

Distinguished Lecture Series

AFRABIA
From Arabo-Hebraic Divergence
to Afro-Arab Convergence

Ali A. Mazrui



THE ACADEMIA BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINAE (ABA)

The greatness of the Ancient Library resided as much in the remarkable community of scholars that it had helped create as in the vast collection of manuscripts it assembled. They represented the best in the World of their time. So, to recapture the spirit of the ancient Museum, we have established the ABA and its objectives include:

- The promotion of excellence in science and the arts;
- Helping build international goodwill, primarily through collaborations between scientists, scholars and artists;
- Spreading the values of science, and the culture of science in Egypt and the region;
- Fostering openness to the cultures of others, through inter-cultural dialogue;
- Encouraging tolerance, rationality and dialogue.

To achieve these objectives, the ABA will, through its membership and secretariat, create and maintain an international network of dedicated scientists, artists and scholars, and will:

- Organize lectures, conferences and exhibitions;
- Organize expert panels around certain themes of general interest;
- Publish reports and proceedings;
- Encourage cross-disciplinary studies and collaborations;
- Suggest improvements in curricula for science, mathematics and the arts; and
- Assist in the identification of young talent.



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Divergence to
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*Lecture delivered by Ali A. Mazrui
at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina
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INTRODUCTION

An Amazing Legacy

The very name of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina conjures up the image of a glorious past, of a shared heritage for all of humanity. For it was indeed at the Ancient Library of Alexandria that the greatest adventure of the human intellect was to unfold. Launched in 288 BCE by Ptolemy I (Soter) under the guidance of Demetrius of Phaleron, the temple to the muses, or *Mouseion* (in Greek), or *Museum* (in Latin) was part academy, part research center, and part library. The great thinkers of the age, scientists, mathematicians, poets from all civilizations came to study and exchange ideas.

They and many others were all members of that amazing community of scholars, which mapped the heavens, organized the calendar, established the foundations of science and pushed the boundaries of our knowledge. They opened up the cultures of the world, established a true dialogue of civilizations. For over six centuries the Ancient Library of Alexandria epitomized the zenith of learning. The Library completely disappeared over 1600 years ago... but it continues to inspire scientists and scholars everywhere. To this day, it

symbolizes the noblest aspirations of the human mind, global ecumenism, and the greatest achievements of the intellect.

The Rebirth of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Sixteen-hundred years later, under the auspices of HE President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, and with the continuous untiring support of HE Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, it comes to life again. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the New Library of Alexandria, is dedicated to recapture the spirit of the original. It aspires to be:

- The world's window on Egypt;
- Egypt's window on the world;
- A leading institution of the digital age; and, above all
- A center for learning, tolerance, dialogue and understanding.

To fulfill that role, the new complex is much more than a Library. It contains:

- A library that can hold millions of books;
- A center for the Internet and its archive;
- Six specialized libraries for (i) audio-visual materials, (ii) the blind and visually impaired, (iii) children, (iv) the young, (v) microforms, and (vi) rare books and special collections;

- Four museums for (i) Antiquities, (ii) Manuscripts, (iii) Sadat, and (iv) the History of Science;
- A Planetarium;
- An ALEXploratorium for children's exposure to science;
- The Culturama;
- VISTA (Virtual Immersive Science and Technology Applications);
- Nine permanent exhibitions covering (i) Impressions of Alexandria: The Awad Collection, (ii) The World of Shadi Abdel Salam, (iii) Arabic Calligraphy, (iv) The History of Printing, (v) The Artist's Book, (vi) Arab-Muslim Medieval Instruments of Astronomy and Science, (vii) Mohie El Din Hussein: A Creative Journey, (viii) Abdel Salam Eid, and (ix) Raaya El-Nimr and Abdel-Ghani Abou El-Enein;
- Four art galleries for temporary exhibitions;
- A Conference Center for thousands of persons;
- Eight academic research centers: (i) Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center (Alex-Med), (ii) Arts Center, (iii) Calligraphy Center, (iv) Center for Special Studies and Programs (CSSP), (v) Center for the Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (located in Cairo), (vi) International School of Information Science (ISIS), (vii) Manuscript Center, (viii) Alexandria Center for Hellenistic Studies; and

- A forum for dialogue and discussion.

Today, this vast complex is a reality, receiving more than one million visitors a year, and holding hundreds of cultural events every year.

The Academia Bibliotheca Alexandrinae (ABA)

The greatness of the Ancient Library resided as much in the remarkable community of scholars that it had helped create as in the vast collection of Manuscripts it assembled. They represented the best in the World of their time.

Today, to recapture the spirit of the Ancient Museum, we have established the Academia Bibliotheca Alexandrinae (ABA), to include 100 of the greatest minds of the contemporary world. Today, with the magic of the Information and Communication evolution, these eminent men and women can and do reside and work in all parts of the world. The ABA is a “virtual organization” with a small secretariat established in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt. The Director of the BA functions as the secretary to the ABA. The ABA will create and maintain an international network of scientists, artists and scholars dedicated to:

- The promotion of excellence in science and the arts;
- Helping build international goodwill, primarily through collaborations between scientists, scholars and artists;

- Spreading the values of science, and the culture of science in Egypt and the region;
- Fostering openness to the other, through inter-cultural dialogue; and
- Encouraging tolerance, rationality and dialogue.

Beyond the virtual network, a special event of the ABA shall be organized tri-annually. Between the proposed meetings every few years, many activities sponsored by the ABA will take place. Indeed, individual members come and visit the New Library at different times and they and their guests, deliver lectures here.

The Distinguished Lecture Series

In the spirit of spreading the goals and values that the ABA espouses, and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina's commitment to its mission, it was considered appropriate that the Distinguished Lecture Series should be developed to record and make available, in an affordable format, some of the distinguished lectures delivered at the BA by members of the Academy or their distinguished guests. Thus was the Distinguished Lecture Series born.

There is no specific frequency for the issuing of these publications of the occasional lectures. We would expect no

less than three such published lectures to appear every year, and sometimes there will be substantially more. The Series is driven by content and quality, not by timing.

In terms of coverage, in keeping with the scope of the Ancient Library and the interests of the New BA and its Academy (the ABA), the Distinguished Lecture Series includes science, the arts, politics, and every aspect of the human condition. The only requirement is the rigor of the presentation and the distinction of the lecturer. It is as broad as the human imagination, as varied as the fields of knowledge whose mosaic creates the universal human experience, and as engaging as the talents of the distinguished speakers who bring to life the different topics of their choice. Each lecture stands on its own. It can be appreciated as an experience in its own right. It does not have to be read in relation to any of the others.

It is our hope that by publishing this series, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is allowing many more individuals to share in the benefits of the lectures, beyond those who have attended the actual event. It safeguards the material for posterity and invites those who are so inclined to view the actual video record of the lecture, which is safeguarded in the Library's multi-media section.

To make the publication more suited for the reader, a special introduction has been included which explains the work of the individual concerned and positions the lecture in relation to that body of work. Each publication also includes a bibliography of selected works and a short biography of the lecturer.

Ismail Serageldin
Librarian of Alexandria
Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina
Secretary of the Academia Bibliotheca Alexandrinae

FOREWORD

Ali Mazrui is a cultural giant who does not only display a wide interest and knowledge regarding his fatherland Kenya but his numerous researches and books bear witness to his involvement in African politics, international political culture, political Islam and North-South relations. Befitting two goals of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, being Egypt's window on the world and the world's window on Egypt, Ali Mazrui's visit to the Center for learning dialogue and understanding was both informative and enlightening.

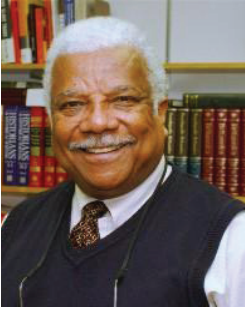
Ali Mazrui is a relentless defender of Muslims and their civil rights in the United States, and in the West in general, and is also one of the staunch supporters of the Palestinian cause. From his perspective, the occupation of Palestine must end if terrorism was to end at all. In 2002, he co-authored an article "Is Israel a Threat to American Democracy?" Mazrui points out that terrorism in the world stems from injustice such as that inflicted upon the Palestinians: "Israeli militarism occupation of Arab lands and repression of Palestinians are the main causes of not only anti-Israeli terrorism but also anti-American terrorism. No issue in the world since apartheid in South Africa has caused greater international rage than Israeli repression of Palestinians."

Mazrui is the creator of the much acclaimed and widely discussed television series *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. A book by the same title was jointly published by the BBC Publications and Little Brown and Company. Both his book and television series were instrumental in prompting the West to view Africa through a new perspective, an attempt on Mazrui's part to alter the negative discourse created about Africa for centuries, one that informed the West's views of this continent.

In his lecture, Mazrui shares with his audience the outcome of his very insightful in-depth research of how the Jews merged over the centuries with Europe and how the Arabs over the centuries gradually merged with Africa. He traces the Europeanization of the Jews historically and then plumbs deep in African-Arab relations both historically and geographically. He mentions several similarities between Africans and Arabs that serve to unify rather than separate them, such as the prevalence of Islam, "As we have observed there are more Muslims in Nigeria than there are Muslims in any Arab country". Mazrui sees the Sahara Desert as "a sea of communication rather than a chasm of separation". He also sees the merging between the Arab world and Africa as inevitable and as the natural outcome of the progressive

“historic march towards merging their historic destiny of integration”.

The fabled Library of Alexandria, often described as the world’s first major site of learning housed the world’s greatest thinkers and scientists. Its heir, the New Library of Alexandria, has resumed its role as a beacon of knowledge in the Mediterranean and as a forum for dialogue and discussion. Certainly, Professor Mazrui has made his own individualistic contribution as a true polymath to this establishment that aims at forging a new outlook. African Arabian merging, began years and years ago, was launched by many leaders of whom late Gamal Abdel Nasser, was one. The unity between Africa and the Arab world is only the first step in a long way towards Universal unity and peace, which constitute a dream for many.



AFRABIA: FROM ARABO-HEBRAIC DIVERGENCE TO AFRO-ARAB CONVERGENCE

This presentation is a work in progress. It addresses the great Semitic divergence. On one side it addresses how the Jews over the centuries gradually merged with Europe and the West, and on the other side, how the Arabs over the centuries gradually merged with Africa.

The great Semitic divergence is the relentless Europeanization of the Jews simultaneously with the partial Africanization of the Arabs.

This lecture appropriately took place so close to *Eid el-Adha*. For Muslims, the *Kaaba* symbolizes in part the legacy of Abraham (Ibrahim). At least for some Muslims the sacrifices of the lamb during the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) partly celebrate Ibrahim's readiness to sacrifice his son, and the permission he received from God at the last minute to sacrifice a lamb instead.

This story is shared between the Qur'an and the Bible and in relation to the two sons of Abraham, Isaac (Ishaq) and Ishmael (Ismail). Some regard Isaac as the ancestor of all modern Jews, and Ishmael as the grandfather of all modern Arabs. The Bible is more emphatic that Ismail's mother was Egyptian.

There is a new term which has gained currency in recent decades, and the term is "the Abrahamic Religions". This vocabulary recognizes Abraham as a founding father of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

However, is there a revival of an older term, but with a revised meaning? Are there Abrahamic peoples, as well as Abrahamic religions? While Abrahamic religions are inter-related faiths, Abrahamic peoples belong to inter-related languages. These are the Semitic peoples, with special reference to the Arabs and the Jews.

While this particular lecture will pay more attention to the Afro-Arab convergence than to the Euro-Jewish convergence, we must at least indicate an outline of the Europeanization of the Jews.

The dispersal of the Hebrews among the Gentiles began with the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE.

Cyrus the Great, of Persia, is credited with having liberated the Jews, when he conquered Babylon. In 538 BCE, Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to ancient Israel, but many dispersed Jews decided to remain in exile.

This is where the city of Alexandria comes into play. In the first century BCE, 40 percent of the population of Alexandria was Jewish. The Jews of Alexandria were regarded as culturally and intellectually the most scintillating and innovative part of the Diaspora in early Jewish history.

In those days, Alexandria was more part of Europe than it was part of either the Arab or Muslim worlds. Indeed, Islam as the religion of the Prophet Muhammad had yet to be born. It was also centuries before the Arab conquest of Egypt. It might, therefore, be said that the Europeanization of the Jews began in Alexandria before the Christian era.

By the first century of the Christian era, the Jews in the Diaspora already outnumbered those still resident in Israel. Up to five million Jews already lived outside Palestine, four-quarters existed in the Roman Empire, including Alexandria.

The major centers of Jewish presence from then on alternated and shifted between Babylonia, Persia, Byzantium and then more clearly European centers of Spain, France, Russia, Germany, Poland, and eventually the United States of America.

The worst rebellion against the Jewish presence in Europe occurred in Germany in the twentieth century, as well as in other countries dominated by the Nazis during World War II.

Paradoxically, this Jewish Holocaust had two ironic long-term consequences. On one side, the Nazi Holocaust gave greater support and sympathy to the Zionist movement which was committed to the mission of reversing the Diaspora formation through the creation of a new Jewish State in Palestine.

On the other hand, the Jews who remained in the Diaspora became more powerful after the Holocaust than they ever were before the Nazis.

By the end of the twentieth century, out of 15 million to 16 million Jews in the whole world, less than one quarter were in Israel, 40 percent were in the United States and most of the remaining Jews were in Russia and other European countries. The Europeanization of world Jewry had become basically the Westernization of the Jews presence in the world.

The integration of the Jews into Western society resulted in massive Jewish penetration into the citadels of power, especially in the United States. Although Jews are less than 3 percent of the population of the United States, they sometimes constitute a tenth of the United States' Senate. They have

disproportionate power in the economy, in the academy, and in such major institutions of opinion-formation as the *New York Times* and the electronic media. This particular branch of the legacy of Abraham (the descendants of Isaac) had substantially fulfilled the Biblical prophecy about Abraham, “And your offspring shall possess the gates of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”¹

Arabs can be fully assimilated into Western society provided they are Christian and fair-skinned. Arab-Americans who have been elected to the US House of Representatives include Nick Joe Rahall II (West Virginia), Darrell Issa (California) and Ray LaHood (Illinois). John E. Sununu, serving as a member of the US Senate, and John Baldacci as Governor of Maine. The most famous Arab-American is probably Ralph Nader, who ran as a serious third party presidential candidate in the US elections of 2000 and 2004.

While Jews have risen to senior membership of the US Cabinets as members of a minority religion in the country (Judaism), no Arab has risen to such American political prominence as a member of the minority religion of Islam.

Let us now turn to the other part of the great Semitic divergence, the Africanization of the Arabs. In reality there are

¹Genesis, 22.4, verse 15.

reciprocal forces at work. Across the centuries the Arab world has become Africanized demographically and territorially. The majority of the population of the Arab world is now in Africa, that is, demographic Africanization.

Secondly, the bulk of the territory under Arab control and settlement is now in Africa. There are more square miles or kilometers under Arab control in Africa than in the rest of the Arab world. This is the territorial Africanization of the Arab world.

While the Arab world is getting Africanized demographically and territorially, the African world is becoming Arabized culturally, as well as religiously. The Arab impact on Africa consists not only in the spread of Islam, but also in the emergence of new languages deeply influenced by the Arabic language, and the penetration of Arab ideas and concepts even in African languages of people who are not religiously Islamized.

While the Euro-Jewish convergence has been mainly about how the Jews politically penetrated the Western world while allowing themselves to be culturally westernized, the Afro-Arab convergence may involve a whole redefinition of geographical areas of the world. In the future, will it be possible to talk about the Arab world without talking more and more about

Africa? Will we talk much about Africa without talking about the Arabs?

By far the most ambitious idea floating in the new era of African-Arab relations is whether the whole of Africa and the whole of the Arab world are two regions in the process of merging into one. Out of this speculative discourse has emerged the concept of “Afrabia”.

Three tendencies have stimulated new thinking about African-Arab relations. One tendency is basically negative but potentially unifying: the war on terrorism. The new international terrorism may have its roots in injustices perpetrated against such Arab people as Palestinians and Iraqis, but the primary theater of contestation is blurring the distinction between the Middle East and the African continent.¹ In order to kill 12 Americans in Nairobi in August 1998, over 200 Kenyans died in a terrorist act at the United States Embassy in Nairobi. In 2002, a suicide bomber in Mombasa, Kenya, attacked the Israeli-owned and Israeli-

¹Among the 25 nations (including Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen) classified by the U.S. State Department as where Al Qaeda operates, are nine African countries (Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia). (Joseph A. D’Agostino “7,000 Men Recently Entered from Al Qaeda ‘Watch’ Countries” *Human Events Online*, Week of 17 December 2001).

patronized Paradise Hotel. Three times as many Kenyans as Israelis died.

African countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda have been under American pressure to pass anti-terrorist legislation, partly intended to control their own Muslim populations and partly targeted at potential Al-Qaeda infiltrators. Tanzania and Uganda, and others, have already capitulated to American pressure.

Independently of the war on terror, Islam as a cultural and political force has also been deepening relationships between Africa and the Middle East. Intellectual revival is not only a Western idiom. It is also the idiom of African cultures and African Islam. The hot political debates about the *Shariah* (Islamic Law) in Nigeria constitute part of the trend of cultural integration between Africa and the Middle East.

The new legitimation of Muammar Qaddafi, as an African Elder Statesman, has contributed to the birth of no less a new institution than the African Union. In my own face-to-face conversations with the Libyan leader, I have sometimes been startled by how much more Pan-Africanist than Pan-Arabist he has recently become. At least, for the time being, Qaddafi is out-Africanizing the legacy of Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The third force which may be merging Africa with the Middle East is political economy. Africa's oil producers need

a joint partnership with the larger oil producers of the Middle East. In the area of aid and trade between Africa and the Middle East, the volumes may have been reduced since the 1980s. Most indications seem to promise a future expansion of economic relations between Africa and the Middle East.¹ In the Gulf countries, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman, the concept of “Afrabia” has begun to be examined on higher and higher echelons. Let us look more closely at this concept in the light of the revival of both intellectual discourse and new approaches to Pan-Africanism.

Who are the Afrabians?

It was initially Trans-Saharan Pan-Africanism which gave birth to the idea of Afrabia. The first post-colonial waves of Pan-Africanists like Nkrumah believed that the Sahara Desert was a bridge rather than a divide.

The concept of “Afrabia” not only now connotes an interaction between Africanity and Arab identity; it is seen as a process of fusion between the two. While the principle of Afrabia recognizes that Africa and the Arab world are

¹According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, financial aid from Arab countries to Africa increased from \$0.1 billion in 1970 to \$0.3 billion in 1999. (“Economic Report on Africa 2002: Tracking Performance and Progress,” Overview Section. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. <http://www.uneca.org/era2002/index.htm>)

overlapping categories, it goes on to prophesy that these two regions are in the historic process of becoming one.

Who are the Afrabians? There are in reality at least four categories:

1) **Cultural Afrabians** are those whose culture and way of life have been deeply Arabized, but fall short of their being linguistically Arabs. Most Somali, Hausa, and some Waswahili are cultural Afrabians in that sense. Their mother-tongue is not Arabic, but much of the rest of their culture bears the stamp of Arab and Islamic impact.

2) **Ideological Afrabians** are those who intellectually believe in solidarity between Arabs and Africans, or at least between Arab Africa and black Africa. Historically, such ideological Afrabian leaders have included Kwame Nkrumah, the founder President of Ghana; Gamal Abdel Nasser, arguably the greatest Egyptian of the twentieth century; and Sékou Touré, the founding father of post-colonial Guinea (Conakry). Such leaders refused to recognize the Sahara Desert as a divide, and insisted on visualizing it as a historic bridge.

3) **Demographic Afrabians** are those Arabs and Berbers whose countries are members of both the African Union and the Arab League. Some of the countries are overwhelmingly Arab, such as Egypt and Tunisia, while others are only marginally Arab, such as Mauritania, Somalia and the

Comoro Islands. What these countries have also in common is a predominantly Muslim population.

4) **Geneological Afrabians** are biological descendants of both Arabs and Black Africans. In North Africa, Anwar Sadat, late President of Egypt, who concluded a peace treaty with Israel and was assassinated in 1981 is one of them. Anwar Sadat's mother was black. He was politically criticized for many things, but almost never for being racially mixed.

Geneological Afrabians in sub-Saharan Africa include Salim Ahmed Salim, the longest serving Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity. Geneological Afrabians also include the Mazrui clan scattered across Coastal Kenya and Coastal Tanzania. It should be noted that Northern Sudanese qualify as Afrabians by both geographical and geneological criteria.

These four sub-categories of Afrabians provide some of the evidence that Africa and the Arab world are two geographical regions which are in the slow historic process of becoming one.

The merger of the Arab world with Africa is a slow integration across generations. What is more urgent is cooperation based on reconciliation in the immediate future. Tensions in places such as Darfur in Sudan make such short-term accord more difficult. Nevertheless, let us examine African-Arab relations

in compasion with two models of historic reconciliation involving other societies. The Anglo–American model traces the transition from hostility to fraternity in the relations between the people of United Kingdom and those of the United States from the late eighteenth century to World Wars I and II. Are there lessons to be learnt which are relevant for relations between Arabs and Africans historically? The Anglo–American reconciliation was slow but eventually deep.

The second model of reconciliation traces the transition from enmity to friendship between the United States and Japan, from 1941 to this new century. Are there other lessons to be learnt in this US–Japanese model which are also pertinent for African–Arab relations in historical perspective? Let us look at these two models of reconciliation more closely. The US–Japanese reconciliation has been quicker, but shallower.

Forgiveness between Arabs and Africans may be somewhere between the US–British model (slow but deep) and the US–Japanese model (quick but shallow). African–Arab reconciliation may be less slow than the Anglo–American fraternity and significantly deeper than the US–Japanese reconciliation. Afro–Arab reconciliation involves not only memories of the Zanzibar Revolution, but even more fundamentally, memories of Arab involvement in the slave trade in Africa. Can the pain of the past be forgotten?

Global trends in the New Global Order are dictating speed in African–Arab reconciliation and integration. Historical continuities and geographical contiguities may lend greater depth to the future relationship between Africa and the Arab world. Conscious steps need to be taken in pursuit of any new forms of solidarity. Forgiving the past is one thing; forging a new future is a bigger imperative.

Afrabia between Geography and Culture

The French once examined their special relationship with Africa, and came up with the concept of Eurafrika as a basis of special cooperation. We, in turn, should examine the even older special relationship between Africa and the Arab world, and name it Afrabia.

After all, the majority of the Arab people are now in the African continent, and the bulk of Arab lands are located in Africa. As we have observed, there are more Muslims in Nigeria than there are Muslims in any Arab country, including Egypt. In other words, the Muslim population of Nigeria is larger than the Muslim population of Egypt. The African continent as a whole is in the process of becoming the first continent in the world with an absolute Muslim majority.

Afrabia is not just a case of the spread of languages and the solidarity of religion. Whole new ethnic communities were

created by this dynamic. The emergence of Cushitic groups, such as the Somali in the Horn of Africa, are one case in point. Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen were also instrumental in helping give birth to whole new ethnic groups on the eastern seaboard of Africa. Swahili culture and the Swahili city states captured a whole epoch in African history and legacy. Oman is central to the modern history of the Swahili heritage.

The brave peoples of Eritrea are also a reluctant bridge of Afrabia. Even the Berbers of North Africa are a special case of Afrabia. The very name “Africa” probably originated from a Berber language, and was initially used to refer to what is now Tunisia. The continent gained its name from what is now “Arab Africa”. Is there a stronger argument for Afrabia?

Then there have been the migrations and movements of populations between Africa and Arabia across the centuries. There is evidence of Arab settlements on the East African coast and in the Horn of Africa well before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. The fact that the first great *muezzin* (prayer summoner) of Islam was Bilal el-Habashi is evidence that there was an African presence in Mecca and Medina before Islam. Bilal was there before he converted to Islam, a symbol of an older Arabian link with Africa. Afrabia is a pre-Hijri phenomenon.

Islam itself is almost as old in Africa as it is in Arabia. In Ethiopia, Muslims sought religious asylum during the Prophet Muhammad's early days when he and his followers were persecuted in Mecca. Archeological excavations in Eastern Africa revealed remains of mosques dating back to the earliest decades of Islam. Islam as a factor in Afrabia does indeed date back some fourteen centuries!

There is the impact of language on Afrabia. The language with the largest number of individual speakers in the African continent is still Arabic. The most influential indigenous African languages are Swahili (Kiswahili) in East Africa and Hausa in West Africa, both of them profoundly influenced by both Arabic and Islam, a manifestation of Afrabia.

Linguistic links between Africa and Arabia are, in fact, more ancient than Islam. Everybody is aware that Arabic is a Semitic language, but not as many people realize that so is Amharic, the dominant indigenous language of Ethiopia. Indeed, historians are divided as to whether Semitic languages started in Africa before they crossed the Red Sea, or originated in the Arabian Peninsula and later crossed over to Africa. The very uncertainties themselves are part of the reality of Afrabia.

Black Continent, Red Sea?

A central thesis of ours in this part of the lecture is that the Red Sea is not supposed to divide Africa from Arabia.

Where then is Africa? What is Africa? How sensible are its boundaries? Islands can be very far from Africa and still be regarded part of Africa, provided they are not too near other major land masses. A peninsula can be arbitrarily dis-Africanized.

Madagascar is separated from the African continent by the 500-mile wide Mozambique Channel. Greater Yemen, on the other hand, is separated from Djibouti by only a stone-throw. Yet, Madagascar is politically part of Africa, while Greater Yemen is not.

Much of the post-colonial African scholarship has addressed itself to the artificiality of the boundaries of contemporary African states. Little attention has been paid to the artificiality of the boundaries of the African continent itself. Why should North Africa end at the Red Sea when Eastern Africa does not end at the Mozambique Channel? Why should Tananarive be an African capital, while Aden is not?

There has been discussion in Africa as to whether the Sahara Desert is a chasm or a link. Continental Pan-Africanism asserts that the Sahara is a sea of communication rather than

a chasm of separation. Yet, there are some who would argue that North Africa is not “really Africa”. Why? Since it is more like Arabia?

In that case, why not push the boundary of North Africa further east to include Arabia? Why not refuse to recognize the Red Sea as a chasm, just as the Pan-Africanist has refused to concede such a role to the Sahara Desert? Why not assert that the African continent ends neither on the southern extremity of the Sahara nor on the western shore of the Red Sea? Should not Africa move northwards to the Mediterranean and North-eastwards to the Arabian Gulf? Should this new concept be called Afrabia?

The most redundant sea in African history may well be the Red Sea. This thin line of ocean has been deemed to be more relevant for defining where Africa ends than all the evidence of geology, geography, history and culture. The north-eastern boundary of Africa has been defined by a strip of water in the teeth of massive ecological and cultural evidence to the contrary.¹

The problem dates back 3 million to 5 million years ago when three cracks emerged on the east side of Africa. As Colin McEvedy put it:

¹The issue of whether the Red Sea is a legitimate boundary of Africa is also discussed in Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (London: BBC Publications and Boston: Little, Brown Press, 1986) Chapter 1.

One crack broke Arabia away, creating the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, and reducing the area of contact between Africa and Asia to the Isthmus of Suez.¹

Before the parting of the Red Sea, there was the parting of Africa to create the Red Sea as a divide. Three cracks had occurred on the African crust, yet only the one that resulted in a “sea” was permitted to “de-Africanize” what lay beyond the sea. The other two cracks resulted in “rift valleys”, straight-sided trenches averaging 30 miles across. The eastern and western rifts left the African continent intact, but the emergence of a strip of water named the Red Sea resulted in the geological secession of Arabia.

What a geological crack had once put asunder, the forces of geography, history and culture have been trying to bind together again ever since. Who are the Amhara of Ethiopia, if not descendants from South Arabia? What is Amharic but a Semitic language? What is a Semitic language if not a branch of the Afro-Asian family of languages? Was the Semitic parental language born in Africa and then crossed the Red Sea? Or was it from the Arabian Peninsula originally and then descended upon such people as the Amhara, Tigre and Hausa in Africa? How much of a bridge between Arabia and Africa are the Somali? All these are lingo-cultural questions which

¹C. McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of African History* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980).

raise the issue of whether the geological secession of Arabia 3 million to 5 million years ago has been in the process of being neutralized by Afrabia, the intimate cultural integration between Arabia, the Horn and the rest of Africa.

In the linguistic field, it is certainly no longer easy to determine where African indigenous languages end and “Semitic” trends begin. There was a time when both Hamites and Semites were regarded as basically alien to Africa. In due course Hamites were regarded as a fictitious category, and the people represented by the term (like the Tutsi) accepted as indisputably African. What about the Semites? They have undoubtedly existed in world history. Are they “Africans” who crossed the Red Sea, such as Moses on the run from the Pharaoh? Or are the Semites originally “Arabians” who infiltrated Africa? These agonizing problems of identity would be partially solved overnight if the Arabian Peninsula was part-and-parcel of Africa, or if a new solidarity of Afrabia took roots.

On Culture and Continent

The cultural effort to re-integrate Arabia with Africa after the geological divide five million years ago reached a new phase with the birth and expansion of Islam. The Arab conquest of

North Africa was a process of overcoming the divisiveness of the Red Sea.

Twin processes were set in motion in North Africa: Islamization (a religious conversion to the creed of Prophet Muhammad) and Arabization (a linguistic assimilation into the language of the Arabs). In time, the great majority of North Africans viewed themselves as Arabs, no less than the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. In short, the Islamization and Arabization of North Africa were once again cultural countervailing forces trying to outweigh the geological separatism perpetrated by the birth of the Red Sea millennia earlier. North Africans have been cast in a dilemma. Are they as African as the people to their south? The question which has yet to be raised is whether the Arabs, east of the Red Sea, are as African as the Arabs north of the Sahara.

If the Red Sea could be ignored in determining the north-eastern limits of Africa, why cannot the Mediterranean also be ignored as an outer northern limit? There was indeed a time when North Africa was in fact regarded as an extension of Europe. This dates back to the days of Carthage, of Hellenistic colonization, and later of the Roman Empire. The concept of "Europe" was at best in the making at that time. In the words of historians R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton:

There was really no Europe in ancient times. In the Roman Empire we may see a Mediterranean world, or even a West and an East in the Latin and Greek portions. But the West included parts of Africa as well as Europe...¹

Even as late as the seventeenth century the idea that the landmass south of the Mediterranean was something distinct from the landmass north of it was a proposition still difficult to comprehend. The great American Africanist, Melville Herskovits, has pointed out how the Geographer Royal of France, writing in 1656, described Africa as “a peninsula so large that it comprises the third part, and this is the most southerly, of our continent”.²

The old proposition that North Africa was the southern part of Europe had its last desperate fling in the modern world in France’s attempt to keep Algeria part of France. The desperate myth that Algeria was the southern portion of France tore the French nation apart in the 1950s, created the crisis which brought Charles de Gaulle to power in 1958, and maintained tensions between the Right and the Left in France until

¹See R.R. Palmer in collaboration with Joe Colton, *A History of the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 1962), 2nd edition, p. 13.

²See Melville Herskovits’ contribution to Wellesley College, *Symposium on Africa* (Wellesley College, Massachusetts, 1960), p. 16.

Algeria's independence in 1962, with an additional aftermath of bitterness in the trail of Charles de Gaulle's career.

This effort to maintain Algeria as a southern extension of a European power took place at a time when, in other respects, North Africa had become a western extension of Arabia. From the seventh century onwards Arabization and Islamization had been transforming North Africa's identity. Since Africa's border was deemed to be the Red Sea, the Arabs became "bi-continental" people, impossible to label as either "African" or "Asian". Indeed, the majority of the Arab people by the twentieth century were located west of the Red Sea (i.e. in Africa "proper") although the majority of the Arab States were east of the Red Sea (deemed as Western Asia).

The Arabic language has, as we indicated, many more speakers in the present African continent than in the Arabian Peninsula. Arabic has indeed become the most important dominant language in the present African continent in terms of speakers.

The case for regarding Arabia as part of Africa is now much stronger than for regarding North Africa as part of Europe. Islamization and Arabization have redefined the identity of North Africans more fundamentally than either Gallicization or Anglicization had done.

In spite of the proximity of the Rock of Gibraltar to Africa, the Mediterranean is a more convincing line of demarcation between Africa and Europe than the Red Sea can claim to be a divide between Africa and Asia.

All boundaries are artificial but some boundaries are more artificial than others. Afrabia has at least two millennia of linguistic and religious history to grant it geo-cultural reality.

CONCLUSION

This presentation has been partly about the great Semitic divergence, how the Isaac wing of the Abrahamic legacy became Europeanized and how the Ishmael descendants of Abraham got Africanized.

We live in an age when people's perception of themselves, can be deeply influenced by which continent or region they associate themselves with. Until the 1950s, the official policy of the Government of Emperor Haile Selassie was to emphasize that Ethiopia was part of the Middle East rather than part of Africa. Yet, it was the Emperor himself who initiated the policy of re-Africanizing Ethiopia as the rest of Africa approached independence. Ethiopian self-perceptions have been getting slowly Africanized ever since.

Yet, cultural similarities between Ethiopia and the rest of Black Africa are not any greater than cultural similarities

between North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Nevertheless, a European decision to make Africa end at the Red Sea has decisively dis-Africanized the Arabian Peninsula, and made the natives there view themselves as west Asians rather than North Africans.¹

Before the parting of the Red Sea, there was the parting of Africa to form the Red Sea. Several million years ago the crust of Africa cracked and the Red Sea was born. As we indicated, this thin strip of water helped seal the identity of entire generations of people living on both sides of it.

Yet, cultural change has been struggling to heal the geological rift between Africa and Arabia. Did the Semites originate to the east or the west of the Red Sea? Are upper Ethiopians originally South Arabians? Has Islam rendered the Red Sea a culturally irrelevant boundary? Has the Arabic language made the boundary anachronistic? Is it time that the tyranny of the Sea as a definer of identity was at least moderated if not overthrown? We have sought to demonstrate that Africa and the Arab world have been slowly merging into one vast region.

In any case, the tyranny of the Sea is in part a tyranny of European geographical prejudices. Just as European map-

¹This question features in Ali A. Mazrui's television series, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Washington, DC: WETA, Public Broadcasting System, 1986), Program No. 1, "The Nature of a Continent".

makers could decree that on the map Europe was above Africa instead of below (an arbitrary decision in relation to the cosmos) those map-makers could also dictate that Africa ended at the Red Sea instead of the “Persian Gulf”. Is it not time that this dual tyranny of the Sea and Eurocentric geography was forced to submerge?

The most difficult people to convince may well turn out to be the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. They have grown to be proud of being ‘the Arabs of Asia’ rather than “the Arabs of Africa”. They are not eager to be members of the new African Union even if it were led by Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Will they at least embrace the concept of Afrabia?

Yet, if Emperor Haile Selassie could initiate the re-Africanization of Ethiopia, and Gamal Abdel Nasser could inaugurate the re-Africanization of Egypt, prospects for a reconsideration of the identity of the Arabian Peninsula may not be entirely bleak. In the New Global Order it is not only Europe which is experiencing the collapse of artificial walls of disunity. It is not just Canada, Mexico and USA that will create a mega-community. It is not just South-East Asia that will learn to re-admit Indo-China to the fold. Also momentous in its historical possibilities is the likely emergence of Afrabia, linking languages, religions and identities across

both the Sahara Desert and the Red Sea in a historical fusion of Arabism and Africanity in the New World Order.

Will Afrabia be a case of rich Arabs in a union with poor Africans? Actually, there are rich countries in Africa, poor countries in the Arab world, and vice-versa. Africa's mineral resources are more varied than those of the Arab world, but African countries such as Congo (Kinshasa) have been more economically mismanaged than almost any country in the Arab world.

Afrabia of the future will include post-apartheid South Africa, richer and more industrialized than almost any other society in either Africa or the Arab world. The Afrabia of the future may economically be led by the oil-rich and the mineral-rich economies, but in a new order where equity and fairness will count as much between societies as they have sometimes done within enlightened individual countries. Relentlessly, Africa and the Arab world continue their historic march towards merging their historic destiny of integration.

BIOGRAPHY

Ali A. Mazrui was born in, Mombasa, Kenya, on 24 February 1933. He is currently Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities, Professor of Political Science, African Studies and Philosophy, Interpretation and Culture, and Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York. He is also Albert Luthuli Professor-at-Large at the University of Jos in Nigeria. He is Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large Emeritus and Senior Scholar in Africana Studies at Cornell University. Mazrui has also been appointed Chancellor of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya.

Mazrui obtained his BA with Distinction from Manchester University in England, his MA from Columbia University in New York, and his doctorate from Oxford University in England.

He has lectured in five continents and has been Visiting Scholar at Stanford, Chicago, Colgate, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, Oxford, Harvard, Bridgewater, Cairo, Leeds, Nairobi, Teheran, Denver, London, Ohio State, Baghdad, McGill, Sussex, Pennsylvania. He is also on the Board of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown

University, Washington, DC. He is President of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists of North America, Washington DC, and is a Fellow of the Institute of Governance and Social Research, Jos, Nigeria. He is Member of Editorial Boards and Advisory Boards of dozen of journals in Africa, Asia and the Western world (a quarter of the journals have involved active editorial cooperation. The rest have been honorific.)

In 2005, the American journal, *Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC) and the British journal, *Prospect* (London), nominated Ali Mazrui among the top 100 public intellectuals in the world. *Foreign Policy* is published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York. Mazrui was earlier elected as Icon of the Twentieth Century by Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, USA.

His research interests include African politics, international political culture, political Islam, and North-South relations. Among his books on language in society is *The Power of Babel: Language and Governance in Africa's Experience* (co-author Alamin M. Mazrui) (James Currey and University of Chicago Press, 1998), which was launched in the House of Lords, London, at a historic ceremony acknowledging Mazrui's works.

Mazrui has also written for magazines and newspapers. His works have been published in *The Times* (London), the *New York Times*, the *Sunday Nation* (Nairobi), *Transition*

(Kampala and Cambridge, Mass., USA), *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), *The Guardian* (London and Lagos), *The Economist* (London) and the *Cumhuriyet* (Istanbul and Ankara), *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo and Osaka), *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), *Elsevier* (Amsterdam), *Los Angeles Times* Syndicate (USA), *Afrique 2000* (Brussels and Paris), and *City Press* (Johannesburg).

Mazrui's most influential articles of the past 40 years have been republished by *Africa World Press* in three volumes under the overall editorship of Dr. Toyin Falola of the University of Texas. Mazrui's Millennium Harvard lectures have been published under the title *The African Predicament and the American Experience: A Tale of Two Edens* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2004).

Selected Previous Organizational Experience

1. Fellow, African Academy of Sciences.
2. Member, Pan-African Advisory Council to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund).
3. Vice-President, World Congress of Black Intellectuals.
4. Member, United Nations Commission on Transnational Corporations.
5. Distinguished Visiting Professor, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA (Spring).

6. Member, Bank's Council of African Advisors, the World Bank (Washington, DC).
7. Vice-President, International African Institute, London.
8. Member of the Advisory Board of Directors of the Detroit Chapter, Africare.
9. On the Board of Directors of the American Muslim Council, Washington, DC.
10. Chair of the Board of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, Washington, DC.
11. Vice-President of the International Political Science Association.
12. Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (1974-1991).

Selected Administrative Experience

1. Director, Center for Afro-American and African Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA (1978-1981).
2. Head, Department of Political Science, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda (1965-1973).
3. Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda (1967-1969).

Selected Media Events

1. Regular columnist and feature writer, *Sunday Nation* (Nairobi, Kenya) from 1992.
2. Writer and Interviewee on *Global Trends*, Yomiuri Shinbun (Tokyo, Japan, 1979)
3. Main African Consultant and on-screen respondent, Program on *A History Denied* in the television series on Lost Civilizations (NBC and Time-Life, 1996), USA.
4. Author of *The Bondage of Boundaries: Towards Redefining Africa*, article in the 150th anniversary issue of *The Economist* (London) (September) Vol. 328, No. 7828, 1993.
5. Author and Narrator, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, BBC and PBS television series in cooperation with Nigerian Television Authority, 1986.
6. Delivered *The African Condition*, The BBC Radio Reith Lectures, (named after the BBC Founder Director-General), 1979.

Selected Awards and Honors

1. First Abdulsalami A. Abubakar Distinguished Lecturer, Chicago State University, Chicago, Illinois (23 February 2001).

2. Millennium Tribute for Outstanding Scholarship, House of Lords, Parliament Buildings, London, hosted by Lord Ahmed of Rotherham and keynoted by Chief Emeka Anyeoku, former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. Also in attendance was General Yakubu Gowon, former Head of State of Nigeria, who read out a tribute to Mazrui from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, June 2000.
3. Also presented at the House of Lords was a Special Award from the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (United Kingdom), honoring Mazrui for his contribution to the social sciences and Islamic studies, June 2000.
4. Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Nkumba University, Entebbe, Uganda, March 2000.
5. Launching by India's High Commissioner to Zimbabwe of *The Mazruiana Collection: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of the Published Works of Ali A. Mazrui, 1962–1997* compiled by Abdul Samed Bemath (Trenton, New Jersey 1998), Zimbabwe International Book Fair, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1998.
6. Icon of the Twentieth Century, elected by Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, 1998.
7. The Du Bois-Garvey Award for Pan-African Unity, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD, 1998.

8. Appointed Walter Rodney Professor, University of Guyana, Georgetown, Guyana, (1997/1998).
9. Appointed Ibn-Khaldun Professor-at-Large, School of Islamic and Social Sciences, Leesburg, Virginia, (1997-2000).
10. Distinguished Faculty Achievement Award, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1988.

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