

GENERAL HISTORY OF AFRICA: Volume IX

Concept Note

Introduction: *General History of Africa (GHA)* – Volume IX: a new intellectual and scientific adventure

The establishment of the African Union (AU) and the initiation of the regional integration process have 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 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 for them to take control of their destiny.

The second phase of the GHA commences with a review of the content of the volumes of the collection to take into account important developments in scientific research since the completion of the GHA as well as socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental changes that have had an impact on Africa and the African diaspora since the 1990s.

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 connection, the initiatives taken by the Brazilian Government – in particular the adoption of a law on the obligatory teaching of African history 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 (AU) summit meeting held at Syrte, Libya, in 2009.

General guidelines

Without attempting to provide an exhaustive list, the main themes of Volume IX break down as follows:

- conduct a review of the concepts and necessary epistemological ruptures in the pan-African and global context. The necessary place for those concepts must be created throughout Volume IX by including an epistemological forum in each part of the Volume;
- use the most appropriate terms for certain issues, for example in the case of the slave trade, speak of captives and enslaved rather than use the word “slaves” and create neologisms when necessary;
- further encourage literary and artistic approaches in order to better understand certain aspects of African experiences and people of African descent;
- use concepts or notions in African languages that better reflect the complexity of the issues and allow us to “think in African”;
- produce comparative studies in relation to Latin America and Asia;

- compile references, at the international level, on Africa;
- propose a positive history of Africa and its diasporas, which departs from a historiography that limits their experiences to problems and difficulties, and reflect further on the concepts of identity, nation, power, civilization and barbarism as well as the notion of global African civilization.

Volume IX of the *General History of Africa* will take into account the diversity of expressions in which the diasporas express themselves through music, language, religion and so forth. The contributors would be invited to think about history differently and to invent another way of writing history, particularly by taking 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 historical contexts of the emergence of the concept of race should be analysed in order to understand how Africans and people of African descent refer to themselves. This also involves critical observation of the dynamics of the relationship between Africa and its diasporas, Global Africaness, movements back and forth and the ways in which Africa connects to the rest of the world.

Objectives of Volume IX

Preparation of Volume IX aims to meet the following objectives:

- updating the content of the volumes of the GHA in the light of recent developments in scientific research and political, socio-economic and ecological changes in Africa since the last volume in the series was published;
- mapping and analysing the various African diasporas, ancient and modern, and their various contributions to the construction of modern societies, and Africa's emancipation and development;
- identifying and analysing the new challenges facing Africa, including questions of African unity, pan-Africanism, regional integration, education and culture, youth, matters related to gender and gender equality, health and healthcare, cultural diversity, creativity, the arts, culture and development, intercultural dialogue in Africa, questions of peace and the environment, climate change, urbanization, scientific research and innovation, sustainable development, good governance, South-South cooperation, relations with the diaspora and so forth.

An epistemological rupture: Global Africa

This involves writing a serene history of Africans and people of African descent on a global scale. This is what is covered by the concept of Global Africa, in other words, taking into account the main dimensions of Africaness worldwide, from the initial expansion of humans from the African continent to the successive diasporas over time right up to the present day. The concept would allow us to overcome the customary dichotomies and divisions between Africa and the African diasporas, enabling us to understand the African diasporas, in the long term and in their diversity, to reassess the approach to the period of slavery, to study the relationship between pan-Africanism and the diasporas, and the enhancement of pan-Africanist thinking nurtured by contributions from different diasporic experiences. It would also allow 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 the 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) 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. 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, in sum, 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, by affording an opportunity to recount an innovative history from within and with a different outlook on the world, would make 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.

Theme and structure of Volume IX

Volume IX, which is being developed in the continuity of the already published GHA collection (Volumes I – VIII), will comprise three parts:

Book 1 will focus on the update of the GHA and theories on the origins of humanity and the first human civilizations.

Book 2 will explore the manifold aspects of Global Africa and its different manifestations through the diasporas in the world.

Book 3 will examine contemporary Global Africa, opportunities and new challenges.

Each of the books will be subdivided into three or four parts. It has therefore been decided not to dedicate one book to the decolonization of concepts and the epistemological ruptures but to include in each of them an epistemological forum to discuss the ruptures to be introduced in the analysis of the issues. The main themes to be addressed in each of the books break down as follows:

Book 1 will include three sections:

1. The epistemological forum;
2. The review of the content of the GHA volumes;
3. “Early Africa” with the updated theories on the origins of humanity and the emergence of the first civilizations in the light of recent developments in paleontological and archaeological research.

The main lines of Book 1 Volume IX would include:

- The origins of humanity.
- Archaeology and anthropology of African peoples
- Populating of the continent
- The environmental dimension
- Development and transfer of technologies
- Knowledge systems of African origin
- Bio-anthropological contributions
- Emergence and evolution of ancient African cultures

Book 2 will include four sections:

1. The epistemological forum;

2. The characterization of Global Africa and mapping of African diasporas;
3. Past and present resistance;
4. The contributions of the diasporas to the construction of the modern world.

The main lines of Book 2 of Volume IX would include:

The relationship with indigenous groups on the other continents
 The various departure waves from Africa and diasporization
 Mapping Africa's presence throughout the world
 The various movements to return to Africa
 Africa in the imagination of the diasporas (Africa as a reference)
 The concept of gender and the role of women
 African contributions to modern societies in various areas (knowledge, know-how, spirituality, thoughts, politics, culture, society, symbolic representations etc.)
 Resistance and its implications
 The Haitian Revolution and its global impact
 Problems of discrimination and racism
 The arts, languages, orality and writing
 Religious syncretism and institutions of African origin
 Youth and innovations

Book 3 will include three sections:

1. The epistemological forum;
2. The new challenges of "Global Africa";
3. Africa's place in the contemporary world.

The main lines of Book 3 of Volume IX would include:

New international relations and the place of Africa
 New solidarity between Africa, South America, the Caribbean and the countries of the Indian Ocean
 Heritage: change and continuity in culture
 New strategies for the control of Africa's resources (land, strategic minerals, etc.)
 Post-racial approaches and the redefinition of resistance
 The issues of reconciliation and reparation
 Contemporary artistic creations of Global Africa and the challenges of the marketplace
 Pan-Africanism of the twenty-first century and its challenges
 The issue of freedom of expression and space for the opinions of Global Africa
 Religious fundamentalism in Africa and the place of African religions
 Appreciation of African knowledge, know-how and world views
 Construction of new development models based on African values and visions
 Construction of new models of governance and exercise of power based on African experiences
 African philosophies and cosmogonies and their operational level in the constructions of alternatives in Africa and the world
 Urbanization of Africa and its challenges
 African futures

The editorial teams

The editorial teams have been established as follows:

Book 1

Section I – epistemological forum coordinated by Martial Zé Bélinga and Olabiyi B. Joseph Yaï.

Section II – review of the content of the GHA volumes coordinated by Doulaye Konaté.

Section III – update of the first eight volumes of the GHA coordinated by Augustin Holl, also general coordinator of Book 1.

Book 2

Section I – epistemological forum coordinated by Paul Lovejoy.

Section II – characterization and mapping of African diasporas coordinated by Elikia M'Bokolo.

Section III – past and present resistance coordinated by Vanicléia Silva Santos.

Section IV – contributions of the African diasporas to the construction of the modern world coordinated by Sheila Walker, also general coordinator of Book 2.

Book 3

Section I – epistemological forum coordinated by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch.

Section II – new challenges of “Global Africa” coordinated by Hilary Beckles, also general coordinator of Book 3.

Section III – Africa’s place in the contemporary world coordinated by Tayeb Chenntouf.

Conclusion

The project is ambitious, original and inspiring. It aims to develop a new way of writing history, taking into account current debate on social and human sciences, epistemological ruptures and reconceptualizations. It is a fantastic challenge to be undertaking.