

Book Review**The Arabs and Africa***Khair El-Din Haseeb (Ed.)**London: Croom Helm and Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1985. 717 p.*

Since the beginning of decolonization in Africa in the late 1950's Arab countries have found it necessary to re-establish links with Africa south of the Sahara. An Arab leader like Gamal Abdel Nasser argued in his *Philosophy of the Revolution* (1954) that Africa constitutes the second circle in Egypt's three concentric circles of identity. The other two were the Arab and the Islamic. Nasser's preoccupation with what he and his fellow Arab nationalists called the "Israeli menace", was another factor which drove him to seek allies and friends in Africa. But Nasser was not the first Arab leader to establish close relations with the Africans. The Magrebiens and the Arabians to the east also forged links with Africa in the years before the primacy of Europe in African political life.

The book under review is one of a series of studies that have come out in the last decade. What distinguishes this work from those before it is its focus and its authors. In the early 1970's when the Afro-Arab caravan began to move rapidly along the pathways of international politics, many Western and Third World intellectuals and scholars began to examine the nature of what was then believed by many as a new phenomenon in international politics. Africa and the Middle Eastern states coexisted in the Bandung Movement; they journeyed together to the United Nations General Assembly, but up until the mid-1970's closer bonds, which resulted in the greater coordination of policies on major international issues, did not develop. In fact prior to the 1973 massive defection of African states from the Israeli camp, most of the independent African states were locked in diplomatic and political embrace with the Jewish state. Indeed, Africa was unique in the sense that it was the only part of the Afro-Asian world where the Israelis received warm welcome. Israeli leaders tried hard to win friends and influence people in Asia but without success. It is indeed against this background that the present book can be adequately reviewed.

The work consists of the proceedings of a major conference held in Amman, Jordan on 24-29 April, 1983. Organized by the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, it brought together some sixty participants. Though the conference itself was conducted in Arabic, many of the participants suggested that the proceedings be published in English and French. This book is the English version of what transpired in Amman. The work tries to capture the various points of view expressed at the meeting as well as the spirit that animated the individual participants. The introduction written by Samir R. Boutros treats us to twenty-three pages of summary and analysis.

In looking into the contents of this book, seven points strike the attention of the reviewer. First of all, unlike the previous studies done by Western and non-Western scholars, this book seeks to cover the entire gamut of Afro-Arab relations. Whereas Anthony Sylvester, Victor Levine and Timothy Luke, Dunston Wai, Andre Simmons and others organized their texts around certain political and economic issues, which in their views, captured the spirit of Afro-Arab relations, the organizers of this conference and the editor of the volume resulting from it, seemed to have been concerned about identifying all the factors likely to affect Afro-Arab relations in the coming years. As a result of this concern, the papers presented took a good look at the political, diplomatic, cultural, technological and economic manifestations and consequences of Afro-Arab relations.

Secondly, the authors of these papers agree on the need for continued relationship between the Africans and the Arabs, but in their analysis and discussions one notices some significant differences. For example, some of the Arab writers seem to take an uninformed and patronising view of Afro-Arab cultural relations. This view was challenged by some of the participants and the application of corrective lenses by scholars like Ahmad I. Salim is certainly useful in that context. Afro-Arab relations cannot be a one-way traffic. For it to succeed culturally, Africans and Arabs must not only use Islam but must go beyond the religious horizons. Although Islam is an important factor in this modern dialogue, one must also realize that Africa is a continent of religious and political diversity.

The third point that emerges from this study is the preoccupation of the authors with the Zionist presence in Africa. Almost all the authors have dismissed the Israeli factor as a negative element in the quest for Afro-Arab friendship and have linked Israel to Western imperialism and to the apartheid system in South Africa.

The fourth point that comes out of these papers is that Afro-Arab relations are hampered by the preponderance of Western cultural influence in both the Arab and African worlds. Many contributors argue that the road to greater cooperation between these two peoples who have a common historical experience lies in the effort to wiggle out of the Western cultural web. The sooner

this is done the better. Dependency on the Western media, argues one paper, is the reason for the lack of sophisticated appreciation of the African liberation struggle.

The fifth point that strikes this reviewer is the authors' concern for more systematic and organized cooperation between the two peoples. Working on the assumption that these two regions are natural allies, the authors assert that meaningful cooperation between the two cannot take place as long as dependency is the order of the day in the area. In fact, one of the most curious analysis I have come across in years is the contention of Helmy Sharawi that the oil price increase was a Western trick designed to strengthen the dollar and that Arab aid was a conspiracy against the Africans. Of course the author does not mean to antagonize the Africans. Rather, he wishes to demonstrate that the process of radicalization in both the Arab and African worlds was undermined by the U.S. through its successful manipulation of the Arab oil-producing states. In other words, the sudden affluence in the conservative Arab oil-producing states changed the political climate in both the African and Arab world and consequently the politics of conservatism displaced the politics of militancy and radicalism.

The sixth point relates to the prescriptive nature of many of the studies. In almost all the papers one sees scholars formulating policies for the Arab leaders. This aspect of the book certainly distinguishes it from all the other studies we have seen in the past decade. The final point that strikes this reviewer about this work is the exercise in futuristic analysis. Towards the end of the book each of the participants of the conference takes a closer look at his crystal ball and forecasts what the future holds for this new Afro-Arab movement. The authors seem to be optimistic, but it must also be added that theirs is a guarded optimism, for it is very clear to them that the road to the future is paved with uncertainties and suspicions.

In conclusion, I would say that this is a major contribution to the study of Afro-Arab relations. It is the product of some of the best Arab minds in the field of social science. Many are familiar with Africa. Even those whose knowledge of African realities is cloudy make some contributions.

Sulayman S. Nyang, Ph.D.  
African Studies Center  
Howard University