

General History of Africa Revisited

EDITOR AUGUSTIN F. C. HOLL



GENERAL HISTORY OF

AFRICA · IX General History of

Africa Revisited

UNESCO General History of Africa

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UNESCO International Committee for the New Volumes of the General History

of Africa **GENERAL**

HISTORY OF

AFRICA · IX

General History of Africa

Revisited EDITOR

AUGUSTIN F. C. HOLL

Published in 2025 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France.

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ISBN 978-92-3-100809-2

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54678/LHRT2470>

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Cover Photo: © Edson Campolina/Shutterstock.com*

Graphic Design (cover and text): Maria Luiza Monteiro Bueno e Silva,
Rafael Hildebrand *Technical revision:* Professor Augustin F. C. Holl
English Editor: Gina L. Doubleday
Proofreaders: David McDonald, Brian Smith

General History of Africa website:
<https://www.unesco.org/en/general-history-africa>

Printed by UNESCO

Printed in France

Acknowledgements V **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

UNESCO acknowledges with gratitude the generous contributions received for the production of this publication from the following public and private partners (in alphabetical order): Government of Angola, Government of Brazil, Companhia Energética de Minas Gerais, Escola Superior Dom Helder Câmara, MTN (Republic of South Africa), UNIBANCO (Brazil), Xiamen University (China).

In memoriam VII **IN MEMORIAM**

The following experts who contributed to the new *General History of Africa*, Volumes IX-XI, passed away prior to publication of the present volume. Their work is gratefully acknowledged and their presence is greatly missed.

Professor Ambassador Olabiyi Babalola Joseph Yai, Benin, member of the International Scientific Committee for the drafting of the new volumes of the GHA Professor Alain Anselin, Guadeloupe, France, author

Professor Mamadi Dembelé, Mali, author

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Foreword XXI

FOREWORD

by Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

In 1964, UNESCO launched a groundbreaking and ambitious project with a simple premise: to tell the history of Africa, from the perspective of Africans. Over the course of the following three decades, UNESCO brought together some of the greatest minds from Africa and around the world to produce eight volumes of the *General History of Africa*.

This pioneering corpus, complete with richly illustrated maps, explanatory charts and revelatory photographs, was published in 12 languages. It replaced colonial distortions with an African perspective, rectifying widespread ignorance and discriminatory prejudices through a pluralistic, interdisciplinary approach to historiography.

This new volume, *General History of Africa Revisited*, comes more than 30 years after the publication of Volume VIII. In line with the principles of the original project, rejecting a static, unchanging view of history, Volume IX revisits the earlier works with new perspectives, taking into account shifts in academic consensus along with major archaeological discoveries and scientific advancements. This work was undertaken in collaboration with 60 distinguished scholars from 28 countries across every continent.

Faithful to the decolonial spirit of the first eight volumes, this volume challenges Eurocentric biases and brings to the fore a range of African sources: oral, material, artistic and written. It gives readers a coherent and condensed analysis of each

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of the previous volumes and provides a framework to evaluate those to come. In particular, it reconceptualizes the notion of 'prehistory' and replaces it with 'initial history', emphasizing Africa's continuous historical presence.

This volume delves into hominid lifeways, stone technologies, food

production and the invention of pottery, characterizing the emergence and early days of humankind, which are widely accepted to have taken place in Africa. It also depicts ancient hunting and gathering societies, integrating environmental, paleo-anthropological, genomic, linguistic and archaeological perspectives throughout the initial history of the continent.

From these fascinating origins, *General History of Africa Revisited* goes on to address the demographic, cultural and dynamic processes that shaped the ancient and modern history of Africa – from the expansion of monotheism to the formation of merchant diasporas and the development of enslavement and resistance.

Building on the advances made in the first eight volumes, this book builds a scientific and decolonized reconstruction of the continent's past, integrating the richness of new data, methodologies and perspectives.

Revisiting this anthology decades later is not only a scientific pursuit, but also a pathway for addressing contemporary issues. Given that racism and discrimination around the world today have long histories with strong roots in colonization and enslavement, combating racial stereotypes and addressing inequalities require a comprehensive understanding of Africa's history.

It is my hope that this new volume of the *General History of Africa* will be widely read and shared. UNESCO will use the knowledge within these pages to promote a better understanding of Africa's past and the ways in which Africa and its diaspora have helped build modern societies. With a particular focus on young people, the Organization will continue its popularization efforts through the development of documentaries, comic books, educational video games and theatre scripts.

Recognizing that history is a living discipline, UNESCO will also continue to foster the development of knowledge on the history of Africa and its diasporas, particularly by promoting the establishment of networks of universities, research centres and institutions.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all members of the International Scientific Committee, its Chair and Vice-Chairs, the editor and authors of this volume, and everyone who contributed to the achievement of this collective work. My sincere thanks also go to the donors and partners, both public and private, whose generosity has made this work possible.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Reconceptualizing the History of Africa and its
Diasporas *Augustin F. C. Holl*

Introduction

The UNESCO *General History of Africa* (GHA) project consists of a three-stage process. The first stage, 'the *General History of Africa*' *stricto-sensu*, was launched in the early 1960s, the second, 'the Pedagogical Use of the *General History of Africa*', in 2009, and the third and last, 'Volume IX of the *General History of Africa*', in 2013.

The Volume IX of the GHA project was initially shaped at the Expert Meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the auspices of the African Union, from 20 to 22 May 2013. Some 50 experts from different parts of world were invited to share ideas and make recommendations on the best ways to proceed. The initiative was spearheaded and initially funded by the Federal Government of Brazil. The International Scientific Committee for the Preparation and Publication of Volume IX of the General History of Africa, composed of 16 members appointed by the UNESCO Director-General, met later in the year in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, to craft the project agenda and set it in motion. From 2013 to 2017, the Committee met successively in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil (November 2013), Paris, France (June 2014), São Carlos, Brazil (October 2015), Luanda, Angola (February 2016), Havana, Cuba (January 2017) and finally, in Xiamen, China (December 2017). The Committee crafted the initial structure of

and selected some 250-300 authors worldwide. During the last meeting in Xiamen, it was decided to produce three volumes (IX, X and XI) instead of one Volume IX comprising three tomes. When the last stage of the process is complete, the GHA will be an impressive eleven-volume series.

The launch of the *General History of Africa*

The middle of the twentieth century was the crest of a wave of independence of African countries. The legacy of World War II, which pitted the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Warsaw Pact military alliances against each other, was the key variable of international geopolitics. The Cold War, spreading its frozen wings over all international affairs, was at its peak. The raw ideological and geopolitical tensions manifested themselves on all continents. In Africa, Patrice Emery Lumumba, the Prime Minister of the newly independent State of Congo-Leopoldville, was deposed and assassinated on 17 January 1961. In Europe, the construction of the Berlin Wall, a palpable symbol of the Iron Curtain, started on 13 August 1961. In the Americas, the Cuban Missile Crisis, which lasted from 16 to 28 October 1962, brought the world to the brink of a nuclear conflagration. And finally, in Asia, following the implementation of the 'containment' doctrine, the United States Air Force attacked North Vietnam in 1964, triggering a sustained escalation in a war that lasted up until 1975.

The World War II alliance to defeat fascism and German-Japanese militarism was shattered in the immediate post-war years. The Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army defeated the Kuomintang and the Chinese Nationalist Party, and proclaimed the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949. The Berlin Blockade, implemented from 24 June 1948 to 12 May 1949, signalled the onset of a new era of ideological rivalry, political confrontations and an arms race. Newly independent countries, pressured to choose sides, were faced with difficult and unpalatable choices. They attempted to create a space between the antagonistic blocks with the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement during the decade 1950-1960. The Bandung

Conference, which took place from 18-24 April 1955 in Indonesia, was an epoch-marking event. It brought together Asian and African leaders and called for a rapid end to colonial domination. The movement toward independence of former colonies – predominantly in Africa – kicked off and the outcome was inevitable. The *General History of Africa* (GHA) project was born in that tense context. The

General introduction XXV

move was motivated by the strong will of newly independent African countries to take their destiny into their own hands, improve their present, shape their future and reflect on their history from their own perspective.

The history curriculum taught in colonized Africa was inadequate in many aspects. Schoolchildren in French colonies were taught to sing 'Our Ancestors the Gauls'. The European self-assigned 'civilizing mission' was predicated on the erasure of African historical agency. A new approach to Africa's past was an absolute necessity. The process of writing the GHA was consequently launched by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1964. Its main goal was to write the history of Africa from an African perspective. The monumental task undertaken then took some 20 years, at the end of which, in the early 1980s, the first volumes were produced. Eight volumes, numbered I-VIII, initially in French, English and Arabic, and translated later into 10 other languages, were published between 1981 and 1999. Some 350 historians and scientists, two thirds of them Africans, were involved. Their work was coordinated by the International Scientific Committee for the drafting of a General History of Africa, comprising 39 experts. They had to challenge the colonial library and rebuild an African historiography free of colonialist imprints and stereotypes. The history of Africa was not confined to enslavement, poverty, famines and civil unrest. The rich and diverse tapestry of Africa's past had to be rendered as thoroughly and precisely as possible through sound and rigorous scholarship. The GHA project pioneered an alternative way of writing history (Schmidt and Patterson, 1993). It brought to the fore marginalized and silenced people's voices and promoted a 'de-nationalized' historical narrative, featuring hidden space and time connections between different countries and regions of the world.

Starting with the GHA, UNESCO launched a series of general and regional histories, including the *History of Humanity*, a *History of the*

Civilizations of Central Asia, a *General History of Latin America*, a *General History of the Caribbean*, and the *Different Aspects of Islamic Culture*. The process was triggered by the liberation of different parts of the world from colonial rule. It showcased new knowledge allowing for the build-up of a new universalism, a universalism that takes into consideration different historical legacies and worldviews. The pluralist and multidisciplinary approaches relied on for the writing of these histories shifted the narrative from the chronicles of kings, princes and dominant elites to the histories of political, social and cultural transformations, as well as scientific and artistic developments in different geocultural areas.

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The *General History of Africa* as an alternative

The GHA was crafted as an alternative to the Eurocentric views of world history. The search for an alternative to the situation of alienation, domination and dependency has been part of the activities of some individuals or organized groups as early as the nineteenth century, with activists like Marcus Garvey, intellectuals like E. W. Blyden, W. E. B. Du Bois, and more recently Cheikh Anta Diop, to name but a few towering figures. Surfing the waves of political independence of African countries in the middle of the twentieth century, UNESCO's GHA project was launched to decolonize African history. The product that emerged from that initiative ended up as an important collection of eight volumes, published between 1981 and 1999. They are arranged along a chronological sequence, with some unavoidable overlap, each volume coordinated by one or two editors. In his preface, A. M. M'Bow, then Director-General of UNESCO, summarized what was at stake in the writing of the eight-volume *General History of Africa*. His presentation focused on a number of key issues, including 'the denial' of history, the false assumption of a 'balkanized' continent, and the conception of Africans and Afrodescendants as 'the wretched of the Earth'. He explained the genesis of the project and its scientific ambitions, and asserted the imperative for a widespread circulation and the need for pedagogical use of the published works.

Centuries of enslavement, followed by destructive conquest and colonial domination have generated peculiar conceptions of Africans, their past and their position in the world, as well as their future. Despite

important contributions of a small number of scholars – Leo Frobenius, Maurice Delafosse and Arturo Labriola – mentioned in his text, M'Bow points to a common theme that emerged during the nineteenth century and spread during the colonial period. According to that theme, derived from the Hegelian conception of world history, African communities were societies unlikely to have a history. The core of the issue was that of the nature of the sources needed to write history. The lack of written sources in most ancient African societies was erroneously equated with the absence of history. Oral sources were paradoxically disparaged. Most of African history was still written from an outsider's perspective, based on external sources and relying on a European template as a model. African history was filtered through a series of preconceptions. It thus appears crucial for the historians to reshuffle their methodological tools and abandon the misleading preconceptions.

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The dominant perception of Africa was that of a continent with juxtaposed subsets. North Africa, known as 'white' and sub-Saharan Africa, known as 'black' were thought to have lived separately on account of an insurmountable obstacle, namely the Saharan desert. Ancient Egypt and Nubia were also thought to have evolved independently from the rest of the continent. Consequently, Africa was not considered to be a historical entity. While each of the regions of Africa possesses its own originality, those regions have maintained uninterrupted exchanges between each other. North Africa, for example, was a bridgehead between the Mediterranean world and sub-Saharan Africa, and as for the margins of the Sahara, they have always been fluctuating. Egypt and Nubia have an interwoven history and share many cultural characteristics with the rest of Africa.

Racial stereotypes linked to the slave trade and colonial domination have distorted the very basis of African historiography. The use of discriminatory categories, for example, establishing white superiority and the '*essentialisation du nègre*' have distorted this historiography. In fact, Africa had to fight against twofold enslavement, economic and psychological. The hierarchy established among races as featured in colonial historiography served to justify colonial domination and the 'civilizing mission'. Changes that occurred after World War II, particularly the entry of African States onto the international scene, contributed to the evolution of the situation.

In this particular context, the Africans themselves felt the profound need to re-establish the historicity of their societies on solid foundations. This was one of the main stakes involved in the GHA project. The methodological innovation required gave great importance to African sources, particularly oral traditions (which require a systematic critical approach for satisfactory exploitation).

GHA volumes I to VIII

UNESCO's GHA includes the following eight volumes:

Volume I – *Methodology and African Prehistory*, edited by J. Ki-Zerbo (1981), has 28 chapters and three themes: methodology; archaeology and its techniques; and environmental change and regional sequences.

Volume II – *Ancient Civilizations of Africa*, edited by G. Mokhtar (1981), has 29 chapters and four themes. It deals with the evolution and emergence of the continent's early States up to 500 CE, with Egypt and Nubia having the lion's share.

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Volume III – *Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, edited by M. Elfasi and I. Hrbek (1988), comprises 28 chapters and five themes. It focuses on the expansion of Islam and its consequences on peoples and cultures of the African continent.

Volume IV – *Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, edited by D. T. Niane (1984), partly overlaps chronologically with the previous volume. It comprises 27 chapters and four themes, dealing with the diversity of Africa's political, social and economic organizations as well as the 'Africanization' of Islam.

Volume V – *Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, edited by B. A. Ogot (1992), focuses on Ottoman expansion in North Africa, the development of the Atlantic slave trade, and their consequences on African societies. It has 29 chapters organized into thematic subsets: global processes on the one hand, and regional and local syntheses on the other hand.

Volume VI – *Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s*, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi (1989), consists of 29 chapters and four themes, dealing with European settlements in northern and southern Africa, the formation of new States, Islam revivalist movements in West Africa,

and the general state of the continent on the eve of European colonization.

Volume VII – *Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, edited by A. Adu Boahen (1985), has 30 chapters on the comparative analysis of European colonial systems and the multifaceted response of African societies, including the emergence and development of nationalist movements.

Volume VIII – *Africa since 1935*, edited by Ali A. Mazrui and C. Wondji (1999), has 30 chapters and seven themes. It explores the effects of major world crises and their impacts on the emergence and development of African nationalisms, pan-Africanism, the struggle for liberation and the place of independent African countries on the world scene.

Unfortunately, the impressive achievement of the GHA project was not widely disseminated in African bookstores, libraries or research institutions. Its impact on history curricula was virtually non-existent in most, if not all, African countries. A new initiative was necessary. The opportunity for launching that new initiative was found on 9 September 1999, with the Sirte Declaration, the founding act of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which changed its name to the African Union (AU) in 2002.

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The pedagogical use of the *General History of Africa*

The Pedagogical Use of the *General History of Africa* project is but the second phase of the GHA long-term objectives. It is geared to shift the momentum back into the hands of Africans and people of African descent. Building on the political dynamics triggered by the Sirte Declaration and the establishment of the Organization of African Unity on 9 September 1999 in Sirte, Libya, the Libyan Government provided funds for an ambitious project geared to support the movement toward the integration and construction of a united continent. Following a request from the African Union, UNESCO launched the Pedagogical Use of the *General History of Africa* project, first through an extensive review of the published volumes and an international meeting in Tripoli from 10-17 June 2010. Once the programme was launched, expert meetings were organized successively in Harare, Zimbabwe, in Accra, Ghana, and in Khartoum, Sudan. The foundational idea was to generate a common frame of mind, and shape a manifest destiny

based on a common history and shared future that would further the construction of a peaceful, united and prosperous continent.

The dense and rich material assembled in the eight volumes of the GHA had to be analysed and included in the history curriculum of all the continent's school systems, from elementary schools to higher education institutions. Africans and Afrodescendants have to learn a history written from their own perspective, away from narrow national histories inherited from the colonial library. Despite significant transformations and sustained curricula changes in almost all African countries, the legacy of the colonial period is still present and resilient. The use of African languages at all levels of the education institutions will be critical for the future success of this project. The destruction in Libya left the project without funding. Alternative funding sources are being explored, with the project moving forward, but at a slower pace.

The post-colonial imperative and new epistemology

Some 60 years after the wave of independence of African countries, it was possible to pause and think. The Bretton Woods institutions – the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and, more recently, the World Trade Organization – set the rules and imposed liberal capitalism as the economic norm. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the ensuing collapse of

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the Soviet empire, some authors wrote about the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1989, 1992) and 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1993, 1996). By way of an introduction to his 1992 book, Fukuyama wrote:

In it, I argued that a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism. More than that, however, I argued that liberal democracy may constitute the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government," and as such constituted the "end of history" (<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/fukuyama.htm>).

Imposed structural adjustments, deregulation, privatization and laissez-faire have proven to be double-edged swords. The consequences were disastrous for most, if not all, African countries.

What is the place of former colonies, caught in the neo-colonial net of their former colonizers – the CFA franc being an emblematic case of neo-colonial domination – in such an international system?

Without having to cut ties with former colonial powers, it is time to explore new spaces and times as well as distant and present connections with South America and Asia. Despite its current political crisis, Brazil, with the largest population of people of African descent outside Africa, will be a crucial partner in the years to come. In most American and Caribbean countries, people of African descent are fighting for their human and civil rights. The history of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean, Asia and the South Pacific has to complement and dilute the dominant focus on the Atlantic world. China, already the first economic partner of Africa and the second largest economy in the world, has had multi-secular relationships with Africa (Li Anshan, 2005).

Past Chinese presence in Africa

It is not known precisely when Chinese goods reached Africa for the first time. Archaeological research provides a number of clues. An Austrian expedition excavating in Thebes, at Deir el-Madina, found the remains of silk in the hair of a 30-50 year-old female mummy discovered in the burial ground of the kings' workers. The burial is dated to the Hyksos period, belonging to the Twenty-First Dynasty, i.e. 1075-945 BCE (Li Anshan, 2005; Lubec et al., 1993). The silk industry certainly originated in China, where archaeologists have found textiles in a mysterious tomb dating back nearly 2,500 years in eastern Jiangxi Province, the oldest to be discovered in China's history. The silk industry,

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trade and consequently the Silk Road, are thus much older than thought, and probably reached Egypt through Persia. Trade and cultural exchange between China and Egypt were well established during the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) (Sun Tang, 1979 in Li Anshan, 2005). According to Li Anshan (2005, p. 60), Du Huan, a Chinese soldier of the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) and war captive in Baghdad, where he spent several years, visited Africa in the eighth century, sometime around 762. His book, *Jingxingji* [经行记, *Record of*

My Travels], was lost and is now known only through quotes in other books. It is therefore not known which part of Africa he may have visited, although Egypt and Northeast Africa appear to have been the most reachable.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, the Ming dynasty decided to project Chinese naval power all over the Indian Ocean. The Yongle emperor (1403-1424) appointed Zheng He as the Chief Admiral of a large fleet – the *Treasure Fleet*. The latter organized a total of seven expeditions, from 1405 to 1433, generally known as ‘Zheng He’s voyages’ (Deng, 2005; Dreyer, 2006; Ferrand, 1919, 1922; Filesi, 1970; Levathes, 1997; Viviano, 2005). The *Treasure Fleet* sailed to the coast of East Africa on the fourth (1413-1415), fifth (1416-1419) and sixth (1421-1422) voyages, docking in Mogadishu, present-day Somalia, as well as Malindi and Mombasa, present-day Kenya. They exchanged Chinese goods for African ones, including live animals such as zebras and giraffes. Chinese celadon pottery of the kind produced in Longquan, found in the Limpopo valley on Mapungubwe Hill in the 1930s, is now firmly dated to the late Yuan (1279-1368) and early Ming (1368-1644) dynasties (Prinsloo et al., 2005). Such evidence is distributed over a large geographic zone in Eastern Africa, including Great Zimbabwe, the Swahili city-states, the Comoros and Madagascar (Beaujard, 2007). In addition, some of the descendants of Chinese sailors from Admiral Zheng He’s fleet living on the small island of Pate were interviewed by Nicholas Kristof (1999) for *The New York Times*. In summary, there is scattered but significant evidence of the presence of Chinese goods and people in Africa’s past. This interaction peaked in the fifteenth century and was cut short by the succeeding dynasty’s imperial ban on foreign trade and naval expeditions.

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Past African presence in China

Beyond the presence of surprising animals, such as zebras and giraffes (Chau Ju-Kua, 1911; Ferrand, 1919, 1922; Filesi, 1970; Wheatley, 1961; Talib and Samir, 1988), a number of Africans, through different indirect channels, ended up living in China as early as the first quarter of the eighth century. According to the *Chronicle of the Tang Dynasty*, in 724, the King of Srinijaya, from Palembang, Sumatra, offered a Zanj [black] girl, among other things, as tribute to the Emperor (Talib and Samir, 1988, p. 732; Ferrand, 1922). This practice

was repeated several times during the following centuries, in 813, 818 and 976. In 813 and 818, the rulers from Kalinga, an Indonesian kingdom, offered several Zanj boys and girls in three successive missions to the Tang Emperor Hsien Tsung. In 976, under the Sung dynasty, the Imperial court received 'a black K'un Lun slave with deep set eyes and black body' (Chau Ju-Kua, 1911) from an Arab trader (Talib and Samir, 1988, p. 732).

Although, indirectly and through Arab and Indonesian intermediaries, the slave trade reached China, mainly through the entry port and distribution hub of Guangzhou (Canton). The enslaved Africans were 'employed on shipboard to caulk leaky seams below the water-line from the outside as they were expert swimmers who do not close their eyes under water' (Chau Ju-Kua, 1911, pp. 31-2; Talib and Samir, 1988, p. 732; Wheatley, 1961, p. 55). Others were gate guards and household servants for the wealthy families in metropolitan areas. According to Chau Ju-Kua (1911, p. 32), 'many families buy black people to make gatekeepers of; they are called *kui-nu*, or "devil-slaves" or *hei siau ssi* (black slaves or servants)'. There is clearly much more research to be done in this direction, if oral histories and family archives can be collected systematically.

The great Moroccan world traveller and explorer Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Abdullah al-Lawati al-Tanji Ibn Battuta – Ibn Battuta for short – visited China in the middle of the fourteenth century. He travelled all over the ancient world, covering some 120,000 kilometres in 29 years. Ibn Battuta arrived at Guangzhou (Canton) in China in 1345 (Ibn Battuta, 1982). He was particularly interested in local crafts, boat construction and porcelain making, and visited a number of places and towns. He travelled north to Hangzhou, which he described as the largest city he had ever seen. He could not reach Beijing and returned to Guangzhou in 1346 to sail to Sumatra.

It is also claimed that Admiral Zheng He's *Treasure Fleet* took some foreign dignitaries back to China to pay homage to the Ming emperors. It is not clear if

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some Africans from the Swahili city-states of Mogadishu, Malindi or Mombasa were involved in these visits. In summary, from as early as the eighth century, Africans were present in Chinese imperial courts and in some wealthy families in southern China.

An exciting new conjuncture

A conjuncture is the convergence of independent factors that generates a new and unpredictable situation that lasts. The new and exciting conjuncture referred to here is made of four distinct developments: (1) a new institutional framework; (2) the improvement of the general economic and social outlook of Africa, despite persistent problems; (3) the expansion and acceleration of economic cooperation between Africa, Asia and South America; and (4) the development of a multipolar world.

A new institutional framework

The end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed important changes in Africa's political map. After long wars of national liberation, the former Portuguese colonies became sovereign States in the 1970s: Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde celebrated their independence on 24 September 1973; Angola followed on 11 November 1974; and finally, Mozambique on 25 June 1975. It was the turn of Namibia and South Africa to go through profound changes in the 1990s. The former gained independence from South Africa's mandate on 21 March 1990. Nelson Mandela was freed from Robben Island jail on 11 February 1990 and was elected shortly after as the first post-apartheid South African president. Two new sovereign States entered the African political scene during the same time, after long and painful wars of liberation: Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia on 24 May 1991, and South Sudan separated from the Republic of Sudan and celebrated its independence on 9 July 2011.

The establishment of the African Union in 1999 and the initiation of the regional integration process sparked a new momentum, challenging the divisions of the continent and the identity and nation construction model inherited from the colonial period. The major changes in the areas of economic cooperation and international relations that have influenced our globalized world since the end of the 1990s have paved the way for new opportunities as well as new

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challenges and threats for Africa. Indeed, the accelerated pace of urbanization, Africa's wealth in terms of natural and strategic resources

and the aspirations and creativity of young people pose new challenges for the people of Africa, thus emphasizing the need to take control of their destiny.

Moreover, people of African descent in South, Central and North America, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and elsewhere are attaching increasing importance to the links that tie them to Africa and African heritage. The countries in which people of African descent reside are increasingly recognizing the important contribution of these citizens to the construction of their societies. These countries are currently establishing public policies that aim to rectify historical distortions and combat racism, racial discrimination and the inequalities of the past, including positive discrimination measures. In that spirit, the initiatives taken by the Brazilian Government – in particular the adoption of a law on the mandatory teaching of the history of Africans and of Afrodescendants at all levels of education by using the GHA – set a standard in this regard. The preparation and publication of Volume IX of the GHA is a positive response to the above-mentioned trends and the requests formulated by Member States at the African Union summit held in Syrte, Libya, in 2009.

Africa's economic outlook

The economic outlook of the entire continent has shifted in the right direction during the last two decades, starting from the 2010s. There are significant variations between regions and countries, but on average, the situation has improved. Globally, major European weekly magazines, such as *Le Point* in France and *The Economist* in the United Kingdom, have praised Africa's economic performances. It is a far cry from the description of Africa as 'the hopeless continent', in the thundering headline of *The Economist* in 2000. The economic growth rate has been sustained for the last few years, averaging 5% per year, with double-digit rates in countries like Ethiopia and Ghana. The European-American financial crisis did not significantly affect Africa, partly because of its loose banks. There are still major obstacles to the freeing of all the potential creative energy, but many African entrepreneurs are more optimistic and less risk-averse. According to demographic projections, there are 500 million Africans of working age and there will be 1.1 billion in 2040, more than in China or India (*Le Point*, 9 August 2012). The potential for greener development is also

The expansion and acceleration of economic cooperation between Africa, Asia and South America

The multilateral cooperation between African countries and Asian and South American partners is on the increase. Most Asian economic powerhouses, whether large, like China, India and Japan, or smaller, like South Korea, are launching cooperation programmes with African countries in a broad range of domains. A new cooperation alliance, BRIC – including Brazil, Russia, India and China – working for an alternative to the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization) was formed in 2009. South Africa joined the alliance later, which changed its acronym to BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. BRICS financial institutions are being created and they are expected to affect international cooperation and financial systems in the years to come. Despite its current political crisis, Brazil, with the largest Afrodescendant population out of Africa, is positioned to play an important role in the cooperation with African countries.

The development of a multipolar world

The collapse of the Soviet empire, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, took all political commentators by surprise. Starting with *glasnost*, the attempted reform movement launched by President Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet empire unravelled within a few months (Sebestyen, 2010). The world was left with a single dominant imperial power that tried to impose its political views on the rest of the planet. Building on the collapse of the Soviet Union, viewed by some as the triumph over the ‘evil empire’ (Fukuyama, 1989, 1992; Huntington, 1993, 1996; Sebestyen, 2010), a power group of ideologues termed ‘neoconservatives’ took control of the foreign policy of the United States of America and devised a new doctrine of ‘pre-emptive strikes’ against whoever challenged the world domination of the United States. The first Gulf War, triggered by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, took place in 1990-1991. The invading army was expelled by an international coalition led by the United States of America. The neoconservatives rose to full executive power with the election of G. W. Bush and Dick Cheney, respectively as President and

Vice-President of the United States, in November 2000. During the chaotic rule of President Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999), the Russian Federation was totally absent from the international stage. On 11 September 2001, the attack on the World Trade

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Center in New York unleashed the implementation of the new doctrine. The war in Afghanistan started on 7 October 2001 and continues today. Under the pretext of the presence of weapons of mass destruction, the Iraq War was launched on 20 March 2003 and lasted until 18 December 2011. Vladimir Putin replaced Boris Yeltsin as President of the Russian Federation on 31 December 1999, and was elected to that post a few months later in 2000. He initiated a series of reforms of Russian governing institutions and launched a ferocious war in Chechnya. A few years later, he restored the pride of the average Russian citizen and brought Russian diplomacy and military back on the world scene. The rise of China as the world's second economic powerhouse and its military build-up led to the emergence of a new multipolar world.

The new *General History of Africa*: an exponential growth

The Volume IX of the *General History of Africa* project is the third phase, launched in 2013, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The impetus came from Brazil. The Brazilian parliament passed a law on the mandatory teaching of the history of Africans and of Afrodescendants at all levels of public education in the country. The Brazilian Government offered funding for an additional volume in the GHA series, a volume that would feature the history of African diasporas worldwide. The new project, anchored on the key concept of 'Global Africa', encourages literary and artistic approaches to gain better insight into certain aspects of the experiences of Africans and people of African descent. It advocates the use of concepts or notions in African languages, allowing people to think in African terms, realizes comparative studies in relation to South America and Asia, and offers a balanced and positive history of Africa and its diasporas.

The contributors were asked to think about writing history differently and to invent another way of portraying history. They were particularly

encouraged to take into account the literary and artistic productions concerning historic African experiences as essential materials in the writing of the endogenous history of Africa and Africans. The contexts and their specific implementation of the concept of race would be central to understanding how Africans and people of African descent refer to themselves. It would also involve critical observation of the dynamics of the relationship between Africa and its diasporas, African 'globality', movements back and forth and the ways in which Africa could connect to the rest of the world.

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An epistemic shift: Global Africa

This project implies writing a serene history of Africans and people of African descent on a global scale. That is what is subsumed under the concept of 'Global Africa'; in other words, taking into account the many dimensions of Africanness worldwide, from the initial expansion of humans from the African continent to the successive diasporas over time, right up to the present day (Harris, 1993; Hodgson and Byfield, 2017). The concept allows us to overcome the customary dichotomies and divisions between Africa and the African diasporas, enabling a balanced understanding of the African diasporas, in the long term and in their diversity. It equally allows us to reassess approaches to the period of enslavement, to study the relationship between pan-Africanism and the diasporas, and the enhancement of pan-Africanist thinking nurtured by contributions from different diasporic experiences. In other words, it allows us to address actively and transversally the different issues linking Africa and its diasporas.

The decolonization of concepts

The decolonization of the concepts, paradigms and categorizations used in social and human sciences, particularly in history, is regarded as an epistemological necessity throughout the scientific and intellectual communities in the former colonies and beyond (Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1979) and as yet another component of the cultural and political emancipation of peoples who, not without difficulty, have thrown off the yoke of European colonization (Mignolo, 2011). Thanks to post-colonial studies, researchers in Latin America, Asia and Africa

now select topics on the structural, protean remnants of colonial relations in the post-colonial era – a sort of ‘coloniality’ – that perpetuates age-old images and epistemological racism, disparaging non-Western cultural output. This inextinguishably burning issue somewhat informs the endogenous African approach taken in writing the *General History of Africa*. The approach to the decolonization of knowledge on Africa, providing an opportunity to write an innovative history from within and with a different outlook on the world, makes a crucial contribution to what the poet and thinker Aimé Césaire called the ‘meeting place for giving and taking’, a rearranged universal, a ‘pluriversal’, illustrating the great variety of human nature.

The current project, initially known as Volume IX of the *General History of Africa*, is consequently different from all the previous ones. It now comprises

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three volumes – IX, X and XI – each with an editorial team consisting of section coordinators, co-editors and editors, with three main goals: (1) to update the *General History of Africa* and theories on human origins and the earliest human civilizations; (2) to explore and flesh out the formation process of ‘Global Africa’ and its consolidation in the rest of the world through its diasporas; and (3) to look at the opportunities and new challenges of ‘Global Africa’ in the contemporary world.

The General History of Africa Revisited

Volume IX, *The General History of Africa Revisited*, essentially aims to update the GHA. After four decades of intensive archaeological, historical and anthropological research, most of the content of the first three GHA volumes is partially or totally outdated. This updating is particularly challenging partly because of tightly limited space. It is divided into four sections, each under the editorial responsibility of coordinators.

Section 1, coordinated by Olabiyi B. Joseph Yaï and Martial Ze Belinga and entitled ‘Writing History of Africans and their Diasporas Today’ explores the epistemological and theoretical conditions for the production of historical narratives in the contemporary world. The concept of ‘historical sources’ is ‘stretchable’ ad infinitum. Objects, monuments, words, songs, poems and artefacts are historical sources

depending on the purpose of the investigations being conducted. The assembled contributions interrogate the meaning and contribution to historical scholarship of such concepts as 'Africa', 'history' and 'oral traditions'. What is the translation of the word 'history' in African languages, in ancient Egyptian or in Yoruba? The authors discuss and explore the intricacies of long-term versus short-term histories, the possible contribution of native African writing systems, and the use and misuse of oral traditions in the chronicle of historical experiences of Africans and Afrodescendants.

Section 2, 'Review of the General History of Africa: Volumes I-VIII', is coordinated by Doulaye Konaté. It comprises the reviews of the contents of GHA volumes I to VIII, published between 1981 and 1999, in order to determine what needs to be updated.

Section 3, entitled 'The Initial History of Africa: An Update', is coordinated by Augustin F. C. Holl. The new formulation is a substitute for the term 'prehistory' that tends to be misread by an increasing number of people. Human history is a continuum from its remote hominid beginnings to the present.

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Periodization is a necessity but it does not have to be constructed on a 'before' – prehistory – and a standard, genuine 'after' – history – viewed as a civilization threshold. The scheme suggested in this section is made of successive stages, as follows: initial, ancient, modern and contemporary history.

The update of the initial history of the continent is carried out in seven topical entries, each with two to four contributions. The first, 'general topics', deals with paleoenvironmental and paleoclimatological research, paleogenomics and African language classifications. Paleoanthropological research has completely changed our understanding of human origins and evolution. The speciation events and radiation episodes that resulted in the emergence of (1) the Ardipithecines – *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, *Orrorin tugenensis*, *Ardipithecus ramidus* and *Ardipithecus kadabba* – dated to 7-4.5 million years ago, (2) the Australopithecines dated to 4.5-1.7 million years ago, (3) *Homo* dated to 2.5 million years ago and finally, (4) *Homo sapiens sapiens* dated to around 300,000 years ago, all took place in Africa. Three contributions under the second topic feature the oldest 7 million-year-old hominid from the Djurab desert in the Republic of Chad, an informed discussion on hominid subsistence and lifeways,

and the presentation of the earliest stone tool complexes. Pleistocene hunting and gathering communities are dealt with under the third topic, in two chapters; and the emergence and expansion of food production is covered under the fourth topic, in three chapters. New directions in Egyptology are featured under the fifth topic, in four chapters. The discussions are evidence-based and serene, staying away from entrenched orthodoxies. Technological inventions and innovations are dealt with under the sixth topic, in two chapters, one on pottery and the other on metallurgies. Finally, the seventh topic explores the emergence of social complexity, in four chapters.

Section 4, coordinated by Doulaye Konaté and entitled 'Ancient and Modern History of Africa: An Update', features 12 contributions organized under four themes: (1) regional processes in the inland Niger delta, the Maghreb and Madagascar; (2) histories of religious systems; (3) trade diasporas in West and East Africa and the Indian Ocean; and finally, (4) enslavement and resistances.

Africa and Its Diasporas

Volume X, *Africa and Its Diasporas*, includes three sections. Section 1, coordinated by Carole Boyce-Davies and entitled 'Redefining Global Africanity and Blackness' includes 16 contributions, organized into two parts: (1) 'Race,

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Location, Diaspora and Global Blackness', containing nine contributions; and (2) 'Global Africanity and the African Diaspora: New Epistemological Considerations', comprising seven chapters. The introduction by Boyce-Davies sets the stage, explores the origins of colour systematics in different settings and scholarly traditions, and traces the genealogies of the concept of 'Global Africa'.

Section 2, 'Mapping the African Diasporas', is coordinated by Vanicléia Silva Santos. The entire section deals with different aspects of the formation and resilience of African diasporas in different parts of the world. It comprises 36 contributions organized under six topics.

The first topic, geographies of the African diasporas, comprises four chapters tracing African presence in China, Australia, India and Iran. African revolutions and resistance to oppression, under the second topic, features revolts and resistances of enslaved peoples in North

America, Brazil, Colombia and Madagascar. The third topic, African diasporic religions, includes six chapters ranging from Black brotherhoods in Angola, Portugal and Brazil, to Muslim resistance in North America and religious experiences of Africans in the Middle East. The fourth topic, oral genres, under the title 'Ties that bind: wisdom tales, orature and literature' are represented by three contributions on the Caribbean, Latin America and Brazil. The transfer of skills and knowledge is dealt with under the fifth topic, African diasporic knowledge and technologies, through four contributions featuring agriculture, foodways, navigation and mining. Finally, the sixth topic, the return to Africa, in three contributions, focuses on the returnees from Brazil to West Africa and India to East Africa. Cases from Liberia and Sierra Leone, not dealt with here, are relatively well-known.

Section 3, 'Life Stories and Freedom Narratives of Global Africa' is coordinated by Paul Lovejoy. It comprises 18 contributions featuring the life trajectories of enslaved individuals who were written about or who wrote autobiographies. The selected narratives range from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, with the largest proportion dated to the nineteenth century. As can be expected in the present state of research, there are many more narratives from the Atlantic world, including the west coast of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. The situations in the Indian Ocean and mainland Asia, in this case during the Ottoman Empire, are featured in two contributions. The potential for new discoveries is particularly high in these parts of the African diasporas that are still underinvestigated. The narratives of 'returnees' feature the situations in nineteenth-century Sierra Leone, the Bight of Benin and Calabar. All the situations described in the narratives attest to the individual

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agency, bargaining skills and resilience of those involved. They bring a direct textured human touch to past African diasporic experiences.

Global Africa Today

The end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the complete liberation of Africa from direct colonialism. The newly launched African Union created a sixth region for 'Africans from

the diaspora'. All these developments open new opportunities and pose difficult challenges. These are the issues dealt with in Volume XI, *Global Africa Today*. It is a very difficult foray into the 'history of present times' or 'immediate history'. The distancing that allows for a serene writing of history is missing from the picture. Historians have to write history while being involved in it.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first explores the current trends in contemporary historical scholarship and the theoretical and epistemological conditions for writing the history of Global Africa today, the second deals with the specific situation of Africa in the contemporary world and the third and last focuses on challenges to Global Africa at the turn of the third millennium.

Section 1, 'Global Africa Today', coordinated by Catherine Coquery Vidrovitch comprises 26 chapters. The assembled contributions are organized under seven topics with two to six chapters each. The four chapters under the first topic address the new paradigms that shape historical research of contemporary Africa and its diasporas. The second topic, comprising six contributions, deals with emerging new approaches on previously neglected issues. What is the intellectual and cultural impact of the transatlantic slave trade in West African collective memories? How did gender relations shape the structures of African and diasporic societies? What does it mean to be poor? Is the current meaning, crafted by international organizations, applicable to African contexts? This is a sample of the issues addressed by the contributors to this topic. Religious factors are explored under the third topic through two chapters addressing the Africanization of Christianity through black churches, on the one hand, and the recent emergence of new religions, on the other. Issues of political renewal are discussed under the fourth topic. The contributors explore the rift between long-lasting African 'territorial-political' organization and the current 'national-territorial' State inherited from the colonial period. Some of the key questions addressed can be spelled out as follows: What is the relationship between nationality and nationalism? What does nationalism mean in African

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multinationality States? What is the genesis of African contemporary chiefdoms and how do they fit in the contemporary State model? The fifth and sixth topics shift from continental Africa to a diasporic perspective. The fifth topic focuses on the concepts of 'Creolization',

'hybridization', and 'miscegenation' as they are relied upon in the Caribbean identity discourses, aesthetics and performing arts. The sixth topic consists of three contributions focusing on how Africa is viewed and conceptualized from the Caribbean. The exploration is carried out via the academic lenses and the development of African studies programmes, and the Caribbean revitalization movement. Lastly, the seventh topic explores present day visions with a focus on blackness, race and representation, economics and African views on globalization.

Section 2, 'Africa in the Contemporary World', coordinated by Tayeb Chenntouf, comprises 29 contributions arranged in three rubrics. The first rubric features the permanence of the Global Africa project weaved through a broad range of topics, from political initiatives to the performing arts. The Global Africa project can be said to have started with the very deportation of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. Music, technology, cuisine and religions were key elements of the survival kits of those who landed in the Americas and the Caribbean. The concept of pan-Africanism was coined and nurtured by intellectuals of the diaspora mostly in the nineteenth century. It expanded through a series of meetings in the early part of the twentieth century and became a mobilizing force in the movements for the liberation of the continent from colonial domination. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU) are, so far, the clearest political materialization of pan Africanist ideas on the continent. The second rubric focuses on the challenges of current globalization and the new world geopolitics. What can be the role of Africa in this emerging new geopolitical world characterized by increasing connectivity through the Internet and faster air transportation? Africa, with its marginal 2% contribution to world trade, tends to witness a regression in its economic development. With very few exceptions, the continent is confined to the exportation of raw materials and unprocessed agricultural products. The influx of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has destabilizing consequences on the operation of local governments. Political and military interference from former colonial powers and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as peace-maintenance operations in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali preclude any pragmatic preparation of a future united, peaceful and prosperous Africa. The third rubric, exploring the role of culture and intellectuals, asks the programmatic question: 'What should be done?'

Debates on the role of Africa in the expanding globalized world are taking shape in different cultural and intellectual contexts. With significant variations between countries, African institutions of higher education are generally underfunded and have been unable to play their rightful role as laboratories of ideas. Narrow State boundaries affect the nature and scope of the ideas explored in different forums. New positive developments are nonetheless taking place. Free movement of people and goods is now in place in West Africa. The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area was signed recently in Kigali, Rwanda, on 21 March 2018, by 44 heads of State and government.

Section 3, 'Africa at the Turn of the 3rd Millennium: Challenges and Dynamics', coordinated by Faranirina V. Rajaonah, comprises 22 contributions organized into four rubrics. The first rubric focuses on demography and urbanization. It explores the implications of African population growth in terms of economics, public health through the lenses of epidemiology, food security and urban growth, both in average-sized towns as well as megalopolises. The second rubric deals with issues of gender and generations. The assembled contributions discuss patterns of age and generation successions in sampled countries, the integration of African college graduates in Russia, social and economic landscapes, institutionalized social promotion as well as women in education and their increased roles and visibility in public affairs, both on national and international scenes. The third rubric, on partnership, envy and integration, explores different aspects of regional integration as well as new opportunities offered by cooperation between Africa and the BRICS alliance (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Is this really an alternative to the predatory practices of dominant multinationals and the unilateral ukases of the Bretton Woods institutions? We will have to wait and see. Envy and the rush to African lands and the ensuing 'land-grabbing' are featured, and their implications assessed, along with an African perspective on migrations and development and the emerging new African financial hubs. Finally, the fourth rubric, 'Africa in Tempo with the World', delves into worldwide cultural circulations. These circulations are manifest in the emergence of new religious practices, such as Salafism and new Christianities, as well as in the worldwide appeal of black cosmopolitan aesthetics in African popular music, African cinema, fabrics and contemporary art.

The general picture that emerges from this volume is that of Global Africans and Afrodescendant communities on the move, slowly carving their paths and shaping their futures.

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Conclusion

The project that has resulted in these three volumes was extraordinarily ambitious, original and inspiring. It aimed at setting a new way of writing history, taking into account current debates in social and human sciences, with epistemological ruptures and sustained reconceptualization. Competences and skills are available to move historical scholarship in new directions, in a multipolar world, rather than a closed relationship with the west. It is a fantastic challenge spelled out in the chapters of these three volumes.

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GENERAL HISTORY OF AFRICA REVISITED: AN INTRODUCTION

Augustin F. C. Holl

Introduction

The UNESCO *General History of Africa* (GHA) was initiated in the wave of independence of African countries in the middle of the twentieth century. It comprises eight volumes published between 1981 and 1999. The adopted perspective is overtly multi-disciplinary, but the whole work can be clearly assigned to the humanities and social sciences research fields. (The research domain encompassing social sciences and humanities is very broad indeed.) The sustained and increasing move towards interdisciplinarity makes the delineation of demarcation lines even more difficult. One will thus have to rely on a minimalist operational definition. Accordingly, humanities and social sciences include all forms of scientific and philosophical research devoted to the understanding and explanation of the human condition. Some – here termed historical sciences – like palaeoanthropology, archaeology and history, deal with the time dimensions. Others, such as geography, habitat research and architecture, focus on the spatial dimension. Others, such as anthropology, linguistics, psychology,

demography, sociology and political science, explore the synchronic dynamic patterns of human societies.

The creative side of the humanities (painting, sculpture, music, literature, theatre, cinema, and so on), with their theoretical and technological developments to be observed, studied and analysed – these productions of

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the human mind – are of particular importance to a balanced understanding of the multiple facets of the history of Africans and people of African descent worldwide. The project of the GHA was launched as a corrective to the distortions and biases contained in the ‘colonial library’.

The production of scholarly knowledge on Africa and its people (Bernal, 2006; Diop, 1999; Khaldun, 2015; Li Anshan, 2005; Mveng, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988), as well as its changes through time, goes as far back as pharaonic Egypt, Greco-Roman antiquity, and early dynastic China. At first glance, the process is initially set off by cultural alterity – striking differences – at the very foundation of encounters between minds shaped by different cognitive and perceptual practices. Perceived differences of patterns of behaviour, physical appearance, food habits, dressing codes, housing styles, and so on, could have been praised – as kindness, simplicity, friendliness, generosity – or condemned – with terms such as cannibals, savage, barbarians, etc. Travel narratives and reports from European explorers and adventurers shaped the ‘others’ perception of the donor societies’ elites and influenced their attitudes. The combination of all these genres led to the formation of the ‘colonial library’.

From the ‘colonial library’ to now

As far as Africa is concerned, the colonial intelligentsia carried out fundamental and applied research in almost all fields of social sciences and humanities. Most of these men and women belonged to the colonial apparatus as administrators, soldiers and military officers, medical doctors and nurses, missionary personnel, and so on. Some became renowned scholars in their respective fields and contributed to the foundation of African studies programmes in European and North American universities and research institutions. Different schools,

museums, research institutions, and academic traditions emerged in Europe at Berlin, London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, and in North America at Harvard and Columbia.

Diffusionism was at its peak (Hegel, 1965; Ratzel, 1882, 1891). With some variations among authors, Africa was viewed as a continent that received all innovations from neighbouring populations – essentially from the Near East – through direct migrations and/or technological influence. The main themes of the ‘colonial library’ – hierarchy of races, civilizations and cultures – were contested and countered initially by intellectuals from the diaspora, in the Caribbean and North America (Antenor Firmin, W. E. B. Du Bois, Sylvester Williams) and later from Africa (Cheikh Anta Diop).

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Modern higher education institutions created in Africa were initially extensions of European universities and Christian missions. Achimota College on the Gold Coast, Makerere in Uganda, Ibadan in Nigeria, were the first to be in operation in Africa during the colonial period. Algiers University, Dakar University, and the University of Cameroon – the French Foundation of Higher Education in Cameroon, an extension of the Academy of Bordeaux – created later, were all French institutions in their former colonies.

The research agendas were exactly the same. The field archaeology programme of the famous ancient Ghana site of Awdaghost – Mission Tegdaoust – led by Jean Devisse and Serge Robert from the History department of the University of Dakar was interested in tracing Arab and North African influence on the emergence of urbanization in West Africa (Holl, 2006a). Glazed ware of Mediterranean and North African origins was analysed thoroughly (Robert Chaleix, 1985), while locally made pottery was neglected and left unexamined. The structure of European archaeological research in Africa is clearly nation-based, with recurrent sub-titles like: ‘British contributions to...’, ‘50 ans d’archéologie française en Afrique’, ‘Polish contributions to...’, ‘Belgian contributions to...’, and ‘German contribution to...’ (Holl, 2006b, 2009a).

The social science and humanities research agenda on Africa and Afro descendants was clearly shaped by Euro-American universities and research institutions. The situation is particularly illustrative in archaeological research. Native African communities have developed different ways and channels to access and revive the past. Can these

different approaches to the past be synthesized to generate a broader and richer understanding of past Africans' lives?

This is precisely one of the core elements of the challenge of postcolonial perspectives on African archaeology. The development of archaeological research in Africa was the result of conflicts, tensions, and negotiations within the colonial techno-structure. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, there was no coherent and well-articulated archaeological curriculum anywhere. Archaeological research was nonetheless conducted by daring and bright minds in Europe and Africa. Without standard methodology and precise goals, 'prehistoric' archaeology was fuelled by major controversies. The development of a more secular view of human history, the theory of 'natural selection', the emergence of European nationalisms, and the well-seated 'primitive'/civilized divide, were such driving forces.

These worldviews helped shape the minds of virtually all archaeologists working in Africa up to the Second World War. A radical shift to field data took place in the early 1950s with the creation of research institutions and the

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training of a handful of professional archaeologists (Holl, 2009a). Paradoxically, and for understandable reasons, West African archaeology was not affected by the rise of African nationalisms and the movement towards independence. The situation was different in Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia. The entry of a larger number of Africans in the field had mixed results: poor communications between African scholars, a tendency to rely on former colonial powers that kept tight control of the field, and virtually no significant internal African support for archaeological research. The production and circulation of new research results is submitted to 'gatekeepers' who either ignore, silence, or disparage dissenting voices. The review of *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa* (Schmidt, 2009) by A. B. Stahl (2010) is an interesting illustration of the colonial legacy. The book, edited by Peter Schmidt, is the product of an intensive seminar organized at the University of Florida, Gainesville, in 2007. The goal was to bring to the fore important issues unaddressed in the practice of archaeology in Africa and the diaspora. Yet Stahl's review, as Karega-Munene and Schmidt (2010) point out:

ironically illustrates one of the primary themes of the book – the silencing

of alternative voices in African archaeology. The review does not address [our] contributions to the volume, which results in our voices being silenced. Consider that most of the review focuses almost exclusively on the introductory chapter by Schmidt (2009a), with only two small points about the chapters that make up its substance. Yet, besides the introduction, the edited volume consists of 13 chapters by different authors, including six African scholars and three women of colour (or eight African scholars and five women of colour if coauthors are considered). However, all doubt is erased when contributions are marginalised by representing them as 'meandering', 'ill-focused', and 'thick descriptions' without any attempt to explain these characterisations. The review does not highlight or engage what we collectively see as important issues shaping archaeology today, including the context of archaeopolitics in which disciplinary and historical representations continue to be forged (Karega-Munene and Schmidt, 2010, p. 325).

There are many other ways of marginalizing research which do not go along with dominant orthodoxies, ranging from 'invisibility' to outright rejection:

Silencing of African scholars who are not in the Western mainstream is a condition that still persists during the postcolonial era. Silencing occurs when scholars proffer views that differ from those familiar to Western scholarship and when peer review becomes a disguise to denigrate these unorthodox viewpoints. Much more troubling are conscious attempts to silence those who challenge well-established paradigms that specifically took root during the colonial era and have held sway since. Beyond consigning work to the periphery by labelling it 'controversial', 'polemical', 'dated', or 'inadequate', the most potent of exclusionary dynamics is to ignore and to erase through silence and 'noncitation' (Karega-Munene and Schmidt, 2010, p. 327).

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Things are unlikely to change rapidly due to the poor and very modest scientific research infrastructure, as well as the state of dependency of many African universities and research institutions.

Volume I of the GHA was published in 1981, and Volume VIII in 1999. The pace and intensity of archaeological and historical research have changed considerably during the last four decades. New techniques and methods and a larger number of well-trained researchers have profoundly changed our understanding of Africa's past. It is essentially that research update that is carried out in this volume. It is a Herculean challenge, if not an impossible task, to update eight volumes in only one. One must be selective, synthetic,

and focus on recent discoveries and analyses that have significantly impacted the writing of the long-term history of the continent. The structure of the volume, consisting of four sections, is straightforward and logical. Section I opens the volume and explores the present epistemological, methodological and theoretical underpinning of writing the history of Africa and people of African descent in the twenty-first century. Section II reviews the content of the published volumes of the GHA, setting the stage for the updates that follow in sections III and IV. Section III deals with the update of the Initial History – formerly known as Prehistory – of the continent. And finally, Section IV explores new developments in historical scholarship of the last 2,000 years of continental social, economic and political developments.

Writing African and Afro-descendants' history today

The obvious entry into the research update task is to review the theoretical and epistemological tools used to write the history of Africa and Africans today. The category of 'historical sources' is an ever-expanding one, particularly in the contemporary context that emphasizes multi-disciplinary approaches. Five related themes are addressed in Section I.

The first theme revolves around crafting a decolonized history, paying particular attention to debunking the colonial lexicon. Much has been said and written about Eurocentrism, an intellectual and cultural posture derived from the recent centuries of European world domination. History written on the dominated was generally self-serving, denying native people cultural and historical agency. The reappropriation of historical agency, already underway in the nineteenth century, took different forms through art revivals, political activism, anti-colonialism, revolutions and independence. It is clear that this

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is a very difficult process that will require a future shift to the use of African and Afro-descendant languages to achieve genuine disalienation potentials. Endo-history, or how people create and narrate their own history through oral or written forms, is a vivid and relevant source of information. It is a special kind of history that requires stringent critical apparatus. History as an academic discipline

has its elaborate methodologies, with source criticism as the cornerstone of historical scholarship. The nature of historical sources is constantly expanding. Written sources were initially considered the *sine qua non* condition for the writing of history. Such a limited view is now totally obsolete. Material culture items, words, songs, genres, and literally all aspects of the material and cultural worlds are now considered as sources of history. African and Afro descendant creative arts – sculpture, painting, music, dance and literature – are now important historical sources. Trans- and multidisciplinary are now theoretical and methodological imperatives, blending natural and social sciences. Historical facts must be assessed from different, competing and complementary perspectives. Science-based historical narratives thus offer a stronger antidote to propaganda and negationism. The goal of a new decolonial history of Africa and Afro-descendants is not beyond reach (Mignolo, 2011; Schmidt, 2009). It will, however, require long-sustained epistemological reworking.

The second theme focuses on the exegesis of the concept of Africa itself. What does it mean? What are the strategic implications of the lexeme? (Mudimbe, 1988). Below are different definitions of Africa from the Collins English Dictionary:

[Africa] the second largest of the continents, on the Mediterranean in the north, the Atlantic in the west, and the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean in the east. The Sahara Desert divides the continent unequally into North Africa (an early centre of civilisation, in close contact with Europe and W Asia, now inhabited chiefly by Arabs) and Africa south of the Sahara (relatively isolated from the rest of the world until the 19th century and inhabited chiefly by Negroid peoples). It was colonised mainly in the 18th and 19th centuries by Europeans and now comprises independent nations... Area: about 30,300,000 sq km (11,700,000 sq miles) (Collins English Dictionary, 2012).

The origins of the word *Africa* are explained as follows:

Latin *Africa* (terra) African land, Libya, the Carthaginian territory, fem. Of *Africus*, from *Afer* 'an African'. Originally only in reference to the region around modern Tunisia, it gradually was extended to the whole continent. Derivation from Arabic *afar* 'dust, earth' is tempting, but the early date seems to argue against it. The Middle English word was "Affrike" (Ibid.).

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The word is clearly of Latin origin, initially not intended to refer to the whole 30 million square kilometre landmass. It is however the

systematic differentiation between North Africa, 'an early centre of civilization, in close contact with Europe and W. Asia, now inhabited chiefly by Arabs' (ibid.) and the rest of the continent south of the great desert presented as 'relatively isolated from the rest of the world until the nineteenth century and inhabited chiefly by Negroid peoples' that is striking. That definition of Africa is self-serving, anchored on the proximity to Europe as a cultural evolutionary criterion, and on present archaeological and paleoanthropological evidence, bluntly inaccurate. Paleoenvironmental data point to the fluctuating margins of the Saharan Desert, which has never been an obstacle to the movements of peoples and ideas. Extended to refer to the whole continent during the centuries of European expansion, the concept of Africa as a continent, conquered, plundered, and exploited by European nations, was crafted by Afro-descendant intellectuals and activists from the nineteenth century onward (Rodney, 1973). Africa became a rallying call for the liberation of the continent from colonial domination. The history of the continent transcends the artificial division between its northern portion and the rest of the landmass, and its naming is a contested issue.

The third theme explores the trajectories of the use of oral traditions as sources of African history. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, academic historians' training was exclusively articulated on methodologies geared to the use of written and material sources. Many African societies have traditions as keepers of different statuses – *elders*, *griots*, *jewli*. Their role generally revolved around the curation and transmission of past deeds and acts through word of mouth (McNaughton, 1987; Niane, 1965). For the orthodox Euro-American-trained historians, the absence of written sources was easily equated with the non-existence of history. The pioneer and extensive work of J. Vansina (1965, 1985, 1990) established oral tradition as a potent and reliable source of historical information, with a replicable methodology. Under different names – oral traditions, oral history, or ethno-history – these new sources of history were embraced by new generations of historians, bringing back to life the past of numerous African kingdoms and states (Person, 1968, 1970, 1975). Not all research carried out under the banner of oral traditions was crafted through sound, replicable methodologies. It is the critical evaluation of the use of oral traditions as sources of African history that is carried out in the papers presented under this third theme.

Several contributions, brought together under the theme of new

sources, explore innovative ways of accessing historical information in various African contexts. Did the equivalent of the modern academic concept of history exist in African

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languages? What are the lexemes, both nouns and verbs, referring to history in these languages in ancient Egyptian language, for example, and what were their contexts of use? – are some of the interesting questions addressed in this rubric. What about African writing systems? What are they? Can they generate a renewal of African history scholarship? The identification of native African writing systems is gaining momentum in cultural and historical research. The decipherment of the Tifinagh, an ancestral Berber script, is well advanced by now in North Africa and the Sahara (Biagetti et al., 2012). This significant progress brings back to life a broad range of messages on rock surfaces, associated or not with rock art, all over the Saharan Desert and parts of West and North Africa. African songs, symbolic dances, related to specific rituals and ceremonies, the language of drums, and even mundane languages, are repositories of the past that can be tapped with the right methodologies. Some ceremonies are performed with the medium of peculiar ‘priestly’ secret languages that are preserved and transmitted through a severe and tightly guarded apprenticeship. Religious concepts and practices, as well as secular repositories of wisdom – philosophies – open windows on different facets of the intellectual past and, as such, allow for the reconstitution of the genealogy of some African thought systems (Nietzsche, 2006).

Views and epistemological options from elsewhere offer complementary views on the production of African history. Case studies from China, Japan, South America, and the Caribbean broaden the picture and shed new light on the diversity of academic traditions.

Theoretical and methodological innovations fuel the GHA project. The goal is clearly to craft a global African history viewed from inside. The category of sources will keep expanding with the creation of new technical, intellectual and scientific tools.

Review of the contents of Volume I-VIII

Section II assesses the ‘state of the art’ through the critical review of

the GHA volumes I to VIII published from 1981 to 1990. The volumes will not be presented in detail but simply summarized in a few lines. The goal of the exercise is to outline themes that require a varying degree of updating.

Volume I, *Methodology and African Prehistory* is edited by J. Ki-Zerbo. It deals with a range of issues including the sources of African history and the techniques of historical investigations. It presents regional sequences of long term cultural and technological development of the continent.

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Volume II, *Ancient Civilizations of Africa*, edited by G. Mokhtar, focuses on the emergence and evolution of the earliest African state formations up to the sixth century CE [Common Era]. North-East Africa, including Pharaonic Egypt, Nubia, the Ethiopian Highlands and the Horn are over-represented in the volume.

Volume III, edited by M. M. El Fasi and I. Hrbek and entitled *Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, focuses predominantly on the expansion of Islam, and its cultural and political consequences, all over the continent, as well as the emergence of West African states and kingdoms.

Volume IV, *Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, is edited by D. T. Niane. It covers the period from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, which witnessed the consolidation and Africanization of Islam, the routinization of long-distance exchanges, as well as development cycles of successive North, West and East Africa city-states, kingdoms and empires.

Edited by B. A. Ogot, Volume V, *Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, examines two related themes: the continuing internal evolution and differentiation of African social formations and deeper and stronger connections with mercantilist world systems. Parallel systems of enslavement, in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, resulted in population downturn and impoverishment of the continent but contributed to the emergence of the modern world.

Volume VI, edited by J. F. A. Ajayi and entitled *Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s*, covers the history of the continent up to the Berlin Conference and the kick-off of the 'scramble for Africa'. Adjustments and reactions to increasing European presence take place in the form of *Mfecane* in Southern Africa and Muslim revival and reform movements in West Africa.

Volume VII, *Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935*, edited by A. A. Boahen, examines the colonial conquest and occupation of Africa by European powers and focuses on the responses of Africans and Afro-descendants to colonial domination.

Volume VIII, *Africa since 1935*, edited by A. A. Mazrui and C. Wondji, deals with the recent history of the continent from the Italian aggression of Ethiopia to the struggle for liberation, the independence of African countries and contrasting experiences in nation-building and continental unity.

Since the publication of Volume I of the GHA in 1981, archaeological and paleoenvironmental research has witnessed significant intensification. New research has been conducted on all aspects of African history, but some fields have experienced far-reaching and profound changes. It is not excessive to suggest that Volumes I and II are probably the ones requiring the most extensive update. It is not unfair to assert that Volume VIII was already dated just a few years after its publication in 1990.

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Updating the initial history of Africa

Section III is devoted to the update of the initial history of Africa. Instead of splitting human history into 'prehistory' and 'history', a new terminology that emphasizes continuity is adopted in this project. The concept of 'initial history' replaces what is generally termed 'prehistory'. It is the longest segment of the 'human career' on the planet, starting with the manufacture of the first stone tools some 3.3 million years ago. The update of this long segment of human history is spelled out in six rubrics.

The understanding of long-term human evolution and cultural adaptation requires exploratory forays into paleoenvironmental, paleogenomic studies and language classification, all three pooled in the first rubric of the update. Intensive paleoenvironmental research in almost all major African river and lake catchments provides, depending on areas, coarse, detailed and/or nuanced long term climate history of the continent. The emergence of bipedal gait is now securely dated to 7 million years ago at least, totally independent from the shift from forest to savannah as suggested by Y. Coppens' (1994) 'East Side Story' theory. Population genetics, boosted by the International Human Genome project, offers an extraordinarily

penetrating history of human population dynamics. With minor variations, the geographic distribution of language, and in this case, African languages, is shown to match results from population genetics.

The second rubric focuses on recent developments in paleoanthropology and early humans' lifeways and adaptations. The earliest hominins, found in Africa in Kenya and Chad, are now securely dated to 7 and 6 million years ago. The Chad fossils series, of both *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* and *Australopithecus bahrelghazali* clades, generated a profound change in the distribution map of early hominin remains. The human phylogenetic tree is becoming increasingly bushy. Hominids' lifeways are now understood to have been much more complex and versatile than the simplified assumption of 'Man, the hunter'. Thanks to L. R. Binford's (1981) penetrating critique and C. K. Brain's (1981) ground-breaking taphonomic research in South African caves, scavenging is now accepted to have been the optimal strategy for access to meat. Gathering and possibly hunting of small game complemented the subsistence systems of hominids, who were very likely nesting in trees instead of sleeping on the ground, by lakes, and on the shores of rivers. As suggested by primatology, twigs, sticks, tree branches, and animal parts may have been elements of early hominids' toolkits prior to the knapping of the earliest stone tools. These are dated to 3.3 million years

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ago at Lomekwi in West Turkana, Kenya. The earliest stone techno-complexes, from the Lomekwian to the Advanced Oldowayan A and B, are confined to East and South Africa up to 2 million years ago. Advanced Oldowayan and early Acheulean tool-complexes spread with the initial expansion of the earliest *Homo sp.* to be found in North-East, North and later West Africa in addition to East and South Africa. The Middle Stone Age, which followed, witnessed significant trends towards regional differentiations with more diversified tool repertoires. The Late Pleistocene witnessed significant technological innovations among widespread hunter-gatherer communities that were severely impacted by the shift to aridity during the Late Glacial Maximum.

The third rubric deals with Later Pleistocene-Early Holocene cultural developments and adaptations. The Holocene global warming was kicked off at the very end of the Late Pleistocene. Coastal plain lands were lost to the oceans. The Saharan and Kalahari deserts shrank

significantly. The replenished aquifers and increased humidity fed Saharan lakes and rivers. Late Pleistocene hunter gatherer populations, confined to a few refuge areas during the peak of the Late Glacial Maximum aridity (the Mediterranean littoral, Nile valley, south-west Cameroon grass fields and Côte d'Ivoire littoral), spread anew and re-peopled the continent. Interesting developments and innovations occurred during that process: the invention of pottery-making, the cultivation of wild sorghum, the rearing in captivity of wild barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), and ultimately, the shift to food production, initially with livestock husbandry and later agriculture. African livestock husbandry systems predominantly based on cattle, sheep/goat, and later dromedaries, have different but overlapping histories. There is, however, an ongoing debate on the domestication of cattle in Eastern Sahara from a local population of *Bos primigenius* (Brass, 2017; Holl, 1998a, 1998b). Sheep and goat originated from the Near East, and dromedaries from the Arabic peninsula. African agricultural systems are diverse in time and place, with new plants introduced from Oceania, Asia, and the Americas during the last millennia.

The fourth rubric presents cross-views and a new look at ancient Egypt. The history of ancient Egypt is a 'battleground' and a highly contested 'scholarly territory' (Bernal, 1987, 1991, 2006, Diop, 1999). The 'new look' feature in this volume starts with the explorations of the deeper Early Holocene roots of ancient Egyptian civilizations and their characteristic processes of social differentiation and specialization. Aspects of such intricate processes are illustrated by the Early Holocene Eastern Sahara megaliths complex of Nabta-Playa, the earliest astronomical observatory. Aspects of ancient Egypt population genetics are discussed through the lens of ancient DNA. And finally, a systematic analysis

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of kinship terms in hieroglyph documents allows interesting entries into ancient Egypt's social structures. The key questions addressed in this rubric are not about the 'ownership' of ancient Egypt. It is instead about the inner dynamics of ancient Egyptian societies in their own terms. Egypt, located at the intersection of Africa and Eurasia, is African, with a fluctuating distribution of African and Eurasian populations depending on historical circumstances.

The fifth rubric discusses two major inventions: pottery-making and

metallurgy. Both are different aspects of pyro-technologies, based on the controlled use of fire to alter the structure of natural raw materials, clay on the one hand and metal ores on the other hand (Holl, 2009b). The invention of pottery-making took place in different places at different times. So far, the oldest specimens are dated to 20,000 years ago at Xianrendong cave in China, showing an early production and use of pottery by Late Pleistocene hunter-gatherers in different parts of the Old World. African specimens found at Ounjougou in the Bandiagara in Mali, Tagalagal and Temet in the Air in Niger, around the Tibesti mountains range in Chad, and Nabta Playa basin in Eastern Sahara [Egypt], date from the very end of the Pleistocene to the Early Holocene. They vary in size, shape and design, ranging from small, undecorated open bowls in Eastern Sahara to relatively large globular and decorated vessels in the Air mountains. This addition to the material repertoire of Later Pleistocene-Early Holocene hunter-gatherers was probably part of an adaptive shift in settlement-subsistence systems, anchored on stable, regularly but intermittently visited key localities.

The archaeology of African metallurgies is a domain of intense debate, partly because of its strong evolutionary implications. The multiplicity of areas of invention of pottery-making is uncontested today. It was not the case a few decades ago when it was considered to have been invented in the Near East and spread later to the whole Old World. Solid archaeological data point to an independent invention of copper and iron metallurgy in different parts of Central and West Africa. The idea of multiple independent centres of origins is difficult to envisage by a decreasing number of researchers. As was the case for pottery-making, additional research on African metallurgies will certainly support the hypothesis of different independent areas of invention.

Finally, the sixth rubric updates the archaeology of emergent and sustained complexity in the continent's relatively recent past. Patterns of vertical and horizontal social differentiations operating in different parts of the continent led to the development of entrenched specialization and social ranking. Societies with specialized political and administrative apparatuses suggestive of state formations emerged following two distinct processes: primary or pristine and secondary or

derived. As indicated by the precise mapping presented in this book, pristine state development was confined to the north-eastern portion of the continent, in an extensive interaction sphere including Egypt, Nubia, the Ethiopian Highlands and the Horn of Africa. Pyramids, temples, palaces, and later, stelae are evidence of rulers and elite investment in monumental architecture. Secondary state development took place elsewhere. In North Africa, it was initiated by Phoenician colonization and the foundation of Carthage in the first half of the first millennium BCE [Before the Common Era], then Greek and Roman colonization. Urban centres emerged in West Africa in the first half of the first millennium BCE as indicated by the Dia urban complex (Holl, 2006a). The introduction of dromedaries by the Romans facilitated long-distance trade and north-south exchanges, resulting in the formation of trade emporia in the hinterland of North Africa, the Sahara, and West African Sahel and savannah. Tekkur and Ghana were the earliest West African state formations that emerged very likely during the second half of the first millennium CE. The Ghana Kingdom – sometimes called the Empire – with Kumbi-Saleh as its capital, reached regional primacy in the eleventh century CE and disaggregated in the early thirteenth century. A new cycle of peer-polity interaction, followed by conquest and consolidation, resulted in the emergence of the Mali Empire (1200-1400 CE), an extensive multi-ethnic social formation with a constitution, the Mande Charter, proclaimed at Kurukan Fuga in 1235 after the battle of Kirina, guaranteeing human rights and fair government (Cissé, 2003). The Mali empire disaggregated in the middle of the fifteenth century, paving the way for the rise and primacy of the Songhay military domination. North-Central Africa witnessed a similar evolutionary cycling of state formation (Ibn Khaldun, 2015; Holl, 2000) with successive, overlapping and competing kingdoms or empires of Kanim, Bornu, Baguirmi, Wadday and the Hawsa states. A similar process of peer-polities interaction, competition, conquest, rise and fall is documented almost everywhere else on the continent: the rise and fall of Kerma, Kush, Meroe and Christian Nubian states along the Nile valley in Sudan, Swahili city-states along the Eastern Africa Indian ocean coast (Kusimba, 1999), the Great-Lakes regions states, as well as the Zambezian states of Southern Africa with the sequence from Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe and its aftermath (Pikhirayi, 2001).

The combination of larger concentrations of population, urbanization,

social differentiation and specialization, emerging elites, and long-distance trade networks has triggered and sustained the emergence and evolution of ancient state formations, each with its own cultural peculiarities.

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Updating the ancient and modern history of Africa

Updating the ancient and modern history of the continent in such a limited space is even more challenging. There is significant overlap with the previous segment, and the chronological boundaries are unstable. The section is organized along five themes. The first one deals with regional dynamics at different time and space scales. This is first done through a focus on settlement patterns and density of occupation prior to the emergence of West Sudan ancient states in a well

delineated region; then an analysis of the emergence and expansion of a Muslim revivalist movement in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE; and finally, the formation of the Malagasy political landscape on the Great Island of Madagascar.

The second theme explores a limited number of diaspora cases, predominantly trade diasporas: Dyula in West Africa, Jews in North Africa and the Sahara, Asians in East Africa and Indian Ocean islands; and finally, a special focus on the Gujuratis, a particularly entrepreneurial ethnic group from India.

The third theme focuses on enslavement and resistance with case studies from selected regions, the Senegambia, Northern Cameroon, and the south central portion of Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

And finally, the fourth theme addresses issues of religious practices from two perspectives. One explores the interaction among African religious monotheist systems, in the cases of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The other focuses exclusively on African religious systems themselves. In addition, African foodways and cuisine heritage are investigated partly through the relationship with belief systems.

Conclusion

Volume IX of the GHA has a very precise and specific goal. It

intends to provide the main outlines of the recent development of scientific research on the long history of the continent in the light of current theoretical, methodological, and epistemological critical and reflexive expectations. The tasks are difficult, challenging but exciting. By necessity, the work had to be selective. Many interesting ongoing projects could not be mentioned, not out of ignorance but because of severe space limitations. It is hoped that the selected data successfully convey the significant jump forward in our understanding of the longest continental historical record in the whole world.

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Writing History of Africans and their Diasporas Today: Some Epistemological Considerations 1

SECTION I

WRITING HISTORY OF AFRICANS AND THEIR DIASPORAS TODAY: SOME EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

INTRODUCTION 3

INTRODUCTION

Olabiyi B. J. Yai and Martial Ze Belinga

Introduction

Volumes IX to XI of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* (GHA) extend the collection beyond the first eight volumes and present new content and structure, with a section dedicated to epistemological issues in African history. This ambitious and unusual choice relative to comparable works reveals the desire for a rupture, or at the very least, the documentation of the profound inertia in the generation of intelligibility frameworks of African history, making it necessary to have a space for specific problematization. It is a call for the deepening and generalizing of reflexivity in the production chain of history – in other

words, a call ‘to write the history of Africans and their diasporas today’ starting with an epistemological reconfiguration.

***General History of Africa:* expanding the pioneer breakthrough**

The editorial history of this interest in an epistemology of African history could find its archives in the first eight volumes of the GHA. In fact, the extent of questions, debates and positions, and the context of decolonization with its

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imported antagonisms, made it necessary to organize forums, colloquia and conferences prior to the definitive writing and publication of the aforementioned volumes. Twelve specialized publications related to the GHA, the ‘studies and documents’ collection, dealt with scientific and methodological questions such as the settlement of Egypt and its marked opposition, the methodology of African history, ethnonyms and toponyms, education and historiography. It is this deep process of questioning, debate and controversy relating to intellectual authority which, in its principles and protocols, should drive decisive writing about European adventures and the industry of prejudice.

A decade later, before embarking on the writing of the following volumes of the GHA with the aim of updating prior knowledge and producing a history of African diasporas around the world, a critical review of the first eight volumes was undertaken under the direction of Doulaye Konaté (2009). These developments for the GHA were unanimously recognized, and the perspective of a history of struggle – the fight against prejudice and pejorative views – pushed back against the most caricatural aspects of the narratives about old Africa. Basically, the historicity of African societies were freed from the grave in which Hegel had buried them and they found unflinching affirmation backed by innovative methodology. Internal sources, linguistics and archaeology were used to create ‘an inside view’ of African societies.

The perspective of an Africa as a receptacle for history produced elsewhere, passive over a long period of time, waiting for an external civilizing force, preferably Caucasian, was rejected and the chronological frameworks based on colonial experience or the four-period view of European historiography – Antiquity, Middle Ages,

Modern Times, Contemporary History – were either discarded or clearly relativized, stripped of their hegemonic status.

However, reservations regarding the chronological and geographical coverage of critical episodes of resistance, and the Eurocentric narrative tendency, whether the GHA or what the debates about Africa's past have the most in common, have not completely dissipated. Certainly, the evolution of the sciences – especially archaeological digs and discoveries relating to the first humans, have made it vital for knowledge to be updated. But beyond this, there has been a clogging in the conduits of prejudice and pejorative views, and Euro

centric categories and concepts such as the Middle Ages, feudalism, slavery (uniform), polytheisms, etc., remain commonplace, if not recurrent. This is a conceptual framework that ends up restoring European history as the backdrop for African narratives.

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Global Africa: an epistemic shift, a new perspective

This 'sticking point' of coloniality, which historical narratives cannot shake off, takes on an almost genetic aspect, like the expression of a power of the very constituents of thought mobilized to tell the story of the peoples of the world and Africans and Afro-descendants in particular. However, questioning, in the absence of a radical challenge to the parameters of understanding the African past, has rarely gone so far as to prioritize a field reserved for the orientation of discourse, categories of thought, languages, written records and inscriptions. It is as if the refutations and criticisms of the Eurocentric paradigm took as a given the conceptual framework of the hierarchy of knowledge, the intention of taking on board 'normal science', that of a Western school. The proof, the occurrence of the term 'epistemology', a reflection on knowledge, appears only three times in the first volume of the GHA devoted to methodology. In the 'studies and documents' collection only one issue out of twelve explicitly mentions epistemology. Of course, despite these absences, it does not mean that this work is devoid of reflection.

The relative absence of epistemological questioning in the sense of a consecrated and constituted field, rather common in historical monographs in general, is only weakly compatible with the narrative of a global Africa, resistant to the spatial and temporal framework of

colonial-centred stories. The change of approach in narrative orientation, focused on the circulation of Africans to areas of reception and the re-rooting of their diasporas in North America, South America, the Caribbean, Asia and Europe undermines narratives that end in a myriad of stories and itineraries coming out of Africa and flowing into the oceans.

Global Africa as dispersions, the scattering of Africans, swarming waves of their cultures across the world over time, going at least as far back as the cultural radiance of ancient Egypt beyond its African oecumene, summon geographies and plural temporalities that the prejudicial and Eurocentric narratives forbid. Whether it be history in full rediscovery of Sino-African relations going back to well before the fifteenth century, or contemporary diffusion of African material culture in the world (braids, printed textiles, music), or the history of the ideas of the Renaissance or pan-Africanism, the tools of an improved history of 'colonial science' cannot fulfil the promise of intelligible interconnections.

The perspective of a global Africa, this historical and cultural hydrography, makes categorizations and narrations fuelled and operated by European epistemological colonialism obsolete, and drives investment in an area offering

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to decompartmentalize the toolbox used to write the history of Africans in the world. The comings and goings from Africa to the diasporas, actual repatriations and imaginary mobilities, intra-Caribbean and American migrations, resettlement experiences in Africa and their economic, sociological, political and territorial consequences, and Black rulers in Asia are all manifestations of global Africa that require a turnaround in thought patterns.

Although prejudice, myths and pejorative views have attracted the attention of African and Africanist historians in the world (Davidson, 1959), the necessary adjustments in lexical and semantic fields would only serve to soften or embellish the process of writing to teleological and diffusionist tropisms. Adjustments aside, the implicit and underlying theme is that Europe remains the only real subject of history. In other words, epistemology should reformulate the issue not of the factual history of Africa but the conditions of possibilities for expressing this historicization.

The prevailing beliefs in the inequality of races fought by Firmin

(1885), Du Bois (1915), the 'falsification of history' by Cheikh Anta Diop (1954), the 'barrier of myths' by Ki-Zerbo (1972), the categories for localization and circulation modelled on the European model, categories of life, linguistic categories and exogenous writing systems, all cast doubt on the ability to reunite the African with his or her history.

The aim of this section, in addition to an 'agoratic' aspect, is to try to bring some reflective elements to the conditions of possibility for a narrative of African history from within. Starting with the findings of the coloniality of modern knowledge about humans and their dependence on the European experience, it will be necessary to suggest going past:

- a decolonial turn,
- a linguistic turn,
- the pre-eminence of the vectors of endogeneity (endogenous knowledge, African written records, imaginative writings, etc.).

There is no doubt that other entries could have been considered, a strong discussion about universalism in the humanities and in the writing of African history, a clash of arguments regarding positivism in history, axiological neutrality, the scientific evolution and history, the profession of historian, and so on. By opting for a decolonial approach and by listening to inner voices, it is the current of 'ancestrality', of the Ancients, of predecessors, of the eight initial volumes of the GHA that have been continued and prolonged; all of these factors demonstrate the extent to which the history written by Africans

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has asserted itself from the outset against omnipresent opinion and topical discourse. The continent and its inhabitants seem frozen, waiting forever for a power from the outside to save them. And it was from the layer exposed by the early steps of Delany, Blyden, Casely Hayford, among others, that a pre-epistemological territory naturally came into being based on refuting Hegelian claims of a historicity. The consequential demonstration of the historicity of African societies, the control of the scientificity of imperial statements, the arguments and axiomatic reversals to produce points and get them across, were a natural incline for the interrogation of classifications, categories and concepts. The diffusionist perspective of narratives, essentialisms and teleologies relating to the discourse on Africa had been the object of an identification and condemnation by the oldest and most famous

Black thinkers under European domination.

The section has explored the meaning of its roots, taking care to welcome, without exclusion, the prolific input of the decolonial and indigenist turn, created essentially by the unfortunates of Eurocentrism in South America, Asia (India) and Africa. The outcome of this initiative and innovation results in a section with various recommendations from the disciplines involved – history, philosophy, linguistics, epistemology, archaeology and anthropology – but also pretty close to a common core of indiscipline with respect to the Eurocentric foundations of their basic knowledge. The section is written as a series of decentering initiatives and of questions that combine concepts and empirical illustrations, multiplying the photographs of illicit crimes of improper importations, of historiographic bias, drifting topics, categories of thought and of the unthinkable. A principled reflexivity innervates the work, and for this price, a set of disciplinary revisions and twists with reassuring axioms, prehistory, writing, orality, for example, confuses and destabilizes established conceptual yokes. These indocilities are brought back into line in the very open and personal presentation of ways of overcoming impasses and epistemological obstacles (Bachelard, 1934) long denied to falsifiability.

Other disciplines, approaches, and sensitivities could have been associated with this unnamed epistemological forum. However, the initial constraint was not that of a blank page but of the lack of a page, and questions often found in preliminary summaries, cautionary statements, footnotes, or in question marks, due to lack of 'space'. The challenge will therefore be to try to create a first page, an outline that can function as a bridge to further reflection, starting with a sample of morphemes, signs, topics and mobilized disciplines and historical or historiographical episodes that are representative of an epistemological change

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in the work or committed volition. Speech was given quotation marks, italics were introduced to straighten out and interpret their curves, footnotes took over the body of the text reversing the order of the narrative and observation.

The section can be understood as four interlinked waves, touching each other, occasionally overlapping, all focused on describing a decolonial, conceptual and decentred turnaround on the debate about Africa's past, a linguistic switch when opening encyclopedias

represented by languages to dig out the potential historical claims, an evaluative appraisal of the hopes raised by the rediscovery of oral sources, and finally, a set of illustrative texts about the vectors of endogeneity in the restitution of the African past (religions, endogenous written records, and so on). A summary will recommend reading scientific advances made regarding the interaction of new techniques and knowledge made available to history.

A decolonial turn: from coloniality to endogeneity

When it comes to the decolonial turn, the section opens with five very different contributions. Martial Ze Belinga tackles the epistemological barriers integral to coloniality of the debate; history-advocate Yoporeka Somet reexamines the foundations of racial prejudice behind the image of the 'Negro' with a powerful denunciation by Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin; and Salim Abdelmadjid puts forward a philosophical concept of Africa in relation to African history. Anshan Li and Katsuhiko Kitagawa widen the section by including a discussion on Asian historiography in Africa, the status of highly active research initiatives in China and the work of Japanese researchers.

The section could have prolonged the coloniality factor of the debate by going deeper into redundant concepts such as Anibal Quino's coloniality of power, Maldonado-Torres's coloniality of being, Maria Lugones's coloniality of gender, or Ndlovu-Gatsheni's African decolonial approach, among others. The 'favourable conditions' for the theology of liberation (African, Afro-American and South-American) and the first decolonial actions in Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation could also have been marshalled in a more explicit way. Similarly, the importance of endogenous knowledge, finally officially recognized by global institutions, would merit rigorous epistemological articulation. Highlighting epistemicides and linguicides, incommensurable mutilations at the heart of the colonial process, would arguably give African history new initiatives and societies the *raison d'être* for 'epistemic justice' as coined by the Indian Shiv Visvanathan. The introduction of endogenous African signifiers,

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source signs and debates about Africa, within the context of an exhumation of written records in Africa, indigenous writings and

inscriptions, would also have been beneficial for an affirmation of alternative thoughts, imaginative thoughts, via the Ajami, Nsidibi, Vai, Mende and Ge'ez writings, Bambara ideograms, creature and other parietal inscriptions.

The second set of texts affected by the linguistic turn tries to define the outline of a reflection about history starting with a way of expressing the past that is specific to African languages. Yoruba for Olabiyi Yaï, and ancient Egyptian for Alain Anselin, are two ideal types used for exploration rather than sealing a generalization shut. Idiomatic issues, intractability and designation with the name of Africa as an example, investigated by Charles Binam Bikoï, indicate the perilous complexity and richness of linguistical capital in the debate on history.

Although an endeavour of openness and non-paralysing caution shed light on the linguistic turn issue, gains made by other linguistic families would certainly have animated the vision that emerges from the linguistic issue when it comes to history. Berber, the family of Khoisan languages, different from Bantu languages, would be natural extensions of the work undertaken so far. By relying on words to tell the story, African linguists could, in the process, help to reappraise exogenous classifications by starting with units of meaning and meaning coming from within.

We should definitely take a closer look at meanings invested by Africans in the diaspora in the rare cases of self-designation – Aruanda, Guinin, Ilé Ayé, Ilu Ayé – that sprang up in *quilombos* (settlements), *palenques* (Creole languages) and other *candomblés* (religions) as these initial attempts at pan-Africanism and African unity are under-researched and have not yet revealed themselves in full.

The third set of texts dedicated to 'oraliture' and literature provide an evaluative summary of the status of 'oral traditions' as sources of African history via the philosophical approach of Mve Ondo Bonaventure in dialogue with the more history-orientated perspective of Gayibor Théodore Nicoué Lodjou, a socio-political perspective on the Tantaros of Madagascar by Manassé Esoavelomandroso, while Cheikh Moctar Ba raises the interest of cosmogonies in this conversation. Kofi Anyidoho expands the internal sources of history from oralitures to artistic performances that convey rhetoric about history as well as the ethical, moral and spiritual organization of their societies. Luis Kandjimbo, for his part, paints a picture of the decolonization of African literature. Given the investment that has been made in the preservation and exploitation of oral sources over a long

period of time, we can no longer consider it to be a question of broaching the subject using a summary-evaluation process and a problem

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about the place of different texts in Western and Islamic written records. The difficulty lies in another use (other than complementary and suppletive) of the diversity of oral texts, and in a sense the scripto-centric paradigm seems to have made a mark with experts and defenders of 'oral traditions'. A whole territory concealing scripturalist ideology remains unexplored: the possibility of thinking about orality as not being a 'source' or provender for a story necessarily written down but as a discursive practice *sui generis* from and in the general history of Africa. It is likely that the maturation of this questioning leads to a more fruitful pluralism of sources without pre-established hierarchies. Tackled themes and their orientations may call for a prioritization of hypotheses and facts originating from one or other of these texts and sources.

The fourth and final group of texts gathers artefacts, mentifacts and institutions through which the endogeneity, agency of societies and their imaginaries can be considered as being in favour of a factual history beyond prejudice and assignment, and especially advantageous for a more efficient interpretative approach to the past. The concepts of religion are exhumed by Sanya Osha in the footsteps of Kwasi Wiredu, drawing on the spirituality of the Orisha in West Africa and the diaspora. Félix Ayoh'Omidire follows Sanya Osha's analysis by suggesting a reading in terms of a cultural continuum between afro-Brazilian candomblé culture in the 'axexê' funeral rite and its Yoruba African referent, 'orò òkú'. This concrete application of the concept of a global Africa works by translating and adapting African identities in diasporas based on specific social, religious or spiritual connections. The range of African signs from writings problematized by Condro Mlaili to epigraphies expounded by Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias reinterprets chapters of history revealed with often unexpected results, such as the role of women in West African societies. This quest for the vectors of endogeneity, tools that add elements that reflect the subjectivity of Africans more than the historian's ordinary sources, can also find an expression in heritage (tangible and intangible). Kiriama Hermann studies this heritage issue and its relevance in the objectification of sociologies of the past,

starting with representative situations in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria, etc. By looking at the importance of Africa in Afro-American arts, Yolanda Wood also tackles forms of continuity, adaptation and differentiation in original material culture or inspired by Africa.

The section closes with a chapter by Augustin Holl who develops a new overview of 'Bantu migration'. The result is a need for a multidisciplinary approach to give history the scientific character that ancient and damaging judgments had taken away from it and that refutationist postures were unable to restore. This

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position at the end of the section also testifies to an interest, precisely because of the decentrations, provincializations and necessary innovations, in maintaining a rigorous approach within a perspective of sanitation, decolonization under the primacy of an insider's perspective. A challenge with a still undetermined outcome a priori, and which invites a proper exploitation of scientific advances more than ever before.

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Decolonizing History: Epistemology of a Creative Destruction 13 CHAPTER 1

DECOLONIZING HISTORY

Epistemology of a Creative Destruction

Martial Ze Belinga

'Perhaps we should note the contradiction of a history of Africa that looks to be "African" while, at the same time, remaining subject to a historiographic model that divides temporal reality according to chronological landmarks that, in fact, correspond to the main axes of the general history of the West. Indeed, in the African history textbooks one finds categories such as "Antiquity", "the Middle Ages" and "Modern Times".'

Jean-Marc Ela (1936-2008), *La plume et la pioche*

Introduction

As early as 1965, when the first generation of African historians trained by the Western school was hard at work, the Algerian historian

Mohamed Sahli (1965) was writing an overtly radical publication with the unequivocal title *Decolonizing History*. He intended to profoundly question the desperate image of the Algerian past that, according to him, was 'woven with absurdities' and 'the eternal resumption of unintelligible events'. Mohamed Sahli observed the way in which historical reason had been converted into hagiographic meta-discourses of European domination. He saw a lesson to be drawn from this, moving towards a complete overhaul of the epistemological scope: 'To break free of this impasse,

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a new Copernican revolution is needed. Revising intellectual tools, enriching, expanding or renewing postulates, notions, definitions, theories and values, in order to express the whole of humanity in all its diversity with equally "sympathetic" treatment for everyone. In particular, this revision requires the *decolonization of history and sociology*' (Sahli, 1965, p. 35).

The revision called upon by the Algerian historian was not unprecedented. To an extent, this 'prehistory'¹ was already age-old and polymorphous. Kwame Nkrumah, writing just before him in 1964 (Nkrumah, p. 80), recalled the importance of an African history of Africans: 'We must write our history as the history of our society, not as the story of European adventurers'; a history where contact with Europeans was to be regarded 'from the perspective of Africans' experience...'.¹

An illustration of this 'prehistory' of the decolonization of history is the powerful revolt of the prophetess Kongo Kimpa Vita Nsimba (1684-1706) against missionary and colonial Catholicism (Mboukou, 2010). The young Christianized 'nganga marinda' initiate, endowed with the gift of mediumship in Kongo spirituality, demanded the restoration of the kingdom, preaching a Catholicism incarnated by Kongo black saints and a liturgy based on traditional or recomposed rites. The popular success of her movement saw her sentenced to death by the Europeans and the King of Kongo, Pedro IV, under Portuguese influence. Although Kimpa Vita Nsimba's political/identity-based resistance has been sufficiently studied, the same cannot be said of her cognitive decoloniality, since she intended to modify the Catholic beliefs taught in Kongo. There are grounds for identifying in the ideology of this uprising one of the initial branches of an African Christian theology of liberation.

Based on the above, it is possible to put forward the hypothesis that the process of revising European cognitive content emerged from the interaction of Black people with masters, commanders, representatives of God and other colonial figures. The lineaments of a decolonization of history thus logically emerged among the first 'Europeanized', Christianized, freed Black figures.

In the nineteenth century, Edward Blyden (1872, 1887), a Liberian born in Saint Thomas in the Caribbean and an eminent pioneer of ideas on African renaissance or 'regeneration', dedicated his life to the re-evaluation and rewriting of history and the 'decolonization' of African minds. To varying degrees, Africanus Horton (1868), Martin Delany (1879), Anténor Firmin

¹ We use the term 'prehistory' to refer to an initial phase during which the refutation of European images of Africa and Africans anticipated (without foreseeing, with the exception of Blyden, etc.) what would later be called the 'decolonization of history'.

(1885), Casely Hayford (1911) and Du Bois, among others, represent the roots of a tradition of historians rejecting the discourses of racial inequality. They formed the vanguard of an antagonistic argumentative line countering racist allegations. African Egypt, the influence of Ethiopia, the Haitian revolution and great Black figures in history were 'evidence' set against the tide of unequal theorizations. These factual rectifications also ran through some of the accounts of African freedmen living in the diaspora (Olauda, Baquaqua, Sa'id, etc.).

The first intuitions suggested by the term 'decolonization of history' associated discourses of Africa's past with the colonial experience, navigating an improbable proximity between knowledge as sympathy and colonization as violence. These representations were informed by demands that were foreign to the requirements of knowledge production in a corrupt process that justified their repression outside the territory of the African past.

Decolonizing history was an attempt to extinguish the discursive structures employed in discourse on the past by the constraining power of a mindset focused on colonial domination. It was thus a critical component in the liberation of African thought. There is no need to point out the monumentality of such an enterprise, regarded as impossible by certain individuals, including African researchers such as the Gabonese sociologist Tonda (2012).

Before marking out the cognitive space of this Africa of stereotypes, it is useful to outline the plural temporality that made its falsification possible. Discourses on 'Negroes', on Others, were elaborated in the dialectic of contacts generated in the global process of colonialism. European narratives preceding the 1884 Berlin Conference (Mungo Park, René Caillé, etc.), along with the definitive arguments of figures such as Kant and Hume, to mention but a few, testify to the precedence of European representations over the territorial conquest of the continent itself. The decolonization of history thus concerns the contemporary writing of African history, covering the whole of the African past, particularly distorted by the contexts of asymmetrical external interactions, in particular with Europe and its most influential representatives.

The invocation of African writings and oral traditions opposed to the literatures of racial essentialism and the duty of colonization cannot, however, smooth over all the malaise provoked by the writing of an African history by and within the ubiquitous European cultural mindset. It is easy to perceive the extent to which the false, albeit widespread, idea of racial superiority did not exhaust the inevitability of a decolonization of history.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine what a history of Greece would be like if interpreted through ancient Egyptian cultural codes and written exclusively

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in hieroglyphics, or the history of France seen under the exclusive prism of Cameroon's Bamoun culture and written in Shūmom.² Reciprocally, we might wonder to what extent European historians, scientists or conquerors could, from their idiomatic cosmovisions, reconstruct African societies' motives for action and historical processes. In the light of this serious objection, Todorov Tzvetan (1991) warns that the disadvantages of exotopia – spatial or cultural exteriority – may be overcome at the price of the narrator's alienation from his original culture. Discovering the conceptual possibilities of 'a common sense' thus depends on this capacity for exile, as do the probabilities of the necessarily relative or asymptotic success of a decolonization of history.

The decolonization of history can be understood as the repudiation of an external vision of Africa's past, but also as the search for terminologies, conceptual tools and categories of thought able to

establish the history of Africa within its own dynamics, based on the logic of African subjects' actions within the multiple scales and temporalities of their praxis. It is ultimately a critical re-examination of the intentions, unconscious drivers, categories and overall issues brought to the fore by this decolonization, ensuring that all its statements have been scientifically sanitized.

Taken as a symbol of territorial expropriation, colonization analogically operates within the knowledge arena to dismiss all the forms of hegemonic intrusion imposed by the force of events. Pejorative or inappropriate non-European representations of Africa constructed in the context of the Eastern slave trade, for example, should be revised in the same way as the others (the absorbing Westernization of mindsets all around the world nevertheless orientates premises of the decolonization of history towards European content)³. The arbitrary but necessary choice made for this text will be to stick to European representations, unless required to do otherwise. This said, we are not unaware of the complexity of the way prejudices form and the reciprocal influences between East and West in the circulation of ideas.

The essential focus for this introductory reflection will be solely on the epistemological dimension, notwithstanding the fact that knowledge production and dissemination (research, school curricula, etc.) relates to a global

2 Shūmom is a language invented by the ruler of the Bamoun people, King Ndjoya, at the end of the nineteenth century and banned under French colonization.

3 For example, the following sentence is attributed to the Arab thinker Ibn Khaldoun: 'The only people who accept slavery are the Negroes, owing to their low degree of humanity and proximity to the animal stage'. Cf. Ibn Khadoun, *Al-Muqaddima*, 1377. Stereotypes from Muslim cultures is a serious issue. Just as the European slave trade and slavery generated prejudices, servitude in Muslim countries long before, and for longer, built up stereotypes of inferiority that naturalized the status of African Blacks.

politico-institutional dimension. We will attempt to assess the conditions of validity for the main categories and paradigms in which African history is written, and to propose a radical reflexivity allowing us to move towards a decolonial and endogenous approach inspired from within.

To do this, we will proceed in three stages, set out in the three parts of our text. The first two will attempt to characterize the coloniality of history by breaking down and then reordering the prevailing perception

of 'prejudice' and bias so often evoked by African and Black African historians and thinkers. This perception, and its heterogeneous content, will lead us on to a matrix of representative categories and key problematic concepts that will need to be modelled in the second part. Finally, the third part will propose a 'creative destruction' approach, intended to suggest a subversion of perspectives and a duty of invention on a thematic, categorical, perceptual and conceptual level.

Decolonization, Frantz Fanon (1961) said, was very simply 'the replacement of one "species" of man by another'. By analogy, we could describe the decolonization of history as the replacement of one 'species' of history by another.

Prejudices, colonialism and Eurocentric dynamics of history

The desire to produce a history 'out of alien days', to paraphrase Aimé Césaire, should not be exonerated from the demands of a rigorous methodology, along with a doubt made greater in the light of a ubiquitous subject – Europe in contemporary African knowledge – with more of a grip on African historians than vice versa. In *L'odeur du père*, Mudimbe (1982), known for his famous 'colonial library', warns:

For Africa, really escaping the West requires an appreciation of exactly what it costs to detach oneself from it; ... This implies a knowledge of that which, in allowing us to think against the West, remains Western; an appreciation of the extent to which our recourse against it is still perhaps a ruse through which it opposes us and, at the end of which, it awaits us, immobile and otherworldly.

This precaution leads us to prejudice, the key word when it comes to the oldest African recriminations against a European historical view of Africa. The challenge lies in characterizing the arena within which the word on Africa circulates, tapping into it to reach beyond the problematic exotopies and 'epistemological obstacles' related to coloniality.

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African history: occupied territory, prejudiced past, prejudicatory history

The challenge of writing an African history – quickly becoming a real

enterprise in hostile territory – runs through the very soul of UNESCO's *General History of Africa* project. Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1972) uses the expression 'barrage of myths' to illustrate the idea that external opinions and pejorations represent barriers to knowledge. It must be said that what we call 'prejudice' or 'race prejudice' approximate to myths and pejorations and mobilized the greatest works of reflection by Africans and Afrodescendants for at least two centuries. When re-reading Anténor Firmin (1885), we are struck by the discovery of a fine epistemologist hidden behind the anthropologist of racial equality, something he uses to demonstrate the pseudoscientific character of the proponents of polygenism and the thesis of racial inequality. This is not unlike Blyden, very much an incarnation of this 'refutationist' epistemology.

At the very heart of this process of pitting rationality against prejudice, the cult work *Discourse on Colonialism* by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire (1955) surprisingly resurfaces. Maldonado-Torres (2006) makes this a centrepiece for the decolonial turn at the origin of the disenchantment of European modernity. With hindsight, we see this *Discourse* as a piece of this 'refutationist' epistemology, largely dedicated to the contradiction brought before the colony's thinkers: Joseph de Maistre, Lapouge, Renan, Mannoni, etc. Césaire points out the 'false objectivity', the passion 'of denying' Non-Whites any merits (Césaire, 1955, pp. 32-34). In the light of the prejudice issue, this rapprochement of Blyden and Césaire, separated by more than half a century, shows the rooting of a will to genuinely get a grasp on a history free of colonial scoria.

An archaeology of pejorations⁴ reveals that, although reducible to a matrix of characteristic features, prejudice is anything but linear over time, composite and dispersed. There are numerous representations by ancient writers that, though often racist, did not give in to racism – we can cite Homer, Herodotus and Strabo, among others. Even after the genocidal conquest of the 'New World', Montaigne (2016) was moving away from dehumanizing modes of classifying otherness. There were, of course, the Hegels, Voltaires, Hugos and Montesquieus, testimony to a racism in France that was particularly well protected, 'inherited from a long, carefully hidden tradition', according to Odile Tobner (2007). Yet even in the dark times of the slave trade and slavery, the names of the

4 Inspired by Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. Cf. Foucault, Michel (1969), *Archéologie du savoir*. Paris, Gallimard.

Tertullians, Cyprians, Saint Augustines, early Christian theologians of North Africa and Terence the Carthaginian poet, were still known and lauded throughout cultivated Europe (Yoporeka, 2007). The abolitionists, like Victor Schoelcher (1948) who forced through the decision to abolish slavery in France in 1848, reversed the burden of prejudice, arguing that slavery was the cause of the black populations' diminished status. Here it is worth mentioning Maurice Delafosse (1927), a colonial administrator passionate about African societies and very attentive to oral presentations, who constantly maintained that African civilizations were the work of Africans. Champollion Le Jeune, who decoded the hieroglyphs in 1822, had no hesitation in making the link between the ancient Egyptians and the Black Africans, going against the paradigm of a European or Eastern Egypt.

This non-linearity of prejudice nevertheless presents a trend absorbed, to a great extent, by the tropisms of legitimation and justification inseparable from a certain pejorative view of the native Black element. For the most part, African and diasporic reflections include the prevalence of prejudices based on the needs of slavery, the slave trade and colonial causes. Eric Williams (1968), followed by Walter Rodney (1972), cited the abundant demand for cheap servile labour as the explanation for the slave trade. Later on, a superstructure of racist opportunistic rationalizations would be grafted to this infrastructure. During this phase of economic accumulation, capitalism and racial prejudices thus seemed to go hand in hand, mutually influencing one another.

We can note just how fragile the term 'prejudice' appears to be. It falters as soon as its source is the justification of domination, not the absence of objective proof. Its strength does not derive from failed procedures of discernment but, rather, services rendered in the interests of its narrators. Conversely, if we take prejudice to mean a pejorative opinion – stereotypes without a solid cognitive base – its use, although weakly heuristic, maintains a degree of relevance. We could thus consider there to be two kinds of prejudices, the effects of which are likely to coalesce: a true-false prejudice, pretext and colonial alibi, and a true prejudice linked to the state of knowledge, the interest of knowing and the reproduction of old images.

The various kinds of knowledge associated with African inferiority connotations form another line through which prejudice is dispersed.

We can distinguish between the knowledge of travellers, missionaries, colonial administrators, etc., and scientific knowledge. Within the scientific knowledge domain, history professionals can be set apart from other human science specialists. The colonial sciences differentiated the natural sciences from the human and social sciences.

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The tension between the ideal of scientific disinterestedness and the will to assist civilizing missions weakened attempts by human scientists to put forward a genuinely scientific discourse on African societies.

Four decades after Mohamed Sahli's pioneering syntheses on the coloniality of history and sociology, the French historian Singaravélou summarized historical trends 'in a colonial situation' by attempting to isolate knowledge, epistemology and the teaching of colonial times. Noting the heterogeneity of discourses advanced by professional or amateur authors of history, he drew up some consensual features of the colonial sciences:

- Eurocentrism,
- diffusionism,
- dehistoricisation,
- essentialism (inferiority/superiority/racism/racialism),
- mesological determinism (geography, society, ethnicity, etc.),
- propaganda, colonial expertise, legitimization.

Ignorance and a psychological component (fear, abomination, difference) cannot be omitted from the properties contributing to the reproduction and spread of prejudice (Rose, 1951).

According to Singaravélou, innovations such as the promotion of oral traditions, the economic dimension of history with colonial companies, ethnic psychology and its diversity, interest for the contemporary, etc., can be credited to these colonial sciences and their 'scientists'.

European prejudice has dominated history (prejudicatory history or history-prejudice) since at least the fifteenth-century conquests, bearing down with all its might until the relatively suspensive appearance of professional historians. This domination is so great that these periods of history, while not reduced to it, nevertheless appear dominated by hegemonic interests: evangelization, the slave trade, colonization, cold

war. M'Bokolo (1980) identifies the 1950s as a point of rupture with the past through the nationalist push coinciding with the birth of historical science for Africa (first reviews of African history, interest in orality, etc.).

The historiography of dispersed prejudice outlined here was justified by the interest of African historians, and by the epistemological value of prejudice. Gaston Bachelard (1934, p. 14) thus warns: 'When it comes to scientific culture, the mind is never young. It is indeed very old, since its age corresponds to that of its prejudices'. He specifies: 'Science, in its need for completion as well as in principle, is absolutely opposed to opinion'. Prejudice thus constitutes a source of epistemological obstacles, that is, the kind of inertia that occurs in the very

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act of knowing. Added to this is the hysteresis of 'authoritarian antecedents', following in the footsteps of Hegel and the Enlightenment thinkers revisited by Sala-Molins (1992), whose influence still represents an impediment to objectively thinking about Africa's past.

In addition to the empire of words and definitions in which prejudice is clad, there are two modes of privilege, two meta-categories, through which parts of history that cannot be integrated into dominant models of thought are devolved: silence and white noise.

Meta-categories of African history: silence and white noise

African historians view the prevalence of racial stereotypes as real epistemological obstacles. Bachelard (1971) thus instigates a semantic insurrection against such uses: 'the language of science is in a state of permanent revolution'. This could be seen as a neo-language ensuring the translation of common terms into scientific concepts.

Beyond the lexical dimension, history-prejudice is nevertheless rooted in cognitive and institutional forces invisible in narrative, but never absent: access to archives, research programmes, publications, etc. Silencing, together with its masking by the tropes of 'mainstream' knowledge metaphorically called 'white noise', represent two meta-categories of discourse on Africa. A vigilant Eduardo Galeano (1997) recalls an unaddressed African proverb: 'As long as lions do not

have their hunters, hunting stories will continue to glorify the hunter'. In other words, silence for the vanquished, history for the victors.

The Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1949-2012) proposes a theorization of silencing in the writing of history. In his *Silencing the Past* (1995), he reveals the power relations omnipresent in the way narratives are put together. In this regard, the marginal place accorded to the Saint-Domingue revolution (1791-1803) in history is a case in point. This revolution, which inflicted more casualties on France than the famous Battle of Waterloo, was presumed to be the only revolution accomplished by enslaved populations outside their countries of origin. Trouillot identifies the reasons for this muting, defining it as unthinkable, 'contaminating', ostracized with all the history of slavery and colonialism. He also notes the way in which Saint-Domingue's revolutionary scope was undermined by the use of the words 'revolt' and 'rebellion', along with the search for external causes to diminish the merit of the Blacks. Moreover, the historian specifies, 'the silencing of the Haitian revolution is only one chapter in the great narrative of domination' (Trouillot, p. 107).

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In an ambitious article entitled 'Hegel and Haiti', the American philosopher Susan Buck-Morss (2000) analyses Hegel's silence vis-à-vis the Saint-Domingue revolution against the slave traders, recalling Jean-Jacques Rousseau's mute stance when it came to the servitude of Africans, as highlighted by Catalan philosopher Louis Sala-Molins (1987). Hegel, who 'invented' the metaphor of 'the master-slave dialectic' in the midst of the slave trade era, manages not to mention the fate of the Blacks in the European colonies! Susan Buck-Morss provides convincing evidence that Hegel could not have been unaware of the Haitian revolution when elaborating the famous metaphor published in his book *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807. After taking stock of the situation, the philosopher asks whether the hidden origins of the master-slave dialectic might, in fact, be found in this Haitian revolution veiled in silence.

The commemoration in 1992 of the 500 year anniversary of Christopher Columbus's 'discovery' of America offered Trouillot the opportunity to disassemble the silence produced not by an absence of facts, but by the unequal capacity for memory reappropriation among the competing social groups: Amerindians and descendants of the

colonial settlers. This sociological dimension of the production of history challenges the naive positivism that portrays a science impervious to its environment. Here, we can recall the work of epistemologist Thomas Kuhn (1962), for whom the validation of scientific paradigms is also founded in the beliefs of dominant groups within scientific communities.

The dimensions and directions of this silence are thus linked to chronology, the sociology of reappropriation and semantics. The very use of the words 'discovery' or 'encounter' to refer to the invasion of lands occupied by peoples was only possible as a product of the Eurocentric power that went on to structure the whole 'New World' narrative (Trouillot, p. 115).

The 'discoveries' trope is probably one of the most problematic in the writing of history, insofar as, applying only to European conquests outside Europe, it favours essentialist sentiments by naturalizing a technical inequality in history. Ivan Van Sertima (1981) argues that there were nevertheless African nautical experiments predating those of the Portuguese. Herodotus teaches us that the first circumnavigation of Africa can be traced to Pharaoh Necho II (610 BCE to 595 BCE), around 2,000 years before the Portuguese endeavours. In short, it is the theme of 'discovery' in itself that carries an exteriority conducive to diffusionism and obliteration of the indigenous creative element.

Congolese (Democratic Republic of the Congo) author Jacques Depelchin (2005) presents two syndromes behind silence in history: the syndrome of discovery, which insinuates a tabula rasa, and that of the abolitions rendering

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victims' struggles invisible – a double theft of history. The 'colonial massacres' chronicled by Yves Benot (2001) in Madagascar, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Algeria, not to mention their epigones in Angola, Congo or Kenya, for example, along with the resistance of subordinated populations and their victories, however modest, are threatened with extinction in major narratives. Silences fill the interstices of periodization, spatial compartmentalization and disciplinary categories. They neutralize 'denials of experience', in the same vein as African and diasporic innovations that are untouchable within the framework of racial inequality, the indigenous call to colonize.

The notion of white noise,⁵ borrowed from science, can act as a metaphor for the idea that silences are accompanied by many other types of knowledge, produced to form a screen, like an omnipresent background hum to which we easily become accustomed. The recurring narrative of a problem Africa, with no significant history, functions as white noise, the frequency of which has annihilated the faculties of critical reaction. This schema would appear to be at work in a rearmament process, relativizing the imperialist and capitalist dominations so indebted to primitive accumulations outside of Europe. On this subject, M'Bokolo (1995) speaks of revisionism, to be distinguished from negationism, in relation to the historiographical minimization of the extent of the transatlantic slave trade (M'Bokolo, 1995, pp. 260-264).

One form of these occultations manifests itself in what Cheikh Anta Diop refers to as 'the falsification of history', when the evidence of a Black Egypt became unacceptable during the colonial period: 'With the help of imperialism, it was becoming increasingly "inadmissible" to continue to accept the hitherto obvious thesis of a negro Egypt' (Diop, 1954, p. 62). The researcher adjusts the narratives to the dominant ideology, but the theory can also withstand artificially neutralized evidence. Falsification saves the ideology of an empirical history where there is no guarantee of relationships of superiority.

White noise favours a 'whitening' of important historical episodes. The marginal place of African soldiers in the official memory of the Second World War contrasts with the real significance of their contributions, documented by the historian Eric Jennings (2014). This historical occultation recalls the military 'whitening' of the French 1st Army, as African soldiers who participated in the liberation were sent back to Africa in 1944. Some of the reasons behind

5 In science we use the term white noise to refer to a variety of hums, such as the crackles emitted by a TV without an antenna. These monotonous and repetitive noises tend to mask other sounds like an invisible screen. They are often conducive to falling asleep.