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

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Appendix I

Organisation of the *General History of Africa*

The administrative organisation of the *General History of Africa* (also see Figure 7) was set up as follows: Before 1971 a meeting of experts came together to discuss the general direction of the work in 1966, 1969 and 1970.¹ There had also been a phase in the project, 1965–70 that concerned itself with fieldwork, primarily in the collection of oral traditions.² Because this was not part of the actual drafting of the GHA, this thesis has only referenced this in so far as it was relevant for the drafting. After 1970, a 39-member International Scientific Committee (ISC) for the Drafting of a *General History of Africa* was appointed (it included newcomers as well as many of the experts who had been involved from the beginning) which met every two years and was in charge of and responsible for the project's scientific activities.³ To direct the project in-between those biennial meetings the committee also elected an executive committee, called the Bureau. This Bureau consisted of seven members, at least four of whom had to be African. The Bureau also had a rapporteur, or secretary, the French historian Jean Devisse.⁴ Devisse remained rapporteur for the duration of the drafting of the GHA.⁵ Originally it was imagined that the whole project would be completed between 1965 and 1975, but this time frame was amended along the way.⁶ From 1975 onwards the Bu-

1 UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Abidjan 31 August – 5 September, 1966, Introductory Document, 23 August 1966; UAP, SHC/CONF.27/1, Meeting of Experts on the Measures to be taken for Drafting and Publishing a General History of Africa, Unesco, Paris – 23–27 June 1969. Final Report, 6 August 1969. Translated from the French, 5 and UAP, SHC/MD/10, Meeting of Experts for the Drafting and Publication of A General History of Africa, Addis Ababa, 22 to 26 June 1970, Paris, 15 September 1970.

2 UNESCO, *preparation of a general history of Africa* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 3.

3 The GHA referred to its work as 'scientific' in part because this was a direct translation from the French, denoting academic activity as a whole, and in part because contributing historians did see African history as a truly scientific endeavor in the English sense of the word.

4 UAP, First Plenary Meeting, Rules of Procedure, Article 7, 3.

5 Jan Vansina, "Unesco and African historiography" *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 337–52, 339.

6 UAP, UNESCO/CLT/HIGENAF/ABIDJAN/3, Committee of Experts on the General History of Africa, Paris 23 August 1966, original French. Introductory Document, 1.

reau also had a president, which from 1975 to 1977 was Aklilu Habte, from 1978 to 1983 it was Bethwell Ogot, and thereafter the president was Adu Boahen.⁷ The UNESCO secretariat, moreover, would be in control of financial and administrative matters, as well as the eventual publication of the GHA. The editors and authors were all paid for their labour on the GHA.⁸ Maurice Glélé was the UNESCO official in charge of the GHA throughout its lifespan.⁹ Glélé played a pivotal role in the creation of the GHA. He often opened committee sessions in name of the Director General of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow (Federico Mayor from 1987 onwards, René Maheu until 1974) and it was his work which allowed for the smooth running of such meetings. Glélé was also an academic historian in his own right, which likely made him all the more valuable as a manager of the project.¹⁰ The GHA policy structure was set up in a democratic way, ensuring all scholars involved, as well as some UNESCO officials, would be able to comment on the content of the volumes. Reading committees of around four to five members taken from the ISC were set up for each volume to ensure quality and to allow the ISC to exert a certain amount of control on all the volumes.¹¹ Each reading committee was subsequently headed by a *rapporteur*, who was in charge of communicating all comments by various readers to the editor and the committee at large. As follows, the volume directors were not solely in charge of the editing of the work, hence their titles as 'directors' rather than editors — although the terms were used interchangeably. The task of editing itself was that of the whole of the 39-member committee as well as the reading committees. It was therefore possible for ISC members who were not part of a specific reading committee to still respond to draft chapters.

⁷ UAP, CLT CID 140, CLT/CID/HGR/71.07/CW, Christophe Wondji to Madame Coffi-Studer, 19 January 1995.

⁸ UAP, CLT CID B7S2.23-12, contract between The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization and Professor Bethwell A. Ogot Department of History University of Nairobi P.O. Box 30197 Nairobi (Kenya)

⁹ N.N., "Human Rights Committee – Members. Maurice Glélé-Ahanhanzo (Benin)", Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, accessed 29 March 2021, <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/membersCVs/glele.htm>

¹⁰ See: Maurice Glélé, *Religion, culture et politique en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981)

¹¹ UAP, CC CSP 34, Préparation Glélé. Comités de lecture d'après le rapport de Paris (30-31 juillet 1979), cc-79/Conf.609/l. 7 July 1980.

Besides the production of 8 multi-authored volumes of around 32 chapters each, the UNESCO project also organised several symposia on topics about which the committee members had identified extensive gaps of knowledge existed.¹² Symposia were held about topics such as the *peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script* in 1974, as well as topics concerning methodological and educational dilemma's. The proceedings of these meetings were published in a series dubbed *UNESCO studies and documents — the general history of Africa*, to be found in appendix IV.

¹² UAP, First Plenary Meeting, Rules of Procedure, article 23, 8 and Vansina, "African historiography" 341, 346.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION

of the *General History of Africa*

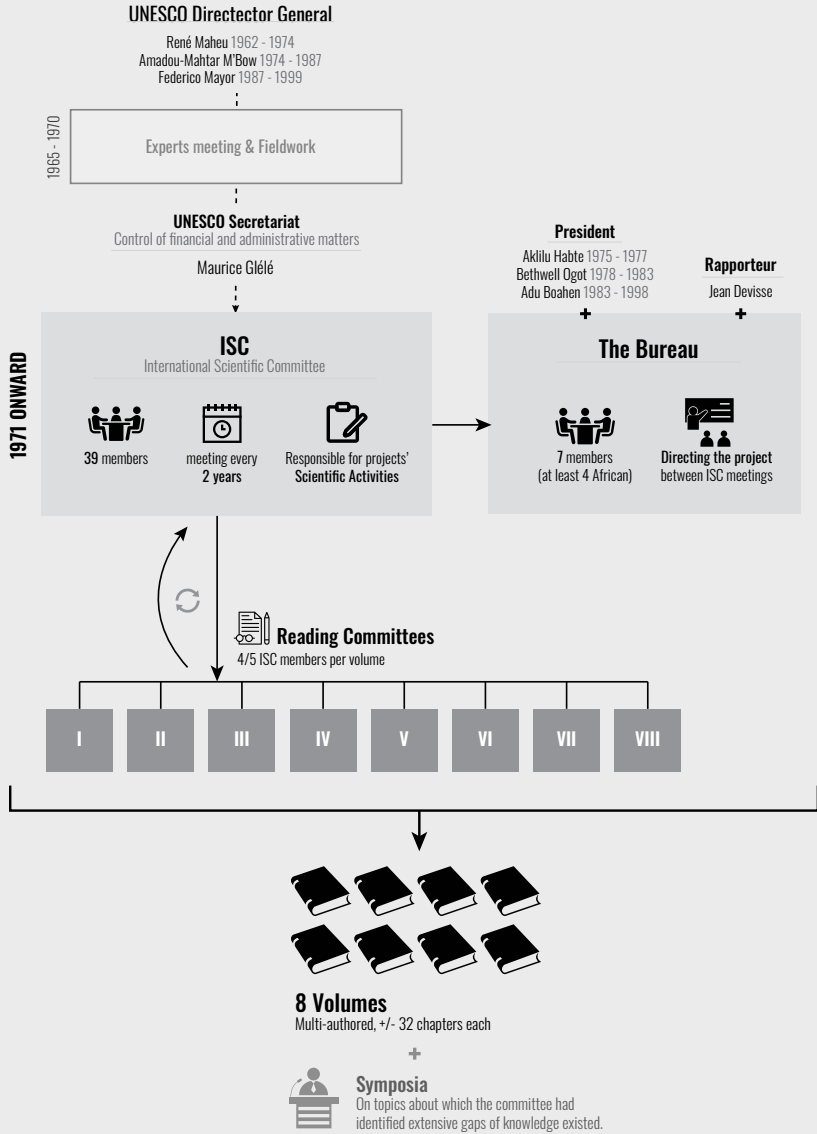


Fig. 7 The Administrative Organisation of the General History of Africa.

Appendix II

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

- J. F. Ade Ajayi (Nigeria) (*from 1971*)
- F. A. Albuquerque Mourao (Brazil) (*from 1975*)
- Adu A. Boahen (Ghana) (*from 1971*)
- H. E. Boubou Hama (Niger) (*1971–1978, resigned*)
- H. E. Mutumba Bull (Zambia) (*from 1971*)
- David Birmingham (United Kingdom) (*from 1985*)
- David Chanaiwa (Zimbabwe) (*from 1975*)
- Philip Curtin (United States) (*from 1975*)
- Jean Devisse (France) (*from 1971*)
- M. Difuila (Angola) (*from 1978*)
- Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal) (*1971–1986, deceased*)
- D. Djait (Tunisia) (*from 1975*)
- H. E. M. El Fasi (Morocco) (*1971–1991, deceased*)
- John D. Fage (United Kingdom) (*1971–1981, resigned*)
- J. L. Franco (Cuba) (*1971–1989, deceased*)
- M. H. I. Galaal (Somalia) (*1971–1981, deceased*)
- Virgini Grottanelli (Italy) (*from 1971*)
- Eike Haberland (Federal Republic of Germany) (*1971–1992, deceased*)
- Aklilu Habte (*from 1971*)
- Hampaté Bâ (Mali) (*1971–1978, resigned*)
- I. S. El Hareir (Libya) (*from 1978*)
- I. Hrbek (Czech Republic) (*1971–1993, deceased*)
- Abeodu Jones (Liberia) (*from 1971*)

Abbé Alexis Kagame (Rwanda) (1971–1981, *deceased*)
Isaria Kimambo (Tanzania) (*from 1971*)
Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Burkina Faso) (*from 1971*)
Diouldé Laya (Niger) (*from 1979*)
A. Letnev (USSR) (*from 1971*)
Gamal Mokthar (Egypt) (*from 1981*)
Phares Mutibwa (Uganda) (*from 1975*)
Djibril Tamsir Niane (Senegal) (*from 1971*)
L. D. Ngcongco (Botswana) (*from 1971*)
Théophile Obenga (People’s Republic of the Congo) (*from 1975*)
Bethwell A. Ogot (Kenya) (*from 1971*)
C. Ravoajanahary (Madagascar) (*from 1971*)
Walter Rodney (Guyana) (1979–1980, *deceased*)
Mekki Shibeika (Sudan) (1971–1980, *deceased*)
Yusuf A. Talib (Singapore) (*from 1975*)
A. Tezeira da Mota (Portugal) (1978–1982, *deceased*)
T. Tshibangu (Zaire) (*from 1971*)
Jan Vansina (Belgium) (*from 1971*)
E. Williams (Trinidad and Tobago) (1976–1978, *resigned*)

Appendix III

General History of Africa Volumes

Volume I — Methodology and African Prehistory

Editor: Joseph Ki-Zerbo

Volume II — Ancient Civilizations of Africa

Editor: Gamal Mokhtar

Volume III — Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century

Editor: Mohammed El Fasi

Assistant Editor: Ivan Hrbek

Volume IV — Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century

Editor: Djibril Tasmir Niane

Volume V — Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century

Editor: B. A. Ogot

Volume VI — Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s

Editor: Jacob Ade Ajayi

Volume VII — Africa under Colonial Domination 1880–1935

Editor: A. Adu Boahen

Volume VIII — Africa since 1935

Editor: Ali A. Mazrui

Assistant Editor: Christophe Wondji

Appendix IV

Studies and Documents of the *General History of Africa*

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 1. The Peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script. Proceedings of the symposium held in Cairo from 28 January to 3 February 1974 (Paris: UNESCO, 1978)

The General History of Africa. Studies and document 2. The African slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Reports and papers of the meeting of experts organised by Unesco at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 31 January to 4 February 1978. (Paris: UNESCO, 1979)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 3. Historical relations across the Indian Ocean. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organised by Unesco at Port Louis, Mauritius, from 15 to 19 July 1974. (Paris: UNESCO, 1980)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 4. The historiography of southern Africa. Proceedings of the Experts Meeting held at Gaborone, Botswana, from 7 to 11 March 1977. (Paris: UNESCO, 1980)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 5. The decolonisation of Africa: southern Africa and the Horn of Africa. Working documents and report of the meeting of experts held in Warsaw, Poland, from 9 to 13 October 1978. (Paris: UNESCO, 1981)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 6. African ethnonyms and toponyms. Report and papers of the meeting of experts organised by Unesco in Paris, 3–7 July 1978. (Paris: UNESCO, 1984)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 7. Historical and socio-cultural relations between black Africa and the Arab world from 1935 to the present. Report and papers of the symposium organised by Unesco in Paris from 25 to 27 July 1979. (Paris: UNESCO, 1984)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 8. The methodology of contemporary African history. Reports and papers of the meeting of experts organised by UNESCO at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, from 17 to 22 May 1979. (Paris: UNESCO, 1984)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 9. The educational process and historiography in Africa. Final Report and papers of the symposium organised by Unesco in Dakar (Senegal) from 25 to 29 January 1982. (Paris: UNESCO, 1985)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 10. Africa and the Second World War. Report and papers of the symposium organised by Unesco at Benghazi, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, from 10 to 13 November 1980. (Paris: UNESCO, 1985)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 11. Libya Antiqua. Report and papers and the symposium organised by Unesco in Paris, 16 to 18 January 1984. (Paris: UNESCO, 1986)

The General History of Africa. Studies and documents 12. The role of African student movements in the political and social evolution of Africa from 1900 to 1975. (Paris: UNESCO, 1994)

Bibliography

List of Archival Abbreviations

UAP	UNESCO archives Paris
CLT CID	Division of International Cultural Cooperation, Preservation and Enrichment of Cultural Identities
CC CSP	Cultural Studies and Circulation Division
JTLI	Jadeas Trust Library Ibadan
JAAP	J. F. Ade Ajayi Papers
BHL UM	Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan
AMP	Ali A. Mazrui papers
HLAS	Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies
JVP	Jan Vansina papers

Archival Sources

Paris

UNESCO Archives Place de Fontenoy

DDG 3 52

SHC/CONF.27/1

UNESCO Archives Rue Miollis

CC CSP 15

CC CSP 31

CC CSP 32

CC CSP 33

CC CSP 35

CC CSP 36

CC CSP 37

CC CSP 38

CC CSP 39

CC CSP 40

CC CSP 42

CC CSP 43

CC CSP 45
CC CSP 46
CC CSP 67
CLT CID 50
CLT CID 89
CLT CID 92
CLT CID 99
CLT CID 103
CLT CID 104
CLT CID 137
CLT CID 140
CLT CID 141
CLT CID 154
CLT CID 159
CLT CID B7S2.23-12

Ibadan

Jadeas Trust Library
Jacob Ade Ajayi papers
Box 67
Box 73
Box 75
Box 77
Box 78

Evanston

Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern
University
Jan Vansina papers
PO Box 134

Ann Arbor

Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan
Ali Mazrui papers
PO Box 7
PO Box 8

Online Archival Sources

Institute of Current World Affairs

CJP-10

UNESDOC

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SHC.75/CONF.601/3, Meeting of the Bureau of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, 5th meeting, Fez, Morocco, 5–11 February 1975.

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

SHC/WS/198, Guide for the Preparation of the General History of Africa. Paris, 18 November 1971.

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Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt hoe de geschiedschrijving over Afrika veranderde gedurende de politieke dekolonisatie in Afrika in de tweede helft van de 20^e eeuw. Het onderzoek is gebaseerd op de casestudie van de *General History of Africa*, ook bekend als *Histoire générale de l'Afrique* (hierna GHA), die tussen 1964 en 1998 tot stand kwam. De GHA was een achtdelige, tweetalige serie boeken over de geschiedenis van Afrika waaraan meer dan driehonderd auteurs mee schreven. Het project werd geleid door een negenendertig-koppige wetenschappelijke commissie. Deze commissie bestond grotendeels uit vooraanstaande Afrikaanse historici, aangevuld met prominente historici van Afrika uit Europa en Noord-Amerika. Het belangrijkste doel was, de geschiedenis van Afrika te beschrijven vanuit een Afrikaans perspectief en haar zo te Afrikaniseren. Dit was een reactie op de 19^e- en vroeg 20^e eeuwse Europese koloniale veronderstelling dat Afrika geen geschiedenis bezat, maar dat alleen de geschiedenis van Europeanen in Afrika de moeite van het bestuderen waard was. Deze herijking van de geschiedenis van Afrika aan een Afrikaans perspectief noem ik de “dekolonisatie van de geschiedschrijving”, omdat het een reactie was op koloniale en racistische ideeën over het Afrikaanse continent.

Mijn studie sluit aan bij eerdere studies binnen de geschiedenis van de geesteswetenschappen die zich op wetenschappelijke praktijken hebben gericht, maar voegt daaraan een cruciale vernieuwende dimensie toe door een Afrikaanse en antikoloniale casus centraal te

stellen. Daarnaast wordt belicht hoe de praktijk en de materialiteit van de dekolonisatie van kennis in zijn werk gaan. Op die manier wordt een aanvulling geboden op rijke theoretische reflecties uit de hoek van *postcolonial* en *decolonial studies*. Daarmee sluit dit proefschrift aan bij eerdere inspanningen om een globale geschiedenis van de geesteswetenschappen op gang te brengen.

Mijn belangrijkste conclusie is, dat een dergelijke dekolonisatie van geschiedschrijving op meerdere niveaus plaatsvindt. Het is zowel een politieke, een economische als een epistemische onderneming. De verhouding tussen deze verschillende elementen alsmede de verschillende persoonlijkheden binnen de GHA was complex. Om de geschiedenis van de GHA te begrijpen is het daarom noodzakelijk niet alleen naar de theorie van en idealen voor de beoogde dekolonisatie te kijken, maar ook naar de manier waarop deze in de praktijk werken én hoe er na afloop van het project op werd teruggekeken. Mijn studie bestaat daarom uit drie deelonderwerpen: 1. De idealen van de GHA. 2. Hoe deze idealen in de realiteit functioneerden binnen de GHA en 3. De retrospectieve reflectie op het werk.

In deel 1 van deze dissertatie toon ik aan dat de *GHA* in de eerste plaats tot doel had de Afrikaanse geschiedschrijving tot een wetenschappelijk en epistemisch respectabele activiteit te maken binnen de (deels denkbeeldige) grotere Euro-Amerikaanse academische wereld. Ten tweede wilde de GHA, door het bovenstaande te bewerkstelligen, bijdragen aan de politieke emancipatie van het continent. Epistemische en politieke overwegingen waren dus met elkaar verweven in de doelstellingen van de GHA. Deze doelstellingen werden verwoord aan de hand van drie verschillende idealen: het ideaal van anti-eurocentrisme, van pan-Afrikaanse diversiteit en van politieke emancipatie. De GHA was een pan-Afrikaans en emancipatoir samenwerkingsproject dat op grote schaal Afrikaanse geschiedenis produceerde omdat het ervan overtuigd was dat het Afrikaanse verleden even serieus bestudeerd moest worden als het Europese. Politieke dekolonisatie moest dus gepaard gaan met historiografische dekolonisatie, en omdat het Afrikaanse continent een gemeenschappelijke geschiedenis van koloniale onderdrukking kende, werd dit vanuit een pan-Afrikaans perspectief bekeken.

Anti-eurocentrisme was misschien wel het belangrijkste epistemische ideaal dat werd geformuleerd, met als doel een onafhankelijke Afrikaanse geschiedenis te creëren als reactie op de koloniale

geschiedschrijving die eraan vooraf was gegaan. Het werd vooral in stelling gebracht als een anti-ideaal, waarbij het ging om het vermijden van eurocentrisme en vooringenomenheid. Het eurocentrisme werd verpersoonlijkt door figuren als Hugh Trevor-Roper en in mindere mate Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, en op die manier geconceptualiseerd als een epistemische ondeugd die verbonden was met individuen in plaats van de historische discipline als geheel. Het werd bovendien gehistoriseerd door middel van reflectie op de geschiedenis van de historische discipline zelf en raakte op die manier achterhaald. Omdat eurocentrische geschiedenissen van Afrika hadden ontkend dat het continent een geschiedenis had voordat het eerste contact met Europeanen had plaatsgevonden, werd onderzoek naar de prekoloniale geschiedenis het aangewezen middel om dat eurocentrisme te bestrijden. *Oral history* was de historische methode bij uitstek om het onderzoek naar dat prekoloniale verleden mogelijk te maken.

Het ideaal van het anti-eurocentrisme ging gepaard met een focus op pan-Afrikaanse diversiteit en samenwerking. Dit was een ideaal dat moest bijdragen aan de objectiviteit waaraan het de eurocentrische geschiedschrijving van het Afrikaanse verleden tot dan toe had ontbroken, omdat het meerdere perspectieven zou omvatten. Het inbrengen van meerdere verschillende Afrikaanse perspectieven had daarnaast een politieke motivatie. Men stelde zich voor dat het privilegiëren van Afrikaanse auteurs boven niet-Afrikanen zou bijdragen aan de Afrikanisering van de historische discipline en daarmee aan de emancipatie van Afrikaanse historici binnen die discipline. Pan-Afrikaanse diversiteit was daarmee ook een antiekoloniaal ideaal. Tegelijkertijd was de GHA betrekkelijk vaag over de vraag hoe auteurs geselecteerd moesten worden. (Afgezien van het feit dat Afrikaanse historici voorrang moesten krijgen.)

Politiek speelde een beslissende rol binnen de GHA. Hoe het werk zou bijdragen aan politieke emancipatie was voor alle betrokkenen een belangrijk vraagstuk. Ze meenden dat dit moest gebeuren door de GHA-delen wijd te verspreiden en daarmee het hele continent te voorzien van een pan-Afrikaanse nationalistische geschiedenis. De GHA stelde zichzelf daarom niet alleen verantwoordelijk voor het produceren van Afrikaanse geschiedenis, maar ook voor het zodanig ontwikkelen ervan dat deze kon bijdragen aan de opvoeding van de burgers van de diverse nieuwe nationale staten in Afrika na dekolonisatie, zowel op universitair niveau als in de rest van de

samenleving. De GHA wilde dus zowel academici als een algemeen publiek bereiken. Als gevolg daarvan ontstond er enige spanning tussen de verschillende beoogde doelgroepen van het project.

In het tweede deel van deze dissertatie analyseer ik wat er van de in deel 1 besproken idealen terecht kwam. Het bleek lastig om eurocentrisme binnen de geschiedenis van Afrika uit te bannen, omdat epistemische en politieke idealen soms maar moeilijk met elkaar in overeenstemming konden worden gebracht. Toen de Senegalese academicus Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) beargumenteerde dat de oude Egyptenaren van oorsprong zwarte Afrikanen waren door gebruik te maken van racialistische wetenschap, bekritiseerde hij eurocentrisme met instrumenten die voortkwamen uit datzelfde eurocentrisme. De commissie die toezicht hield op het tot stand brengen van de GHA vond het moeilijk om dergelijke epistemisch ondeugdelijke, maar politiek aansprekende argumenten te weerstaan. Diops statuut als een van de meest prominente Afrikaanse historici van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis droeg bij tot de aantrekkingskracht van zijn betoog, wat suggereerde dat de interne politiek van de ontluikende subdiscipline van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis moeilijk te negeren was. De doelstellingen van het creëren van Afrikaanse geschiedenis als een wetenschappelijk achtenswaardige discipline enerzijds, en anderzijds een instrument om specifiek bij te dragen aan politieke emancipatie door natievorming op het Afrikaanse continent, waren soms moeilijk met elkaar te verenigen.

Dit was eveneens zichtbaar in de manier waarop de redacteur van deel 7, Adu Boahen (1932-2006), de geschiedenis van de koloniale periode in Afrika wilde vormgeven. Politiek en geschiedenis waren voor hem geen gescheiden zaken, en daarom stelde hij zich in de naam van natiestaatvorming op het continent een geschiedenis van de koloniale periode voor die zich zowel richtte op het verzet tegen de Europeanen als op de geschiedenissen van proto-nationalistische groeperingen. Dit leidde tot een conflict met de Britse historicus Terence Ranger (1929-2015), die een ander idee had over de aard van het verzet tegen het kolonialisme en die andere politieke ideeën had ontwikkeld over het gebruik van Afrikaanse geschiedschrijving.

De ideeën van Ali Mazrui (1933-2014) omtrent de precieze betekenis van dekolonisatie van de geschiedenis, zorgden eveneens voor frictie. Mazrui was de redacteur van deel 8, dat de postkoloniale periode bestreek. Hij vond het belangrijk om in dat deel verbanden

tussen de koloniale en de postkoloniale periode zichtbaar te maken door zich te richten op de politieke realiteiten die het kolonialisme in de 20^e eeuw had gecreëerd, terwijl de rest van de commissie juist afstand wilde nemen van het belang van de Europese impact op de geschiedenis van Afrika. Bovendien werd Mazrui door sommigen gezien als te zeer betrokken bij hedendaagse kwesties en te politiek in zijn behandeling van het postkoloniale verleden. Het was hier dat wetenschappelijke respectabiliteit en politieke en morele idealen opnieuw in conflict kwamen.

Vragen over de manier waarop Afrikaanse verledens moesten worden gepresenteerd speelden bovendien een belangrijke rol in termen van macht en mogelijkheid. Wie kon pleiten voor een gede-koloniseerde geschiedenis van Afrika en wie mocht bepalen wat dat betekende? Het was moeilijk de Afrikaanse geschiedenis binnen de GHA te dekoloniseren of te Afrikaniseren omdat er sprake was van raciale ongelijkheid in termen van mondiale epistemische positionering. Afrikaanse en Euro-Amerikaanse historici van Afrika namen zeer verschillende posities in binnen het mondiale systeem van kennisproductie, en de inbreng van Afrikaanse historici had uiteindelijk niet altijd evenveel invloed als die van Euro-Amerikaanse historici, zelfs binnen een dekoloniserend project. Hoewel de GHA een gezamenlijk pan-Afrikaans geschiedkundig werk had willen creëren, bleven Euro-Amerikanen in feite een cruciale rol spelen als gevolg van groeiende ongelijkheid in materiële omstandigheden en financiering.

De Afrikanisering van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis werd daarom misschien wel het ernstigst belemmerd door de groeiende ongelijkheid binnen de mondiale politiek van kennisproductie over Afrika in de twintigste eeuw. Terwijl de jaren zestig de gouden jaren van de door Afrikanen geschreven Afrikaans georiënteerde geschiedenis waren geweest, brachten de jaren zeventig een ruw ontwaken uit de dromen van dekolonisatie en epistemische onafhankelijkheid, net als economische onafhankelijkheid. Deze twee zijn, misschien niet verrassend, nauw met elkaar verbonden. Als gevolg van de financiële crises in veel Afrikaanse landen in de jaren zeventig en de opkomst van autoritaire politieke regimes snoeiden veel Afrikaanse universiteiten aan hun begroting, waarbij de studie van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis vaak werd opgeofferd aan wat nuttiger studiegebieden werden geacht. Tegelijkertijd namen de financiële middelen voor de studie van de Afrikaanse geschiedenis aan de

Amerikaanse universiteiten in de jaren zestig toe ten gevolge van Koude Oorlogspolitiek. De politieke realiteit creëerde dus praktische moeilijkheden bij de verwezenlijking van alle drie de GHA-idealen. Afrikanisering, anti-eurocentrisme en politieke emancipatie werden moeilijker te verwezenlijken naarmate de studie van Afrika zich rond Amerikaanse instellingen concentreerde. De materialiteit van wetenschappelijk werk bepaalde daarom in belangrijke mate wat het in de praktijk betekende om Afrikaanse geschiedenis te dekoloniseren.

Praktische problemen vormden daarmee een tweede belangrijke barrière voor het tot stand komen van een Afrikaans georiënteerde geschiedenis van het Afrikaanse continent. Veel van de historici binnen de GHA raakten steeds meer belemmerd door administratieve verplichtingen in eigen land. Als gevolg daarvan daalde het werktempo binnen de GHA aanzienlijk vanaf de jaren 1970. Toch veranderden de werkwijzen binnen de GHA veelal niet mee met de veranderende realiteit. De GHA hield vast aan het belang van een op samenwerking gebaseerde werkethiek en stuurde documenten de wereld rond voor commentaar, om zo te komen tot wat zij als een meer diverse en daarmee objectievere geschiedenis beschouwden. Tegelijkertijd werd het leeuwendeel van het project uiteindelijk uitgevoerd door minder dan tien van de belangrijkste commissieleden, waarvan de meesten afkomstig waren uit West- of Oost-Afrika, Europa of Noord-Amerika. Ondanks het feit dat de GHA een pan-Afrikaanse ideologie aanhing, speelden slechts weinig Noord- of Zuid-Afrikanen een rol van betekenis in het project, en waren Afrikaanse vrouwen er evenmin op een zinvolle manier bij betrokken. Marxistisch georiënteerde historici figureerden bovendien in de periferie van het project, ondanks het belang van marxistische ideologieën voor de bevrijding van Zuidelijk Afrika. De GHA wilde geen partij kiezen in de Koude Oorlog, hoewel ze er onmiskenbaar door werd beïnvloed.

In het laatste deel van deze dissertatie maak ik duidelijk hoe de GHA werd ontvangen nadat de reeks in de jaren '80 en '90 werd gepubliceerd. Deze ontvangst was niet altijd positief, mede omdat de GHA door de tijd was ingehaald. Het besef dat een wisseling van Europese naar Afrikaanse perspectieven alleen niet voldoende was, ontstond in de jaren zeventig als gevolg van postkoloniale kritiek. Deze kritiek betoogde dat koloniale denkbeelden waren doorgedrongen tot het discours van de geschiedschrijving zelf. Afrikaanse

geschiedschrijving moest zich hiervan losweken en een eigen theoretisch kader ontwikkelen voordat dekolonisatie van de geschiedschrijving zinvol zou zijn. De GHA was hier volgens recensenten niet in geslaagd. Sommigen vonden ook dat het werk te uitgesproken politiek was. Dit oordeel is vooral interessant in vergelijking met de manier waarop er over de Britse tegenhanger van de GHA, de *Cambridge History of Africa*, werd geoordeeld. De Cambridge serie kreeg doorgaans geen verwijten dat ze té politiek geëngageerd was. Dit illustreert mijn conclusie dat hetgeen als politiek wordt gezien, deels wordt bepaald door positionering. Wat op epistemisch niveau als dekoloniserend wordt beschouwd en wat louter als politiek wordt afgedaan, wordt op zijn minst gedeeltelijk bepaald door iemands positie, net als de vraag of epistemische en politieke zaken als zodanig kunnen worden gescheiden. Wanneer die positionaliiteit als gevolg van verschillende historisch bepaalde factoren meer macht heeft op het toneel van de mondiale kennisproductie, moet de conclusie niet alleen zijn dat kennis macht is, maar evenzeer dat macht bepaalt wie kennis kan produceren, en welke kennis op de juiste waarde wordt geschat. Het was overigens precies dit besef dat de GHA-historici zelf na afloop van het werk met een merkwaardige nostalgie deed terugkijken op het project. Zij realiseerden zich dat de tijd waarin dekolonisatie van de geschiedschrijving mogelijk was, althans wat betreft perspectiviteit, was verstreken na de periode van optimisme in de jaren zestig.

In deze dissertatie heb ik postkoloniale kritiek op de conceptuele aard van de academische geschiedschrijving en de geschiedenis van de kennisproductie over Afrika in gesprek gebracht met studies van de wetenschappelijke praktijk om te laten zien dat zulke kritiek haar grenzen heeft. De ontwikkeling van een autonome academische kennisproductie in Afrika wordt niet alleen belemmerd door de epistemische barrières die worden opgeworpen door de kolonialiteit van de kennis. Zonder politieke macht en financiële steun lijkt het dekoloniseren van de geschiedschrijving op universitair niveau onhaalbaar. Ter aanvulling van de theoretische beschouwingen heb ik een casestudie over de praktijk van de dekolonisatie gepresenteerd. Praktische belemmeringen en institutionele dynamiek, evenals (geo)politieke veranderingen en machtsstructuren, beïnvloeden de productie van Afrikaanse geschiedenis evenzeer als de ontwikkeling van theoretische kaders. Ik heb bovendien de rol van Europese en Amerikaanse onderzoekers bij de dagelijkse vormgeving van de

geschiedenis van Afrika geanalyseerd om aan te tonen dat zij invloedrijk bleven en blijven binnen de academische gemeenschap die kennis over Afrika produceert. De context van dekolonisatie is van groot belang in termen van mondiale politieke machtsverschuivingen en de financiële situatie van specifieke universiteiten. Binnen de GHA deden zich bovendien, zoals bij elk grootschalig project gebaseerd op een specifiek ideologische grondslag, meningsverschillen en daaruit voortvloeiende spanningen voor, die nog werden versterkt door logistieke problemen. De specifieke dynamiek met betrekking tot de GHA werd echter sterk beïnvloed door de snel veranderende realiteit van het Afrikaanse continent in de 20e eeuw. Is het, achteraf gezien, niet een klein wonder en een blijk van het doorzettingsvermogen van de GHA-historici dat de acht delen überhaupt zijn verschenen?

Curriculum Vitae

Larissa Schulte Nordholt was born in 1992 in Hilversum, the Netherlands. She completed a BA (cum laude) in History at Leiden University in 2015 and an Mphil in Political Thought and Intellectual History at Cambridge University in 2016. In the autumn of that same year, she became the 18th Prix de Paris Lauréate, which allowed her to reside in Paris during one year to conduct archival research in the UNESCO archives. In September 2017 she started her PhD research on the decolonisation of knowledge within the *General History of Africa* thanks to the NWO programme *promoties in de geesteswetenschappen*. This research was based on the archival research conducted during her year in Paris. Her research was supervised by professor Herman Paul and professor Jan-Bart Gewald. She has published articles in *History in Africa*, *History of Humanities*, *Yearbook of Women's History* (of which she also an editor) and *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*. She also co-edited (with Herman Paul) a special issue of the *Journal for the Philosophy of History* and has published a chapter in an edited volume (by Herman Paul).