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

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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?

