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

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PART THREE

Perceptions

Introduction to part three

Part three of this dissertation focuses on the way the GHA volumes were received by both insiders and outsiders. It deals with the retrospective perceptions of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* in order to gauge what the project has meant for African historiography and its emancipation within the historical discipline. It asks the question of how the project was reflected upon after it had been brought to a finish and how and why the ideals as formulated in the 1960s and early 1970s changed, if at all? How did both critics and contributors look back on the project? It traces how they accounted for the way that African studies had changed between 1964 and 1998. The dual, partly contingent goals of the GHA had been to become incorporated in the academy as a reputable scholarly endeavour and, secondly, to contribute to emancipation of Africans on the continent. Did those retrospectively reflecting on the project think that the political and epistemic goals of the GHA had been fulfilled and if not, what was its perceived legacy, both in terms of scholarship as well as academic politics? I ask these questions not only to ascertain whether the General History was a 'success' or 'failure' according to its own standards, but also to reflect on its position within the history of historiography as part of the history of decolonisation. This is of especial interest because the history of African historiography and the role of the GHA within it was judged very differently by different historical actors. Part three of this dissertation broadens the perspective of this study somewhat and outlines these differences to show they stemmed from contrasting interpretations on the purpose of both the GHA and African historiography and arguably historiography more broadly.

