



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

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

Schulte Nordholt, L.R.C.

Citation

Schulte Nordholt, L. R. C. (2021, December 1). *Africanising African history: decolonisation of knowledge in UNESCO's general history of Africa (1964-1998)*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3244250>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3244250>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

AFRICANISING AFRICAN HISTORY

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

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof. dr. ir. H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op woensdag 1 december 2021
klokke 16.15 uur

door

Larissa Schulte Nordholt
geboren te Hilversum
in 1992

Promotores: Prof. dr. H.J. Paul
Prof. dr. J. B. Gewalt

Promotiecommissie: Prof. dr. Daniel Woolf (Queens University)
Prof. dr. Mirjam de Bruijn
Prof. dr. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (Universität Bayreuth)
Prof. dr. Alanna O'Malley
Prof. dr. Jakob Vogel (Institut d'études politiques de Paris)

AFRICANISING AFRICAN HISTORY

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

Larissa Schulte Nordholt

This research was supported by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) under project number: 322-69-015.



Cover Image

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

Photograph by Nina Wilkinson

Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license. The photo was cropped, flipped and touched up lightly. A small detail in the top left corner was altered. Original file: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Conference_1.jpg

Cover design

Wouter Wouda

©**Larissa Schulte Nordholt**. All rights reserved. No part of this dissertation may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form of by any means without written permission by the author.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of four years of research funded by the Dutch Scientific Organization (NWO) for which I am grateful.

This thesis would not have been possible without my supervisor Herman Paul, whose clarity of mind I admire. Ever since I met him in 2014 he has continuously supported and encouraged me. I am grateful for his guidance, insightful critique and his willingness to help. I am also deeply grateful to Jan-Bart Gewald. His enthusiasm and encouragement have helped me become more strident and secure as a scholar and have undoubtedly improved my analysis of a continent with which he is much more familiar than I will ever be.

There have been numerous others who have helped me become a historian. I would like to thank my father, Gerard Schulte Nordholt, not just for his support, but for teaching me about history. I grew up in a household where history was always present in some form or other and for this, I will always be grateful. I want to thank my teachers and friends Kim Beerden and Adriaan van Veldhuizen, their guidance has immeasurably improved my argumentation. Thanks to another great friend, Conor Bollins, who, though never officially my teacher, taught me more about the English language than anyone else.

Thanks to all my colleagues at the Institute for History. In particular I would like to thank Bente de Leede for her support and for our endless conversations about Said, eurocentrism, colonialism, academia and just about anything else, Patrick Dassen for helping me become a better teacher and Anne-Isabelle Richard and Alicia Schrikker for their advice and support. I want to thank Suze Zijlstra for her invaluable friendship and advice. Thanks to Duncan Money for agreeing to comment on a final draft of this thesis. I am grateful to my Huizinga roommates for sharing the ups and downs of PhD-life: Stefan Penders, Wietse Stam, Marlisa den Hartog, Teuntje Vosters, Patricia Kret and Omar Achfay. I would also like to thank Sanne Ravensbergen, Nadia Bouras, Carolien Stolte, Henk Kern, Girija Joshi, Thomas Mareite, Dirk Alkemade, Sjang ten Hagen, Edurne De Wilde, Yusra Abdullahi, Peter Meel, Chris Engberts, Maartje Janse, Joost Augusteijn, Diederik Smit, Judith Pollman, Luuk de Ligt, Walter Nkwi and Inge Ligtvoet.

There are many other colleagues whom deserve thanks: Marleen Reichgelt - an excellent comrade -, Travis Ross, Marie Huber, Remco

Raben, Hugo Drochon, Sara Polak, Jon Verriet, Lieke Smits, Stephanie van Dam and the editorial board of the Yearbook of Women's History.

It was thanks to the Prix de Paris that I was able to spend a year in Paris to study the UNESCO archives in 2016-2017. Thanks in particular to Jakob Vogel for offering me both an institutional home as well as comments on my work during my time there and to the UNESCO archivists, Eng Sengsavang, Alexandre Coutelle, Sang Phan. There were also other archivists across several continents who have helped me in the years since and to whom I am grateful.

When I travelled to Nigeria in 2018, I met many wonderful people. I am grateful to Ayobami and Member Ojebode for hosting me. Thanks also to Mbakeren Ikeseh, Mbangohol Ikeseh, Iver Ikeseh, Aya Agber Ikeseh, Egun Ojebode, Mosun Ojebode and many others. Ayo, I want to thank also for his help in ordering my thoughts and for providing me with office space at the Arts Faculty in Ibadan. Many (emeritus) faculty members helped me by agreeing to be interviewed, reading my work or allowing me to sit in on their classes: Obaro Ikime, Jide Osuntokun, Bolanle Awe, Simon Ademola Ajayi and David Ajayi. I am indebted to Olutayo Adesina for introducing me to Chief. Mrs. Christie Ade Ajayi. I owe Mrs. Ade Ajayi a debt of gratitude for her hospitality and access to the archive of her late husband, J.F. Ade Ajayi. I am grateful to Yetunde Ade Ajayi for including me in the operations of the Jadeas Trust Library Archive.

I am grateful to my mother, Renée Vink, not only for her belief in me, but also for her willingness to read my crappy first drafts and for teaching me about the richness of different languages. I would not be the scholar I am today without her.

Thanks to friends and family who I cannot all list as there are just too many of you. Rest assured that you are in my mind.

Lastly, I would like to thank Wouter Wouda, the love of my life. His steady presence throughout the years have helped me in ways that are too numerous to recount here. Thank you for your unwavering belief in my abilities, thank you for cooking me delicious meals almost every night and thank you for tolerating Miso, who brings me great comfort and thank you for making sure this thesis looks as good as it does.

Voorburg, September 2021.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

- 1 Taking pan-African historical initiative at Flagstaff House in Accra
- 6 Historiography
- 18 Research questions
- 21 The colonial library
- 27 Methodology and primary sources
- 33 Organisation of the thesis

37 Dramatis Personae

PART ONE

The Ideals of the *General History of Africa*

43 Introduction to part one

45 CHAPTER ONE

Ideals and Anti-ideals in Reaction to eurocentrism

- 45 Introduction
- 47 How not to be a historian of Africa. Inverse ideals of scholarly behaviour
- 53 Historian non grata
- 64 The ideal of pre-colonial African history
- 72 Conclusions

75 CHAPTER TWO

Ideals of pan-African Diversity and Collectivity

- 75 Introduction
- 76 The *General History of Africa* as a pan-Africanist project
- 80 Pan-African diversity as an ideal of knowledge production
- 88 Conclusions

89 CHAPTER THREE
Ideals of Political Emancipation

- 89 Introduction
- 90 Nation-state building through oral historiography
- 97 The political ideal of 'reaching the widest possible audience'
- 104 History for whom? The contested relevance of nationalist history writing
- 109 Conclusions

113 Conclusions to Part One: Ideals

PART TWO

The Realities of the *General History of Africa*

117 Introduction to part two

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

- 119 Introduction
- 121 Combatting external influences
- 132 Language
- 141 Reclaiming Egypt
- 151 Conclusions

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

- 155 Introduction
- 158 Balancing the numbers amongst changing circumstances
- 176 'Slow progress', 'recalcitrant authors' and 'continual delays'
- 183 Conclusions

187 CHAPTER SIX
Positionality and the Global Politics of Knowledge Production within the *General History of Africa*

- 187 Introduction
- 189 The power of the European voice and the politics of global knowledge production
- 197 Disparate material circumstances
- 205 The insider–outsider view
- 213 Conclusions

215 CHAPTER SEVEN
Defining the Political and the Place of ‘Europe’ within the *General History of Africa*

- 215 Introduction
- 217 Volume VII: Where does history end and politics begin?
- 231 Volume VIII: How to write contemporary history of Africa
- 242 What politics and for whom within the GHA?
- 246 Conclusions

249 Conclusions to Part Two: Realities

PART THREE
Perceptions

253 Introduction to part three

255 CHAPTER EIGHT
‘A massive work of little worth.’ Retrospective Perceptions of the Project by Africanists in the United States and the United Kingdom

- 255 Introduction
- 258 The reviewers
- 260 The *General History of Africa* reviewed
- 273 The *Cambridge History of Africa* in comparison
- 279 Conclusions: The GHA as academic outsiders

281 CHAPTER NINE
The Nostalgic Remembrance of UNESCO's *General History of Africa*

- 281 Introduction
- 285 Nostalgia for scholarly activism
- 299 Nostalgia for the end of empire
- 310 Conclusions

313 Conclusions to Part Three: Retrospective reflection

315 Conclusions

326 Appendix I

- 326 Organisation of the *General History of Africa*

330 Appendix II

- 330 Composition of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a *General History of Africa*

332 Appendix III

- 332 *General History of Africa* Volumes

333 Appendix IV

- 333 Studies and Documents of the *General History of Africa*

335 Bibliography

- 335 List of Archival Abbreviations
- 335 Archival Sources
- 337 Online Archival Sources
- 339 Other Primary Sources
- 340 Primary Literature
- 352 Secondary Literature

377 Samenvatting

385 Curriculum Vitae

