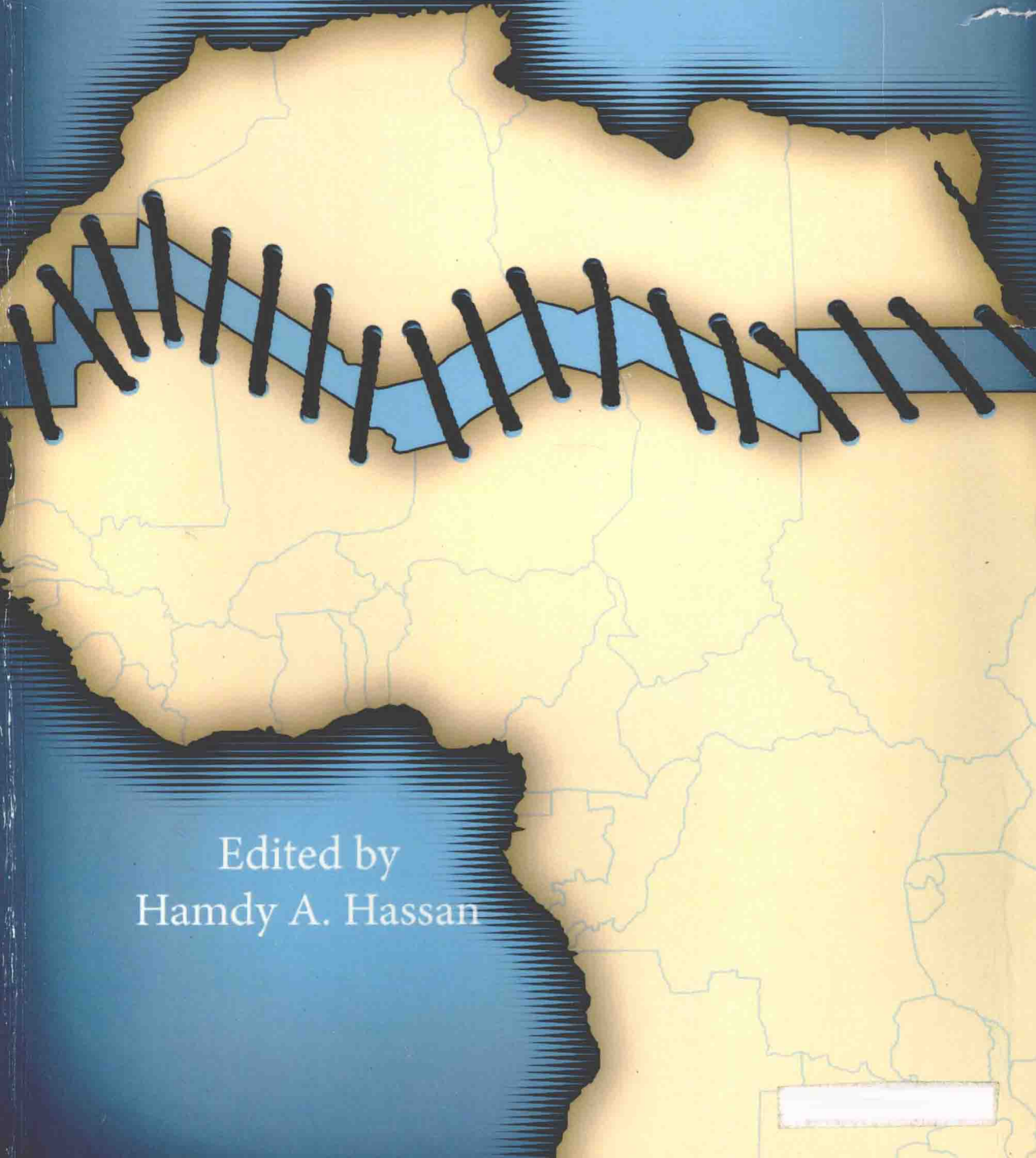Regional Integration in Africa
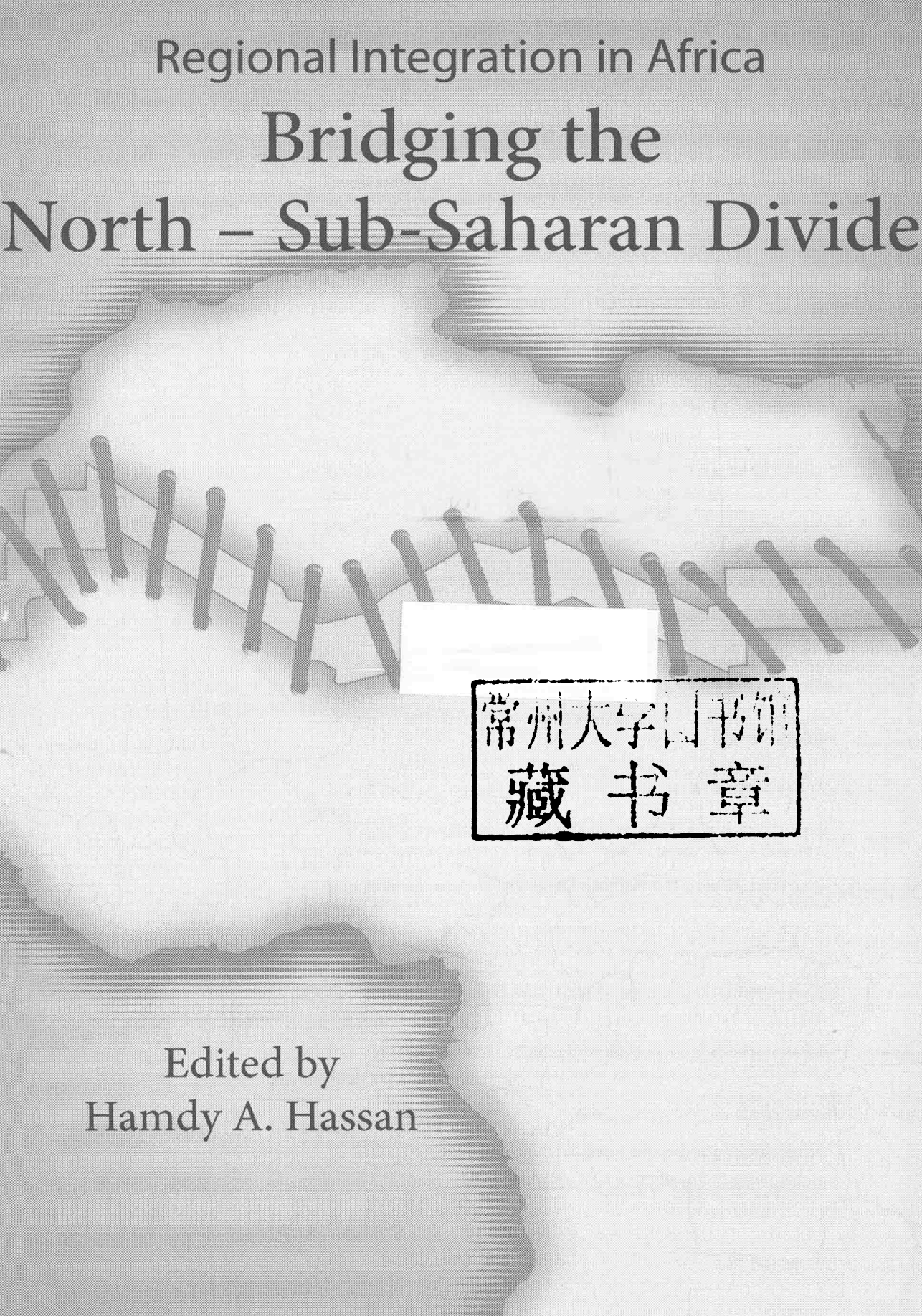
Bridging the
North – Sub-Saharan Divide

Edited by
Hamdy A. Hassan

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Acknowledgements

In 2009 Dr Raufu Mustapha, a lecturer in political science at Oxford University and of Partners in Development (PID) whom I have known since the 1980s, contacted me and inquired whether the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) could accept his doctoral student Mrs Rawia Tawfik Amer as a fellow. My response was that if we could negotiate a mutually beneficial project then we would gladly welcome her. AISA had not undertaken work on North Africa for a while and this was a golden opportunity to engage with this region, especially within the context of our research agenda covering regional integration.

Thus we commenced discussions with Ms Amer and eventually agreed on "Regional integration in Africa: bridging the gap between the North of the continent and sub-Saharan Africa" as our joint project. We issued a call for papers on various issues under this topic to scholars globally, but targeting mainly North Africa. Ms Amer then joined us from October 2009 to February 2010 when she would work on the project whilst also undertaking the fieldwork for her thesis. During this time she was involved in getting the abstracts, reviewing them together with AISA staff and overseeing the authors as they prepared the papers. Our initial plan was to have a conference in Cairo, in June 2010 where the authors together with other academics and interested parties would meet in a conference and discuss the papers. Unfortunately this was only possible in November 2010.

Ms Amer was instrumental in facilitating connections with Dr Mustapha and AISA who worked with us in planning the conference. By having the conference in Cairo, we reduced the costs of travel and translation since most of the participants were from that region and the Middle East. Secondly, it allowed AISA to re-establish ties with various partners in the region and increase our footprint. AISA and PID singed a Memorandum of Understanding whereby the latter was responsible for the logistics of the conference – arranging accommodation, conference facilities, ground transport and cultural activities. AISA paid for these services, but having a partner on the ground was value for money since it alleviated the extra costs we would have incurred of having someone from South Africa going to Egypt to make the above arrangements. A big shukran (thank you) to them. PID also organised many other local partners like the Arab Africa Centre, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African diplomatic missions, universities, think tanks and media that provided facilitators, chairs for sessions, rapporteurs or participants etc.

The project would not have been successful without the writers of the papers who provided valuable insights into various national and international issues related to North Africa which will contribute to knowledge production and an interest in this region by the rest of the continent.

The conference was held just before the Arab spring that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and continues to sweep across various countries in North Africa. Interestingly, when issues of democracy, good governance and rule of law were raised during the conference many speakers including some academics chose the ostrich head in the sand approach – arguing that their governments were stable and the people were content. Other speakers

were more objective and recognised the challenges facing their countries and the region. Well just about a month later the region erupted, with the people fighting for freedom and change of autocratic governments. We might not be able to predict what will happen, exactly when; but it is important as social scientists to study social phenomenon and try to be as objective as possible.

This was the first project under the revised AISA fellowship guidelines and it proved very successful. There were many lessons learnt on all sides and it was beneficial to all. The pilot is over and we will now institute the guidelines as we work with other fellows in future. Through this project AISA has spread its footprint all the way to the north of Africa and the Middle East; new networks have been created and increased opportunities for collaboration have been created.

Many staff in AISA contributed to the success of this project. These included the researchers who assisted with the final conceputalisation of the project proposal, mentoring the fellow, reviewing abstracts and papers (including contributing a joint paper), participating in the conference and marketing AISA. Our Publications Division took over the manuscript after the conference papers had been reviewed and revised and got it ready for publication. Re a leboga.

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Introduction

Hamdy Abdelrahman Hassan

Why should there be a need to discuss North Africa's interactions with Africa south of the Sahara? This question perhaps raises the bigger issue of people's general understanding of Afro–Arab relations. Since the beginning of the 1990s I have had the opportunity to travel to many African countries and acquire a detailed understanding of the Afro–Arab relations discourse, in terms of both its theory and practice. Perhaps the logical and most objective conclusion that can be drawn is that an Arab–African dialogue is an urgent strategic necessity. Afro–Arab relations have not emerged today or even in the recent past: they are the product of history and a multidimensional, cultural and civilisational reality.

And yet there are complex, interrelated issues that obstruct the process of activating good relations between the two 'sides'. Some talk about the need to overcome the negatives of the past and to build on the commonalities for a better future. However, this might not be useful in the face of the atmosphere of doubt and the negative mental images that Arabs and Africans have of each other. A frank dialogue is needed and a clear understanding that the era in which we are living imposes upon us the need to rebuild the bridges of civilisation and cultural communication between the two parties.[1]

The Afro–Arab summit held in Sirte on 10 October 2010 after an interval of more than 30 years since the convening of the first summit in Cairo in 1977 can be seen as a reflection of the missed opportunities that have characterised the trajectory of Arab–African relations since the post-independence period.[2] Is it possible then to say that the revolutions that happened in Arab North Africa in spring 2011 will rebuild the bridges of cohesion and interconnection between the north and south of the continent?

Roots of the 'Afrabia' notion

Some commentators argue – as does the prominent Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui – that 'Afrabia' is 'an expression of the essence of organic cohesion between Arab and African regions'. Some studies indicate that the Arabs and Africans lived in one continent before the geographic separation of Africa from the Arabian Peninsula due to the emergence of the Red Sea[3], and that this physical separation between the two entities was a fate finally sealed in the nineteenth century with the construction of the Suez Canal.

Despite this, the degree of interaction between the Arab and African civilisations over a long period of history exceeded the physical separation created by the barrier of the Red Sea. The experience of interaction and co-existence over long periods of time led to the emergence of Afro–Arab communities.

While the Afro–Arab bond is to one extent a product of geography and geology, it is also, in its human dimension, a product of history and the interactions shared between the Arab and African cultures. This human interconnection has taken place in three main regions. The

first is East Africa, which extends to the Indian Ocean region. Arabs have migrated to and practised trade in the greater East Africa region since pre-Christian times.

The second region is the Nile Basin, the life artery for many Arab and African communities co-existing simultaneously, as evidenced by the establishment of Sudan – a state composed of both Africans and Arabs.

The Saharan coast (the Sahelian region) and West Africa represent the third region of cohesion between Arab and African peoples. The history of relations between Arabs and the Berbers in the north of the Sahara and the Africans in the south is well established.

From disconnection to cohesion

Despite these deep bonds that have long connected the Arab and African civilisations, they faced serious challenges during the colonial period. The Europeans constantly looked to cut the ties and cohesion between the Arab and African communities in many ways, such as abolishing the common relationships and legacies between the two groups and redirecting the Arab and African economies to link them with the European colonisers' countries. The West tried to stir up hostility and conflict between the nations of the region. This was evident in countries such as Sudan, Mauritania and Tanzania. Nevertheless, the challenges of the post-colonial era, which saw a number of public policies that were supported by Arabs and Africans alike, such as opposing colonialisation and condemnation of the apartheid regime in South Africa, served to reconnect the two parties.

Afro-Arabism also manifested itself in certain historic and unforgettable moments, such as Egypt's victory of October 1973 in the Yom Kippur War, when most African states severed their diplomatic ties with Israel and aligned themselves with the Egyptian position. Consequently, under discussion was the necessity and importance of strategic dialogue between the Arabs and the Africans, which impelled some to demand the revival of the Cape to Cairo railway, now that it had shed its colonial connotations of the past.

Indeed, as mentioned previously, Cairo hosted the first Afro-Arab summit in 1977, which adopted the Cairo declaration for joint Afro–Arab cooperation. The objectives of the working programme of this cooperation were presented in terms of developing greater understanding between African and Arab nations. The convening of the conference embodied a determination to forge greater African–Arab solidarity. The strength of such solidarity increased because of three factors: the role of Egypt under Nasser; Gaddafi's seizing power in 1969; and the role played by the Arabs in the realpolitik of oil.[4]

The crisis of lost opportunities

By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Afro–Arab relations had severely deteriorated; an environment of suspicion and mistrust between the two parties had developed. The Egyptian–Israeli peace agreement led to a state of confusion and chaos in Arab–African relations. The Arab state had abandoned the ideological and strategic foundation which supports the assumption that Afro–Arab ties are a necessity for the common interests and security considerations of both parties.

Some scholars underlined the significance of globalisation, a new form of colonialisation that sought to take advantage of Africa's resources, which gained momentum in post-Cold War Africa, and Israel's encroachment into Africa as the main challenges to Afro–Arab

cooperation. However, there are also certain other obstacles related to the negatives of the distant past that need to be overcome in order for the historical Afro–Arab bonds to be revived.

In the Arab world, one often refers with a degree of apprehension to the experience of slavery and the participation of some Arab traders in it. We also do not want to remedy the environment of mutual suspicion and negative images exchanged between Arabs and Africans. For instance, the racial bias in the African–Arab neighbouring areas along the western shore of the Sahara is witnessed in the feelings of racial superiority among the Arab communities of Baidan (whites) and Moors towards the black communities of Sudan and the Fulani, Wolof and Tokolor. There is no question that the use of forged names that have racial connotations and negative images among racial groups in Mali, such as Tuareg, Moor, Arab and Songhai, reveals the atmosphere of suspicion and insecurity that prevails in these communities. If the intentions were good and the political determination between Arab and African communities were present, then it would be possible to make up for the lost opportunities suffered by both.

If some of the major regional powers that are contending with Arab existence in Africa have managed to use 'soft' power to gain the hearts and minds of the African communities (Israeli policy is a prominent example in this regard), then surely the large Arab states, such as Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Libya, in addition to some emerging countries such as Qatar, should be able to manage collectively to get Afro–Arab mutual cooperation and development back on the rails. The cultural approach for enhancing Afro–Arab relations calls for the old, stale negative imagery harboured by both parties of each other to be erased and redrawn. It is possible to refer in this context to the role played by the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute, established in Bamako, Mali, in 1985 according to the resolutions of the first Afro-Arab summit.

It appears that the crisis in Afro–Arab relations is reflected in the performance of this significant cultural institution, which was officially launched in 2002, but has not produced anything since then except for one work about the African transcripts in Arabic letter by the renowned Egyptian scholar, Hilmi Sharawi.[5]

Today we are facing more than any time before new colonial attempts to redraw the borders of the Arab and African worlds, through a geopolitical disconnection, breaking up and reconstruction, which will lead to new artificial entities that damage the elements and foundations of the prevailing regional systems. It is well known that the West has continued promoting the predicament of the conflict between Arabs and Africans in the main areas of contact from the Horn of Africa to the Mauritanian coast on the Atlantic. And has not the conflict in Darfur been portrayed as an attempt by an Arab minority to dominate an African majority suffering from the injustice of marginalisation and slavery?[6]

Therefore, Arabs have to turn south towards Africa to renew the links and connections that connect Arab and African peoples. The common motto shall be 'go south towards Africa' to establish a strategic dialogue based on new pillars that address the issues and challenges pertaining to both parties. In this context civil society institutions can play an active and effective role in establishing a new Afro–Arab alliance.

Scope of the book and its structure

This book, which came about as a research project conducted by the Africa Institute of South Africa, examines the North African countries' strategies of involvement in the African

continent, and their integration initiatives. The book looks at major issues involving Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania.

These countries, in most cases, have been treated as separate from sub-Saharan Africa. However, the historical reality and economic and political interests, as mentioned before, indicate that the North African countries have been and still are closely connected with the rest of the African continent. Egypt, for example, was one of the leading countries in the African unity movement, and, together with Libya, has contributed to the restructuring of the African continental organisation and the establishment of the African Union. The North African countries have contributed to the design and implementation of African development plans, one of the recent examples being the participation of both Egypt and Algeria in the declaration of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

The book consists of two parts. The first part includes five chapters written in English. In Chapter 1 Ahmed Salim discusses the problems of relations between North African and sub-Saharan African countries based on constructionist and realist theories to analyse the external behaviour of countries. The divide between North African and sub-Saharan African countries in terms of their visions and identities is examined through a comparison of different positions on two basic issues. The first is Egypt's membership of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. The second is the issue of the distribution of the Nile water. It is important to mention that the North African region does not represent a homogeneous group, as there are differences and divisions between these countries as well as differences between them and the sub-Saharan African countries.

Chapter 2, written by Issaka Souare, analyses the position of Mauritania as an intercommunication and interconnection bridge between northern and southern Africa. This chapter shows that there is a division in terms of geopolitics between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, which leads to views and perceptions of distinction and division both at the level of imagination and lived reality. Those African countries that witness the presence of divided communities among their populations tend to highlight this division in their views and perceptions. Mauritania may present a model and example for co-existence between Arabs and Africans.

Chapter 3, written by Thokozani Simelane and Monica Juma, discusses the negative effects of the energy project in North Africa proposed by Desertec Corporation. This project can be placed in the context of the new scramble for the natural resources in Africa. Throughout history, Africa has always been a major contributor to the development of the other regions of the world. If the Desertec project implies that Africa still represents the backbone of the international sustainable-development agenda because the continent plays a key role in the provision of renewable energy resources, then it raises the important question of the development and integration of Africa itself. Hence, despite the strategic importance of the Desertec project, the main challenge lies in the effective participation of the African Union in popularising and implementing this project.

Rawia Tawfiq discusses in Chapter 4 the studies related to North Africa in South Africa's academic and research institutions. This chapter raises many questions about South Africa's research agenda in such studies, and the approaches, methodologies and sources used. Perhaps the focus on the issue of the Islamic movements in North Africa reflects a general stereotypical image of the region. South African studies fall captive to the mental images and stereotypes which view North Africans as suffering from political autocratic regimes and religious extremism. Commonly, reference is made to secondary and Western sources to analyse what is happening in North Africa.

Akinsanya raises in Chapter 5 the problems of Afro–Arab cooperation in general from a historical perspective with emphasis on the experience of North Africa. The researcher has used a political-economic approach and some of the analysis is based on the writings and documents which dealt with the development of Afro–Arab relations from their very beginning.

The second part of the book comprises six chapters written in Arabic. Chapter 6, written by Khaled Chiat, focuses on Moroccan–African relations in the period of international trade liberalisation. It seems that these relations have suffered since the beginning from major misunderstandings, as Morocco after its independence claimed Mauritania as part of its territories. However, Morocco, which suffered semi-African isolation, was quick to rectify its international strategy and entered into political and economic relations with many African countries south of the Sahara. Morocco is facing a big challenge because of its withdrawal from the African Union, as it tries to substitute African regional groupings for the general African grouping.

Bashir Al-kut discusses in Chapter 7 the Libyan role in achieving African continental integration through a study of the role of political leadership. The study demonstrates that Libya's foreign policy, which is intrinsically linked to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's vision, has been focused on Africa since the Lockerbie incident, which placed Libya in semi-international isolation, and after the transformations witnessed by the word order.

In Chapter 8, Kouider Boutaleb and Gamil Abdel Galil raise some issues on the extent to which the partnership of the Arab Magreb countries with the European Union affects their regional integration and their connection with African countries south of the Sahara. It seems that the search for a Euro-Mediterranean partnership by the Arab Magreb countries, especially in terms of trade, finance and economic measures, is aimed at testing the extent to which the North African region benefits from these advantages. This chapter also analyses the common denominators of the collective agreements that the Arab Magreb countries are party to, such as the European Partnership Agreement and NEPAD.

Mohamed Jouili discusses in Chapter 9 the experience of Tunisian women's empowerment in terms of their historical, cultural and biological specificity, and applying the Tunisian model in other African countries south of the Sahara. Perhaps what distinguishes the Tunisian experience is its precedent to many experiences in the African continent, which made it learn from its mistakes and follow some of the world's leading empowerment experiences.

Chapter 10, written by Samir Budinar, discusses the impact of national and regional policies of some North African countries on the issue of illegal immigration. These impacts are examined from two angles – firstly, the evolution of the migration phenomenon itself, and, secondly, the social and legal aspects of what is one of the main challenges facing North African countries, as transit countries to Europe. The question raised by the study is the possibility of achieving integration of African policies north and south of the Sahara towards the issue of immigration in general and illegal immigration in particular.

Chapter 11, written by Mohamed Ashour, presents a critical view of the constants of Afro–Arab relations and calls for revision of some matters that have been postulated in the history of relations between the two parties, such as the issue of geographical neighbourhood, human interconnection and human and cultural links between Arabs and Africans. The author draws attention to the fact that researchers see these postulations as mere research hypotheses, and that it is inevitable to stress the language of common interests between the two sides.

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1

CHAPTER

The Myth and Reality of the North Africa Versus Sub-Saharan Split in the Nile Basin

Ahmed Ali Salem

Introduction

Many assumptions about the relationship between North Africa and the rest of Africa need to be revisited. One such assumption is that North African and Sub-Saharan states interact with each other as two groups or blocs, or at least with a certain level of harmony within each group. This assumption, however, can hardly explain the disharmony within each group, which empirical studies can demonstrate. Studying the positions of North African and Sub-Saharan states in any conflict specifically between a North African and a Sub-Saharan state provides ample examples that disprove the assumed divide between North African and Sub-Saharan states.

This chapter aims at testing the relation between the identities of conflicting states on one hand, and the identities of their allies on the other, as far as the assumed divide between North African and Sub-Saharan states is concerned. I compare the positions of North African and Sub-Saharan states in two conflicts between a North African and a Sub-Saharan state:[1] (i) Egypt's membership in the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa); and (ii) the distribution of the Nile river water resources, a serious security and development concern for both states and the underlying cause of the first conflict. The chapter begins, however, with a theoretical section in which I develop one hypothesis based on the assumed divide between North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and two hypotheses based on two international relations theories that explain state international behaviour; namely, realism and constructivism.

One important prerequisite is to identify 'North Africa,' which is by no means an easy task because the term 'north' here has to do with language more than geography. North Africa usually refers to the predominantly Arabic speaking states, which include Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and less obviously so Mauritania and Sudan. These two states have significant minorities that speak Arabic as a lingua franca, not as a mother tongue. Mali, Niger, Chad and Eritrea are predominantly non-Arabic speaking states with Arabic speaking minorities. Djibouti, Somalia and the Comoros are members of the League of Arab States but are predominantly non-Arabic speaking states. In this chapter, 'North Africa' refers specifically to Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania.

Realism, constructivism, and the assumed North versus Sub-Saharan divide

Like all states, African states conflict over security, economic and other issues. To serve their conflicting interests, they form alliances and counter-alliances. I here use Walt's rather loose definition of alliance as 'a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between

two or more sovereign states.'² Hence, according to the assumed divide between North and Sub-Saharan Africa,

> **Hypothesis 1:** When a North African and a Sub-Saharan state are in conflict, the North African states group together against that Sub-Saharan state, and the Sub-Saharan states group together against that North African state.

Disproving this hypothesis would be to find out that the variance *within* each group is more significant than that *between* the two groups. In other words, the positions of a significant number of North African states in a conflict between a North African and a Sub-Saharan states is closer to the latter than the former, and, similarly, the positions of a significant number of Sub-Saharan states in a conflict between a North African and a Sub-Saharan state is closer to the former than the latter.

Neither the realist nor the constructivist scholars of international relations would agree with this assumed divide. Realists argue that states employ power to serve their interests, which include not only survival and welfare, but also hegemony and power maximisation. As a result, states must be in conflict with other states. Realists define state identities based on their positions in the international system, thus, states are either major/powerful or minor/weak actors. Culture is not an important factor in this regard. To the contrary, constructivists argue that culture is a key defining attribute in state identities, which in turn define state interests. They stress that identities are socially constructed, not fixed, and highlight the role of other ideational elements, such as ideology, norms and principles, in shaping state foreign policies and international behaviour. While realists argue that the ideational elements are mere justifications of power politics, constructivist argue that power has ideational elements, and international politics is constructed socially, as opposed to only materially.³

Realists and constructivists would therefore have different insights on the relationship between North African and Sub-Saharan states. Realists would argue that both North African and Sub-Saharan states act as minor states in the international system, and their positions must therefore be at least acceptable to – if not dictated by – their global major-power allies. Consequently, their alliance patterns must follow the alliance patterns of their global major-power allies in Africa. To test this realist proposition, I identify the major-power allies of Egypt, Ethiopia and their African allies in the conflict cases of this study. Hence,

> **Hypothesis 2:** When a North African and a Sub-Saharan state are in conflict, states align with the allies of their global major-power allies, regardless of their North African or Sub-Saharan identity.

Constructivists, however, would expect states with similar ideologies, principles and norms of international behaviour to align together. To test this specific constructivist proposition, I identify the ideologies, principles and norms of international behaviour of Egypt, Ethiopia and their allies in the conflict cases of this study. Hence,

> **Hypothesis 3:** When a North African and a Sub-Saharan state are in conflict, states with similar ideologies, principles and norms of international behaviour group together, regardless of their North African or Sub-Saharan identity.

Constructivists would also argue that North African and Sub-Saharan states act according to their particular definitions of Arab and black identities respectively. Thus, North African states with similar definitions of Arab identity group together, and Sub-Saharan states with similar definitions of their black identity group together. Testing this proposition, however, is beyond the limited scope of this chapter. Also beyond the scope of this chapter is testing if alliance with global major powers explains ideological and normative similarity, or the vice versa. This should concern international relations scholars and students.

Conflict over Egypt's membership in Comesa

Three North African states are members of Comesa: Sudan is a founding member, while Egypt and Libya are late joiners. Egypt joined Comesa in 1998, although it had exerted great efforts to join it since its establishment in 1994, not to mention Egypt's attempts to join Comesa's predecessor, namely, the Preferential Trading Area of Eastern and Southern Africa, established in 1981. Egypt was eager to join Comesa for several reasons, including meeting the African Economic Community requirement that every African state join at least one African regional organisation, and to set off the failure of Undogo; the Nile basin organisation carrying the Swahili word for 'brotherhood'.[4] Yet Egypt failed to join Comesa before 1998 because Ethiopia rejected its initial membership applications. Ethiopia's position was a result of its conflict with Egypt over the distribution of the River Nile water (a conflict discussed in the next section). This position changed to a positive one in 1997, as a result of Ethiopia easing its tensions with Egypt over the same conflict.

Although Ethiopia's position was sufficient to block Egypt's membership – because consensus is required for admitting new members to Comesa – two other members sided with Ethiopia and explicitly rejected Egypt's initial membership applications. One was Rwanda; the other, Sudan. The alleged divide between North and Sub-Saharan Africa may explain Rwanda's objections, but hardly explains the positions of Sudan as well as the approving Sub-Saharan states. Why should one North African state block the membership of another? The answer is simple: at that time, the two North African states were foes, not friends. Throughout most of the 1990s, the two ruling regimes in Egypt and Sudan were at odds with each other. Manifestations of their conflict were numerous, including notably their territorial claims over the disputed border area of Halayeb and Shalateen on the Red Sea, and Egypt's accusations that Sudan supported Egypt's Islamist militants fighting the government, and was involved in the failed attempt to assassinate the Egyptian president in Addis Ababa in June 1995.

Egypt was able to join Comesa only with Sudan's explicit endorsement and direct assistance. It was Sudan that presented Egypt's renewed membership application in 1997, urged the other members to vote for it, and played a key role to make successful the negotiations between the Egyptian delegate and the Comesa secretariat. Sudan's new position was an indication that the relations between the two ruling regimes in Egypt and Sudan had begun to normalise.[5] In short, Egypt's North African identity failed to make Sudan approve its initial membership application to join Comesa. And, except for Rwanda, it also failed to make the Sub-Saharan states disapprove Egypt's initial membership application in conforming with Ethiopia's initial position. Indeed, all other Sub-Saharan members approved Egypt's initial and final membership applications.[6]