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Helmi Sharawy, *Al-Thaqāfah wa-l-muthaqqafūn fī Afrīqiyah*, (Culture and the Cultured People in Africa), Vol I, Africana Series, Cairo: Al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyyah al-‘āmmah li-l-kitāb, 2016, Pp. 232. ISBN 978 977 91 0971 8.

Review by Professor Amidu Sanni, Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

In the past couple of years, a new thinking among Arab, and indeed Egyptian intellectuals and Africanists started to engender the turn towards rectifying the Western narratives and/or stereotypes about Africa. Thus, a foremost Arab publishing house, the General Egyptian Book Organization introduced a new Africana series which is dedicated to exploring and examining all subjects and studies on Africa from new perspectives or materials hitherto sidestepped or unknown. The work under review is the first in the new series. Western stereotype on Africa manifests itself first, in the balkanization of the continent into the North (the Maghreb, often classified along with the Middle East, viz, MENA), and south of the Sahara, pejoratively called the sub-Saharan (rather than Sudanic) Africa. The second drawback is the tradition of denial or contempt for indigenous African cultural indices of high value. The primary objective of the new series (in Arabic) therefore is to present Africa from the reality of her historical Afro-Arab heritage, alliances, and commonalities.

The book under review consists of five chapters and an enlightening introduction about the “Africanness” of cultural multiplicity and the “multiplicity” of African cultures, right from antiquity through pre-colonialism, colonialism, post-colonialism up to the new-fangled globalization narrative. Chapter 1 (pp. 19-72) discusses the interface among the various African cultures; their interactions, convergences and divergences. Here the ideology of contempt for African cultures by Eurocentrists and their Arab aficionados is discussed in the context of African engagement with the Hegelian and neo-Hegelian ‘a-historical’ Africa, the grand narratives of global capitalism, colonialism, decolonization, liberal democracy, and globalization (what about glocalization?). According to Sharawy, the effects of all these phenomena on African individuals and corporate lives have been discussed by great African thinkers such as Samir Amin (d. 2016), Yash[pal] Tandon, and Mahmood Mamdani whose 1996 *Citizen and Subject* is characterized as “a masterpiece” (p. 58) in regard to engagement with the legacy of colonialism, trade war, among others. The national constitutions of some countries across the continent are also discussed in this chapter, albeit superficially. Chapter 2 (pp. 75-105) is about African heritage. According to Sharawy, the realization of the significance of native languages as a strong instrument in the decolonization campaign led many Africans to advocate for the recognition of local tongues; linguistic freedom was considered as a necessary corollary to political emancipation. But the author’s blaming of globalization for the low level rapprochements between Afro-Arab and black African states is less than accurate (p. 79). Anti-Sudanic African sentiment in the Arab and Afro-Arab psyche has a deep root in historical

antiquity which predates globalization, but we need not delve into this here. Nevertheless, our author convincingly illustrates the richness of the Sudanic African heritage as represented by the stupendous manuscript tradition and the original and derivative works in formal Arabic and local languages in the Arabic script, the *Ajami*; viz, Hausa, Mande, Ki-Swahili, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Wolof among others. In his view, the *Ajami* facility is a common cultural heritage of the Sudanic Africans and the (Afro)Arabs. As a matter of fact, there are more than just 16 African tongues with *Ajami* manuscripts, as our author seems to suggest (p. 15); over 60 African languages with attested use of the Arabic script have in fact been established, and there are a number of significant native historical and folkloric works in the same medium (See “Islamic Historical Sources: Manuscripts and Online”¹ Chapter 3 (pp. 109-138) examines the various faces of African Islam and Islam in Africa in the context of historical revivalism; the 18th-19th centuries Jihadism of Usman Dan Fodio and his ilk, the new Islamic awareness (*ṣaḥwa*) as introduced by Salafism, among other manifestations of fundamentalism. The Boko Haram, the Daish, and al-Shabāb stand out in this regard.² Sociology of legal response (fatwas), and of saint veneration and pilgrimage to African holy sites, especially by Sufi acolytes, are also discussed here. Chapter 4 (pp. 141-190) is on African literature and Art. The Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz remains an icon of creative and fictional writing, though in Arabic, but his works have earned global acclaim and critical studies in other climes and languages. Sharawy reviews the Nigerian Afis Oladosu’s critique of Mahfouz’s *Children of our Quarters* in the context of the discourse on the public space (pp. 141-146). But nowhere did Sharawy give details, namely, Afis A. Oladosu, “The Public, The Private and the Sphere In-Between: Re-Reading Najib Mahfuz’s *Children of Our Quarters*” *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 17: 4 (2009), 269-287.

Yet another issue discussed in this chapter is the Nigerian literary tradition in Arabic, especially among the Yoruba (southwest Nigeria) for which the monumental efforts by Moshood M. M. Jimba are praised for unearthing the hidden or sidestepped facts about the enormous historical and contemporary literary and cultural traditions and genres in Yorubaland, specifically Ilorin (pp. 147-150). Aside from the 2011 study on the influence of Arabic poetry on Yoruba Islamic verse to which Sharawy refers (p. 148), Jimba has in fact started the publication from 2016 a bio-bibliographical project on Yoruba/Ilorin Ulama from the late 19th century. The satire of the Egyptian pre-Modern society in Fathy Imbaby’s 2014 fairy novella, namely, *On the Thresholds of Paradise*, is yet another subject of analysis by Sharawy where he shows how African geo-politics affected trans-border interaction and counteraction, as illustrated in a literary genre (pp. 151-162). The impact of the film industry in which local African languages are predominantly used is also analysed in regard to contemporary Afro-Arab relations in the economic, tourism, and entertainment sectors. The strong nexus between heathen ideas and African arts, crafts, and music is adduced as a reason for the opprobrium exhibited by the Afro-Arab society towards, for example, African sculpture, visual, and graphic art works. Chapter 5 (pp. 193-229) is the final chapter in which African ideologies and ideologues are analyzed. Egyptian Samir Amin and Muhammad Mandur, Kenyan Ali Mazrui, Ugandan Yash Tandon, and Malawian Thandika Mkandawire are some of the intellectuals and ideologues discussed here in light of their postulations.

But as enlightening as this work is, there are a few infelicities. Some of the sections which were presentations at past conferences should have been updated in light of new developments, although some of the assumptions in them remain substantially valid. Moreover, the failure of the author to give the Latin originals in respect of certain terms, personal names, and concepts that are transcribed in Arabic (for example, apartheid, charisma, gender) is yet another drawback. It is not clear why the author would give a “mid-term” bibliography within the chapter (for example, pp. 47-50), and a reading list “*qirā’āt*” indicating some of the works discussed or cited (pp. 63-66), mostly in a floppy or less than discreet bibliographical style. In any case, Helmi Sharawy has over the past 60 years been engaged in various aspects of the African cultural and political life, so he is in a good stead to analyze issues from both sides of the aisle; the Afro-Arab, and the Sudanic African artificial divide. An English translation would doubtless make the useful insights contained in this work more accessible to a larger readership.

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¹ See link at <http://africanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-124>).

² Amidu Sanni, *Jihadist and Salafi Discourses in Sudanic Africa: Boko Haram and the Emerging Terror Network in Muslim West Africa*, *Dirāsāt*, 17, November 2016, pp. 42; idem, “Conflict and Peacebuilding in a Multi-Religious and Multi-Ethnic State”, in Mohammed Abu Nimer & Timothy Seidel (eds), *The Hizmet Movement and Peacebuilding. Global Cases*, Lexington Books: Lanham etc, 2018, pp. 313-28.