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EDITORIAL

We are glad to announce a new associate editor that will join us starting with the current issue. His name is Mostafa Abdelaal, Assistant Professor (Lecturer) at the Department of History, Faculty of African Postgraduate Studies, Cairo University. Mostafa obtained his PhD from the Faculty of History at Cambridge University. He is currently working on turning his PhD dissertation into a book that investigates the roles of State, Resources and Modern Manufacturing in Zambia from 1924 to 1992. He recently published a book in Arabic titled *Colonial Exploitation and Economics of Rubber in the Congo Free State, 1885-1908*. Mostafa's research interest is on the economic history of Africa, economic aspects of Afro-Arab history, and the questions of industrialisation and economic development.

His contribution will help the journal in bridging the gap between Northern Africa and Southern Africa both in terms of themes covered and in terms of authorship. Too often, we observe a divide between the northern part of the continent and its southern part, as if the Sahara were not only a geographical element of separation but an intellectual one as well. In the following few pages, Dr Abdelaal will share with us some reflections on the historiographical debates surrounding this topic and how this journal can contribute towards dismantling this historical divide.

The question of dividing the break between North and Sub-Saharan Africa has remained unattended from any weighted interventions from Africanists. This silence could be attributed to the domination of Eurocentric approaches to studying Africa, colonial legacies, the rising of nationalism in post-colonial Africa, including the emergence of the often-competing Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism, and the recent controversial debates

on Afrocentricity and the origins of Egyptian civilisation. Therefore, the historiography of North and Sub-Saharan Africa has been written in separate contexts causing serious challenges to reconstruct a common identification of the African peoples as one, regardless of their geographical origin.

Revisiting African history is one of the main pillars that would help scholars deconstruct many of the stereotypes that have mainly subliminally led to producing distorted images of the linkages among African peoples. So, to deal with this issue, essential questions should be considered here, like: on what standards do scholars divide between North and Sub-Saharan Africa? Why look at the Great Sahara as the main chasm between North and South and neglect the trans-Saharan links among the peoples of the continent? Also, why do Africanists usually overlook the proximity and geographical linkages between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa? For instance, the Nile Valley and the Eastern Part of Africa are historically linked, and their histories are intertwined. And why do scholars usually identify North African people as Arabs? Is Arab a race or a culture? And why have the peoples of the African continent turned from a common struggle against colonialism into igniting controversies over racial relations? Further, how far did focusing on racial issues contribute to dividing the intercultural nature of African history and neglecting its diversity?

Eurocentric views of world history could be defined as the main culprit in inventing Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East.¹ Samir Amin, a renowned African economist, has interpreted the domination of the West as responsible for the ideological deformations and changing of the course of history.² Even more critical are Edward W Said, Valentine-Yves Mudimbe, and Ali Mazrui, who, in their works, challenged Western consciousness and the imaginative ideas of the high cultural standards of Western humanism.³ Said's *magnum opus* Orientalism was mainly influenced by his PhD research on Central Africa and Joseph Conrad.⁴ Mudimbe's influential work has had a major impact on postcolonial studies. In criticising centric ideas, Mudimbe's deftly concluded that, "Nobody is at the centre of human experience, and

1 L Keita, "Eurocentrism and the contemporary Social Sciences", *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 45 (2), 2020, pp. 17–38; E Shohat and R Stam, *Unthinking eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 249-255.

2 S Amin, *Eurocentrism: Modernity religion and democracy: A critique of eurocentrism and culturalism*, 2nd edition (Nairobi: Pambazuka, 2011), pp. 255-258.

3 AA Mazrui, "The re-invention of Africa: Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, and beyond", *Research in African Literatures* 36 (3), 2005, pp. 68-82.

4 E Said, *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 199 and 215-216; A Hussein, *Edward Said: Criticism and society* (New York: Verso, 2004), pp. 19-28.

there is no human who could be defined as the centre of creation”.⁵ Mazrui strongly engaged in criticising the arguments about whether the Sahara is a link or a barrier between Northern and Southern Africa, and he argued that, “continental Pan-Africanism asserts that the Sahara is a sea of communication rather than a chasm of separation”.⁶ Mazrui called for the fact that writing the history of the African continent never ends by the southern extremity of the Sahara nor on the western shore of the Red Sea.⁷ Eurocentric approaches paved the way to academic fields in which *African Studies* are confined to the Sub-Saharan Africa and do not apply to North African countries or peoples to be considered as Africans.⁸ Molefi Kete Asante and Maulana Karenga tried to settle these debates by introducing *Africana Studies* in the early 2000s to study black peoples who originally descended or immigrated from Sub-Saharan Africa.⁹

Colonial legacies also played a significant role in introducing even more separation in the African continent. There is ample evidence to support this argument. For example, Sudan before 2011 was characterised by the presence of Arab Muslims in the north and African Christians in the South, which colonialism artificially kept separated; the same happened between Northern and Southern Nigeria; Even the bitter conflict between what Mazrui described as *Swahilized Arabs and Arabized Waswahili* in Tanzania in the early 1960s can be read as a byproduct of colonial intervention.¹⁰ Many scholars confront the colonial legacy of divide-and-rule, which led to a separation of Northern and Southern Africa. For instance, the prominent Malawian historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza argued that, “The correlation of Africa with ‘sub-Saharan’ Africa is based on a racist construct intended to divorce North Africa from the mainstream of African history”.¹¹ Other examples include Mahmood Mamdani’s voluminous writings on the questions of African

5 VY Mudimbe, *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 204.

6 AA Mazrui, “Afrabia: Africa and the Arabs in the new world order”, *Ufahamu: Journal of the African Activist Association* 20 (3), 1992, p. 61.

7 Mazrui, “Afrabia”, pp. 61-62.

8 Z Bentahar, “Continental drift: The disjunction of North and Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Research in African Literatures* 42 (1), 2011, pp. 1-13.

9 MK Asante and M Karenga (eds.), *Handbook of Black Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), pp. ix-xi; A Mazama, “Interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or unidisciplinary? Africana Studies and the vexing question of definition”. In: Asante and Karenga (eds.), *Handbook of Black Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), pp. 3-13.

10 Mazrui, “Afrabia”, p. 51.

11 PT Zeleza, *A modern economic history of Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational, 1993), p. 2.

identity, citizenship, race, and the shaping of permeant minorities in Africa¹² and Ralph Austen's contribution to the history of Trans-Saharan Africa within global history and how the desert developed from natural barriers to a "global highway".¹³

More studies have investigated African identity in specific regions or countries of the continent, like, for instance, the works of Elsayed Flefil, a prominent intellectual historian of African history. In his book *Misir El-Afriqiyah* (The African Egypt), he argued that the Africanity of Egyptians is unquestionable. However, the lack of in-depth historical investigation overshadowed the fact that Egyptians were never colonisers of Sudan. Rather, the Turkish invasion of Egypt is classified as an imperialist conquest of North Africa. Further imperialist invasions continued with the ambition of Muhammad Ali's family towards the upstream Nile.¹⁴ In parallel with what Flefil has argued, Mostafa Menawi deftly traces the expansions of the Ottoman Empire into Africa and the Arab world, seeing neglected aspects of Istanbul's involvement in the colonial partitioning of the African continent.¹⁵ Prominent scholars engaged with studying the Saharan frontiers in Northwest Africa and the relation between the Maghreb and West Africa. Ann McDougall expanded her research from studying trans-Saharan trade and Saharan-Sahelien in the regions of Mali and Mauritania to developing a programme of Middle East and African Studies at Alberta University.¹⁶ These invaluable contributions have developed our thoughts on the significance of bridging the histories of North and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, many African and Middle East Research centres are still following the traditional context in doing research on Africa.

The rising of Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism and their overall alliance against colonialism and neo-colonialism represents a romantic era between Arab and African countries in confronting the imperialists in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷ However, this has not last for a long time until racial and religious-

12 For Mamdani's main contributions, see: M Mamdani, *Define and rule: Native as political identity* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013); M Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018); M Mamdani, *Neither settler nor native: The making and unmaking of permanent minorities* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021).

13 R Austen, *Trans-Saharan Africa in world history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-22.

14 E Flefil, *Misir El-Afriqiyah* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 2020), pp. 1-13.

15 M Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. 61-78.

16 A McDougall, "The Sahara reconsidered: Pastoralism, politics and salt from the ninth through the twelfth centuries", *African Economic History* 12, 1983, pp. 263-286.

17 Recently, many studies have flourished which bridge the gap between Arab and African worlds and challenge the traditional approaches of Africanist historiography. Prominent scholars and researchers in this field include Reem Abou-El-Fadl, Chanfi Ahmed, Eric

related conflicts re-emerged in Africa. These recall the old stereotypes of identifying Africa as the continent of only black peoples or seeing Arabs as invaders or colonisers of different regions of Africa. Since the definition of Arabs as a race was one of the misleading contexts in the literature during colonialism, many studies have overlooked the intercultural aspect between Arabs and Africans and confined their studies to what was, and maybe still is, a racial conflict.¹⁸ A recent, strikingly apparent example is the confrontation between Egyptian and Afrocentric approaches over the heritage of the figure of Cleopatra and the whole Ancient Egyptian civilisation.

The recent controversial debates between the Egyptian media and Afrocentric intellectuals over the origins of Egyptian civilisation have raised many voices from research centres to social media, encouraging Africanists to fill this gap in the literature on the questions of the African identity of contemporary North Africa in general and Egypt in particular. The obvious limits of the Afrocentric approach when dealing with such a case are following the same patterns of Eurocentricity in cancelling the otherness and taking the colour of the skin as the main standard for judging the Africanity of Egypt.¹⁹ Molefi Asante has made an even more provocative claim that Cleopatra was black and that the Greeks stole Egypt's heritage. Such a claim ignited a wave of criticism of the diversity of Egypt. Instead of calling for objectivity in dealing with such issues, Netflix's series "Queen Cleopatra" went viral, leading to more ruptures among scholars. This justifies the need to revisit African history and avoid any interventions that divide the multicultural nature and the diversity of the continent and the peoples that inhabit it. Not all academic institutions that are interested in African history consider North Africa in their research and teaching agenda. However, many have recently called for the decolonisation of knowledge and bridging the gap between North and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Burton, Fahad Bishara, Zeyad el Nabolsy, Amal Ghazal, Matteo Grilli, Sara Salem and Alden Young.

- 18 To explain the consequences of labelling Arabs and Middle Eastern people as races, not cultures, one can analyse how the immigration office of the United States applied these definitions. This caused anxiety and conflict of identities for many immigrants from North Africa in identifying themselves as white Arabs or Middle Eastern while filling up applications about their information. In 1978, one of the Egyptian immigrants to the United States, Mostafa Hefny (black Egyptian), was admitted to enter the United States by being classified as a white man from the Middle East. See: M Hefny, *I Am Not a White Man but the US Government Is Forcing Me to Be One* (Africa World Press, 2019).
- 19 Hisham Aidi offers a more judicious analysis for this case, see: H Aidi, "Egypt and the Afrocentrists: The latest round", *Africa is A Country*, <https://africasacountry.com/2022/03/egypt-and-the-afrocentrists-the-latest-round>, accessed 26 June 2023.

The *Southern Journal for Contemporary History* can definitely contribute to the inclusion of these voices who call for decolonising knowledge production, and rewriting African history.²⁰ Many of South Africa's academic institutions, influenced by young African students, have played a vital role in the demand for fundamental transformation towards dismantling institutional cultures and decolonising the curriculums.²¹ Encouraging scholars to publish in African-based institutions would contribute to producing knowledge apart from Western authorship.²² Linking the above-mentioned themes with the current influences of South African academic institutions would definitely offer new perspectives in writing African history.

In the current issue, four out of five papers deal with Zimbabwe's contemporary history. All of these four contributions pertain in some ways to economic history. Tawanda Chambwe deals with the African business association movement in colonial Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia/Rhodesia), examining how African traders contested colonial restrictions to business, often mirroring the contemporary African nationalist movement in the country. Jabulani Garwi uses the example of ARDA Rusitu Small Scale Dairy Settlement Scheme in Zimbabwe to examine the nature and development of smallholder contract farming projects in post-colonial Zimbabwe between 1985 and 1997. James Hlongwana also works on Zimbabwe, but his article deals instead with cross-border farming, a practice which has been adopted by the Ndau communities of South-eastern Zimbabwe. As explained by Hlongwana, after the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in 2000, some of the Ndau communities from Zimbabwe have resorted to a cross-border search for land in neighbouring Mozambique. Aaron Rwodzi and Terence Muzorewa examine the issue of land resettlement and elite monopoly in peri-urban Harare in the last two decades, examining how the so-called "third chimurenga" was characterised by stratification, which alienated the poor and the marginalised in Harare from accessing prime peri-urban land to the advantage of ZANU-PF veterans supporters. In the last paper of the issue, the only one not about Zimbabwe, Unaludo Sechele offers the reader an analysis of the relations between Botswana and South Africa during the apartheid period. As explained by Sechele, Botswana was caught in a balancing act between its economic relations with both hegemonic South Africa and fellow independent African states.

20 N Roos, "Notes from the University of the Free State", *History in Africa* 49, 2022, pp. 361-366.

21 S Heleta, "Decolonizing knowledge in South Africa: Dismantling the 'pedagogy of big lies'", *Ufahamu: Journal of the African Studies* 40 (2), 2018, p. 61.

22 JD Jansen (ed.), "On the Politics of decolonisation: Knowledge, authority and the settled curriculum". In: *Decolonisation in universities: The politics of knowledge* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2022), pp. 50-53.