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

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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

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*-â*ge*' 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

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

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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

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.