfway through the process of drafting volume VIII (see Chapter 5), the French translation of that volume took much longer than expected. Whereas the English version was published in 1993, the French version did not appear until 1998. Obviously, the years between 1993 and 1998 were not devoid of changes in Africa — ranging from the tragic in the form of the Rwandan genocide to the ecstatic regarding the formal end of apartheid in South Africa. Christophe Wondji, who had been asked to function as an assistant French-language editor to Mazrui, therefore, came up with the idea to add a postface to the volume. When Mazrui drafted this postface, however, protest erupted.

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79 Regarding the African Union and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, see: N.N., "Western Sahara", *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series* 54:1 (2017): 21278

80 UAP, CLT CID 99, Fax transmission Gaynor Bartagnon to Ali Mazrui, 22-07-1992 and Volume VIII, 576.

Jan Vansina rejected the postface completely, stating that it undermined the very goal the GHA had set out to achieve:

> *Tout cela est beaucoup trop actuel et superficiel pour mériter une inclusion dans ce volume — il ne faut pas donner une arme capitale aux détracteurs en puissance de cette histoire de l'Afrique qui sont tentés de l'accuser d'être partisane et un outil politique, ce que la commission et son bureau one en general [sic] évité depuis 25 ans* ! [All of this is much too current and superficial to merit inclusion in this volume — one should not provide a lethal weapon to powerful critics of this history of Africa, who are inclined to regard it as partisan and a political tool, which is what the Committee and its Bureau generally avoided for 25 years!][81]

Vansina's commentary on the postface may tell us more about his general idea of what the GHA was to achieve than about the postface itself. Vansina shied away from an overtly political, and therefore, in his estimation, biased GHA. Mazrui had evidently crossed the boundary guiding professional scholarly behaviour in the direction of political partisan involvement. Another critic was Diouldé Laya, a sociologist who had theorised how oral tradition could be used for research within the social sciences.[82] Like Vansina, he did not approve of the postface, calling it '*très subjectif au plan scientifique, très erroné au plan politique, et noctif [sic] au plan intellectuel*' [scientifically very subjective, politically very wrong, and intellectually harmful].[83] Another similarity with Vansina was Laya's investment in the acceptance of oral tradition as viable and reliable source material. Although not quite the same as wanting to shy away from political partisanship, there is a tacit link between needing to be seen as a respectable scholar, with respectable source material, and shying away from overt political involvement. Scholarly respectability, in this instance, seems to have been contingent on scholarly values associated with 'the' imagined or perceived academy. Vansina had, strategically, applied the method of historical

81 UAP, CLT CID 103, Jan Vansina to Christophe Wondji 08-02-1997.

82 For a short biography of Diouldé Laya see: N.N., "Diouldé Laya", Africulture, accessed 11 February 2020, http://africultures.com/personnes/?no=29071

83 UAP, CLT CID 103, Diouldé Laya to Christophe Wondji 16-05-1997.

source criticism to oral traditions because that could prove to the historical scholarly community that oral traditions were in fact legitimate historical sources.[84] For him, scholarly respectability was important and it could be achieved by playing by the rules of scholarship, even now that African history was an established scholarly endeavour — he wrote the letter in 1997. Therefore, Mazrui's apparent failure of doing as such in his political partisanship and his supposedly incorrect application of method, because the postface pertained to recent and current events that could not count as history, were linked. That Vansina did not think the postface should be published in the volume, therefore, was perhaps connected to his wish to be seen as a respectable scholar and to have African history accepted as a respectable scholarly discipline. Fundamentally, Vansina did not like the postface because it did not align with his idea of what historical scholarship ought to be.

That point may be underlined more clearly by looking at those ISC members who did like the postface, or who did not like it, but for reasons completely different from Vansina's. Boahen thought the postface was 'interesting and a typical Mazrui piece — informed, well-written, contrasting and analytical.' Nevertheless, he had a few suggestions:

> Ali has left out completely one of the most crucial issues confronting African states in this decade, namely, how to achieve sustainable, self-reliant, human-centred economic and social development [...] There have also been pro-democracy movements which have forced a military ruler either to return to the barracks or to run for usually farcical elections as a civilian candidate of a political party formed by himself.[85]

Although no longer as pre-occupied with history for self-governance in 1997, Boahen still emphasised the civic responsibilities of history. In contrast with Vansina, he did not at any point suggest that the piece was too political or that the history of the early 1990s was too recent to be included in the volume. His critique, rather, suggested

84 David Newbury, "Contradictions at the Heart of the Canon: Jan Vansina and the Debate over Oral Historiography in Africa, 1960-1985" *History in Africa* 34 (2007): 215-216.

85 UAP, CLT CID 103, Adu Boahen to Christophe Wondji, 13-02-1997.

that the piece was not relevant enough nor sufficiently engaged in the continent's affairs. Kimambo, too, responded positively to the postface. Given his personal history as a Marxist historian who searched for societal relevance in the context of the Dar es Salaam school of history, his approval of Mazrui's piece makes sense.[86] Both he and Boahen had ideas on the purpose of academic history that were radically different from those of Vansina. Whereas Boahen and Kimambo thought of African history as overtly political, albeit in different ways, for Vansina it was only covertly political. As a result, they judged the Mazrui piece very differently.

This difference in judgment on how to write contemporary history echoed throughout volume VIII, in the debates on the place of colonialism in postcolonial history as well as in the postface. This was at least partly connected to the question of how political a historian could be before they would no longer be taken seriously and more imporantly, what kind of politics that historian espoused. What was perceived as impartial scholarship or not — whether political or not and whether politics could infringe on scholarly impartiality — was based on different ideals and rules of scholarship. What was seen as political was not a neutral judgement. Related to that, the question of whether as a scholar it was desirable to be perceived as political or not, depended on whether the scholar wanted to appeal to ideals of scholarly respectability, or to African political realities. For that decision, identity seemed to have mattered.

What politics and for whom within the GHA?

Who was perceived as an impartial professional historian within the GHA and who was not, was contingent on the perceived goal of the project. Given at least one of the goals was emancipatory, the GHA also received critique from within when contributors thought it did not live up to this potential. Ogot was amongst those who critiqued the GHA from within, arguing for the emancipation of non-centralised societies. He worried about the legitimacy of African history after critiques were increasingly levelled against the Nationalist school and

86 Isaria Kimambo, *Three Decades of Production of Historical Knowledge at Dar es Salaam* (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993), 4-12 and Bertram B. B. Mapunda, "A Critical Examination of Isaria Kimambo's Ideas Through Time" *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 269–79, 274–5.

suggested that an emphasis on the state was part of an intellectual dependence on the west — specifically Hegel.[87] Ogot had written a dissertation on non-centralised states in East African pre-colonial history.[88] He had pioneered the collection of oral traditions and the writing of history of non-centralised political entities. Early on in his career Ogot had become the president for the Kenyan historical association. In that capacity he published and edited the proceedings of the same society and in its very first edition argued that to only pay attention to the great states of the African past, was to play into European hands.

> There is no need to comment on the impression [...] that those African peoples who developed forms of centralised states are the only ones worthy of attention [...] current research on the pre-European history of Africa has effectively disposed of it.[89]

In the GHA itself, too, Ogot emphasised how 'court-centred histories' could never be sufficient source material to write the history of the Great Lakes region of East Africa.[90]

As the editor of volume V on the 16th and 17th century, Ogot got into a conflict over the history of the Sudan with Yusuf Hasan, one the authors, because he thought the chapter was too focused on the history of the centralised Islamic state in the north of the country.[91] This seemed antithetical to the ideals and goals of the GHA to Ogot as it denied the history of non-Islamised peoples, the southern Nilotes who had also been non-centralised. Or as he wrote in a letter to Hasan:

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87 Twaddle, "Historians and African History", 146.

88 Ogot, *My footprints*, 96, 105-6. Ogot's thesis was later adapted into a book: Bethwell Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967)

89 Bethwell A Ogot, "Some approaches to African History" in *Hadith I, Proceedings of the annual conference of the Historical Association of Kenya 1967*, ed. Bethwell A. Ogot (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968) 1-10, 7.

90 B. A. Ogot, "20. The Great Lakes region" in *The General History of Africa IV. Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, ed. D.T. Niane (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 496-524, 499.

91 For more on the conflicting histories of the Sudan see: Elena Vezzadini, "Identity, history and power in the historiography of Sudan: some thoughts on Holt and Daly's *A History of Modern Sudan*" *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 46:3 (2012): 439-451.

> You have left out from your account the history of Southern Sudan. Indeed, you have dismissed the whole region in three lines on page 9 [...], on the ground that 'remained outside the influence of Islam and Arabic culture until the nineteenth century', thereby confirming the assumption that the history of the Sudan during this period must be equated with the history of its Islamisation and Arabisation![92]

Ogot may have been partly motivated to do this because he himself was a Luo from Kenya. The Luo belonged to the Nilotic ethnic group, the same group which was also part of South Sudanese history. Ogot's insistence that African history had to include not just the narrative of great states, but also that of decentralised peoples was not to be seen apart from his own particular context. The tensions between north and south, moreover, were high when Ogot wrote the letter in April 1981. Civil war broke out in June 1983. Northern dominance of Sudan was a key grievance in this conflict and it may therefore be that Ogot was not satisfied with a chapter that was skewed towards the North. Conversely, when Ogot had changed the text, it was Hasan's turn to critique him. Ogot had committed the gravest of historical errors in adding anachronistic elements to the chapter:

> Professor Ogot [...] had introduced some fundamental changes which to my mind are not relevant to the period under discussion but are probably more relevant to the "History of the Sudan in the Twentieth Century".[93]

Hasan noted that he thought the 'ethnic struggle' had only come into being after 1821, when Sudan was created as a political entity and that any reference to such struggles before that time, and specifically

92 Ogot, moreover, was unhappy with Hasan's use of the term 'Hamitic', pointing out that the term was "obsolete and meaningless." UAP, CLT CID 92, Bethwell Ogot to Yusuf Hasan, 15 april 1981 and UAP, CLT CID 92, Bethwell Ogot to Maurice Glélé, 24 september 1982.

93 UAP, CLT CID 104, Yusuf Fadl Hasan to Bethwell Ogot, Maurice Glélé and the members of the Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 12-08-1986, 3 (Hereafter: UAP, Hasan to Ogot, 12-08-1986)

before the 1947 Juba convention, would be ideological.[94] Glélé urged Ogot to salvage the chapter and handle the situation diplomatically.[95] Eventually, Ogot decided to accept Hasan's point of view, even though he did not agree with it, because it was in the spirit of the GHA to do so and because his volume had already suffered delays. He recognised that the conflict between himself and Hasan was essentially a conflict between northern Sudanese and southern Sudanese perspectives, but since the GHA was 'a work of synthesis involving several authors with different perspectives', he was willing to resist the urge to revise the chapter further.[96] In the end, Hasan too consented to adding Ogot's name to the chapter. The situation was resolved. What this shows is how difficult history writing for emancipation can be. What is seen as emancipatory is open to debate. Here again the origins of the two authors mattered greatly in what perspective they adopted — northern or southern.[97]

As this example shows, what it meant to write impartial, non-ideological, history was dependent on who judged. The opinion of that judge in turn could be dependent on where they came from and what their ethnic background was. As the example of Ogot's and Hasan's dispute shows, however, the GHA goal of embracing different perspectives and authors, seemed to have reigned supreme. What the example also shows is that the inclusion of multiplte perspectives is perhaps without end and, moreover, not without conflict. After all, not all perspectives are congruent with one another. Choices will always have to be made regarding the inclusion of perspectives, specifically when it comes to political emancipation. The inclusion of one group perspective may mean obscuring or amending that of another, as the example with Ogot and Hasan shows, even, or perhaps especially, beyond the exclusion of eurocentric perspectives. Beyond that exclusion were a multitude of perspectives and ideas that could not always be made to fit the same mould. Once the prime enemy of the GHA, eurocentrism, had been dealt with, there were still a multitude of other incongruent

94 UAP, Hasan to Ogot, 12-08-1986, 4.

95 UAP, CLT CID 92, Adu Boahen to Bethwell Ogot, 26 october 1986 and UAP, CLT CID 92, Maurice Glélé to Bethwell Ogot, 26 june 1986

96 UAP, CLT CID 104, Bethwell Ogot to Maurice Glélé 04-11-1986.

97 Another example of background influencing how an author interpreted changes to their chapter occurred when Taddesse Tamrat wrote Maurice Glélé in protest when he found his chapter for volume IV had been altered as part of the editing process. See: UAP, CC CSP 40, Adu Boahen to Tadresse Tamrat, 17-05-1983.

perspectives and narratives. This makes it apparent that the pan-African ideals of the GHA were contingent upon the historical reality of colonialism. The choice what to include and what not, moreover, was, of course, at least partly motivated by politics. The wish to move beyond the Trevor-Roper trap described by Ranger, Kimambo and others, moreover, was not so easily fulfilled because a history focused on state-formation served the immediate needs of some GHA historians.

Conclusions

What the role of politics should be and how politics was related to the writing of history was interpreted in various ways within the GHA. This became clear in the various debates surrounding the role of Europe and the perceived imposition of colonial categories on African history within volumes VII and VIII.[98] The interpretation of the histories of colonisation and decolonisation remained essentially politicised. The reason for this was that the place of Europe within the history of Africa as seen by the GHA was focused on emancipation from Europe. Europe was cast as the enemy to be defeated in the narrative of colonialism and decolonisation within the GHA. This served the purpose, at least regarding volume VII under Boahen's editorship, to rally citizens of new nation states to the national cause. As the altercation between Boahen and Ranger shows, not everyone was on board necessarily with this specific political agenda. Most of the scholars working on the project were sympathetic to its political goals, although some more than others. For some scholars, however, the most important goal, unmistakeably political as well, was not to provide burgeoning nation states with a supporting historical discipline, but to develop the field of African history academically as part and parcel of the larger historical academy. African history had to be accepted as a respectable area of historical inquiry and overt political activism could damage that need. Political and scholarly ideals were therefore hard to separate when it came the history of Europe in Africa, namely the history of (de)colonisation, resulting in tensions between GHA historians who had different interpretations on what it meant to contribute to political emancipation and how important that ideal should be made. They also

98 The arguments surrounding the Hamitic hypothesis, for instance, could also be dubbed 'colonial' as the Hamitic hypothesis itself had been a 19th century, colonial, invention.

had different interpretations on just what exactly constituted politics and even on what kind of politics would be permissible or necessary within the GHA. Mazrui, for instance, notoriously disagreed on some matters with the rest of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (ISC). When it came to the importance of colonialism within volume VIII; he did not feel the same need as the rest to emphasise that Africa had moved on from colonialism and that it had just been an episode. Mazrui's reluctance to neatly follow the path the ISC had carved out for him, highlights the contested nature of some of the GHA ideas. Emancipation and inclusion of different narratives became key issues within the GHA.

This chapter has offered a narrative of the, sometimes arduous, relationship between political imperatives and scholarly standards in the writing of history. It has therefore shown that the ideal that the GHA should contribute to political emancipation was difficult to implement in reality because it was not always clear what kind of political emancipation was meant by that, or for whom. At the same time, it is safe to conclude that the various controversies around the inclusion or exclusion of some forms of history, or the ethnic and national sensibilities that influenced the writing of chapters were fitting testaments to the (pan-African) ideal of plurality that was set out in the positioning documents. At the same time, it was precisely that diversity that sometimes made it difficult to come to a shared understanding regarding the way African history should be written and what role politics should have therein.

Conclusions to Part Two
REALITIES

The three ideals discussed in part I were sometimes hard to align. The reason for this is that all three ideals, anti-eurocentrism, pan-African collectivity and the ideal that the GHA should contribute to political emancipation, when brought to fruition, were enmeshed and entangled in the political realities of decolonisation, both inside and outside of academia. The reality of anti-eurocentrism was complicated to implement because it was perceived to be both political and epistemic. The ideal of pan-African collectivity was difficult to implement because of practical realities regarding the funding of a project as enormous as the GHA as well as changing political circumstances and moreover, the fact that Euro-Americans retained the upper hand within the global politics of knowledge production. The ideal of political emancipation, lastly, directly clashed at times with what some scholars, mainly Euro-Americans, saw as reputable scholarship.

It remained difficult for the GHA to truly decolonise African history because, firstly, it was not always clear exactly what that meant. Did it mean moving away from European categories of thought, such as race, thereby deracialising the writing of history? The problem with that approach was that race could, in some instances, be made useful for analyses that put the primer of history back in African hands, as was the case with Diop. Or did decolonising history mean to provide political decolonisation with historical narratives? The answer to these

questions, unsurprisingly, depended on who was asked. The GHA, although it often articulated it wishes in one voice through minutes of meetings, was made up of many different individuals who each had different ideas on what the ultimate goal of the GHA should be. Moreover, these goals were not just hampered on occasions because of substantive debate on the role the GHA was to play. In fact, such debates may have contributed to an intellectual climate within the GHA which helped further the growth of African history, as Vansina noted. More problematic perhaps than internal discussions, were external practical problems connected to funding, the demise of the African academy and the subsequent and connected growth of Euro-American, but particularly American, expertise on African history.

The challenges the GHA encountered are a testimony to the continuing efforts towards historiographical and intellectual decolonisation. The project struggled partly, I think, because its premise, that historical knowledge about Africa had to be written from an African perspective, was incongruent with the way the global politics of knowledge production developed, partly as a result of Cold War manoeuvring. Perhaps what I mean is best explained by reversing the age-old adage of 'knowledge is power'.[1] 'Power is knowledge', rather, would explain why the *General History of Africa* could come into being in 1964, but did not quite live up to its promise when the last volume was published in 1998. Those who had envisioned a decolonised history of the continent had lost power on the global stage — even if we can debate what exactly it means to move beyond European categories of thought. The fact is that many of the terms used throughout this work — eurocentrism, Provincialisation, pan-Africanism — were not invented by Euro-Americans. What we see as a European category of thought may, in part, equally be decided by who has to power to determine. Following decolonial scholars then, I want to argue that the GHA, in part, could not always fully succeed at decolonising because, although the colonial period had ended, the legacy of colonialism still impacted the global politics of knowledge production.

1 Attributed to Francis Bacon, *Scientia potentia est.*

PART THREE

Perceptions

Introduction to part three

Part three of this dissertation focuses on the way the GHA volumes were received by both insiders and outsiders. It deals with the retrospective perceptions of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* in order to gauge what the project has meant for African historiography and its emancipation within the historical discipline. It asks the question of how the project was reflected upon after it had been brought to a finish and how and why the ideals as formulated in the 1960s and early 1970s changed, if at all? How did both critics and contributors look back on the project? It traces how they accounted for the way that African studies had changed between 1964 and 1998. The dual, partly contingent goals of the GHA had been to become incorporated in the academy as a reputable scholarly endeavour and, secondly, to contribute to emancipation of Africans on the continent. Did those retrospectively reflecting on the project think that the political and epistemic goals of the GHA had been fulfilled and if not, what was its perceived legacy, both in terms of scholarship as well as academic politics? I ask these questions not only to ascertain whether the General History was a 'success' or 'failure' according to its own standards, but also to reflect on its position within the history of historiography as part of the history of decolonisation. This is of especial interest because the history of African historiography and the role of the GHA within it was judged very differently by different historical actors. Part three of this dissertation broadens the perspective of this study somewhat and outlines these differences to show they stemmed from contrasting interpretations on the purpose of both the GHA and African historiography and arguably historiography more broadly.

CHAPTER EIGHT
'A massive work of little worth.' Retrospective Perceptions of the Project by Africanists in the United States and the United Kingdom

Introduction

The first two volumes of the *General History of Africa* appeared in French in 1980 and in English in 1981. Later volumes followed gradually during the 1980s and 1990s, with the French edition of volume VIII making up the rear in 1998. By then the scholarly environment surrounding African history had changed markedly from the 1960s. African history was no longer seen as an oxymoron, but had, by 1980, become an established and accepted part of the historical discipline in various countries. The original premises with which the GHA had been launched in 1964 and carried out in the 1970s were no longer as relevant in 1980. Yet, the field of African history had also become less African with time as many universities on the continent had either lost funding for history departments or were suffering from state control as a result of anti-intellectual governments, if not both. African studies had meanwhile grown in the United States, mostly at historically

white institutions, even if neoliberal policies had impacted higher education there too.[1] And, whilst departments of African studies in the United Kingdom and continental Europe had equally suffered from a depletion of funds, an Africanist community was nevertheless firmly established by the 1980s.[2] The global centre for African studies, in other words, had moved away again from the African continent after a brief period of Africanisation in the 1960s. The atmosphere in which the GHA was published was different from when the project had been conceived.

This chapter focuses explicitly on the academic Anglophone critics of the GHA through an analysis of published reviews of the project in academic journals. These reviews are especially interesting because they were mostly written by white Europeans and Americans. Besides the shifting of the academic centre of African studies to the United States, another reason for this was because most of the African academic historians of the time had contributed to the volumes and could therefore not review them. These participants in the project, moreover, generally looked back on it in a much more positive and nostalgic light, a topic to which the following chapter returns. As such, this chapter's corpus of source material consists mostly of reviews written by American and British Africanists. I chose to focus on these reviews, explicitly, because of my primary interest in the academic reception of the *General History of Africa*. Its cultural reception within African Africanist circles is described in the next chapter. The question of whether the GHA was successfully incorporated into the mainstream of the Euro-American academy or not, and what that academy entailed, may therefore be best researched by scrutinising these written reviews for the volumes once they came out in the 1980s and 1990s. Generally speaking, the GHA was not reviewed very positively. What can these reviews tell us about the success of the GHA in terms of broad scholarly acceptance of the project and the, by the 1980s, established environment of African studies?

In order to answer these questions, the chapter also looks at the reviews written for the *Cambridge History of Africa* project, which was

1 William G. Martin, "The Rise of African Studies (USA) and the Transnational Study of Africa", *African Studies Review* 54:1 (2011): 59-83, 78.

2 Anthony Kirk-Greene, "The Emergence of an Africanist Community in the UK" in *The British Intellectual Engagement with Africa in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Douglas Rimmer and Anthony Kirk-Greene (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), 11-40, 11-2.

seen as a rival to the GHA. The British *Cambridge History of Africa* (hereafter CHA), like the GHA, consisted of eight volumes. The CHA was a very English project and it is in that context that the comparisons with the GHA should be placed. For this reason, too, the chapter mostly focuses on the Anglophone Africanist circles. The first CHA volume appeared in 1975. In some ways the project was seen as more successful than the GHA. It received the obvious critique that it was eurocentric, given most of its authors were white men from SOAS. However, in its attempt to create a synthesis of African history, it was not seen as less successful than the GHA. It was also compared to the GHA favourably for being less politically charged. Yet, most of the reviewers were also Euro-Americans. A comparison between the ways the two projects were reviewed therefore might provide an illustration of the specific way in which the GHA was seen to have failed or succeeded in the eyes of the reviewers. Although the view of these reviewers should of course not be taken as necessarily representative for all Africanists at the time, they do provide some insight into several existing opinions. They may also provide an answer towards questions concerning the acknowledgement and perceived importance of activism and the perception of racial difference within African studies at the time. Whereas many of the GHA Africanists were, broadly speaking, of the opinion that scholarship and activism or political engagement were not necessarily or not always in opposition to one another, other Africanists might have thought differently as they adhered to a different scholarly standard. A pertinent question that remains, and one which also follows from Chapters 6 and 7, is whether these differences were, to a large extent, racially or geographically organised. Of course, to some extent, African studies have always been racially organised in that the praxis of academic research about Africa has for the most part been external to the continent itself.[3] African historiography and African studies more broadly has always had to reckon with the effects of European (epistemic) colonisation in its orientation. What was studied under the guise of African studies has largely been determined by factors from outside the continent.

To analyse the academic Anglophone perceptions of the GHA, the chapter first briefly details who the review writers were, followed by an analysis of the reviews for the GHA as published in academic jour-

3 Paulin J. Houtondji, "Knowledge of Africa, Knowledge by Africans: Two Perspectives on African Studies" *RCCS Annual Review* 1 (2009): 121–31, 127

nals and discussion on why some review authors choose to critique the GHA, sometimes in very harsh terms, whilst others found aspects to praise. Lastly, it discusses how the GHA and the CHA were compared to one another.

The reviewers

In total, this chapter analyses 35 reviews written for various volumes of the GHA (see Figure 5). Most of the reviews concern the first volume, or the first two, as these came out simultaneously in 1980 and 1981. The chapter also looks at 14 reviews written for the CHA (see Figure 6.) It bears mentioning that 41 out of a total of 49 reviews were written by Britons or Americans and some individuals reviewed both series at different points in time. It seems that, in the 1980s and 1990s, British and American scholars mostly decided what was and was not good scholarship within African history, at least within academic journals. Prominent British reviewers for the GHA were Basil Davidson and Roland Oliver, who was himself one of the series editors for the CHA. Prominent American reviewers included Joseph C. Miller. Jan Vansina, moreover, reviewed volume IV of the CHA. Bogumil Jewsiewicki reviewed volume I of the GHA. There were no African American reviewers, a telling absence given that a sizeable group of the reviewers were Americans. By the time the GHA came out African American scholars had claimed a place within the American academy and yet they were apparently divorced from this project of Africanisation. The relative lengthiness of some of the reviews, moreover, emphasises the importance of the project under review for the discipline. The entanglement and overlap between both the projects as well as who reviewed them reflects how relatively small and close-knitted the Africanist community was in the 1980s and 1990s.

The reviewers for both projects should be viewed in the context of the rise and consolidation of African studies within the United Kingdom and the United States. Once the study of Africa had become mainstream and more consolidated around historically white North American centres, it seemed to move away from some of its more radical anti-colonial roots — even if some of the British pioneers had been anti-colonial activists as well. Reviewers were mostly either part of this first generation of British and American pioneers, like Davidson and Oliver, but amongst which we can also count Vansina and Curtin. Or they belonged to the generation that came immediately after and

had been taught by them. Their foremost goals within the field of African history had in part been similar to that of some of the African founders: to see African history accepted as a valued and reputable epistemic activity. Though what that meant in different geographical, political and epistemic contexts, and whether it included pan-African perspectives, could differ markedly. The engaged scholarship of the African founders of the discipline on the continent was not always necessarily a part of the American Africanist academy.

VOLUME GHA	N. OF REVIEWS	AUTHORS
V1	4	2 Britons 1 American 1 Frenchman
V2	3	1 American 1 Briton 1 Nigerian
V1+V2	6 (one incl. CHA)	5 Britons 1 American 1 Lithuanian
V3	3	1 Australian 1 Briton 2 Americans
V4	4	3 Americans 1 Britain
V5	3	2 Americans 1 Briton
V6	3	2 Americans 1 Canadian
V7	5	1 South African 3 Americans 1 Briton
V8	4	2 Britons 1 American 1 South African

Fig. 5 Table showing the number of reviews for each volume of the GHA, as well as the nationalities of the authors.

Volume CHA	N. of reviews
V1	3
V2	1
V3	0
V4	4
V5	0
V6	1
V7	2
V8	3

Fig. 6 Table showing the number of reviews for each volume of the CHA.

The *General History of Africa* reviewed

Most of the reviews for the GHA generally seemed quite critical of the project. These critical reviews are interesting because in offering criticism they may show what standards of scholarship the authors adhered to. By comparing the GHA volumes negatively with what these authors thought good scholarship ought to be, the reviews can reveal what their ideal image of African historical scholarship was. Reviews that tend to judge the work negatively inform us about the way the GHA might have differed from some established ideas about the way African history needed to be written. At the same time, less critical or even overtly positive reviews may tell us something about a possible sympathy towards the project and from that, shared values of scholarship, as well as a shared idea of the direction of African history. The reviews, therefore, may show in what way the GHA was accepted by the Africanist community that existed in the 1980s and 1990s in Britain and the United States.

The criticism the GHA received can be roughly divided into two main categories. The first type of critique was focused on the way the GHA lagged behind current historiographical debates. As time wore on, reviewers increasingly expressed their displeasure with the time lapse between the writing of chapters and their eventual publication, which caused chapters to be outdated. Secondly and perhaps more scathing, there were those reviewers who disapproved of the entire project due to the fact that it had a political agenda. The Cheikh Anta Diop chapter especially harvested harsh criticism and the accusation that the GHA was mostly a political project.[4] Of course there is overlap between these two categories and neither are mutually exclusive. I will mostly focus on the diagnoses, made by review authors, that the project was either too political or too outdated, as these are the most telling regarding the whole of the GHA project. That is not to say there was not also a third type of critique centred on what was perceived as shoddy editorial work, issues of translation or typographical errors as well as, fourthly, more detailed criticisms for specific chapters

4 In the American context the chapter was most likely reminiscent of African-American Afrocentrism and the black American need to meaningfully connect 'western' history with Egyptian civilization. This could be interpreted as a threat by white Africanists who sought to produce 'objective' knowledge on Africa which they felt needed to be separated from domestic issues of cultural heritage. West and Martin, "Introduction", 10.

and specific historiographical issues.[5] The third type of critique may sometimes illustrate other more fundamental critique and moreover, speaks to the difficulty of organising editorial work across three continents during a 34-year period. When the GHA was praised, conversely, it was often for its authenticity and its adherence to pan-African diversity. Praise was also directed towards specific well-known authors who had devoted their time and energy to the GHA, such as Jan Vansina or Terence Ranger.[6] It is perhaps not coincidental that both valued scholars and trailblazers were Europeans.

Owing to the fact that the first two volumes appeared in the same year in English, 1981, quite a few reviews focus on both volumes at once. One such a review was written by Bogumil Jewsiewicki in French, next to an English review by Peter Shinnie. Jewsiewicki was a Lithuanian historian who had spent time teaching at Louvanium from 1968 until 1977, alongside Vansina. The remainder of his career as an academic took place in Québec. He was a specialist on Congolese history. His review concluded that the UNESCO project had failed in its mission to return history to the people. Specifically, Jewsiewicki

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5 See: Peter L. Shinnie and B. Jewsiewicki, "Review: The UNESCO History Project / L'Histoire-monument ou l'histoire conscience. Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, Vol. 1 by UNESCO and J. Ki-Zerbo; General History of Africa II, Ancient Civilizations of Africa by G. Mokthar." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 15 :3 (1981): 539-51, 541 and J. Jeffrey Hoover, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, Vol II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa b G. Mokhtar; The Peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of Meroitic Script: Proceedings of the Symposium Held in Cairo from 28 January to 3 February 1974 by UNESCO" *African Studies Review* 24:4 (1981): 135-7, 135.

6 See: Donald R. Wright, "Reviewed Work(s): Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Centuries. Volume IV of General History of Africa by D.T. Niane" *Canadian Journal of African / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 20:1 (1986): 133-5, 133; Randall L. Pouwels, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa. Volume 5, Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century by B. A. Ogot." *The American Historical Review* 99:4 (1994):1371-2, 1371; John Hargreaves, "Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History Vol I: Methodology and African Prehistory by J. Ki-Zerbo." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 54:3 (1984): 111-2, 111; David W. Phillipson, "Review: The Unesco History: Volume One. Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History of Africa. Vol I: Methodology and African Prehistory by J. Ki-Zerbo." *The Journal of African History* 23:1 (1982): 115-6, 115; Ivor Wilks, "Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History of Africa. Volume I: Methodology and African Prehistory by J. Ki-Zerbo; UNESCO General History of Africa. Volume II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa by G. Mokthar." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15:2 (1982): 283-5, 284 and T C McCaskie, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, VII: African under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935 by A. Adu Boahen." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 57:3 (1987): 401-3, 403.

thought the absence of a neo-Marxist perspective of history was '*une lacune deplorable*' [a deplorable gap].[7] He accused the project of being a servant of state power rather than a useful critique of the way African history had been done. The figures of Trevor-Roper and Hegel had been propped up as strawman by the project to chase off the old eurocentric myths that had long been defeated and proven untenable by the time the project came out.[8] Here then, lies the tragedy of the GHA. As Jewsiewicki suggested, the GHA's defining ideals and raison d'être, that Africa had a history apart from Europeans, had, at least within Africanist circles, become a commonplace by the time the first volumes were published. As a starting point for an eight-volume series of African history, the statement that Africa had a history worth telling seemed outdated and even beside the point. The debate had progressed beyond what the GHA had engaged itself in. As a result, Jewsiewicki identified the GHA as not radical enough in its rejection of either European oppression or African autocracies.

Other reviewers had similar opinions; they did not disagree with what the GHA had set out to do, but, did not consider the project a success on its own terms either, in part because new debates and questions had arisen. David Phillipson concluded that laudable as UNESCO's originals aims may have been, the times had changed so radically that the result was of 'very doubtful quality.'[9] John Hargreaves and Christopher Ehret drew similar conclusions. The latter also complained that volume I had failed to include enough African authors.[10] Tom McCaskie pinpointed these thoughts articulated by other reviewers by contextualising in how far the GHA adhered to a political and scholarly ideology that had since become outdated and that he did not necessarily agree with either:

> In a very real sense this book is an epitaph rather than a future directed effort; it sums up nearly two decades of 'liberal' scholarship on Africa, and in its breathless (almost ingratiating) plea for an 'African past' it encapsulates the mirror

7 Shinnie and Jewsiewicki, "Review: The UNESCO History Project", 550.

8 Ibid, 543.

9 Phillipson, "Review: The Unesco History: Volume One.", 115.

10 Hargreaves, "Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History Vol I:", 111-2 and Christopher Ehret, "Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. I: Methodology and African Prehistory by J. Ki-Zerbo." *African Studies Review* 24:4 (1981): 133-4, 133.

> image of decolonisation and independence — a curious mixture of defensive apologia and self (academic) congratulation about Africa's place on the world stage.[11]

McCaskie then, like Jewsiewicki, thought the work was trying to make a point regarding the existence and importance of an African past that had lost its pertinence. It was the kind of scholarship that had 'mirrored' Euro-American academia and Euro-American modernity in an effort to decolonise without really being critical of the underlying logic of such scholarship. What both Jewsiewicki and McCaskie diagnosed, then, was the absence, largely, of postcolonial critique within the GHA. Given the suggestion that the GHA was perhaps not critical enough in its realisation of African historiography, it seems both reviewers did appreciate the project for what it had originally set out to do. Conceivably it was for that reason too that McCaskie, in another review for volume VII, changed his tune somewhat: 'Some time ago, in reviewing volume IV of this series, I was sceptical, even pessimistic. This volume has, on the whole, restored my sagging equanimity. It is a useful (and usable) decently priced teaching text.'[12] Judged by educational rather than scholarly standards, it seems the GHA could be seen as at least a useful project. Although it is hard to appraise what it was exactly that McCaskie meant to convey with his assessment that the GHA was indeed a useful teaching text. Was it perhaps a compliment, but a rather fatal one?

Following from this, the idea that the GHA had in fact copied Euro-American ideals of what scholarship had to be, thereby failing to provincialise Europe, appears in some reviews as well. William Cohen commented on the internalisation of 'western' ideals in volume VII by the GHA's referral to Africans that had received 'western' schooling as 'educated', showing that, despite Boahen's best efforts, some eurocentrism had creeped into his volume.[13] Joseph C. Miller, moreover, professor at the university of Virginia when he wrote a review for vol-

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11 T.C. McCaskie, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa: Volume IV. Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century by D.T. Niane." *African Studies Review* 28:4 (1985): 109-11, 109.

12 McCaskie, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, VII", 403.

13 William B. Cohen, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa. Volume 7, African under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935 by A. Adu Boahen." *The American Historical Review* 92:3 (1987): 716-7, 717.

ume IV on Africa from the 12th to the 16th century, stated that 'these chapters [...] stress Africa's contribution to the history of mankind in terms that reflect Western rather than African values.'[14] Although he did not elaborate what he meant by 'African' or 'Western' values, he found that the history had mostly adopted a 'western historiography' and that this was problematic. At the same time, he also commended the volume for 'formulating valuable African perspectives on Africa's past.'[15] It is therefore hard to appraise what Miller meant exactly in his judgement of the volume. In 2018, about a year before he died, Miller had articulated very clearly what his lifelong aspirations had been regarding African history: 'a commitment to bringing Africans respectfully into the mainstream of the history they share with the rest of us, and us with them.'[16] In other words, Miller shared those aspirations with Vansina, under whose tutelage he had worked towards a PhD at Wisconsin, and other GHA members who wanted to see African history accepted as an epistemic activity that was just as worthwhile as European history.[17] However, Miller seemed to suggest that the GHA had mostly failed at its goal of decolonising that history in the process. Even though reviewers argued that criticising eurocentrism within the history of Africa had become somewhat of a commonplace, at least in terms of topic and focus, they also argued that the GHA had not gone far enough in its attempt at such a decolonisation.

The volume under editorship by Ali Mazrui, moreover, suffered, more than any of the other volumes, from a delay in publication, because it was conceived, written and edited before the major changes of the 1990s, but published after. For a work of history dealing with recent events this was a sure recipe for astonished and very sharp reviews. One review for volume VIII stands out especially, both because it

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14 Joseph C. Miller, "Reviewed Work(s): General History Africa. IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century by Djibril Tamsir Niane" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17:3 (1987): 698-700, 698.

15 Miller, "Reviewed Work(s): General History Africa. IV", 698.

16 N.N., "UVA Law's Goluboff, History's Miller Elected to American Academy of Arts and Sciences." *UVA Today* 18-04-2019, accessed on 15-5-2020, https://news.virginia.edu/content/uva-laws-goluboff-historys-miller-elected-american-academy-arts-and-sciences

17 Kenda Mutongi and Martin Klein, "In Memoriam: Joseph C. Miller (1939-2019)" *Perspectives on History. The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* 20-05-2019, accessed on 15-5-2020, https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2019/joseph-c-miller-(1939%E2%80%932019)

is nine pages long and because it was published in *Présence Africaine* in 2006, post-apartheid. It was written by Christopher Saunders, a white South African historian working at the University of Cape Town. The Mazrui volume had missed describing the events leading up to the end of apartheid and as such it was unsurprising that Saunders was very critical of the volume. Saunders opened his review by comparing the GHA and the CHA and wondering why the GHA took so long to get published. [18] The delay had not done the volume any favours. The lack of South African historians in this volume and within the project as a whole, moreover, may also explain why it had neglected to do the history of Southern Africa justice. Saunders identified that much of what was said in the volume about the liberation of Southern Africa was conceived and written during the 1978 seminar on the decolonisation of Southern Africa in Warsaw and had not been sufficiently updated by 1993, when the volume appeared in English: 'The volume, so long in gestation, only marginally took account of these dramatic changes.' Saunders concluded that it showed: 'a very blatant example of historians caught up in a present-day concern, in this case the struggle for liberation.'[19] His criticism of the volume rested on the subjective way in which he felt the volume treated the struggle for liberation in southern Africa, as a result of the contemporary nature of the events the historians were trying to describe and analyse.[20] It had missed the mark in its description of recent events in Southern Africa — perhaps proving Vansina right when he had criticised Mazrui earlier on for wanting to include history that was too contemporary.[21] As Jean All-

18 Christopher Saunders, "The General History of Africa and Southern Africa's Recent Past." *Présence Africaine* 173 (2006): 117-26

19 Saunders, "The General History of Africa", 120. The same comments were made by Richard Rathbone, "Reviewed Work(s): The UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. VIII: Africa since 1935 by Ali A. Mazrui", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28:1 (1995): 182-4.

20 Saunders was, of course, not the only review author who commented on the lack of useful information and analysis on southern Africa as a result of the delay in publication and the lack of South African authors. Jean Allman too, in a review for the journal of African history published in 1995, stated that the work was outdated. It had failed to incorporate new scholarship. Jean Allman, "Review: The Burden of Time. Reviewed Work(s): Africa since 1935: General History of Africa by Ali A. Mazrui" *Journal of African History* 36:3 (1995): 528-30.

21 See chapter seven.

man put it in another review, the volume clearly carried 'the burden of time.'[22]

Another reviewer, E. Ann McDougall, who had completed at PhD at Birmingham during the period that Fage was king of the castle, was decidedly negative about the way the pan-African aspirations of the project had guided its decision making policies in her review for volume VI. She chided the work for its lack of critical engagement in questions of identity and the philosophy of history underlying the work itself. Her comments pertain to M'Bow's preface and are therefore relevant for the whole series:

> Most disturbing [...] is an agenda which echoes uncomfortably in our present 'politically correct' climate [...]. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow (former Director-General of UNESCO) introduces the series as a response to Africans' 'right to take the historical initiative', to their need to 're-establish the historical authenticity of their societies on solid foundations ... by demonstrating the inadequacy of the methodological approaches long ... in use in research on Africa' (pp. xxiv–vi). 'Western' historians grappling with recently articulated theoretical discourse(s) welcome changes in Africa which have allowed African historians to develop a new agenda. But to suggest that the simple inclusion of African authors allows for 'historical initiative', achieves 'authenticity' or redresses existing 'inadequacies' is at best naive; at worst, patronising. There is little evidence here that African contributors saw the sources, questions or answers any differently than their non-African colleagues. Ironically, 'what is 'African' about African history?', and 'what does being African mean for the writing of African history?' questions genuinely reflecting the concerns of the founders of this series, are today generating introspection by African and 'western' historians alike. This consciousness is influencing a growing number of publications but, unfortunately, this volume is not among them.[23]

22 Allman, "Review: The Burden of Time.", 528.

23 E. Ann McDougall, "Review: The Sands of Time. Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History of Africa, Volume VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century Until the 1880s by J.F. Ade Ajayi", *Journal of African History* 35:2 (1994): 314-16, 315-16.

McDougall vehemently dismissed what she identified as essentialism in the GHA's goals of incorporating as many African authors as possible. Like Jewsiewicki, Phillipson, Miller and others, moreover, McDougall established that the GHA was behind in its theoretical underpinning of the project and had failed to catch up to the times. Her critique echoes critique levelled at Africanist historiography by postcolonial thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon, who argued that Africanisation and nationalisation were not the same as decolonisation. There is, moreover, perhaps also some hedged praise within McDougall's review. Like others, she did seem to ascribe to the starting ideals of the GHA, but was ostensibly critical of the way they had been implemented. She seems to have been unaware or unwilling to take into account that the project had come into being during a different time.

Radical as it may have been in 1964, these review authors concluded that in 1981 the GHA had mostly been overtaken by new, even more radical, insights. In a way this is a testimony to the success of at least part of the GHA goals; to incorporate African history as a scholarly reputable endeavour. Yet, at the same time, what was seen as reputable scholarship had changed. It is an irony of progress that the GHA found itself criticised by authors from the global north for not being decolonised enough. It would likely not have been possible to voice critique of the sort mentioned above without first arguing that African history was a viable academic endeavour. Arguably the assertation that Africa had a history — and could therefore lay claim to a national past and self-government — had been a very political, or rather politicised, statement to make, even if the idea that Africa would be organised along the nation-state model was not, at least not within Africa itself. It is a testimony to the progress of African historiography that such statements as 'Africa has a history' had become depoliticised by the time the first volumes appeared.

Many reviewers, however, still objected to what they identified as an overtly political ideology within the GHA. They did not necessarily object to the flavour of that ideology, but rather to the presence of a political agenda as such. Often Diop's chapter seemed to serve as a catalyst for that sentiment. Peter Shinnie intimated that he did not subscribe to what he perceived as the political ideology that underwrote the GHA. He reviewed volume II, including the Diop chapter, when he wrote: 'Sadly, this volume of the long-awaited UNESCO sponsored history of Africa is a warning of how such a book should not be produced. A distinguished Egyptologist to edit it, and a varied

array of contributors have managed to produce a massive work of little worth. [...] Perhaps it was inevitable that political considerations and a wish by UNESCO that different opinions should be represented should have led to such an unfortunate result.'[24] One of the most important reasons for Shinnie's disapproval was the chapter by Diop on the origin of the ancient Egyptians: 'He presents once again his peculiar view about the nature of the ancient Egyptian population [...] It seems that UNESCO and Mokhtar were embarrassed by the unscholarly and preposterous nature of Diop's views but were unable to reject his contribution.'[25] He was also critical of the inclusion of some aspects of the Hamitic hypothesis in volume II: 'surely by now historians of Africa can do better than to describe Kushite kings as having 'features ... more akin to those of Hamitic pastoralists with an undoubted strain of black blood' (pp. 282–83). This is writing virtually on the level of Anta Diop.'[26] The reading committee had not been able to weed out all references to Hamites, an unforgivable error in the eyes of Shinnie. A concept that had originated in the European academy was now, half a century later, criticised by a European author when it appeared in print. He concluded that the work had all together been too ideological and politically charged in order to function as serious scholarship. Shinnie was one amongst many of the reviewers who thought the Diop chapter was problematic.[27] J. Jeffrey Hoover, an American who, at the time of writing the review in 1981, worked at the University of Lubumbashi in Zaire wrote he 'was sadly struck by the stale aroma of racism' when referring to Diop's chapter. He quickly dismissed all discussions about skin colour and nose length as 'the dirty laundry of Egyptology.'[28] The inclusion of Diop was seen as proof that the GHA had been unable to rid itself of political pressure to include such chapters, even if they did not actually concern 'real' scholarly work. And as discussed in Chapter 4, the inclusion of the Diop chapter was partly the result of the GHA's wish to contribute to political emancipation. Nevertheless, the demarcation between

24 Shinnie and Jewsiewicki, "Review: The UNESCO History Project", 539.

25 Ibid, 540.

26 Ibid.

27 See for instance: Michael Brett, "Review: The Unesco History: Volume Two" *The Journal of African History* 23:1 (1982): 117-20 and Wilks, "Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History of Africa. Volume I", 283-5.

28 Hoover, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, Vol II", 136.

political and epistemic concerns was not as clear-cut as the reviewers sometimes supposed. The inclusion of Diop's chapter, moreover, was seen by some insiders as part of the GHA's emphasis on the political as well as epistemic affirmation that the inclusion of different ideas and perspectives was important.

Diop's chapter, however, was not the only reason reviewers reacted negatively to what they perceived as political intrusion into a work of scholarship. Ivor Wilks, a British specialist on the Asante kingdom in Ghana, wryly noted: 'Those of us who are perturbed by the whiff of an Orwellian Nineteen Eighty-Four in all of this [...] will not find their fears assuaged by UNESCO Director-General Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow's statement of purpose, that the *General History of Africa* will be "widely disseminated in a large number of languages"[29] What to make of his sarcasm? In his review, Wilks seems particularly disturbed by the idea that the Bureau exerted a large amount of control and wondered whether UNESCO could not have better spent its money on fundamental research rather than a large-scale publication functioning, foremostly, in his estimation it seems, as a summary of existing research.[30] Possibly, this is a critique of UNESCO more generally as much as towards the GHA itself. Much harsher critique even was levelled against the GHA for *Itinerario* by Robert Ross in his review for volume I and II.[31] He considered the GHA's attempt to create a history that would encompass the whole of the African continent failed and questioned whether it was even sensible to treat Africa as one historical entity, thereby implying he did not agree with the project's pan-African ideology or did not think it had a place in serious historiography. 'At first sight [...] the only criterion to be used would be that of race, a highly dangerous and outmoded concept, although not one that has been avoided in these volumes', Ross wrote, referring to the Diop chapter, which he called a 'valueless undertaking.'[32] As a historian of South Africa, Ross may have been particularly set against the use of race as an organising principle. It is, moreover, notable that two of the GHA's harshest critics, Saunders and Ross, were both South African historians, given that the GHA had neglected to include South African historians. Although Ross' review may have been one

29 Wilks, "Reviewed Work(s): UNESCO General History of Africa", 283.

30 Ibid, 285.

31 Both author and journal are situated at the same university as I am.

32 Robert Ross, "The Mountain has Gone into Labour." *Itinerario* VI (1982): 149–52, 150.

of the harshest in terms of phrasing, essentially, he, Wilks and others agreed about the quality of the work. Ross even referred to the review written by Phillipson pointing out that the latter had already phrased some worthwhile criticisms.[33]

A plethora of editorial errors moreover, further emphasised the reviewers' conviction that the necessity to include multiple perspectives had resulted in a lack of quality control. Reviewers seem to have been somewhat uninterested in the challenging circumstances under which the GHA was drafted. This is telling given the disparities in funding and support between the global north and global south at the time the reviews were written from locations in the global north. The errors were sometimes also read as the result of conscious policy though. As Phillipson stated: 'in its effort to be dispassionate, the Drafting Committee has evidently followed a policy of allowing several conflicting views to be presented with, one suspects, minimal editorial guidance.'[34] Cohen called what he correctly identified as a 'pluralism of views' confusing.[35] Roland Oliver, moreover, joined this type of critique by suggesting that editorial decisions had 'not always been actuated by purely scientific considerations.' He was referring specifically to volume VII, which he chided for an excessive focus on resistance to colonialism and the rise of nationalism.[36] Delays in publication, moreover, made some of the editorial errors incomprehensible. Some of the authors discussed above then, did not agree with or trust the pan-African UNESCO inspired outlook of plurality that was a part of the GHA and they did not think such politics belonged in scholarly writing about Africa in the first place. For them, African history had to be independent of the very political ideologies that had made it possible in the first place. Although their scepticism towards the GHA's political ideology was often induced by the Diop chapter and sustained by what they saw as a lack of critical engagement in the concepts the GHA deployed.

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33 Randall Pouwels, from the University of Arkansas, moreover, also dismissed the GHA because of its politics in his review for volume V: 'It is clear [...] that pan-African politics took precedence over scholarship.", Pouwels, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa. Volume 5", 1372.

34 Phillipson, "Review: The Unesco History: Volume One", 115.

35 Cohen, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa. Volume 7", 717.

36 Roland Oliver, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa Vol. V: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century by B. A. Ogot." *The English Historical Review* 108:428 (1993): 681-3, 681-2.

Nevertheless, the kind of history of Africa they adhered too was one that had shed both its anti-colonial and colonial origins.

Conversely, the reviews that are positive in a general way mostly praise the GHA along lines that are very reminiscent of the project's original goals: its pan-African orientation, the focus on 'Africa from within' and the inclusion of a diversity of different perspectives on the same historiographical issues. These were the very things that some negative reviewers were hesitant about. The review by Basil Davidson is illustrative of this point. It was one of the earliest and most positive reviews for volume I and II. In it, Davidson praised the project for its pan-African aspirations and, strikingly, for its anti-nationalism! In Davidson's estimation it was the GHA's focus on a diversity of African views that made it laudable as a project that transcended national interests. He, moreover, seemed to praise the annex that was added to Cheikh Anta Diop's second chapter:

> On one or two knotty controversies, for instance, the editors are not content to leave the recording of alternative versions to a single hand, but go out of their way to provide discursive "annexes" [...] There is a lively and attractive promotion of the awareness that historiography is also "history in the making".[37]

This, of course, seems like an improbable positive comment on the controversy around Diop's contribution, given that the debate over the ancient Egyptians created an uproar within the GHA community and well beyond. Davidson's positive appraisal of the GHA stands out because it is one of few positive reviews and because Davidson himself was such a towering figure within the field of African history. It may be that Davidson, because he was not an academic by trade originally, was less inclined to police the boundaries of scholarship than others. He was, moreover, not against political positioning as his radical anti-colonial stance and efforts to aid in the struggle against Portuguese colonialism show. As Caroline Neale has argued moreover, Davidson had aligned himself very closely with the same Africanist ideals of scholarship as the GHA. He too aimed to pro-

37 Basil Davidson, "Review: General History of Africa by UNESCO" *Third World Quarterly* 3:3 (July 1981): 559–60, 560.

vide Africans with a past that could be inspiring.[38] What is surprising, however, is that he, unlike Jewsiewicki, did not assess in how far the GHA had actually managed to satisfy those goals. It may also be, therefore, that he was being polite. Or he may have felt a sympathy towards the project, its original political anti-colonial aspirations and specifically its pan-Africanism and therefore may have attempted to, in the face of critique, draw attention to what could be deemed positive about the Diop contribution. Or, may it have been that praising an overtly political project could only be done by established Africanists such as Davidson without sustaining injury to one's own career?

Yet, others also wrote positive reviews. Anthony Kirk-Greene wrote a relatively positive review of both volumes I and II. Like Davidson, he aligned himself with the GHA goals, praising the project for creating a view of 'Africa-from-within'.[39] Richard Lobban, moreover, an American specialist on the history of the Sudan, praised the whole project for its historic accomplishments in a review for volume IV, which dealt with Africa from the 12th to the 16th century. Furthermore, Lobban stated that the volume 'correctly stresses an Afro-centric perspective.'[40] Jacques Hymans had very similar words of praise for volume VI on Africa in the 19th century. He wrote that the work was a 'faithful reflection of the way in which African authors viewed their own civilisations', which was literally copied from Ogot's introduction to the project published in every volume.[41] He moreover praised the volume's treatment of the Mfecane period in Southern African history, stating that the volume had used internal African factors to explain events, rather than emphasise the European impact.[42] Given his mimicry of

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38 Caroline Neale, *Writing "Independent" History. African Historiography 1960-1980* (London: Greenwood Press, 1985) 44-46.

39 A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, Vol I: Methodology and African Prehistory by J. Ki-Zerbo; General History of Africa, Vol. II, Ancient Civilizations of Africa by G. Mokhtar." *The English Historical Review* 99:391 (April 1984): 461-2.

40 Richard Lobban, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century by D.T. Niane." *The International Journal of African historical Studies,* 18:3 (1985): 551-2, 551.

41 See: B.A. Ogot, "Description of the Project" in *The General History of Africa VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s,* ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi (UNESCO: Paris, 1989), xxix-xxxi ,xxx

42 Jacques L. Hymans, "Reviewed Work(s): The UNESCO General History of Africa. Volume VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s by J.F. Ade Ajayi." *African Studies Review* 34:1 (April 1991): 140-2.

the GHA documents I would say it is safe to say this was not a very engaged or critical review altogether.

Where some of the reviewers thought the pan-African aspirations of the project had led to politically correct but academically unsound historical work, others aligned themselves with the GHA and seemed to argue that these political aspirations could not be seen apart from the historical work itself. Contrary to many of the more critical reviewers they did not think the project was too political for they judged the work by different standards and were sympathetic to its political outlook. The positive reviews by and large seemed to appreciate the GHA for its historic contribution to African historiography enough to praise it as such. These authors placed the GHA within the larger context of resistance against European prejudice.

The political and epistemic ideals the GHA espoused, as discussed in the first chapters, were originally hard to separate or identify as independent concerns and only became identifiable as somewhat separate endeavours after African history had already been accepted as worthy of academic research. In fact, those that disapproved of the project's political aspirations did so only in degree. That the GHA received both the critique that it had lagged behind current discussions in African historical scholarship as well as the criticism that it was too political is telling regarding the continued intertwining of politics and scholarship within the historiography of Africa. What was deemed too political or perhaps not political enough could change over time. Whether reviewers appreciated the GHA or not, deemed it successful or not, largely hinged on whether they judged the GHA as a primarily academic project or as something that was academic, but which also served different purposes. Some reviewers may have thought that to seem political was in fact damaging to the field of African history if it was to be seen as equal to other fields of history and, by extension therefore, contribute to African emancipation.

The *Cambridge History of Africa* in comparison

The Cambridge History of Africa was similar to the *General History of Africa* in more ways than one. It consisted of eight volumes, was first conceived of in 1966 and written mostly during the 1970s. The eight volumes all had a different editor, except for volumes III and VI, which were both edited by Roland Oliver. The biggest differences between the two projects were that the GHA insisted on appointing African

editors and mostly African authors thereby attempting to write an Africa-centred history of the continent, which was moreover a collaboration between both the Francophone as well as the Anglophone world. With John Fage and Oliver as its chief editors, the CHA, on the other hand, was very obviously a British project. Fage had also been an active member of the ISC, commenting on chapters and proposing authors, until his resignation from the committee in 1981 as a result of overcommitment.[43] It is possible that this in part referred to his work as an editor for the CHA, although he did not mention this in his letter of resignation. Fage was a valued ISC member as Glélé attempted to persuade Fage to rethink his resignation.[44] Fage nevertheless choose to leave the ISC, but did continue working on the CHA. The CHA was itself part of a longer series of Cambridge history volumes, which had started with Lord Acton's *Modern history* in 1899.[45] The CHA was a lot less complicated than the GHA. It was mostly contained on a single island, instead of three different continents and published only in English, instead of English as well as French. As a result, the CHA published its first volume in 1975 and it's last in 1986. Compared with the GHA, which was published between 1980 and 1999, this was at almost a breakneck speed. How then was the CHA judged in comparison to the GHA? How was the difference between the CHA and the GHA reflected in the written reviews for both projects?

First of all, the project was chided much less than the GHA about inconsistencies and editorial errors.[46] There, moreover, was only a single comment pertaining to one chapter in the CHA's volume VIII that suggested that the volume was maybe less than politically neutral.[47]

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43 UAP, CLT CID 103, D J Church to M. Makagiansar 9 july 1981 and UAP, CLT CID 103, J.D. Fage to the Director-General UNESCO 23-03-1981.

44 Glélé wrote "I, personally, have greatly enjoyed working with you and have learned much from you [...] your continued presence on the Committee is necessary." Fage replied that he really could not give the GHA the attention it merited but also wrote: "I shall miss you all very much!" UAP, CLT CID 103, Maurice Glélé to Professor Fage, 03-04-1981 and UAP, CLT CID 103, J.D. Fage to Maurice Glélé, 27-04-1981

45 Roland Hill, *Lord Acton* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2000), 394.

46 Though John McCracken, in an overwhelmingly positive review, jokingly noted that he had been ascribed authorship of a book that he never wrote. John McCracken, "Review: The Parition. Reviewed Work(s): Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 6, c. 1870-1905 by Roland Oliver and G.N. Sanderson", *The Journal of African History*, 28:2 (1987): 301-3, 303.

47 J.G. Darwin, "Reviewed Work(s): The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol. 8, c. 1940-c.1975 by Michael Crowder" *African Affairs* 86:342 (1987): 117-18.

Unlike the GHA, the CHA was not told off for having a 'political agenda' or for reeking of the 'stale aroma of racism.' In other words, it was not accused of being politically partisan, nor of being racialist. Rather, it was mostly judged as a fair assessment of African history. Only a few reviewers commented on the CHA's overtly British flavour — Vansina chief amongst them. In fact, Vansina's review of the CHA is the only one that is relatively critical in comparing it with the GHA, though not the only CHA review that leans towards a negative appraisal of the project. The other reviews that explicitly compare the two projects are either quite negative towards the GHA, as is the case with a 12-page long reflection written by Joseph C. Miller, already mentioned above for his separate review of volume IV of the GHA, or judge both projects relatively equally. When they do have something positive to say about the GHA, it pertains to the GHA's more successful inclusion of African authors.[48]

The Miller review is especially telling. After acknowledging the importance of leaving the idea of a 'timeless African past' behind, Miller goes on to review first volume I of the CHA and thereafter, volume I and II of the GHA. He is critical of both, doubting whether the CHA volume is actually historical, rather than archaeological, thereby policing the boundaries between disciplines.[49] But, whereas the negative comments pertaining to the CHA are mostly of a rather technical or methodological manner, the negative comments towards the GHA dismiss the entire project on very general grounds: 'There is an effort to justify Africa's past partly in the characteristically African manner of asserting prestige through proof of antiquity; but partly also by a less authentic search for achievement in terms alien to Africa, phrased so that the rest of the modern world might find the claims readily intelligible. The goal of authenticity thus comes into conflict with the urge to win understanding an acclaim abroad.'[50] Miller struck the central nerve of the GHA's most ardent struggle — how to decolonise whilst remaining respectable? At the same time, the comment also makes clear how difficult it was for the GHA to be treated on mer-

48 See: Lobban, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa, IV"

49 Joseph C. Miller, "Review: History and Archaeology in Africa. Reviewed Work(s): The Cambridge History of Africa I: From the Earliest Times to c. 500 BC By J. Desmond Clark; General History of Africa I: Methodology and African Prehistory by Joseph Ki-Zerbo; General History of Africa II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa by G. Mokthar", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16:2 (1985): 291-303, 293.

50 Miller, "Review: History and Archaeology", 298

it. It seems that something that was 'characteristically African' was seen as negative per definition. Moreover, 'asserting prestige through proof of antiquity' is hardly a distinctly African pursuit, but rather a nationalist one. Miller, moreover, spoke of 'political objectives barely concealed amongst the multiple goals of UNESCO's project' when referring to a chapter on early hominids in Africa.[51] It seemed then that, 'the respectful mainstream of history' he would refer to later, in 2018, had not been achieved yet by the GHA. Miller preferred the CHA: 'the chronological imprecision of the UNESCO volumes, their preoccupation with inherently static continuities, origins, and legacies, their resulting historicism, and the reflection in them of contemporary political issues, leaves them less historical in effect than the solid volume I of the Cambridge History.'[52] The GHA according to Miller had attempted to write history influenced by contemporary ideals and preconceived notions of what that history should be — which the CHA had not done. Additionally, the one quality that might have set the GHA apart from the CHA — its authenticity — was executed poorly. Even though the ideal of authenticity could arguably be seen as a preconceived concern as well.

For Vansina, however, the lack of authenticity was a real problem for *The Cambridge History of Africa*. He began his review of volume IV, on Africa from 1600 until 1790, by asserting that the volume was centred on the London School of Oriental and African Studies, whose scholars he had described as being 'happily surprised that Africans could be rigorous academics' in his autobiography.[53] 'The lead established by British scholars may explain in part why all the volume editors of the Cambridge History are British; most are also associated with SOAS in one capacity or another. Nine of the ten contributors to the volume under review also have close ties with SOAS.'[54] This, Vansina continued meant the volume was left with a certain tone:

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51 Miller, "Review: History and Archaeology", 299

52 Ibid, 303

53 Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1994), 52.

54 Jan Vansina, "Review: The Cambridge History of Africa. Reviewed Work(s): The Cambridge History of Africa by J.D. Fage and R. Oliver; Volume 4 c. 1600 to c. 1790 by Richard Gray" *Journal of African History* 17:3 (1976): 441-445, 441.

> Given the common background shared by all the writers, one may well ask if this is a Fage and Oliver history writ large. Is there a British school in African History? [...] Their concerns are still the concerns of the 1960s: political organisation of states and long-distance trade, Islam and Christianity. [...] But if these essays are compared with many works written recently by Africans or by Francophone authors certain differences are noticeable. [...] In this way it is a product of a certain 'school' albeit not a trend limited strictly to SOAS alone. Compared with this the UNESCO history will be much less homogeneous, much harder to read, but will give a truer feeling for all the intellectual trends at work in African history today.[55]

As a result of this, Vansina wrote to drive his point home, the CHA, was too 'categorical', did not make enough use of primary sources from the continent itself and left one with the feeling that 'Ibi sunt leones' was a preferable way to write African history — the very words with which Joseph Ki-Zerbo started the introduction for volume I of the GHA to make the point that African history had been glossed over for too long.[56] In other words, Vansina thought the CHA did not leave enough room for new insights from Africa itself. Put differently, he politely, and in hedged language, referring to the 'lead established by British scholars', deemed the work just a touch too eurocentric and, in the process, used the review to advertise the GHA, the African History project to which he had pledged his allegiance. Vansina therefore certainly used his review of the CHA to advocate for his own project. He, writing in 1976 when none of the GHA volumes had yet come out, seemed to have held hope that GHA could present a genuinely African version of history. He turned out to have been partly right, but his prediction that the work would therefore be harder to read, also seems to have been justified.

Vansina was not the only reviewer who noted the Anglocentric nature of the CHA. John Hargreaves, who reviewed both volume VII

55 Vansina, "Review: The Cambridge History of Africa", 443-4.

56 John Thornton too thought that the GHA, in his case volume V, contained more 'focused' chapters. John Thornton, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century by B.A. Ogot" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26:3 (1993): 654-5.

and VIII of the CHA, made similar comments and complained that treatment on colonialism had been restricted to the British Empire.[57] David Schoenbrun, moreover, added that the inclusion of more African authors by the GHA provided an 'important counterweight' to the CHA.[58] Another reviewer, however, concluded that although the GHA may have been more Africa-centred, that did not make the CHA eurocentric: Thurstan Shaw, an archaeologist who contributed a chapter to volume I of the GHA, stated that out of the

> two cooperative attempts to produce a detailed general history of Africa [...] on our imagined scale from extreme Eurocentrism to ardent demonstration of African achievement, many authors of the latter must be judged to stand fairly over towards the latter end of that scale. The Cambridge volume would be placed pretty much in the middle.[59]

In other words, although the GHA was very obviously an expression of African success, the CHA was not necessarily its eurocentric polar opposite.

The one critique then that the CHA received that put it in a negative light in comparison with the GHA was that it was too British. Importantly, the CHA hardly received the allegations of political bias that were directed towards the GHA. That is not to say that the CHA was not criticised for other reasons. Volume VIII, for instance, like its UNESCO counterpart, did not receive very many positive reviews. One reviewer commented that both volumes seemed to have been the 'runts of the litter' for having failed to do contemporary history justice.[60] A testimony perhaps to the difficulty of writing history in the making. Yet, crucially, the CHA was mostly judged on technical, methodologi-

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57 J.D. Hargreaves, "Reviewed Work(s): The Cambridge History of Africa. Vol 7: 1905 to 1940 by A.D. Roberts" *The English Historical Review* 102:405 (1987): 987-9, 987.

58 David Schoenbrun, "Reviewed Work(s): General History of Africa II, Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century by I.Hrbek" *The History Teacher* 27:2 (1994): 233-5, 234.

59 Thurstan Shaw, "Review: African Beginnings. Reviewed Work(s) The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol I: From the Earliest Times to c. 500 B.C. by J. Desmond Clark." *The Journal of African History* 24:1 (1983): 105-8, 105.

60 Rathbone, "Reviewed Work(s): The UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. VIII", 182.

cal and historiographical matters, rather than political ones. The only review author who really homed in on the idea that a predominantly British series of African history could not possibly do justice to the diversity of that field was Vansina's.

Conclusions: The GHA as academic outsiders

The question posed in this chapter is that of whether the *General History of Africa* was seen as a successful and thereby accepted scholarly endeavour within the field of African studies as it existed when the volumes first started appearing. The mostly American and British reviewers who retrospectively passed judgement on the project objected to its overt political nature as such. The political agenda that the GHA espoused no longer seemed relevant to them. This becomes apparent even more in comparison with the *Cambridge History of Africa*, a project that, despite its Anglocentrism, was seen as more scholarly and less politically charged. The majority of the reviewers were not enthused by the GHA's overtly pan-African goals and perspective. To them, the chapter by Cheikh Anta Diop in volume II especially discredited the GHA's scholarly aspirations, suggesting the project may have placed more weight on politics than it did on scholarship.

Reviewers mostly wished to separate the overt politics connected to decolonisation and the period of anti-colonial agitation that had spurred the GHA into existence from the scholarship that had become associated with African history in the global north. Since its transformation from an imperial eurocentric project to a more African endeavour in the 1950s and 1960s, African history had become more and more incorporated and accepted into the Euro-American academy that had at first denied its existence. That left the need for overt scholarly activism less and less pertinent for those who inhabited the discipline. The reviews make it clear that there were several different ideas as to what African history had to achieve. This divide between African history as a political tool and African history as a mostly epistemic endeavour hits at the heart of the conception and growth of African studies.

It may be concluded, therefore, that the GHA had not fully succeeded in its goal to be accepted as a reputable scholarly endeavour, even if African history as a field of study was. The British and American (based) historians who by the 1980s had again come to overshadow the Africans in African studies, deemed the project either too political

or outdated in its criticism towards eurocentric ideas of what African history entailed. The GHA had not incorporated newer ideas on decolonisation developed in the late 1970s and 1980s under the guise of postcolonial critique. The GHA at its conception in 1964 had been at the forefront of innovation and intellectual resistance to colonialism, whereas the very goals it had set out to accomplish seemed less pertinent by 1980, and other goals were also being formulated.

The GHA was to be admired for its historic accomplishment, but, as such, became more of a remnant of a different activist past, than a work of state-of-the-art scholarship. At the same time, the reviewers seem to have lost sight of that activist past and the important political and anti-colonial origins of African history — something which Basil Davidson did seem to recognise as worthwhile in and of itself. Did the Euro-American Africanists of the 1980s and 1990s overlook how much they owed to the GHA and its generation of African historians?

CHAPTER NINE
The Nostalgic Remembrance of UNESCO's *General History of Africa*

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the retrospective perception of the project from inside, meaning by those who had either contributed to the project or who could be deemed its intellectual allies or progeny. The previous chapter deals mostly with the place of the GHA within academia and the development of African studies outside of the African continent, whereas this chapter pays attention to the reception of the project within its own circles and within a space that was mostly sympathetic to it. The chapter argues that the remembrance of the GHA was partly nostalgic because the GHA was reminiscent of a time when emancipation through scholarship seemed like an achievable goal, which had since become more difficult. It therefore researches the retrospective perception of the ideal of political emancipation, as discussed in Chapter 3, and its realities, as primarily discussed in Chapters 5 and 7.

I am mindful that 'nostalgia' as a concept is somewhat overused in the analysis of modernity, often in an effort to diagnose people's reac-

tions to rapid change or perceived cultural decline.[1] Here, I use nostalgia as a tool to characterise an emotional element accorded the history of the GHA by some. I thereby wish to convey that the GHA was meaningful to its contributors as more than just an academic project. That is not to say that the retrospective reflection on the GHA from inside its own ranks was not academic or analytical too, but simply that it was also permeated with a sense that the GHA, a project which ran for half a lifetime, had left an affect that allowed for it to be significant in more than one way. This nostalgia in the remembrance of the GHA from within its own ranks can be characterised as existing between a spectrum of restorative and reflective nostalgia. This typology was made by Svetlana Boym in her *The Future of Nostalgia*, wherein the former corresponds more clearly to a longing for home, *nostos*, or a wish to reconstruct the past, and the latter to the wistful longing itself, *algia*. The latter specifically does not necessarily conflict with the present or the future or with the complexities of modernity as it accepts that the past is past, although both forms of nostalgia long for a past that has never in fact existed as such.[2] Reflective nostalgia, moreover, bears resemblance to nostalgia for Empire as opposed to a restorative nostalgia for colonialism, which is most devotedly longed for amongst the descendants of returned colonial settlers, as argued by Patricia M. E. Lorcin.[3] Lorcin connects a longing for Empire to a longing for political power for the state, whereas she locates a longing for colonialism more in the realm of the sociocultural, that is as part of the personal.[4] The *algia* within the GHA could likewise be described as a longing specifically for the power the global south briefly held with the crumbling of Empire and the accompanying short window of possibilities for worldbuilding and epistemic breaks — a shared enemy to confront, which it is felt has since become much more opaque and less easily recognisable as such. Nostalgia, moreover, is tacitly connected with European nationalism in that it often desires a return to an imagined pure nation. It perhaps no coincidence that the nostalgia for the GHA is also connected to nationalism, albeit a very different sort.

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1 See: Tobias Becker, "The Meanings of Nostalgia: Genealogy and Critique", *History and Theory* 57:2 (2018): 234-250.

2 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), XVIII.

3 Patricia M.E. Lorcin, "The Nostalgias for Empire", *History and Theory* 57:2 (2018): 269-285, 272.

4 Lorcin, "The Nostalgias for Empire", 269.

The nostalgia for the GHA is also one for the pan-Africanism that was a reaction to oppression, but which nevertheless managed to create a common bond for many. The first part of this chapter deals more obviously with a sense of such a pan-African *nostos*, a wish to idealise the past building of the field of African history, whereas the latter part is more engaged in the *algia* inherent in the realisation that a project like the GHA was unique and therefore carried a unique potential that was connected to the era of decolonisation.

This rhymes with the fact that when the GHA was launched in 1964 African history was in the making and its purpose could still be meaningfully shaped. The ISC and other (African) historians working on the GHA rightly saw the GHA as an extraordinary chance to create autonomous and meaningful African history. The ideal of a decolonised African history, however, turned out to be difficult to realise given the intellectual, academic, political and financial context of African historical studies in the second half of the 20th century. By the time the GHA volumes had actually been published, the landscape of African studies had changed considerably and the sub-discipline had been partly shaped by people from outside the continent, as has been discussed in the previous chapters. African history had lost its prime position as a shaper of national destinies, as money flowed away from institutions on the continent in the 1970s and 1980s and nationalist history increasingly seemed unable to cope with the economic and political problems of the postcolonial eras.[5] The ideals of the 1960s seemed to be drifting further and further away, not just in terms of viability, but in terms of relevance as well. As a consequence of these struggles, the commemoration of the project, which started taking shape even before the last volume was published, in the 1990s, was surrounded both by a need for justification as well as mourning the loss of a time when real change had seemed possible. The nostalgia inherent in the remembrance of the GHA was not only mourning a loss, it was also a yearning for the time when African history could still be meaningfully shaped by Africans themselves rather than in Euro-American institutions. Calls for an African perspective and decolonisation grow ever louder in the 21st century, even if those calling for

5 Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, "African Historiography and the Crisis of Institutions" in *The Study of Africa. Volume I Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters*, ed. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (CODESRIA: Dakar, 2006), 135–58, 149–58.

a decolonised academia on the continent have by and large moved on from the nationalist perspectives of the 1960s.[6]

This chapter starts by looking at the way the scholarly activism inherent in the early years of African historiography and therefore the GHA was reflected in the obituaries written for some of its key members and how, retrospectively, the combination of scholarship and activism was envisioned as much more compatible than it might have felt at the time. I have called this *Nostalgia for Scholarly Activism* because some of the obituaries reflect a longing for a time when it seemed like one could engage in activism and still be taken seriously as scholar as well. They seem to smoothen the tensions between politics and scholarship discussed in Chapter 7 to present an imagined unity between activism and scholarship.

Secondly, the chapter engages in reflections on the GHA that belong more wholly to Boym's *algia* through which conflicting realities could be expressed. In this remembrance, through a variety of commemorations, such as personal recollections as well as speeches, the past becomes a hyperreal space. The nostalgia that is apparent within it is not only about the past, but about the future as well, as Boym also argues is a distinct part of nostalgia. In this case the nostalgia deals with the simultaneous acceptance of a failure to deliver on some of the promises of independence as well as the very real appreciation of the anti-colonial pan-African successes of the GHA and the need to further this agenda. These reflections on the project therefore become a pars pro toto for larger questions of emancipation and liberation in its remembrance. For this reason, it is important to ask what the GHA insiders saw as the project's most lasting contribution, not just to scholarship, but to the emancipation of African history and Africans in society? I ask this question specifically in opposition to the relative outsiders whose views were discussed in the last chapter. What did these insiders think was the way forward for African history and what role, if any, could the GHA play in the future?

6 See for instance the numerous papers and panels on decolonizing the academy and/or Eurocentrism at the 2019 European Conference for African Studies, See, to name a few: "Epistemological legacies of empire: interrogating Eurocentrism in African Studies [Roundtable], "Decolonizing Africanist migration research? [CRG AMMODI], "Decolonize Now [CAS/CrAS roundtable] and "Decolonizing the academy in future Africa [Roundtable], *ECAS2019, Africa: Connections and Disruptions*. University of Edinburgh June 11-14 2019.

Nostalgia for scholarly activism

There are, broadly speaking, two forms of activism to consider here, political and scholarly activism, both of which could earn a scholar the name of scholar activist. By scholarly activists I mean those academics who advocate for change within academia itself. For instance, by arguing for the inclusion of a new disciplines or the enlarging of source materials or topics to be studied within a discipline; such as LGBTQ studies, women's history and black studies. Such advocacy, however, is always also connected to larger society. The wish to create new fields of study within existing academic frameworks almost always stems from some kind of social movement and the rising social mobility of a specific group — for instance (black) women.[7] This activism within the academy is somewhat different although not distinct from political activists who also operate as scholars, or scholars who spent time as politicians or political activists next to and often informed by their scholarship. The first characterisation pertains to scholars who, influenced by greater societal changes, wish to influence the way knowledge is produced as a result of those changes, whilst the second characterisation pertains to scholars who primarily wish to use their scholarship to change society. Of course, these two goals mutually influence one another. This is subject to critique from those activists who argue that intellectualisation of the cause may create too great a distance between theory and practice.[8] Institutionalisation has been criticised as having had a de-radicalising influence on the field of study to be incorporated. As Judith Bennett has noted: 'the greatest challenge to women's history may come, indeed, from the debilitating effects of institutionalisation itself, which has nurtured the field's slow and ongoing severance from feminism.'[9] To become incorporated, rather than to become accepted as equal, into academia was possibly to be neutralised and we have seen this effect take place in the previous chapter, as well. Once African history became more mainstream, its anti-colonial roots were sometimes forgotten. There is, moreover,

7 Stefan Berger, "Introduction. Historical Writing and Civic Engagement" in *The Engaged Historian: Perspectives on the Intersections of Politics, Activism and the Historical Profession*, ed. Stefan Berger (New York: Berghahn books, 2019), 1-31, 1-3.

8 See for instance: Paulo Freire's assertion that true liberation cannot be reduced completely to either practice or theory, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Penguin Random house, 2017[1970]), 98.

9 Judith M. Bennett, "Feminism and History", *Gender & History* 1:3 (1989): 251-272, 253.

considerable overlap between these two conceptualisations of what it means to be an activist and a scholar at once. By scholarly activism I here therefore mean something different from political activism to denote specifically advocacy within the academy for certain fields of knowledge, methodologies or epistemologies. Political activism, conversely, I shall use to describe activism in the realm of national or international politics, and not so much the realm of academic politics.

It is specifically in the obituaries written for Jacob Ade Ajayi that we find scholarly activism as pertaining almost exclusively to the realm of academic politics. These obituaries tend to centralise Ajayi's achievements during the so-called 'golden years' of African history on the continent, the 1960s. Toyin Falola, for instance, remembers Ajayi's ability to favour and argue for research into the African perspective within African history.[10] JD Peel, who was a close personal friend of the Ajayis and whose obituary is therefore of a personal nature, describes the enormous task the first generation of African historians had to complete, mentioning Trevor-Roper's remark as an example.[11] Moreover almost all of the obituaries that are contained in the book of tributes published in Ibadan shortly after his passing celebrate Ajayi for his role in decolonising African history.[12] These tributes are of a different nature from academic obituaries even though they are mostly written by other Nigerian historians and academicians; they emphasise the writer's personal connection to Ajayi and are addressed directly to his family, making it all the more noteworthy that most highlight his role as an academic trailblazer.

There is one tribute that stands out because the author, Olufunke Adeboye, also wrote an official scholarly obituary for the journal of the International African Institute. Whereas her tribute is devoted to her personal relationship with 'Baba Ajayi', who, she emphasises, was invested in the personal wellbeing of his doctoral students, the official obituary serves to defend her mentor against possible detractors.[13] In the book of tributes, Adeboye writes for her compatriots, friends and

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10 Toyin Falola, "Professor Jacob Festus Ade-Ajayi (1929-2014): A Eulogy with a Dirge" Website African Studies Association, August 14, *2014*, Accessed March 31, 2020, http://www.africanstudies.org/news/391-professor-j-f-ade-ajayi-1929-2014

11 J. D. Y. Peel, "J. F. Ade Ajayi: A Memorial" *Africa* 85:4 (2015): 745-49, 747.

12 I was gifted a copy when I visited the Ajayi library in 2018. N.N., *A Book of Tributes for Emeritus Professor Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi.* (Ibadan: University of Lagos Press and Jadeas Trust, 2014)

13 N.N., *A Book of Tributes*, 83.

family, whereas her obituary for the International African Institute is geared towards a much wider audience of scholars and is therefore more academic in nature. In the obituary she highlights Ajayi's success during the formative years of African historiography and connects that success to the *General History of Africa:*

> Together with Dike, he defined the essence of African historiography. This generation challenged the claims of European colonial historiography about the African past. Their mission was to decolonise African history from the grip of Eurocentric authors who claimed that Africa had no history worth studying. [...] Nationalist historiography has been criticised as being too empirical and lacking in theoretical rigour. Some critics claim that it is irrelevant to the challenges of underdevelopment and perennial poverty facing post-independence Africa. However, it must be noted that the Ibadan approach to history [...] served the needs of the moment. It helped to decolonise the African past and foster national identity.[14]

All of the commemorations of Ajayi's life remember him for his contribution to the creation of the field of African history in the face of European scepticism. Yet, tend to emphasise the scholarly nature of this endeavour, rather than its political side. Adeboye's obituary is especially interesting in that light because it is implicitly aimed at the Marxist historians of the Dar es Salaam school and other underdevelopment scholars. Adeboye clarifies that Ajayi's scholarship was necessary at the time and necessary for the demands of decolonisation that existed when Ajayi was working. This is also a point Peel implicitly makes by emphasising the nature of resistance Ajayi and others were up against.

14 Olufunke Adeboye, "J.F. Ade Ajayi, 1929-2014", *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 85:4 (2015): 741-4, 742.

This need to defend Ajayi to the outside world can be found in the 2014 multi-authored biography for Ajayi as well.[15] Akinjide Osuntokun, the editor, and Tunji Oloruntimehin explicitly disavow Ajayi of any overt ideological or political allegiances. They write that he did not indulge in 'sloganeering' or the 'propagation of political catch-phrases.'[16] They may have retrospectively felt a need to defend Ajayi against the association of political activism and concurrent issues of perceived inadequate scholarship. As they write elsewhere: 'the hallmark of a good historian like Ajayi is to avoid distortion of fact and as a well-rounded scholar he is definitely above this kind of temptation. [...] We have made the point that Ade Ajayi is liberal in his orientation as a scholar, and is therefore not to be compared to radical scholars like Cheikh Anta Diop, Alioun Diop with his *Societe Africaine de Culture* [sic] or even Joseph Ki-Zerbo.'[17] These biographers seemed to adhere to an ideal of historical scholarship that separated politics from scholarship. They seem to have done as such to upholster Ajayi's work as a trailblazer in African history. Simultaneously, however, the authors pressed that Ajayi had chosen to pursue nationalist historiography because 'for him building a nation [...] is the most important challenge facing most African states.' Ajayi, of course, was not just an average Nigerian historian, but had, alongside Kenneth Dike, been the founder of academic historical scholarship in Nigeria. Throughout the biography he was not only praised for academic virtues, but for his duty to the Nigerian nation, for being a good Christian, husband and father, as well. He provided a good example on multiple axis of being.[18] In a sense, Ajayi here had become a symbol for the early years of African history in very much the same way as the GHA, and he is

15 The Ajayi GHA volume is also praised as "the most important volume" in the GHA by one of its contributors in the multi-authored Ajayi biography because the 19th century had hitherto only been seen in the light of European expansion, Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, "Ajayi and the UNESCO General History of Africa" in *J.F. Ade Ajayi: His Life and Career*, eds. Akinjide Osuntokun and Tunji Oloruntimehin (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2014), 350-7, 355.

16 Akinjide Osuntokun and Tunji Oloruntimehin, "J.F. Ade Ajayi and His Intellectual Contribution to the Study of History" in *J.F. Ade Ajayi: His Life and Career*, eds. Akinjide Osuntokun and Tunji Oloruntimehin (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2014), 293-305 ,295.

17 Osuntokun and Oloruntimehin, "J.F. Ade Ajayi", 304-5.

18 Much like Henri Pirenne in fact did in the context of Belgium national historiography, Camille Creyghton et al., "Virtue language in historical scholarship: the cases of Georg Waitz, Gabriel Monod and Henri Pirenne", *History of European Ideas* 42:7 (2016): 924-36, 927.

equally defended in the same way: by reference to the early necessity of writing African history for nation-building. He had also become a representative of a united Nigeria, a country which has suffered from regional tensions. This remembrance, moreover, aims to present the amalgam of politics and academics in Ajayi's professional and personal past as more harmonious than it might have been relative to the creation of African historical studies in Nigeria in the face of its colonial denial. It thereby seems to project an idealised and nostalgic image of Ajayi back in time. Peel's obituary, conversely, offers a slight contrast in that he draws attention to Ajayi's protest against government interference at the University of Lagos (UNILAG) during his tenure as Vice-Chancellor.[19]

Perhaps it is because activism, scholarly or political, speaks to a longing for a better world, retrospective reflection on it easily becomes nostalgic. Activism and nostalgia therefore meet one another specifically in the obituaries written for prominent African historians, such as Ajayi. The obituaries for the African pathfinders within the academic study of African history emphasised their activist focus on an African perspective to include them in the disciplinary history and its continued need for advocacy. Obituaries, moreover, serve a function as a reflective practice towards not just the individual who is being commemorated, but towards their field of scholarship as well and as such they lend themselves to both nostalgia and boundary work.[20] The lives of those passed may be fitted into a mould that endorses an ideal of scholarship as forwarded by the biographer, rather than the commemorated.[21] They therefore project an ideal-typical imagine back in time that may not have existed in exactly that way — like nostalgic remembrance does as well. Obituaries can serve to present a field or discipline to the outside world, whilst serving as a system of justification towards other scholars, as is the case in the Ajayi biography. In that sense, obituaries were sometimes used to wage 'battles in

19 Peel, "J. F. Ade Ajayi", 748

20 In the history of science, the term 'boundary work' is used to describe instances were divisions between fields of knowledge as well as between scientific and non-scientific knowledge are created, enforced or attacked. Thomas Gieryn, "Boundary-Work and The Demarcation of Science From Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists.", *American Sociological Review* 48:6 (1983): 781-795.

21 Léjon Saarloos, "Virtue and Vice in Academic Memory: Lord Acton and Charles Oman", *History of Humanities* 1:2 (2016): 339–54, 340-1.

the shadow', as Anna Echterhölter has aptly characterised this system of inter-academic justification in the case of 18th- and 19th-century German scientists.[22] This need to emphasise certain parts of disciplinary history over others may be especially pertinent in a context of disciplinary innovation or when engaged in boundary work, as was the context of the GHA. According to Ian Hesketh, moreover, boundary work 'if the goal is to expand authority', which it was within the GHA, 'heightens the contrast between rivals'.[23] Within the obituaries written for GHA members, this often means there is an emphasis on activist scholarship, whilst emphasising that the commemorated work is nevertheless of the highest scholarly quality. The activist scholarship in these obituaries therefore serves to connect the scholar being commemorated to an epistemic and moral imperative to do the right thing, to further both knowledge that has been hidden by obscurantists and to further the emancipation that was made possible by that knowledge. This observation follows from those made by Herman Paul and Léjon Saarloos in their work on scholarly virtues, namely that they are most meaningful as constellations.[24] Activism here then, is meaningful in that it is upholstered by a simultaneous focus on objectivity and critical scholarship. In remembering, the two are merged as if harmoniously fitting together.

Following also what Creyghton et al have shown in their article on *Virtue language in historical scholarship*, I argue that the virtues showcased in the obituaries discussed here were part of a constellation of virtues that transcended the merely epistemic.[25] Virtues, like having a critical disposition towards colonial and/or European knowledge, were seen as necessary for conducting good historical research on Africa because they showed the historian had moral as well as epistemic norms. It was the combination of those goals that made 'activism' a virtue to be celebrated. Activism, in the context of decolonisation, was a positive descriptor because it emphasised that the historian was willing to go against the grain of colonial historiography and, moreover, use their learning for a public good — liberation — rather than just

22 Anna Echterhölter, *Schattengefechte: Genealogische Praktiken in Nachrufen auf Naturwissenschaftler (1710-1860)* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), 10, 20-1.

23 Ian Hesketh, "Diagnosing Froude's Disease: Boundary Work and the Discipline of History in Late-Victorian Britain", *History and Theory* 47:3 (2008): 373-95, 384.

24 Saarloos, "Virtue and Vice in Academic Memory", 341-2.

25 Creyghton et al., "Virtue language in historical scholarship", 925-6.

the academic advancement of knowledge. In that light it is important to note that commemorative scholarly practices in general can be used to look not just at the past, but specifically at the imagined future as well.[26] And, moreover, that this can be a distinct feature of nostalgia too. Predecessors were honoured in order to create continuity with the present, as well as the imagined future. Jo Tollebeek argues that their function therefore contributes to community building, at least in his analysis of commemorative practices in the humanities in Europe around 1900.[27] In the context of the GHA this may mean that the (African) historians who wrote obituaries for ISC members who had also been eminent historians of a first generation of post-colonial historiography, felt the need to commemorate not just the individual historians who were the subject of the obituary, but, through them, the whole field of African history as it had existed at its inception in the 1950s and 1960s. It may be that by commemorating the first generation, the biographers aimed to invoke their success, which had since been elusive. The predecessors had to be acknowledged for their contributions not just personally, but possibly in an attempt to redirect African history back to the continent, or to at least situate its origins there.

A heightened contrast between rivals as suggested by Hesketh is certainly present in the obituaries written for Adu Boahen. The value of political engagement played a considerable role in those obituaries. When Boahen died in 2006, the journal of African history published an editorial obituary for 'Ghana's foremost historian and a distinguished statesman.' It stated that Boahen had been a political activist all his life: 'A scholar-activist, he demonstrated a consistent opposition to dictatorial rule and military regimes that earned him stints in prison.'[28] The importance of Boahen's politics for his historical work, moreover, becomes more evident in the obituaries written for him by and for Ghanaians in an English-language pan-African publication, *the New African*. The two obituaries in this publication, moreover, mention the *General History of Africa* and connect the UNESCO project to

26 Pnina G. Abir-Am, "Introduction" in *Commemorative Practices in Science: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Collective Memory*, eds. Pnina G. Abir-Am and Clark A. Elliot (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1-33, 17-8.

27 Jo Tollebeek, "Commemorative Practices in the Humanities around 1900", *Advances in Historical Studies* 4:3 (2015): 216-31.

28 N.N., "Editorial: Professor Emeritus Albert Adu Boahen (1932-2006)", *The Journal of African History* 47:3 (2006): 359-61, 359.

Boahen's role as a trailblazer in African history. As one of the obituary writers, Ivor Agyeman-Duah, put it: 'Recognising him as Africa's voice to its post-colonial past, Unesco made him the president and consultant (1983–1999) of its International Scientific Committee for the eight-volume *General History of Africa*.'[29] Both obituaries, moreover, place the figure of Trevor-Roper as a historian non grata opposite their pan-African hero, Boahen, evoking a different time of perhaps simpler dichotomies of good and bad.[30] Referring to Trevor-Roper's infamous phrase about Africa Cameron Duodu writes: 'When the British don, Hugh Trevor-Roper, wrote this, little did he know that an African colossus, Albert Adu Boahen, would one day rise and make him look quite foolish.'[31] Duodu continued on to place Boahen opposite the whole establishment of British history, including Oliver and Fage, calling the latter 'probably racist.'[32] He relished in narrating how Boahen had once corrected 'the high and mighty of African Studies in Great Britain' on their own turf.[33] Duodu and Agyeman-Duah both also celebrated Boahen's political activities, describing him as an Ashanti warrior who challenged not just the racist historiography from Britain, but also the authoritative politicians from Ghana.[34] Boahen, then, was a scholarly activist as well as a political activist, though it is questionable whether his obituary writers thought the two could be separated. Most importantly, however, they appealed to scholarly precision and a critical attitude to show how exactly Boahen had put the arrogant Britons in their place. Boahen is remembered as the critical hero historian of the golden days. Importantly, activism is here shaped as a corrective to bias to European predecessors. It functions to increase scholarly accuracy and is therefore both moral as well as scholarly. In fact, it could be argued that the moral claim was connected to an assertion of truthfulness. The reference to Trevor-Roper specifically seem to suggest this: scholarly activism was meant as

29 Ivor Agyeman-Duah, "the historian who made history himself." *New African*, July: 58-60 (2006)

30 Agyeman-Duah, "the historian who made history himself." and Cameron Duodu, "The man who rescued African history." *New African*, July: 60-63 (2006)

31 Duodu, "The man who rescued African history."

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Agyeman-Duah, "the historian." and Duodu, "The man who rescued."

a correction to (previously) existing scholarly bias, here personified through Trevor-Roper, as also discussed in Chapter 1.

The connection between good historical scholarship and activism or rather, history and public political activity, is even more pronounced in the obituaries written for Joseph Ki-Zerbo. When Ki-Zerbo died in 2006 *Présence Africaine* published a special issue in his honour: *'L'histoire Africaine: l'après Ki-Zerbo.'* It was filled with obituaries for Ki-Zerbo written mostly by West African historians and one former French colonial officer, historiographical essays, including Christopher Saunders' critical review of volume VIII of the GHA and a few essays by Ki-Zerbo himself.[35] The obituaries written for Ki-Zerbo not only mention but also emphasise his connection to the *General History of Africa*.[36] The editorial introduction, which we will return to in more depth in the second part of this chapter, focuses almost exclusively on Ki-Zerbo's contribution to the GHA and the problem of a continuing European denial of African historicity that Ki-Zerbo and the GHA had reacted to. Pathé Diagne explicitly links Ki-Zerbo to the *General History of Africa* and to some of the other celebrated historians that were connected to it, such as Jacob Ade Ajayi and Cheikh Anta Diop.[37] Of course, for Ki-Zerbo, the connection with Diop is more evident, as both scholars were engaged in the circle of Francophone West African anti-colonial intellectuals who formed networks in Paris in the 1940s.[38] They were politically engaged and conceived of history as a purposeful producer of identity and, at the same time, realised how Euro-American history had utilised that identity making power to create the otherness Africans had difficulty escaping from.[39] Ki-Zerbo was born in 1922 in what was then the Upper-Volta. He was the product of French colonial education. He eventually moved to Paris where he

35 N.N., "L'histoire africaine: l'après Ki-Zerbo." *Présence Africaine* 173:1 (2006)

36 Assane Seck, "Un nationaliste sans concession", *Présence Africaine* 173:1 (2006): 37-44, 42.

37 Pathé Diagne, "Une nouvelle image du Professeur Africain", *Présence Africaine* 173:1 (2006): 23-26, 24.

38 Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism. A History* (London: Bloomsbury publishing, 2018), 187-9.

39 For a reflection on the philosophy of history connected to *Présence Africaine*, see: Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "Présence Africaine as Historiography: Historicity of Societies and Specificity of Black African Culture" in *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1992), 95-117.

studied, amongst other things, history at the Sorbonne, after which he became a teacher. In 1957 he founded the *Mouvement Libération Nationale* to campaign for a 'no' vote in France's constitutional referendum that offered colonial territories to become part of a French community ('yes') or independence ('no').[40]

In the obituaries for Ki-Zerbo an image develops of the Burkinabé historian as an anti-colonial political activist who fought valiantly against colonial stereotypes but who was equally a critical scholar. The characteristic that is reiterated most in the obituaries, was of Ki-Zerbo as a man who did not identify a difference between being an intellectual and a politician.[41] As one of the obituaries stated: '*Joseph Ki-Zerbo, lui, n'a jamais accepté la césure fictive entre intellectuels et politiques*' [Joseph Ki-Zerbo never accepted the fictional divide between intellectuals and politicians].[42] We should read that comment to understand how Ki-Zerbo and arguably other African Africanists of his generation, understood the historical discipline.[43] History to many of them was and always had been at the service of a political or social cause, be it nationalism or Marxism or something else again. The construction of history for the reinstatement of a specific identity was therefore as much an academic as it was an anti-colonial political project during the era of independence.[44] Ki-Zerbo consequently felt a responsibility to develop a new way of thinking and writing history that would capture the specificity of the African past in order to contribute to the development of his country and his continent.[45] Mangoné Niang, who was the director of the centre for oral tradition in Niamey, illustrated this point further by sketching a scene in which Cheikh Anta Diop and Ki-Zerbo, who were great friends according to Niang, pondered

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40 The 'yes' vote won with 99%, but the French community had a short lifespan as it fell apart in 1960.

41 See: Salim Abdelmajid, "Joseph Ki-Zerbo: Le Savant, Le Politique et L'Afrique", Esprit (2007/8): 83-108, 85.

42 Mangoné Niang, "Le veilleur de jour", *Présence Africaine* 173:1 (2006): 21-22, 22.

43 Assane Seck, a Senegalese politician who served as the minister of foreign affairs in the '70s, in an interesting reversal of what one would expect while reading the obituary for a prominent historian, even mentions that Ki-Zerbo's accomplishments lie beyond the political realm as well, Seck, "Un nationaliste sans concession", 40.

44 Mamadou Diouf and Mohamad Mbodj, "The Shadow of Cheikh Anta Diop" in *The Surreptitious Speech. Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1992), 118-135, 122-3.

45 See: J. Ki-Zerbo, "Histoire et conscience nègre", *Présence Africaine* 16 (1957)

whether there was a difference between intellectual and political engagement.[46] In the obituary written by Adame Ba Konaré, moreover, there is decisive defence of activist historiography:

> *Et justement, c'est là où se trouve le mérite de la science historique, qui seule permettre de garrotter les falsifications, les interprétations arrangeants les faux refuges, tout en sachant qu'ils sont lestes et inévitables, d'où cette exigence d'inscrire dans la pensée historiographique, la place qu'il faut à un mécanisme de veille et de vigilance. Mais n'y a-t-il pas là un aveu de militantisme, quand bien même il est scientifique?* [And this is precisely where we find the merit of the historical science, as it is the only way to curb falsifications, conveniently reassuring interpretations, knowing that they are nimble and inevitable, hence the need to make room in historiographic thinking for a mechanism of observance and vigilance. But is this not an admission of activism, even if it is scientific?][47]

As Ba Konaré sees it, African historians seem to have had no choice but to be 'activists', given the role of history in society and the falsifications that surrounded and continue to surround African history. This, however, did not mean it was 'unscientific.' And this identification of Ki-Zerbo with activism focused on scholarly accuracy may be the reason that the obituaries written for him so explicitly link him to the *General History of Africa*, a civic project that aimed to rehabilitate African history within the Euro-American academy.

The fact that *Présence Africaine* took upon itself the task of remembering Ki-Zerbo is significant as well. *Présence Africaine*, like the GHA, had what one could call explicit ideals of emancipation. Both could be identified with the urge to build new systems of representation. As Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Bogumil Jewsiewicki both emphasise in their contribution to a history of *Présence Africaine*, however, African Africanists were well aware of the predicament in which they found themselves vis-à-vis the historians' imperative to be objective. As Coquery-Vidrovitch aptly writes:

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46 Niang, "Le veilleur de jour", 22.

47 Adame Ba Konaré, "L'histoire africaine aujourd'hui'" *Présence Africaine* 173:1 (2006): 27-36, 35.

> While making their history, the African historians were perfectly aware of the affective mode from which they could not escape because of both the recent wounds inflicted by Europe and the urgency to construct a new political and cultural identity. African history claimed itself to be objective, but not neutral.[48]

It was the oxymoron of African history that African historians of Africa had to overcome. The difference between being 'objective' and 'neutral' alluded to here, relates to the idea that political imperatives and historical knowledge could not be separated. The very act of writing scholarly African history was, for a long time, political. The GHA aimed to change that status quo and could therefore never escape some semblance of political engagement. A historian, as follows, had to be both critical and militant in order to rehabilitate African history. Coquery-Vidrovitch, moreover, writes that *Présence Africaine* 'did not cease to alert the conscience of African historians to the risks and duties of the profession.'[49] There were dangers in activist history and therefore the most rigorous analysis of source must take place. In a chapter on *objectivity and impartiality*, Lorraine Daston suggests that, within 19th century European historical scholarship, objectivity, as a modern scientific scholarly virtue, distinct from impartiality, was connected to the methods of source criticism.[50] The methods of historical source criticism, and an awareness of their limits, could qualify a historian as objective in their work.[51] Although Coquery-Vidrovitch uses different language, neutral and objective, she also seems to suggests the possibility of a form of historical scholarship that allows for political engagement via the methods of critical historical scholarship. African history could not be impartial because of the historical moment which it inhabited and the assignment which it had given itself:

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48 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Présence Africaine: History and Historians of Africa" in *The surreptitious speech: Présence Africaine and the politics of otherness, 1947-1987*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1992), 59-94, 75.

49 Coquery-Vidrovitch, "History and Historians of Africa", 77.

50 Lorraine Daston, "Objectivity and Impartiality. Epistemic Virtues in the Humanities" in *The Making of the Humanities III: The Modern Humanities,* eds. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 27-42, 32-3.

51 Daston, "Objectivity and Impartiality", 31-3.

to be anti-colonial and nationalist. Therefore, it was of the utmost importance to emphasise the critical analysis of sources and the African historians' critical stance towards existing historical material. In others words, their objectivity towards the sources they encountered. As such, scholarly activism engendered political activism in equal amounts as vice versa. Scholarly activism was political, but the obituaries argued, that did not necessarily disqualify scholars engaging in it from striving towards the academic element of truth. They made the claim that excluding African perspectives was inaccurate and unscholarly more than they argued that it was morally wrong. Ki-Zerbo's life, moreover, was easily adapted to such a juxtaposition of objectivity and activism, given his anti-colonial political view on African history and activities as a public intellectual.

And this is what Ba Konaré does as well in her obituary for Ki-Zerbo, not only in the quote placed above where she emphasises that history can get rid of falsifications, but also elsewhere in the obituary where she reiterates that the '*mots clés*' [keywords] of a historian, and indeed Ki-Zerbo, are: '*relation de faits*, *refus de jugement moral*, *objectivité*' [relations between facts, refusal of moral judgement, objectivity].[52] In the editorial introduction emphasis is placed on how the GHA under Ki-Zerbo's guidance was an objective history of Africa. In another non-*Présence* appraisal of Ki-Zerbo's life before he died, the combination of critical scholarship and activism surfaces again. Here Amadé Badini, a compatriot of Ki-Zerbo, wrote that Ki-Zerbo had understood that knowledge of history was in fact a weapon when used correctly: 'he felt a moral, almost sacred duty to repay the debt he owed to his country.'[53] Moreover, Badini wrote that 'the epistemological benchmarks of Professor Ki-Zerbo's thought are self-confidence based on self-knowledge, thinking by oneself for oneself, a sound understanding of otherness, critical reference to the past and the 'irreplaceable importance of research based on popular African wisdom.'[54] In other words, he posited Ki-Zerbo as a critical thinker.

Whereas the obituaries for Ki-Zerbo function to smoothen the inherent tension between political activism and scholarly distance, the availability of an anti-persona in the obituaries for Boahen served to heighten the contrast between the historian commemorated and the

52 Ba Konaré, "L'histoire africaine aujourd'hui'", 31.

53 Amadé Badini, "Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1922-)" *Prospects* XXIX:4 (1999): 615-627, 616.

54 Badini, "Joseph Ki-Zerbo", 617.

history he sought to disprove. The obituaries described above use a combination of praise for scholarly and/or political activism or nation building, with an emphasis on their subject's scholarly qualities in order to place them in opposition to European historiography. At the same time, they present an image of scholarly activism and political activism as harmoniously integrated in a nostalgia for the making of African historiography in the 1950s and 1960s. The obituaries thus lay bare the conflict between the practice of historiography for decolonisation and its remembrance. Moreover, the obituaries, most ardently in the cases of Boahen and Ki-Zerbo, display a yearning for a time when it seemed possible to agitate against racist historiography without necessarily suffering negative consequences as a serious scholar with a serious career. However, as Coquery-Vidrovitch has noted, this imagined past was perhaps a mirage as such a harmony between scholarship and politics never really existed, nor was it ever possible for African historians of Africa to criticise historical scholarship on Africa entirely without it impacting their careers as scholars. What we see in these obituaries, then, is a longing for past ideals more than realities. As Boym points out: 'the stronger the loss the more is it overcompensated with commemorations, the starker the distance from the past and the more it is prone to idealisation.'[55] The expectations of early African historiography, that European intellectual intrusions upon the interpretation of African history could be done away with, had not come to fruition, at least not in the way as envisioned perhaps by Boahen, Ki-Zerbo or Ajayi. The obituaries therefore present an idealisation of an era that seemed unequivocal at the time but which, in retrospect came to be recognised as unique.

My analysis of the obituaries has focused on how the individuals within the GHA were represented towards the outside world because the obituaries' function to commend their subjects is part of the nostalgia described above in as much as it was part of boundary work in the field of African history. As such they attempt what Boym has called a 'transhistorical reconstruction' of times that are perceived as better.[56] In fact, because the field on the continent of Africa itself was, and arguably still is, weathering a storm of underfunding and political instability, the retrospective boundary work that concerned the first generation of academic African historians, is almost by defini-

55 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 17.

56 Ibid, XVIII.

tion nostalgic in its longing for the past and its challenge towards the future. This kind of nostalgia may suggest a longing for a return to that time of the post-independence period, when, to some, it seemed like the 20th century would be Africa's century. When, put differently, the break of empire promised the making of a new world. At the same time, the intensity of the longing suggests the impossibility of return and this is where the future appears as a possible outcome. It is towards this field of tension, between past regrets and future possibilities, that we now turn.

Nostalgia for the end of empire

This second section of the chapter pays attention to nostalgia as a directive towards the future through a reappraisal of questions posed towards the function of African history and a lamentation on opportunities lost that were connected to the end of Empire. The end of empire offered many of the early Africanists and African historians of Africa discussed in reference to the GHA the opportunities to shape the world in new ways. Yet, by the end of the 20th century that new world had not necessarily arisen in the way they had imagined. A consequent longing back to the era of decolonisation, though, had an almost perverse taste to it, especially for Euro-American scholars of Africa, who would not have had the academic opportunities they did without imperialism. Take, for instance, the grand journeys Curtin could make through Africa thanks to French and English territorial possessions. Or, beyond the Euro-American Africanists, the endless hours spent on planes by virtually all of the ISC members as a result of global networks at least in part brought into existence as a consequence of the dismantling of empire. This was a globalisation which for a brief period of time seemed to work in favour of African powers. In a way then the nostalgia for the GHA could be compared to Lorcin's nostalgia for empire in that it was focused on political power. Power which made it possible for epistemic agents to follow. By nostalgia here then, I refer to something akin to what David Scott describes in his *Refashioning Futures* and again in *Conscripts of Modernity*. It was the nagging feeling that both the questions asked in the 1960s as well as the adopted narrative in which the answers were cast, had perhaps

become irrelevant with time.[57] Political and historical representation had not been enough to wrest free control from Africa's former colonial overlords it seemed. There could be no decolonisation of history without an excavation of the 'colonial library' — that is, the epistemological assumptions concerning history, subjectivity, culture, class, race and knowledge generally, that accompanied and were shaped by the European imperialist penetration of Africa.

The source material used for this second section is concerned with Boym's reflective nostalgia because the sources themselves are more consciously reflective and, as a result, are more open to the complexities of both past and present than the obituaries discussed above. I will here concentrate explicitly on the commemorative texts that concern the *General History of Africa* as a project, rather than its individual contributors to show what that reflective nostalgia meant to the project specifically. The most important sources for that purpose are the 'De Vita Sua' that Vansina wrote about a year before he would pass away in February 2017 as well as a series of interviews with Vansina conducted by Florence Bernault in April 2016. Secondly, I will look in detail at the editorial introduction to the *Présence Africaine* special issue for Ki-Zerbo — which reads almost like an obituary for the GHA rather than for Ki-Zerbo. I will also look at some archival material, including a speech which was of a commemorative nature given by Niane when the project was presented in the 1990s and an interview with Christophe Wondji, also from 1994 — when the final volume appeared for the first time in English.

Niane's speech was part of the reflection on the project during its finalisation in the 1990s. When the Guinean national committee for UNESCO organised a day at the national museum of Guinea in Conakry to present the finished project on 14 April 1994 (even though it had not yet been translated into French by then), the day inevitably also took on a commemorative nature and was meant as a sort of reflection on historical research within and about Guinea. Djibril Tamsir Niane, the Guinean editor of volume IV, reflected on the GHA ideal of African history from the inside. Such a wish was an old one, he

57 David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: criticism after postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton university Press, 1999), 10-15 and David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity. The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1-9.

noted, making the GHA a relatively 'old project'.[58] Niane recognised that the concerns of African history had changed and that researching African history 'from within' was no longer the most pressing matter within African historiography on the continent. It was not that history should no longer be written from within, but rather that doing as such, was not enough. The problem space of African history had expanded. In February of the same year, the UNESCO Courier had published an interview with the co-editor of volume VIII, Christophe Wondji, in which the same sentiment was reflected: the GHA had aged in the values it exemplified.[59] The GHA had made it possible to regard African history in a different way as before, for instance in its attempt to use a different kind of periodisation, and was at least partly responsible for the acceptance of oral history as serious scholarly methodology. Something for which, Niane stated, the authors of the GHA had been ostracised for from the historical community.[60] Niane also looked to the future and pondered how the GHA could be used for Guinea. It, he concluded was a project that could spur on further research, that needed to be translated into local languages and that could possibly even be adapted to comic book form for illiterate audiences. For such a programme of public outreach to be possible, Niane appealed to the Guinean minister for education. Furthering research into Guinean history could only be done with the aid of the ministry.[61] During the day itself the ministry announced that it would indeed develop such a programme.[62] What the day of presentation for the *General History of Africa* in Guinea makes clear is that, whilst Niane thought the GHA was a project of past glory, it did hold continued value beyond the realms of academia.

The idea that the GHA was not an endpoint is also to be found in the editorial introduction to the special issue for Ki-Zerbo, which strikingly focuses almost exclusively on his contribution to the *General History of Africa*. The introduction quotes the very first sentence on

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58 UAP, CLT CID 50, PRESENTATION L'HISTOIRE GENERALE DE L'AFRIQUE. Quelques suggestions à l'attention du Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique en vue de la relance de la recherche historique en Guinée, 1.

59 Betty Werther, "Into Africa. Just-completed: General History: a new look at Africa's past." *UNESCO Courrier* 55 (February 1994)

60 UAP, CLT CID 50, PRESENTATION L'HISTOIRE GENERALE DE L'AFRIQUE, 1-2.

61 Ibid, 4.

62 Ibid, 3.

the eight-volume series: 'Africa has a history.' It reads almost as an ode to the General History:

> *Cette grande entreprise de réflexion sur l'histoire de l'Afrique fut exemplaire à plus d'un titre. Elle révélait ce qui avait été si souvent et si complaisamment tu, et fut menée selon les formes et les méthodes que requiert la recherche historique. [...] S'il n'est pas possible de rendre compte ici de tous les acquis de cette aventure intellectuele, ni de témoigner [...] — notre — reconnaissance à tous ceux qui ont œuvré à son succès, il est loisible de rappeler les enjeux de cette vaste entreprise d'une histoire de l'Afrique afin de mieux envisager les différentes tâches qui restent à accomplir* [This great undertaking of reflection on the history of Africa was exemplary in more ways than one. It revealed what had been so often and so complacently concealed, and was conducted according to the models and methods required by historical research. [...] While it is not possible to give an account here of all the achievements of this intellectual adventure, nor to express [...] — our — gratitude to all those who worked for its success, it is possible to recall the stakes of this vast undertaking of a history of Africa in order to better envisage the various tasks that remain to be accomplished].[63]

The editorial acknowledged the importance of the GHA for African history, but also impressed upon its reader the sense that continued work was necessary. *Présence Africaine* described how the GHA, under Ki-Zerbo's direction, had as its task to further knowledge on the African continent, as they put it: *'L'enjeu de cette entreprise était aussi d'ordre épistémologique'* [The challenge of this undertaking was also epistemological].[64] That epistemological mission, however, could not be separated from the people it was subsequently made to serve. Knowledge and epistemology could not be separated from the struggle that had become part and parcel of the African past as *Présence Africaine* saw it. African history then was a public and therefore political enterprise

63 N.N., "Écrire L'Histoire de L'Afrique Après Ki-Zerbo" *Présence Africaine* 173:1 (2006): 5-8, 5.

64 N.N., "Après Ki-Zerbo", 5.

as opposed to a detached endeavour, as seems to have been the case in most of the reviews discussed in the previous chapter.

The editorial introduction placed the legacy of the GHA partly outside academia. Its point was not only to convince academia of the existence of African history, but, society as a whole. It is telling, for instance, that the introduction denounces Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 Dakar Discours, in which the 23rd president of France had imperiously stated that the 'African' had not yet entered history.[65] The *Présence Africaine* introduction to the Ki-Zerbo special issue deemed this a Hegelian and decidedly racist conception of history that, once again, proved the importance of Ki-Zerbo's work as well as the need for the UNESCO *General History of Africa*, whilst mirroring that project's early goals as well as the problems of the 1960s.[66] However, the authors of the editorial made clear that the battle of today was not the same as Ki-Zerbo's. Histories of Africa had been written and the academic discipline had grown and even prospered, but, paradoxically, this had not necessarily created a greater understanding of African history. In global media, Africa was still portrayed as a war and conflict-ridden continent, a place of poverty and disease, replacing old stereotypes by new ones.[67]

> *Le succès de l'histoire générale de l'Afrique a rendu paradoxalement plus tendues les relations des historiens africains avec les progrès qui sont accomplis dans leur discipline* [The success of the general history of Africa had paradoxically made the relationship of African historians with the progress made in their discipline more strained].[68]

What this means has largely been described in the last chapter: the success of African history as discipline, which *Présence Africaine* here links decidedly to the GHA, has, as a result of geo-political power structures, caused the discipline to move away from the continent itself, putting the endeavour of African history in the hands of Euro-Americans. *Présence Africaine* concluded that the GHA itself needed to be disseminated more widely on the continent and that was argua-

65 The 2006 issue was actually published the year after.

66 N.N., "Après Ki-Zerbo", 7.

67 See also the Economist of 13th May 2000 on *The hopeless continent*

68 N.N, "Après Ki-Zerbo", 8.

bly where the UNESCO project had failed. The editorial introduction then, seemed to long for a chance to revisit the GHA and the possibilities encased within it.

This nostalgia expressed a longing to reclaim the African particular away from the perceived Euro-American universal. Nostalgia, more broadly, is sometimes seen as a reaction to the losses brought on by globalisation, often connected to specific localities; in the form of paraphernalia of past colonial empires, for instance.[69] In this case, it could be argued that the nostalgia for the African historiography, or rather its possibilities, of the 1950's and 1960s is also located in a particular place, albeit a rather larger one: Africa itself. Once African history was pulled into and accepted by the academic historical disciplines in Europe and North America, it partly lost its orientation towards Africa and thereby possibly its meaning towards the people it concerned. The above then is a nostalgia for an African centre within a globalised web of mobility around the world; the precise condition in which the GHA could briefly flourish during the end of Empire.

Another reflective and nostalgic document that mourns the loss of an African centre is the *De Vita Sua* written by Jan Vansina.[70] In her obituary for Vansina, Michele Wagner draws on the text to illustrate to her reader the emotional life of her friend and mentor.[71] The remarkable text is indeed filled with personal remarks and emotional reflections, as one is wont to do near the end of one's life. Maybe Vansina felt it was time to take stock of what he had achieved and, perhaps more importantly, what his failures had been.[72] The reason he himself stated for writing a *De Vita Sua*, a defence or justification of one's conduct, becomes clear early on in the text. Vansina wrote because he

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69 This idea of nostalgia as opposed to universalism, even if it is a universal experience, and connected to particular places is described in more detail in: Seth Graebner, *History's Place. Nostalgia and the City in French Algerian Literature* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007), 1-25, See also: Lorcin, "The Nostalgias for Empire", 273, Becker, "The Meanings of Nostalgia", 235 and Alastair Bennett, *The Geography of Nostalgia. Global and Local Perspectives on Modernity and Loss* (London: Routledge, 2015)

70 Vansina died on February 8th, 2017 and had published the final word on his life on April 4th 2016, Jan Vansina, "De Vita Sua", *Society* 53 (2016, published online 4-4-2016): 240-5.

71 Michele D. Wagner, "Obituary - Jan Vansina (14 September 1929 – 8 February 2017)", *History in Africa* 44 (2017): 5-9, 8-9.

72 Wagner, "Obituary – Jan Vansina"

wanted to offer context to the extraordinary endeavour that had been African history during his lifetime. It had been extraordinary because:

> The main body of historiography about Africa is foreign to Africa: it stems from foreigners, is published elsewhere, often out of reach to locals, often about topics that are of concern elsewhere, and most often in the so-called 'west'. In Africa many of those accounts are seen as barely relevant. [...] Unlike most of my colleagues who probably see what I have thus far described as a minor hindrance at best, I have become gradually convinced over time that this issue constitutes a major problem for non-African historians of Africa, if only because of the role histories play in sustaining or even creating collective identities.[73]

This external orientation of African studies deeply concerned Vansina. In a way this very thesis is a testament to the problem he describes, given the fact that it was written from a European university by a European researcher. It is also an attempt at a reflection on the meaning of that European position. Vansina was not an opponent of foreign historiography on Africa per definition, but he worried about the attitudes of those foreign historians he had observed during his career. In this account of his life, which is different from his autobiography in that it concerns itself more with the life of the mind and less with events, Vansina almost seems to be speaking directly to the establishment of African historiography in the United States — of which he himself was a part. 'Many academic scholars tend to write more in analytical ways, than to compose a continuous narrative and instead write primarily for their peers "to advance knowledge."' But, Vansina wondered, is that what the primary purpose of African history should be? 'I have [...] witnessed directly the pent-up demand of so many Congolese, and other Africans who have sought a history that is meaningful to them' and therefore not just advancement of knowledge in Europe or North America. Vansina constructed history, therefore, as a 'meaningful' endeavour as different from history as an academic endeavour — meaningful in that it should carry a 'social' responsibility. That responsibility was often absent in a 'foreign' context

73 Vansina, "De Vita Sua", 240-1.

according to Vansina: 'Foreign historiography is authoritative and foreign historians are by far the most numerous. There is no congruence between their concerns which are instead usually dictated by concerns, fashions and careers in their own societies, rather than the concerns of many African historians, much less with those of African elites, and even less with those of the general public in those countries.'[74] And, Vansina continued, this problem of a divergence of interests between those writing the history of Africa and those living it, did not look like it would be solved anytime soon. The promise of creating a 'vibrant African historiography [...] vanished by the mid 1990's.'[75] The historiography Vansina observed around him in 2016 was no longer that of the old 'colonial vintage', yet he thought it was divorced from African interests. 'My awareness of this "disconnect" between producers and natural audience and of its impact on that audience has been growing over my whole working life, and it motivated me ever more to carry out the research that I did pursue.'[76]

That is not to say that Vansina thought there had been no meaningful contributions to African historiography from Africa itself. Indeed, for him the *General History of Africa* was exactly that. Vansina perceived of the GHA as one of his most important contributions to scholarship. Even if he did not realise this at the time:

> It would take many years, many observations and countless conversations with leading African scholars on the UNESCO committee before I truly understood how much our collective and individual identities are involved here and that the imposition of a foreign interpretation of history usually induces a disastrous lack of self-confidence and a deprecation of one's self in those who are the so-called objects of such history. This struggle for Africa's own view about its history was one that could not be abandoned. So, I gave that history and UNESCO all the possible time I could find so that a few years later I became one of the four members of

74 Vansina, "De Vita Sua", 241.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

> its bureau that prodded and supervised the whole operation, until well into the mid 1990's.[77]

Vansina's belief in the importance of meaningful history that spoke to the people who one wrote history about, stemmed from his immersion in the *General History of Africa*. His conviction that history was an emotional affair that spoke to much more than the augmentation of academic knowledge, but that had to be socially meaningful for the everyday reality of the people who functioned as the subjects of history, grew during his time spent with historians such as Ajayi, Ogot, Ki-Zerbo and others. In a series of interviews conducted by Florence Bernault at his home in Madison in April of 2016, around the time the De Vita Sua was published, Vansina explained that he had come to realise that identity was one of the main drivers of history. 'All history has to do with identity and all identity has some form of history in it' — Vansina spoke during the interview.[78] For that reason too, Vansina saw himself more opposed to what he called the foreign interpretation of African history, which he saw materialised in the form of *the Cambridge History of Africa*:

> Over time this kind of historiography was to become the most dominant and most damaging enemy of an African understanding of history. It recruited most foreign historians at western universities and the more scientific and abstruse the publications became, the better they were regarded. Hence, as time went by, I rebelled more and more against similar views; however reasonable or well-founded they might be in theory. [...] recently, the banked fires of the old colonial or imperial histories have been rekindled in the former metropoles and are slowly eroding the effects of UNESCO's achievements, not only internationally but in Af-

77 Vansina, "De Vita Sua", 243.

78 This entanglement of history and identity was especially central to the history of Rwanda, he went on. Jan Vansina, "Maturation of African history", interview by Florence Bernault, April 8, 2016, video, 03:36-03:42, accessed 08-01-2021, https://jan-vansina.africa.wisc.edu/interviews/

> rica, as well. Reacting today against this, as I still do, feels ever more as just a rearguard action.[79]

In the context of this thesis, the above reads almost like a direct response to the reviews discussed in the previous chapter. Near the end of his life, then, Vansina had become partial to the kind of history he had rejected as post-modernism in his autobiography from 1994:

> After 1990 post-modernism began to underline the flaws of the 'scientific' and 'objective' history more and more. [...] when I wrote *Living With Africa* in 1994, I failed to see that, in Africa by itself postmodernism was not the main historiographical challenger. Instead, the universalising hegemonic movement with its metropolitan colonialist outriders was that challenge. Whatever the reason, it remains an inexcusable failure that I did not fully recognise, at the time.[80]

Vansina's self-critical attitude here and his wish to call out in favour of what he called 'inside accounts' of African history shows an urge to set the record straight regarding his own position and opinions before the end and is perhaps characteristic of one taking stock of one's life in old age. Vansina also shows himself averse to the universalising tendencies he identified in historical science and as such, expressed the same kind of nostalgia for the particular as mentioned above. In the position Vansina took by critically assessing the establishment of which he himself was a part for most of his life, he essentially placed himself alongside the editors of *Présence Africaine* who introduced the special issue for Ki-Zerbo.

Vansina felt responsible for the way African history had moved away from the continent. In the end, however, he did not plead for a purely indigenous history of Africa, but a history of Africa wherein foreign historians, like himself, are tuned into the needs of the continent they are concerned with. His *De Vita Sua* contains a clear directive for future generations: to write history that is meaningful outside of academia and for the people who it concerns and to do this in the face of critique and struggle if necessary. Vansina's reflection on his

79 Vansina, "De Vita Sua", 244.

80 Ibid.

own position and his retrospective recognition of the importance of African historians in his own trajectory — a recognition he had not yet made as earnestly in his 1994 autobiography — is deeply reflexive and motivated by morality. In these texts, Vansina is longing for the period when it seemed that real change could be made, but when he had not sufficiently heeded its call, he thought. What binds these texts together, then, is their acknowledgement of the *General History of Africa* and its recognition of African perspectives as worthwhile. In 1981 Boahen equally reflected on the loss of African perspectives during a lecture for the Canadian Association of African studies, already mentioned in Chapter 6. The problem of African history was not that it was too far removed from 'real issues', but rather that it had failed to live up to the expectations of the 1950's and 1960s to centre African history on Africa.[81] The texts betray a sorrowful longing for a time gone by and an imagined opportunity lost, for it is questionable whether it was ever possible to live up to the expectations of the 1950s and 1960s. Most importantly, however, these texts find a sense of salvation in an assignment for the future.

The nostalgia that is present in the reflection on the GHA, furthermore, does not necessarily only bring to mind a longing for an era when decolonisation of history seemed possible, but specifically reflects the ongoing necessity of decolonisation itself. Not simply because one cannot return to the past, but also because the kind of decolonisation that postcolonial critique identified as necessary could probably not have come into being without there first being the decolonising efforts that focused on political and historiographical self-representation — the problem space of the anti-colonial project as Scott puts it.[82] Not because, as Scott is careful to explain, 'the anticolonial nationalists were simple minded essentialist, but because it [the post-colonial excavation of the origins of colonial knowledge itself] had not yet become visible as the question of the moment', that question being 'the decolonisation of self-representation itself, the decolonisation of the conceptual apparatus through which their political objectives were thought out' and, as I would like to add, the conceptual apparatus of

81 Adu Boahen, "The Historiography of Anglophone West Africa in the 1980s" in *Africa in the Twentieth Century. The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), 625–35, 631.

82 David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: criticism after postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton university Press, 1999), 10–15.

history writing.[83] As Scott makes clear in his second book, the emplotment of the anti-colonial moment which sought a romantic narrative of vindication — as Boahen had constructed regarding the history of resistance to colonialism in volume VII of the GHA — no longer seemed realistic. Criticism on the status moulded into a romantic narrative with a vision towards a postcolonial utopia had lost its narrative power and had been made redundant as a result of a neoliberal world order.[84]

Conclusions

This chapter shows how nostalgia can be used an analytical tool to illustrate the retrospective reflection on the *General History of Africa* from within its own ranks and largely from within the continent itself. Those who looked back at the project with sympathy after it was finished regarded it with a sense of melancholy because they rightly regarded the project as a unique chance at decolonising. At the same time, historians of Africa were invested in according the project, and the remarkable historians who worked on it, with retrospective honours. By doing as such, they were engaged in nostalgic boundary work because, as is often the case with obituaries, they moulded the past into an idealised image, not just with the aim of making it fit the present, but also and more importantly, whilst yearning for that past as for some it retrospectively seemed like the pinnacle of anti-colonial success.

Within the obituaries written for Ajayi, Boahen and Ki-Zerbo and largely containing a reflection of the early years of Africanist historiography, the conflict that existed between political and scholarly imperatives in the writing of African history as shown in earlier chapters seemed to have abated. The combination of scholarly activism, or even political activism and what was perceived as epistemically sound objective historical work had become a celebrated epistemic and moral virtue belonging to the very foundation of African history. Retrospectively then, a more congenial image of African historical studies was projected back in time.

The nostalgia that was apparent within reflections that were specifically focused on the *General History of Africa*, rather than its editors

83 Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 12, 14.

84 Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 9.

and authors, was much more wistful. Unlike in the obituaries, reflections on the project itself and African history more broadly carried within them the unmistakable acceptance of the past as past. As a result, they mourned a period in history that had made it possible for the GHA to come into existence in the first place: the end of empire and the global power shift that briefly came along with it. These reflections then, the editorial by *Présence Africaine* and Vansina's musings most importantly, echo a sense of loss that is akin to the waning of optimism after independence. Peculiarly, it was the end of empire that had brought so much opportunity for both African as well as Euro-American scholars. The GHA was a truly transnational and pan-African project that nevertheless could only have come into being as a result of empire. This realisation marks the nostalgic reflection on the project after it had finished as paradoxical. It was not until the advent of postcolonial critique that this paradox became all the more apparent again and again. Nevertheless, these reflections also point the way forward for African historical studies by reiterating the importance of an African history connected to the African continent. What they had in common then, is how they valued the GHA most for its authenticity and its related moral as well as epistemic advocacy for African ownership of knowledge about Africa.

Conclusions to Part Three
RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTION

The difference in the way the GHA was retrospectively reflected on and judged between what I have dubbed 'insiders' and 'outsiders' is stark. It underscores the fact that within the field of African history in the second half of the 20th century, there were very different ideas of what African history should be and should achieve and what role politics had to play therein or even what counted as political or not. Moreover, it underscores the GHA's multiple nature. In Vansina's words, the insiders to the GHA and those that wrote the reviews for the volumes had different ideas on what it meant to write meaningful history. The majority of the review writers judged the GHA for its academic qualities, which they sometimes found lacking and sometimes criticised it for mixing research standards with political imperatives. Insiders who retrospectively reflected on the project, conversely, appreciated that very blending together of political and academic ideals and saw it as an inevitable part of African history. It was precisely the combination between politics and academia that obituary writers seemed to long for in nostalgic accounts of the past. Moreover, in retrospective reflections on the GHA both contributors and others displayed a remarkable nostalgia for the time when it had seemed possible to create an African centre within the study of Africa. They mourned the possibilities that had come with the end of empire and connected the grieving to an assignment for the future: to once again recentre

African studies on Africa in order to create meaningful history of the continent. Of course, the categories of 'outsider' and 'insider' are not that clear-cut and some of the reviews also appreciated the GHA for its historic achievement, even if they found the end results lacking. Many reviewers also diagnosed the GHA as stuck in a time that had since passed and as unresponsive to new debates within historiography. In a way, they chided the GHA for the very thing that the commemorators described in this chapter nostalgically longed for.

The tension between political needs and desires and academic reputability is what the decolonisation of history within the GHA resolved around. Academic credibility for African history in Europe was contingent on the acceptance of the political agenda that was a part of the GHA from its very start. Of course, once a political agenda becomes 'accepted' it stops being perceived of as political and that is a form of boundary work in itself. Yet, when the project started, such academic credibility for African history had not yet arrived. This contingency therefore spoke directly to the question of whether incorporation into the academic world was more important than history writing for political emancipation on the continent itself. In the end, the GHA was praised for the very fact that it had represented the will to create African history as a reputable scholarly endeavour in a decolonising world. Yet, there was also an awareness of some of the problems that were pointed out by the review writers: that the GHA had essentially been overtaken by time and that its emancipatory goals were no longer relevant in the same way in the 1990s as they had been in 1964. The nostalgia inherent in the commemorative texts acknowledged that neither the GHA nor the African historians attached to it had solved all problems and that there were new problems that had arisen. Those new problems constituted an agenda for the continuing the struggle for authentic African history in the 21st century, albeit differently constituted.

CONCLUSIONS

The *General History of Africa* was a complex and multifaceted project. How the project aimed to decolonise the writing of history in its specific historic moment and why it was difficult to do as such has been the starting question of my research into its history. It has been a historiographic study in which the intellectual motivations of the GHA historians and their practice of history writing as followed from those motivations have been the primary objects of analysis. I have described and contextualised the ideals connected to the aim of writing an Africa-centred history of Africa and analysed their practice as part of the history of decolonising knowledge. Of course, this thesis has not offered an all-encompassing account of all aspects of the GHA. There are indubitably worthwhile questions that have been left unasked and unanswered in this thesis. What can the case of the GHA nevertheless tell us specifically about the process of intellectual decolonisation given the challenges of creating independent historical scholarship under conceptual prerequisites and methodology developed in Europe? How, as I put it in the introduction to this work, can we use the GHA to understand the practice of decolonising or Africanising knowledge? This thesis has been about the history of decolonising African history in practice. It has shown that the decolonisation of knowledge in its current form has a history of its own. This conclusion section first summarises my arguments loosely following the three-part structure of this thesis, then moves on to a general conclusion to bring together the various strands of my argument. Next, I describe how UNES-

CO further developed the GHA in the 21st century. I delve into the meaning of my research for the 21st century and draw some parallels between contemporary calls for decolonisation and the GHA as a historical phenomenon, before conveying what I think could be fruitful avenues for follow-up research.

In the first part of this thesis, I have shown that the *General History of Africa* first and foremost aimed to establish African history as a scholarly and epistemically reputable activity within the imagined larger Euro-American academy. It aimed to prove, put differently, that African history existed and could be studied academically, just like European history. Secondly, in proving as such, the GHA aimed to contribute to the political emancipation of the continent. The GHA wanted to contribute to nation building through the writing of history. Epistemic and political concerns, therefore, were intertwined in the objectives of the GHA. These goals, I have argued, were articulated through three distinct ideals: the ideal of anti-eurocentrism, of pan-African diversity and of political emancipation. The analysis of these ideals, placed in the context of the project, has shown why the GHA took on the shape that it did and why it strove towards the two goals mentioned above. The GHA was a collaborative pan-African project of emancipation which produced African history on a large scale because it vehemently believed that the African past needed to be studied as seriously as the European past had been studied. Political decolonisation thus needed to be accompanied by historiographical decolonisation and because the African continent had come to share a common history of colonial oppression, this was envisioned from a pan-African perspective.

Anti-eurocentrism was perhaps the most important epistemic ideal marshalled in order to create independent African history in reaction to the colonial historiography that had come before. It was articulated as an anti-ideal and connected to bias in individuals. Eurocentrism, personified by the figures of Trevor-Roper as well as Hegel to a lesser extent, was conceptualised as an epistemic vice connected to individuals rather than the historical discipline as a whole. It was seen as an epistemic vice, related to dogmatism, which led to shoddy scholarship. As a result, it was connected to bias, subjectivity and racial prejudice and historicised, and thereby made outdated, through reflection on the history of the historical discipline itself. Because eurocentric histories of Africa had denied it its past apart from contact with Europeans, research into pre-colonial history, moreover, became the favoured means to move away from eurocentrism and oral history was envisioned as

the historical method to accompany research into the pre-colonial past.

Ideals of anti-eurocentrism worked in concert with a focus on pan-African collaborative diversity. This was an ideal that, through an embrace of perspectivity, was imagined to contribute to the objectivity that eurocentric history of African pasts had so far lacked. The inclusion of many different (African) points of view moreover, had a political motivation as well. It was imagined that the stipulation that African authors should be preferred over non-Africans would contribute to Africanisation of the historical discipline and thereby emancipation of African historians within that discipline. It was an anti-colonial ideal. Yet, the positioning documents were relatively vague as to how authors needed to be selected beyond a focus on Africans.

Politics played a decisive role within the *General History of Africa*. How the work would contribute to political emancipation, in the form of widespread dissemination of the volumes or by providing the continent with a pan-African nationalist history, was made important. I therefore argue that the GHA saw itself as civically responsible for not just the creation of African history but for developing it in such a way that it could contribute to the education of new national citizens, both at the university level as well as throughout the rest of society. It wanted to reach both academics as well as a general public. As a result, there was some tension regarding the various intended audiences for the project.

In the second part of this thesis, I have analysed what happened to the ideals discussed in part one. Getting rid of eurocentrism within the history of Africa sometimes proved difficulty partly because it was sometimes difficult for epistemic and political ideals of emancipation to work in congruence. When Cheikh Anta Diop argued for the black origins of the ancient Egyptians by making use of racialist science it seemed eurocentrism could be criticised by deploying the tools of eurocentrism, namely racialism, itself and the international scientific committee in charge of the GHA found it difficult to withstand such epistemically unsound, but politically appealing arguments. Diop's stature as one of the most prominent African historians of African history contributed to the appeal of his argument, suggesting that the internal politics of the burgeoning sub-discipline of African history were hard to ignore. It turned out, moreover, that the ISC strategy of focusing on African history from the inside was not always easy to bring into practice because African history had fundamental connec-

tions to extra-African pasts. The goals of creating African history as scholarly reputable and creating African history to contribute specifically to political emancipation through nation-building on the African continent were sometimes, but not always, incongruent.

This was all the more visible in the way that Adu Boahen aimed to shape his volume VII on the history of the colonial period in Africa. Politics and history for him could not be artificially separated and he therefore envisioned a history of the colonial period that focused on resistance to Europeans as well as the histories of proto-nationalist groups. This however led to conflict between him and Terence Ranger, who had a different idea on the nature of resistance to colonialism and who had developed different political ideas regarding the use of African history. Equally, Ali Mazrui had ideas on what it meant to decolonise history that deviated somewhat from the rest of the ISC in his volume VIII on decolonisation. He thought it was of importance to show the connections between the colonial and post-colonial period through a focus on the political realities that colonialism had created, yet the rest of the ISC wanted to move away from what they perceived as a European perspective. Mazrui was, moreover, often understood by some as too engaged in contemporary issues and overtly political in his treatment of the postcolonial past. It was here that tensions between scholarly respectability and political and moral ideals came into conflict once more.

Questions of positionality in the portrayal of the African past played an important role in terms of power and possibility as well, moreover. Who could argue for a decolonised history of Africa and who was allowed to determine what that meant? Racial inequality in terms of global epistemic positioning, I have argued, is part of the answer to why it was difficult to decolonise or Africanise African history within the *General History of Africa*. African and Euro-American historians of Africa came to occupy very different positions within the landscape of global knowledge production. Their voices eventually came to carry an unequal weight, even within a project of decolonisation as a result of growing inequalities in material circumstances and funding. These differences mattered primarily because Euro-Americans retained the upper hand within the global politics of knowledge production on Africa and such different positionalities carried with them differences in opinion as to what was most important regarding the decolonisation of African history. Even though the *General History of Africa* had wished to create a collaborative pan-African work of his-

torical scholarship, Euro-Americans actually came to play crucial roles as a result of disparate material circumstances.

The Africanisation of African history therefore was hindered perhaps most seriously by the growing inequality in the politics of knowledge production about Africa in the 20th century. Whereas the 1960s had been the golden years of Africanised African history, the 1970s proved a rude awakening from dreams of decolonisation and epistemic independence, as well as economic independence. These two are, unsurprisingly perhaps, intimately connected. As a result of financial crises in many African countries in the 1970s and the rise of authoritarian political regimes, budget cuts were made in many African universities, often sacrificing the study of African history in favour of what were deemed more useful areas of study. At the same time, funding for the study of African history at American universities had only increased in the 1960s as a result of Cold War politics. Political realities therefore created practical difficulties in the realisation of all three GHA ideals. Africanisation, anti-eurocentrism and political emancipation became more difficult to realise as the centre of African studies repositioned around American institutions. The materiality of scholarly work therefore played an important role in who decided what it meant to Africanise African history.

Practical problems were therefore perhaps amongst the most devastating barriers towards the creation of an Africanised history of the African continent. Many of the GHA's most important contributors were increasingly bogged down by administrative duties in their respective countries. As a result, the pace of the work slowed down considerably from the 1970s onwards. Yet, the GHA historians largely refused to change their work practice in response to changing realities. They clung to the importance of a collaborative work ethic, sending papers across the world for criticism by dozens of people in order to create what they thought was a more well-rounded GHA. At the same time, the brunt of the work was carried out by less than 10 contributors, most of whom were either from West or East Africa, Europe or North America. Despite the GHA's adherence to pan-African ideology, very few northern or southern Africans played significant roles in the project, nor were African women meaningfully involved. Marxist-oriented historians, moreover, remained at the periphery of the project, despite the importance of Marxist ideologies for the liberation of Southern Africa. The GHA aimed not to take sides in the Cold War even though it was unmistakably influenced by it.

In the last part of this thesis, I have made clear how the GHA was received after it had been published in the 1980s and 1990s. This reception was not always positive, in part because the GHA had been overtaken by time. The realisation that a decolonisation of representation alone was not enough emerged in the 1970s as a result of postcolonial critique. Whilst the GHA was being written, ideals of knowledge production changed. New problems centred around the theory of history arose whereas African nationalism as a goal within history writing became less important. Although the GHA should be seen as more than a part of the so-called nationalist school of African historiography, it did after all include chapters on economic disparities and cultural history, it was largely seen as not having focused on theory enough. This became all the more obvious in the various reviews that were written for the work. Reviewers often deemed the work out of date and judged it for neglecting to really engage in newer, postcolonial and Marxist, scholarship. Some also thought the work was too overtly political. In my analysis of the reviews written for the GHA in the 1980s and 1990s, I have deliberately chosen to look at mostly American and British judgments, as it was around American and more broadly Anglophone scholarship that African studies globally had come to be centred. Moreover, the judgment the GHA received that it was too overtly political in relation to its British counterpart, the *Cambridge History of Africa*, is exemplary for my conclusion that what was seen as political was partly in the eye of the beholder. What we deem decolonising on an epistemic level and what we dismiss as merely political is at least partly decided by one's positionality, as is the question of whether epistemic and political concerns can be separated as such. If that positionality consequently has more power on the stage of global knowledge production, as a result of various historically determined factors, the conclusion must be not only that knowledge is power, but equally that power determines who can produce knowledge and what knowledge is valued. It was precisely this realisation moreover, that caused the GHA historians themselves to reflect on the work after it was finished with a remarkable nostalgia. They had realised that the window of opportunity for decolonisation, at least pertaining to the materiality of knowledge production, may have closed when the euphoria of the end of empire and related possibilities slipped away.

Finally, to move on to general concluding remarks, I conclude that decolonising history takes place on different levels: epistemic, economic as well as political. In this thesis I have brought postcolonial critique

on the conceptual nature of academic history writing and the history of knowledge production about Africa — the colonial library — into conversation with studies of scholarly practice to show that such criticism has its limits. There is more at play hindering the development of autonomous academic knowledge production in Africa besides the epistemic barriers thrown up by a coloniality of knowledge. Without political power as well as financial support it seemed decolonising the writing of history at the university level was unfeasible. I have presented a case study on the practice of decolonisation to supplement theoretical reflections. Practical concerns and institutional dynamics, as well as geo-political changes and power structures, influenced the production of African history just as much as the development of theoretical frameworks. The analytical wall between studies of scholarly practice and histories of Africa needs to be broken down further, however, in order to enrich both. I have, moreover, analysed the role of Euro-American researchers in shaping the history of Africa on a daily basis to show that they remained and remain influential within the academic community that produces knowledge about Africa. I therefore also conclude that the practice of decolonisation should be studied in conjuncture with a more thorough examination of the role of their countries and institutions in financing African studies within specific national contexts. The context of decolonisation matters greatly in terms of global political shifts in power as well as the financial situation of individual universities. Within the GHA, moreover, as with any large-scale project of an overtly ideological nature, there were differences of opinion and subsequent contention, which were reinforced by problems of logistics. However, the specific dynamic regarding the GHA was influenced heavily by the quickly changing realities of the African continent in the 20th century. In fact, it could be concluded that it is a small miracle and a testimony to the GHA historians' perseverance that the project was brought into print at all.

Another conclusion that aligns with work done by decolonial scholars is that universities who have historically emerged in Europe and have been transplanted to Africa, are not the best places for a decolonisation of historical knowledge. The *General History of Africa* never managed to disentangle itself completely from Euro-American frameworks of knowledge production. And although the GHA also made a moral claim about the exclusion of African history, it mostly remained invested in emphasising scientific rigour and accuracy as part of a politics of scholarly respectability. In that respect the project offers

a stark contrast to both the postcolonial critique that followed as a result of changing circumstances, as well as contemporary calls for decolonisation. I now want to move on to the state of affairs for the GHA in the 21st century as well as what this thesis may conclude about some contemporary issues.

Given the enduring inequalities within the politics of global knowledge production it is perhaps not all that surprising that the problems GHA historians were dealing with are similar, though not the same, to problems scholars are still dealing with in 21st century African studies. This is reflected in revived calls for the decolonisation of knowledge production, most notably the Fallist movement in South Africa. They, and others, contend that the history of Africa has not yet been provincialised or decolonised in a meaningful way, in part as a result of the same global neoliberal structures of power that frustrated the GHA. Increasingly, moreover, historians are starting to frame the question of intellectual decolonisation as a European problem, rather than a purely African one. The role of global power structures is brought into question more than before. I have shown in this study why an integrated study of scholarly practice and global politics of knowledge production is so important and that by connecting the everyday minutiae of scholarship to larger structures, we may come to a greater understanding of the way in which scholarship works and is entangled with these larger structures.

The *General History of Africa* itself, moreover, has not yet thrown in the towel and its history has not yet come to an end. UNESCO has, first with the aid of Elikia M'Bokolo who contributed a chapter to volume V, started a series of online lectures as well as podcasts in cooperation with *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) for a general audience in an effort to disseminate the GHA, but more importantly knowledge of African history, ever more widely.[1] In an effort to retroactively fulfil some of the ideals articulated in 1970, UNESCO has started several projects to integrate the GHA into school curricula. More notably, UNESCO has also embarked on the drafting and publication of three new volumes in order to update the older volumes. UNESCO has chosen to focus these volumes on what they dub 'Global Africa' in an effort to connect the history of the continent more deeply to its various diaspora's. As such, it could be said that, once again, UNESCO is speaking

1 "Histoire Générale de l'Afrique", #HistoireAfricaine RFI Savoirs, accessed 3 May, 2021, https://savoirs.rfi.fr/fr/comprendre-enrichir/histoire/histoire-generale-de-lafrique

to the times. Given the rise in recent years of global movements of black emancipation, Black Lives Matter first amongst them, it seems that a study of the afterlives of transatlantic slavery is especially pertinent at this time. UNESCO's continued investment in the GHA project is a result of the continued need to argue for the validity, relevance and importance of Afrocentric perspectives on the African past.

UNESCO's role as a funding body within an unequal landscape of global knowledge production suggests there is more to investigate, to move on to avenues for further research. My thesis has demonstrated that the role of UNESCO as a producer of historiography, given also these recent activities, is understudied. Further investigation into UNESCO's role as a catalyser for historical knowledge is therefore needed, especially regarding the other general history projects that the organisation funded. Further research could also be conducted regarding the everyday scholarly practices of African historians and African scholars more broadly as it took place at African universities such as Ibadan and Makerere during the post-independence period, the so-called 'Golden Years'. Such analysis may help us understand what the early period of decolonisation within the humanities at these institutions looked like, even if we do not want to mirror it.

Moreover, my analysis of the history of the GHA has suggested that the GHA was not just important for the actual content of history it produced, but perhaps also for the networks of intellectuals it engendered. The GHA functioned for decades as a meeting place for like-minded academics and intellectuals who were all concerned with the historiography of Africa. As such it inspired, encouraged and connected many historians of Africa, both African and Euro-American and exerted influence far beyond the GHA itself. It is hard to pin down exactly what this has yielded in terms of historiographical content. However, scholars of historiography and knowledge more broadly may be stimulated to investigate the importance of projects such as the GHA not only for the texts they produce, but also for the environment of scholarship and the networks they create. This thesis has measured the GHA against its own ideals. Yet, another way to look at the project would be to investigate what it has contributed to the emergence of African studies within the United States or somewhere else entirely. This would not only entail a different perspective and a different type of research, but would also illuminate the importance of both global inequalities in knowledge production as well as create an

awareness of the importance of networks for researching and writing African history.

The tension between politics and knowledge production that I have described as an integral part of the GHA, moreover, can be found more broadly in what I call historiography for emancipation. This tension partly corresponds with the tension between the ideals and the practice of historiography that I have described. The need to break through traditional barriers and ideas of what scholarship is by means of scholarly activism can be observed in various histories of historiographical inclusion. These various histories of emancipation need to brought in conversation with one another. What can the study of the history of inclusion of LGBTQ narratives in historiographical practice tell us about shifting paradigms in African studies and vice versa? What, moreover, may an investigation of gender history or feminist history, add to the question of what decolonisation is and what it means to reinterpret history from a different epistemological point of departure?

Along the course of this study, I have come to understand decolonisation as something that both pertains directly to the end of empire in the 20th century and to broader questions of inclusion and epistemic diversity in the study of history. The reasons for this are that decolonisation of history, and indeed the GHA project, spoke to questions of justice in the representation of historical knowledge. The GHA historians were engaged in fundamental questions on the nature of historical knowledge about Africa as well as fundamental questions about identity.

Appendix I

Organisation of the *General History of Africa*

The administrative organisation of the *General History of Africa* (also see Figure 7) was set up as follows: Before 1971 a meeting of experts came together to discuss the general direction of the work in 1966, 1969 and 1970.[1] There had also been a phase in the project, 1965–70 that concerned itself with fieldwork, primarily in the collection of oral traditions.[2] Because this was not part of the actual drafting of the GHA, this thesis has only referenced this in so far as it was relevant for the drafting. After 1970, a 39-member International Scientific Committee (ISC) for the Drafting of a *General History of Africa* was appointed (it included newcomers as well as many of the experts who had been involved from the beginning) which met every two years and was in charge of and responsible for the project's scientific activities.[3] To direct the project in-between those biennial meetings the committee also elected an executive committee, called the Bureau. This Bureau consisted of seven members, at least four of whom had to be African. The Bureau also had a rapporteur, or secretary, the French historian Jean Devisse.[4] Devisse remained rapporteur for the duration of the drafting of the GHA.[5] Originally it was imagined that the whole project would be completed between 1965 and 1975, but this time frame was amended along the way.[6] From 1975 onwards the Bu-

1 UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Abidjan 31 August – 5 September, 1966, Introductory Document, 23 August 1966; UAP, SHC/CONF.27/1, Meeting of Experts on the Measures to be taken for Drafting and Publishing a General History of Africa, Unesco, Paris – 23-27 June 1969. Final Report, 6 August 1969. Translated from the French, 5 and UAP, SHC/MD/10, Meeting of Experts for the Drafting and Publication of A General History of Africa, Addis Ababa, 22 to 26 June 1970, Paris, 15 September 1970.

2 UNESCO, *preparation of a general history of Africa* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 3.

3 The GHA referred to its work as 'scientific' in part because this was a direct translation from the French, denoting academic activity as a whole, and in part because contributing historians did see African history as a truly scientific endeavor in the English sense of the word.

4 UAP, First Plenary Meeting. Rules of Procedure, Article 7, 3.

5 Jan Vansina, "Unesco and African historiography" *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 337-52, 339.

6 UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Paris 23 August 1966, original French. Introductory Document, 1.

reau also had a president, which from 1975 to 1977 was Aklilu Habte, from 1978 to 1983 it was Bethwell Ogot, and thereafter the president was Adu Boahen.[7] The UNESCO secretariat, moreover, would be in control of financial and administrative matters, as well as the eventual publication of the GHA. The editors and authors were all paid for their labour on the GHA.[8] Maurice Glélé was the UNESCO official in charge of the GHA throughout its lifespan.[9] Glélé played a pivotal role in the creation of the GHA. He often opened committee sessions in name of the Director General of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow (Federico Mayor from 1987 onwards, Réne Maheu until 1974) and it was his work which allowed for the smooth running of such meetings. Glélé was also an academic historian in his own right, which likely made him all the more valuable as a manager of the project.[10]

The GHA policy structure was set up in a democratic way, ensuring all scholars involved, as well as some UNESCO officials, would be able to comment on the content of the volumes. Reading committees of around four to five members taken from the ISC were set up for each volume to ensure quality and to allow the ISC to exert a certain amount of control on all the volumes.[11] Each reading committee was subsequently headed by a *rapporteur*, who was in charge of communicating all comments by various readers to the editor and the committee at large. As follows, the volume directors were not solely in charge of the editing of the work, hence their titles as 'directors' rather than editors — although the terms were used interchangeably. The task of editing itself was that of the whole of the 39-member committee as well as the reading committees. It was therefore possible for ISC members who were not part of a specific reading committee to still respond to draft chapters.

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7 UAP, CLT CID 140, CLT/CID/HGR/71.07/CW, Christophe Wondji to Madame Coffi-Studer, 19 January 1995.

8 UAP, CLT CID B7S2.23-12, contract between The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization and Professor Bethwell A. Ogot Department of History University of Nairobi P.O. Box 30197 Nairobi (Kenya)

9 N.N., "Human Rights Committee – Members. Maurice Glélé-Ahanhanzo (Benin)", Office of the United Nations Hihg Commissioner for Human Rights, accessed 29 March 2021, https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/membersCVs/glele.htm

10 See: Maurice Glélé, *Religion, culture et politique en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981)

11 UAP, CC CSP 34, Préparation Glélé. Comités de lecture d'après le rapport de Paris (30-31 julliet 1979), cc-79/Conf.609/l. 7 july 1980.

Besides the production of 8 multi-authored volumes of around 32 chapters each, the UNESCO project also organised several symposia on topics about which the committee members had identified extensive gaps of knowledge existed.[12] Symposia were held about topics such as the *peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script* in 1974, as well as topics concerning methodological and educational dilemma's. The proceedings of these meetings were published in a series dubbed *UNESCO studies and documents — the general history of Africa*, to be found in appendix IV.

12 UAP, First Plenary Meeting. Rules of Procedure, article 23, 8 and Vansina, "African historiography" 341, 346.

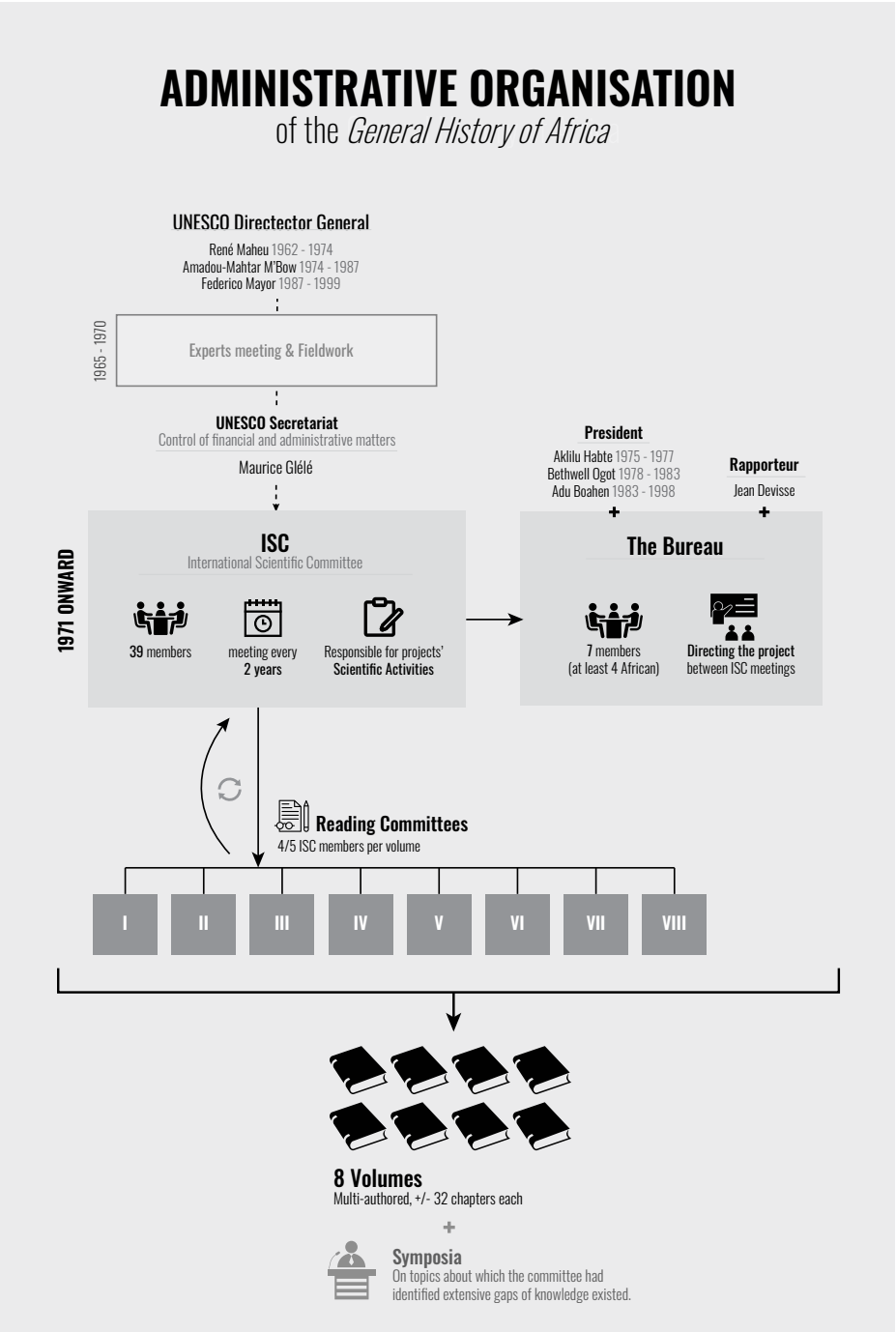

Fig. 7 The Administrative Organisation of the General History of Africa.

Appendix II

Composition of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a *General History of Africa*

J. F. Ade Ajayi (Nigeria) *(from 1971)*

F. A. Albuquerque Mourao (Brazil) *(from 1975)*

Adu A. Boahen (Ghana) *(from 1971)*

H. E. Boubou Hama (Niger) *(1971–1978, resigned)*

H. E. Mutumba Bull (Zambia) *(from 1971)*

David Birmingham (United Kingdom) *(from 1985)*

David Chanaiwa (Zimbabwe) *(from 1975)*

Philip Curtin (United States) *(from 1975)*

Jean Devisse (France) *(from 1971)*

M. Difuila (Angola) *(from 1978)*

Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal) *(1971–1986, deceased)*

D. Djait (Tunisia) *(from 1975)*

H. E. M. El Fasi (Morocco) *(1971–1991, deceased)*

John D. Fage (United Kingdom) *(1971–1981, resigned)*

J. L. Franco (Cuba) *(1971–1989. deceased)*

M. H. I. Galaal (Somalia) *(1971–1981, deceased)*

Virgini Grottanelli (Italy) *(from 1971)*

Eike Haberland (Federal Republic of Germany) *(1971–1992, deceased)*

Aklilu Habte *(from 1971)*

Hampaté Bà (Mali) *(1971–1978, resigned)*

I. S. El Hareir (Libya) *(from 1978)*

I. Hrbek (Czech Republic) *(1971–1993, deceased)*

Abeodu Jones (Liberia) *(from 1971)*

Abbé Alexis Kagame (Rwanda) *(1971–1981, deceased)*

Isaria Kimambo (Tanzania) *(from 1971)*

Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Burkina Faso) *(from 1971)*

Diouldé Laya (Niger*) (from 1979)*

A. Letnev (USSR) *(from 1971)*

Gamal Mokthar (Egypt) *(from 1981)*

Phares Mutibwa (Uganda) *(from 1975)*

Djibril Tamsir Niane (Senegal) *(from 1971)*

L. D. Ngcongco (Botswana*) (from 1971)*

Théophile Obenga (People's Republic of the Congo) *(from 1975)*

Bethwell A. Ogot (Kenya) *(from 1971)*

C. Ravoajanahary (Madagascar) *(from 1971)*

Walter Rodney (Guyana) *(1979–1980, deceased)*

Mekki Shibeika (Sudan) *(1971–1980, deceased)*

Yusuf A. Talib (Singapore) *(from 1975)*

A. Teizeira da Mota (Portugal) *(1978–1982, deceased)*

T. Tshibangu (Zaire) *(from 1971)*

Jan Vansina (Belgium) *(from 1971)*

E. Williams (Trinidad and Tobago) *(1976–1978, resigned)*

Appendix III

General History of Africa Volumes

Volume I — Methodology and African Prehistory
Editor: Joseph Ki-Zerbo

Volume II — Ancient Civilizations of Africa
Editor: Gamal Mokthar

Volume III — Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century
Editor: Mohammed El Fasi
Assistant Editor: Ivan Hrbek

Volume IV — Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century
Editor: Djibril Tasmir Niane

Volume V — Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century
Editor: B. A. Ogot

Volume VI — Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s
Editor: Jacob Ade Ajayi

Volume VII — Africa under Colonial Domination 1880–1935
Editor: A. Adu Boahen

Volume VIII — Africa since 1935
Editor: Ali A. Mazrui
Assistant Editor: Christophe Wondji

Appendix IV

Studies and Documents of the *General History of Africa*

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 1. The Peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script. Proceedings of the symposium held in Cairo from 28 January to 3 February 1974 (Paris: UNESCO, 1978)

The General History of Africa. Studies and document 2. The African slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Reports and papers of the meeting of experts organised by Unesco at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 31 January to 4 February 1978. (Paris: UNESCO, 1979)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 3. Historical relations across the Indian Ocean. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organised by Unesco at Port Louis, Mauritius, from 15 to 19 July 1974. (Paris: UNESCO, 1980)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 4. The historiography of southern Africa. Proceedings of the Experts Meeting held at Gaborone, Botswana, from 7 to 11 March 1977. (Paris: UNESCO, 1980)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 5. The decolonisation of Africa: southern Africa and the Horn of Africa. Workings documents and report of the meeting of experts held in Warsaw, Poland, from 9 to 13 October 1978. (Paris: UNESCO, 1981)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 6. African ethnonyms and toponyms. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organised by Unesco in Paris, 3–7 July 1978. (Paris: UNESCO, 1984)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 7. Historical and socio-cultural relations between black Africa and the Arab world from 1935 to the present. Report and papers of the symposium organised by Unesco in Paris from 25 to 27 July 1979. (Paris: UNESCO, 1984)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 8. The methodology of contemporary African history. Reports and papers of the meeting of experts organised by UNESCO at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979. (Paris: UNESCO, 1984)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 9. The educational process and historiography in Africa. Final Report and papers of the symposium organised by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982. (Paris: UNESCO, 1985)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 10. Africa and the Second World War. Report and papers of the symposium organised by Unesco at Benghazi, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, from 10 to 13 November 1980. (Paris: UNESCO, 1985)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 11. Libya Antiqua. Report and papers and the symposium organised by Unesco in Paris, 16 to 18 January 1984. (Paris: UNESCO, 1986)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 12. The role of African student movements in the political and social evolution of Africa from 1900 to 1975. (Paris: UNESCO, 1994)

Bibliography

List of Archival Abbreviations

UAP	UNESCO archives Paris
CLT CID	Division of International Cultural Cooperation, Preservation and Enrichment of Cultural Identities
CC CSP	Cultural Studies and Circulation Division
JTLI	Jadeas Trust Library Ibadan
JAAP	J. F. Ade Ajayi Papers
BHL UM	Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan
AMP	Ali A. Mazrui papers
HLAS	Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies
JVP	Jan Vansina papers

Archival Sources

Paris

UNESCO Archives Place de Fontenoy
DDG 3 52
SHC/CONF.27/1

UNESCO Archives Rue Miollis
CC CSP 15
CC CSP 31
CC CSP 32
CC CSP 33
CC CSP 35
CC CSP 36
CC CSP 37
CC CSP 38
CC CSP 39
CC CSP 40
CC CSP 42
CC CSP 43

CC CSP 45
CC CSP 46
CC CSP 67
CLT CID 50
CLT CID 89
CLT CID 92
CLT CID 99
CLT CID 103
CLT CID 104
CLT CID 137
CLT CID 140
CLT CID 141
CLT CID 154
CLT CID 159
CLT CID B7S2.23-12

Ibadan
Jadeas Trust Library
Jacob Ade Ajayi papers
Box 67
Box 73
Box 75
Box 77
Box 78

Evanston
Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University
Jan Vansina papers
PO Box 134

Ann Arbor
Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan
Ali Mazrui papers
PO Box 7
PO Box 8

Online Archival Sources

Institute of Current World Affairs

CJP-10

UNESDOC

CC/77/CONF.602/2, Septième Réunion du Bureau du Comité Scientifique International pour la Rédaction d'une Histoire Générale de L'Afrique, Paris, 18–29 July 1977.

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SHC.75/CONF.601/3, Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 5th meeting, Fez, Morocco, 5–11 February 1975.

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Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt hoe de geschiedschrijving over Afrika veranderde gedurende de politieke dekolonisatie in Afrika in de tweede helft van de 20e eeuw. Het onderzoek is gebaseerd op de casestudie van de *General History of Africa*, ook bekend als *Histoire générale de l'Afrique* (hierna GHA), die tussen 1964 en 1998 tot stand kwam. De GHA was een achtdelige, tweetalige serie boeken over de geschiedenis van Afrika waaraan meer dan driehonderd auteurs mee schreven. Het project werd geleid door een negenendertig-koppige wetenschappelijke commissie. Deze commissie bestond grotendeels uit vooraanstaande Afrikaanse historici, aangevuld met prominente historici van Afrika uit Europa en Noord-Amerika. Het belangrijkste doel was, de geschiedenis van Afrika te beschrijven vanuit een Afrikaans perspectief en haar zo te Afrikaniseren. Dit was een reactie op de 19e- en vroeg 20e eeuwse Europese koloniale veronderstelling dat Afrika geen geschiedenis bezat, maar dat alleen de geschiedenis van Europeanen in Afrika de moeite van het bestuderen waard was. Deze herijking van de geschiedenis van Afrika aan een Afrikaans perspectief noem ik de "dekolonisatie van de geschiedschrijving", omdat het een reactie was op koloniale en racistische ideeën over het Afrikaanse continent.

Mijn studie sluit aan bij eerdere studies binnen de geschiedenis van de geesteswetenschappen die zich op wetenschappelijke praktijken hebben gericht, maar voegt daaraan een cruciale vernieuwende dimensie toe door een Afrikaanse en antikoloniale casus centraal te

stellen. Daarnaast wordt belicht hoe de praktijk en de materialiteit van de dekolonisatie van kennis in zijn werk gaan. Op die manier wordt een aanvulling geboden op rijke theoretische reflecties uit de hoek van *postcolonial* en *decolonial studies*. Daarmee sluit dit proefschrift aan bij eerdere inspanningen om een globale geschiedenis van de geesteswetenschappen op gang te brengen.

Mijn belangrijkste conclusie is, dat een dergelijke dekolonisatie van geschiedschrijving op meerdere niveaus plaatsvindt. Het is zowel een politieke, een economische als een epistemische onderneming. De verhouding tussen deze verschillende elementen alsmede de verschillende persoonlijkheden binnen de GHA was complex. Om de geschiedenis van de GHA te begrijpen is het daarom noodzakelijk niet alleen naar de theorie van en idealen voor de beoogde dekolonisatie te kijken, maar ook naar de manier waarop deze in de praktijk werken én hoe er na afloop van het project op werd teruggekeken. Mijn studie bestaat daarom uit drie deelonderwerpen: 1. De idealen van de GHA. 2. Hoe deze idealen in de realiteit functioneerden binnen de GHA en 3. De retrospectieve reflectie op het werk.

In deel 1 van deze dissertatie toon ik aan dat de *GHA* in de eerste plaats tot doel had de Afrikaanse geschiedschrijving tot een wetenschappelijk en epistemisch respectabele activiteit te maken binnen de (deels denkbeeldige) grotere Euro-Amerikaanse academische wereld. Ten tweede wilde de GHA, door het bovenstaande te bewerkstelligen, bijdragen aan de politieke emancipatie van het continent. Epistemische en politieke overwegingen waren dus met elkaar verweven in de doelstellingen van de GHA. Deze doelstellingen werden verwoord aan de hand van drie verschillende idealen: het ideaal van anti-eurocentrisme, van pan-Afrikaanse diversiteit en van politieke emancipatie. De GHA was een pan-Afrikaans en emancipatoir samenwerkingsproject dat op grote schaal Afrikaanse geschiedenis produceerde omdat het ervan overtuigd was dat het Afrikaanse verleden even serieus bestudeerd moest worden als het Europese. Politieke dekolonisatie moest dus gepaard gaan met historiografische dekolonisatie, en omdat het Afrikaanse continent een gemeenschappelijke geschiedenis van koloniale onderdrukking kende, werd dit vanuit een pan-Afrikaans perspectief bekeken.

Anti-eurocentrisme was misschien wel het belangrijkste epistemische ideaal dat werd geformuleerd, met als doel een onafhankelijke Afrikaanse geschiedenis te creëren als reactie op de koloniale

geschiedschrijving die eraan vooraf was gegaan. Het werd vooral in stelling gebracht als een anti-ideaal, waarbij het ging om het vermijden van eurocentrisme en vooringenomenheid. Het eurocentrisme werd verpersoonlijkt door figuren als Hugh Trevor-Roper en in mindere mate Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, en op die manier geconceptualiseerd als een epistemische ondeugd die verbonden was met individuen in plaats van de historische discipline als geheel. Het werd bovendien gehistoriseerd door middel van reflectie op de geschiedenis van de historische discipline zelf en raakte op die manier achterhaald. Omdat eurocentrische geschiedenissen van Afrika hadden ontkend dat het continent een geschiedenis had voordat het eerste contact met Europeanen had plaatsgevonden, werd onderzoek naar de prekoloniale geschiedenis het aangewezen middel om dat eurocentrisme te bestrijden. *Oral history* was de historische methode bij uitstek om het onderzoek naar dat prekoloniale verleden mogelijk te maken.

Het ideaal van het anti-eurocentrisme ging gepaard met een focus op pan-Afrikaanse diversiteit en samenwerking. Dit was een ideaal dat moest bijdragen aan de objectiviteit waaraan het de eurocentrische geschiedschrijving van het Afrikaanse verleden tot dan toe had ontbroken, omdat het meerdere perspectieven zou omvatten. Het inbrengen van meerdere verschillende Afrikaanse perspectieven had daarnaast een politieke motivatie. Men stelde zich voor dat het privilegiëren van Afrikaanse auteurs boven niet-Afrikanen zou bijdragen aan de Afrikanisering van de historische discipline en daarmee aan de emancipatie van Afrikaanse historici binnen die discipline. Pan-Afrikaanse diversiteit was daarmee ook een antikoloniaal ideaal. Tegelijkertijd was de GHA betrekkelijk vaag over de vraag hoe auteurs geselecteerd moesten worden. (Afgezien van het feit dat Afrikaanse historici voorrang moesten krijgen.)

Politiek speelde een beslissende rol binnen de GHA. Hoe het werk zou bijdragen aan politieke emancipatie was voor alle betrokkenen een belangrijk vraagstuk. Ze meenden dat dit moest gebeuren door de GHA-delen wijd te verspreiden en daarmee het hele continent te voorzien van een pan-Afrikaanse nationalistische geschiedenis. De GHA stelde zichzelf daarom niet alleen verantwoordelijk voor het produceren van Afrikaanse geschiedenis, maar ook voor het zodanig ontwikkelen ervan dat deze kon bijdragen aan de opvoeding van de burgers van de diverse nieuwe nationale staten in Afrika na dekolonisatie, zowel op universitair niveau als in de rest van de

samenleving. De GHA wilde dus zowel academici als een algemeen publiek bereiken. Als gevolg daarvan ontstond er enige spanning tussen de verschillende beoogde doelgroepen van het project.

In het tweede deel van deze dissertatie analyseer ik wat er van de in deel 1 besproken idealen terecht kwam. Het bleek lastig om eurocentrisme binnen de geschiedenis van Afrika uit te bannen, omdat epistemische en politieke idealen soms maar moeilijk met elkaar in overeenstemming konden worden gebracht. Toen de Senegalese academicus Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) beargumenteerde dat de oude Egyptenaren van oorsprong zwarte Afrikanen waren door gebruik te maken van racialistische wetenschap, bekritiseerde hij eurocentrisme met instrumenten die voortkwamen uit datzelfde eurocentrisme. De commissie die toezicht hield op het tot stand brengen van de GHA vond het moeilijk om dergelijke epistemisch ondeugdelijke, maar politiek aansprekende argumenten te weerstaan. Diops statuur als een van de meest prominente Afrikaanse historici van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis droeg bij tot de aantrekkingskracht van zijn betoog, wat suggereerde dat de interne politiek van de ontluikende subdiscipline van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis moeilijk te negeren was. De doelstellingen van het creëren van Afrikaanse geschiedenis als een wetenschappelijk achtenswaardige discipline enerzijds, en anderzijds een instrument om specifiek bij te dragen aan politieke emancipatie door natievorming op het Afrikaanse continent, waren soms moeilijk met elkaar te verenigen.

Dit was eveneens zichtbaar in de manier waarop de redacteur van deel 7, Adu Boahen (1932-2006), de geschiedenis van de koloniale periode in Afrika wilde vormgeven. Politiek en geschiedenis waren voor hem geen gescheiden zaken, en daarom stelde hij zich in de naam van natiestaatvorming op het continent een geschiedenis van de koloniale periode voor die zich zowel richtte op het verzet tegen de Europeanen als op de geschiedenissen van proto-nationalistische groeperingen. Dit leidde tot een conflict met de Britse historicus Terence Ranger (1929-2015), die een ander idee had over de aard van het verzet tegen het kolonialisme en die andere politieke ideeën had ontwikkeld over het gebruik van Afrikaanse geschiedschrijving.

De ideeën van Ali Mazrui (1933-2014) omtrent de precieze betekenis van dekolonisaite van de geschiedenis, zorgden eveneens voor frictie. Mazrui was de redacteur van deel 8, dat de postkoloniale periode bestreek. Hij vond het belangrijk om in dat deel verbanden

tussen de koloniale en de postkoloniale periode zichtbaar te maken door zich te richten op de politieke realiteiten die het kolonialisme in de 20e eeuw had grecreëerd, terwijl de rest van de commissie juist afstand wilde nemen van het belang van de Europese impact op de geschiedenis van Afrika. Bovendien werd Mazrui door sommigen gezien als te zeer betrokken bij hedendaagse kwesties en te politiek in zijn behandeling van het postkoloniale verleden. Het was hier dat wetenschappelijke respectabiliteit en politieke en morele idealen opnieuw in conflict kwamen.

Vragen over de manier waarop Afrikaanse verledens moesten worden gepresenteerd speelden bovendien een belangrijke rol in termen van macht en mogelijkheid. Wie kon pleiten voor een gedekoloniseerde geschiedenis van Afrika en wie mocht bepalen wat dat betekende? Het was moeilijk de Afrikaanse geschiedenis binnen de GHA te dekoloniseren of te Afrikaniseren omdat er sprake was van raciale ongelijkheid in termen van mondiale epistemische positionering. Afrikaanse en Euro-Amerikaanse historici van Afrika namen zeer verschillende posities in binnen het mondiale systeem van kennisproductie, en de inbreng van Afrikaanse historici had uiteindelijk niet altijd evenveel invloed als die van Euro-Amerikaanse historici, zelfs binnen een dekoloniserend project. Hoewel de GHA een gezamenlijk pan-Afrikaans geschiedkundig werk had willen creëren, bleven Euro-Amerikanen in feite een cruciale rol spelen als gevolg van groeiende ongelijkheid in materiële omstandigheden en financiering.

De Afrikanisering van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis werd daarom misschien wel het ernstigst belemmerd door de groeiende ongelijkheid binnen de mondiale politiek van kennisproductie over Afrika in de twintigste eeuw. Terwijl de jaren zestig de gouden jaren van de door Afrikanen geschreven Afrikaans georiënteerde geschiedenis waren geweest, brachten de jaren zeventig een ruw ontwaken uit de dromen van dekolonisatie en epistemische onafhankelijkheid, net als economische onafhankelijkheid. Deze twee zijn, misschien niet verrassend, nauw met elkaar verbonden. Als gevolg van de financiële crises in veel Afrikaanse landen in de jaren zeventig en de opkomst van autoritaire politieke regimes snoeiden veel Afrikaanse universiteiten aan hun begroting, waarbij de studie van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis vaak werd opgeofferd aan wat nuttiger studiegebieden werden geacht. Tegelijkertijd namen de financiële middelen voor de studie van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis aan de

Amerikaanse universiteiten in de jaren zestig toe ten gevolge van Koude Oorlogspolitiek. De politieke realiteit creëerde dus praktische moeilijkheden bij de verwezenlijking van alle drie de GHA--idealen. Afrikanisering, anti-eurocentrisme en politieke emancipatie werden moeilijker te verwezenlijken naarmate de studie van Afrika zich rond Amerikaanse instellingen concentreerde. De materialiteit van wetenschappelijk werk bepaalde daarom in belangrijk mate wat het in de praktijk betekende om Afrikaanse geschiedenis te dekoloniseren.

Praktische problemen vormden daarmee een tweede belangrijke barrière voor het tot stand komen van een Afrikaans georiënteerde geschiedenis van het Afrikaanse continent. Veel van de historici binnen de GHA raakten steeds meer belemmerd door administratieve verplichtingen in eigen land. Als gevolg daarvan daalde het werktempo binnen de GHA aanzienlijk vanaf de jaren 1970. Toch veranderden de werkwijzen binnen de GHA veelal niet mee met de veranderende realiteit. De GHA hield vast aan het belang van een op samenwerking gebaseerde werkethiek en stuurde documenten de wereld rond voor commentaar, om zo te komen tot wat zij als een meer diverse en daarmee objectievere geschiedenis beschouwden. Tegelijkertijd werd het leeuwendeel van het project uiteindelijk uitgevoerd door minder dan tien van de belangrijkste commissieleden, waarvan de meesten afkomstig waren uit West- of Oost-Afrika, Europa of Noord-Amerika. Ondanks het feit dat de GHA een pan-Afrikaanse ideologie aanhing, speelden slechts weinig Noord- of Zuid-Afrikanen een rol van betekenis in het project, en waren Afrikaanse vrouwen er evenmin op een zinvolle manier bij betrokken. Marxistisch georiënteerde historici figureerden bovendien in de periferie van het project, ondanks het belang van marxistische ideologieën voor de bevrijding van Zuidelijk Afrika. De GHA wilde geen partij kiezen in de Koude Oorlog, hoewel ze er onmiskenbaar door werd beïnvloed.

In het laatste deel van deze dissertatie maak ik duidelijk hoe de GHA werd ontvangen nadat de reeks in de jaren '80 en '90 werd gepubliceerd. Deze ontvangst was niet altijd positief, mede omdat de GHA door de tijd was ingehaald. Het besef dat een wisseling van Europese naar Afrikaanse perspectieven alleen niet voldoende was, ontstond in de jaren zeventig als gevolg van postkoloniale kritiek. Deze kritiek betoogde dat koloniale denkbeelden waren doorgedrongen tot het discours van de geschiedschrijving zelf. Afrikaanse

geschiedschrijving moest zich hiervan losweken en een eigen theoretisch kader ontwikkelen voordat dekolonisatie van de geschiedschrijving zinvol zou zijn. De GHA was hier volgens recensenten niet in geslaagd. Sommigen vonden ook dat het werk te uitgesproken politiek was. Dit oordeel is vooral interessant in vergelijking met de manier waarop er over de Britse tegenhanger van de GHA, de *Cambridge History of Africa*, werd geoordeeld. De Cambridge serie kreeg doorgaans geen verwijten dat ze té politiek geëngageerd was. Dit illustreert mijn conclusie dat hetgeen als politiek wordt gezien, deels wordt bepaald door positionering. Wat op epistemisch niveau als dekoloniserend wordt beschouwd en wat louter als politiek wordt afgedaan, wordt op zijn minst gedeeltelijk bepaald door iemands positie, net als de vraag of epistemische en politieke zaken als zodanig kunnen worden gescheiden. Wanneer die positionaliteit als gevolg van verschillende historisch bepaalde factoren meer macht heeft op het toneel van de mondiale kennisproductie, moet de conclusie niet alleen zijn dat kennis macht is, maar evenzeer dat macht bepaalt wie kennis kan produceren, en welke kennis op de juiste waarde wordt geschat. Het was overigens precies dit besef dat de GHA-historici zelf na afloop van het werk met een merkwaardige nostalgie deed terugkijken op het project. Zij realiseerden zich dat de tijd waarin dekolonisatie van de geschiedschrijving mogelijk was, althans wat betreft perspectiviteit, was verstreken na de periode van optimisme in de jaren zestig.

In deze dissertatie heb ik postkoloniale kritiek op de conceptuele aard van de academische geschiedschrijving en de geschiedenis van de kennisproductie over Afrika in gesprek gebracht met studies van de wetenschappelijke praktijk om te laten zien dat zulke kritiek haar grenzen heeft. De ontwikkeling van een autonome academische kennisproductie in Afrika wordt niet alleen belemmerd door de epistemische barrières die worden opgeworpen door de kolonialiteit van de kennis. Zonder politieke macht en financiële steun lijkt het dekoloniseren van de geschiedschrijving op universitair niveau onhaalbaar. Ter aanvulling van de theoretische beschouwingen heb ik een casestudie over de praktijk van de dekolonisatie gepresenteerd. Praktische belemmeringen en institutionele dynamiek, evenals (geo)politieke veranderingen en machtsstructuren, beïnvloeden de productie van Afrikaanse geschiedenis evenzeer als de ontwikkeling van theoretische kaders. Ik heb bovendien de rol van Europese en Amerikaanse onderzoekers bij de dagelijkse vormgeving van de

geschiedenis van Afrika geanalyseerd om aan te tonen dat zij invloedrijk bleven en blijven binnen de academische gemeenschap die kennis over Afrika produceert. De context van dekolonisatie is van groot belang in termen van mondiale politieke machtsverschuivingen en de financiële situatie van specifieke universiteiten. Binnen de GHA deden zich bovendien, zoals bij elk grootschalig project gebaseerd op een specifiek ideologische grondslag, meningsverschillen en daaruit voortvloeiende spanningen voor, die nog werden versterkt door logistieke problemen. De specifieke dynamiek met betrekking tot de GHA werd echter sterk beïnvloed door de snel veranderende realiteit van het Afrikaanse continent in de 20e eeuw. Is het, achteraf gezien, niet een klein wonder en een blijk van het doorzettingsvermogen van de GHA-historici dat de acht delen überhaupt zijn verschenen?

Curriculum Vitae

Larissa Schulte Nordholt was born in 1992 in Hilversum, the Netherlands. She completed a BA (cum laude) in History at Leiden University in 2015 and an Mphil in Political Thought and Intellectual History at Cambridge University in 2016. In the autumn of that same year, she became the 18th Prix de Paris Lauréate, which allowed her to reside in Paris during one year to conduct archival research in the UNESCO archives. In September 2017 she started her PhD research on the decolonisation of knowledge within the *General History of Africa* thanks to the NWO programme *promoties in de geesteswetenschappen*. This research was based on the archival research conducted during her year in Paris. Her research was supervised by professor Herman Paul and professor Jan-Bart Gewald. She has published articles in *History in Africa*, *History of Humanities*, *Yearbook of Women's History* (of which she also an editor) and *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*. She also co-edited (with Herman Paul) a special issue of the *Journal for the Philosophy of History* and has published a chapter in an edited volume (by Herman Paul).

This thesis researches how and why the UNESCO sponsored General History of Africa (1964-1998) sought to Africanise and decolonise the writing of African history in the wake of the political independence of many West African and East African countries in the early 1960s. As such, it provides a case-study on the practice of African historiography in the second half of the twentieth century. The thesis investigates how formulated ideals of a decolonisation of African history were translated into practice and analyses what this might tell us about the establishment of African history within the humanities and the history of decolonising knowledge production. The study is divided in three parts: the first part concerns the formulated ideals of African history as they came into being in opposition to eurocentrism during the 1960s and early 1970s. Part two shifts the focus to the realities of the ideals discussed in part one. How did the historians of the GHA try to bring their ideals into practice and what came of them during the long process of drafting the GHA? The third and final part of the thesis focuses on the reception and retrospective perception of the project in its final years and after it was finished.