



SHAHIDA AHMED KHALIL ELBAZ (1938–2021)

Saluting a Life of Unflinching Commitment to Justice, Equality and Freedom



The Council for the Development of Social Science in Africa (CODESRIA) has learned with great sadness the passing on of Dr. Shahida Ahmed Khalil El-Baz. Until her death on 21 October 2021, Shahida, as she was popularly known in the CODESRIA circles, was a dedicated member of the pan-African social research and activist community who also served on the CODESRIA Executive Committee from 2008 to 2011. A regular presence in major CODESRIA events, Shahida never tired from reminding those of us in the CODESRIA Secretariat that she was available and willing to offer whatever assistance she could to support the advancement of the Council. She cherished the Council as much for its role in serving as a home for African social researchers as for the collective commitment of its members to defend its autonomy as a credible space for original thinking by African scholars on the history, realities, and future of the continent.

Born on 2 November 1938 in Dakahliya, Shahida will, justifiably, be remembered as one of the best that Africa offered the Arab world and, indeed, also as one of the best the Arab world offered Africa. For in Shahida's life, as in her scholarship and indeed in her overall worldview, the African and Arab world meshed seamlessly into each other and gave meaning to the fullness and beauty of the diversity that defines our common humanity. If the legacy of that unfortunate Hegelian notion that sought to separate North Africa from the rest of the continent and which came to be referred to as sub-Saharan, was freely adopted by many, in the worldview of Shahida El-Baz, it was a distinction that had no place because it lacked historical and conceptual meaning. Shahida lived the Arab and African reality as a seamless unity, a life that gave meaning to Africa as a melting pot of cultures, traditions and ideologies and asserted the place of Afro-Arab solidarity as part of a broad continuum that included the embrace of the Bandung spirit of anti-imperialism.

We know little of Shahida's formative life except that she went to Helmeia Girls Secondary School from where she proceeded for studies at Cairo University. Whichever institutions of learning Shahida attended after Cairo University, we have been witness to who she became through her schooling into the university and beyond. Shahida El-Baz earned her Ph.D. from the Department of Economics and Politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

At SOAS, Shahida conducted her PhD studies on the Development of Capitalism in the Gezira Scheme in Sudan. Perhaps this is where her radical Marxist inclination began to take shape. Unapologetically radical in her thinking, she saw little analytical value in categories of analysis that did not have a material base or that aspired to advance the human condition towards liberation from exploitation and want. It was precisely because of her intellectual persuasion that she was constantly mentioned in the company of some of the best radical thinkers Africa produced including the eminent Marxist scholar Samir Amin with whom she forged a life-long professional and comradely association.

Shahida was also an outstanding institution builder, serving on editorial boards of publications like the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, and, most prominently, on the Executive Committee of CODESRIA. She was also the Director of the African and Arab Research Center (AARC) in the last decade of her life, after directing the research programme of the Cairo-based Centre a decade earlier. Among other things, her role helped facilitate the linkage between different constituencies in CODESRIA regardless of their geographical location. To ensure greater engagement between North Africa and the other regions of the CODESRIA community, the Council entered into an agreement with AARC to translate a set of core CODESRIA publications, including the *CODESRIA Bulletin* and selected articles and monographs, into Arabic. This formed the birth of CODESRIA's Afro-Arab Selections. Shahida was at the heart of these initiatives.

It was also in this context that CODESRIA started the gender symposium in 2005 and decided to hold it as an annual event in Cairo, Egypt in collaboration with AARC. Most younger academics will remember Shahida for her interventions during the annual symposium. A committed activist, Shahida illuminated the notion of gender and the need for gendered equity based on a materialist analysis. In one of her publications on women's group formation in Egypt, she made the point that women's position, initiatives and abilities to organize themselves for effective participation in social processes are greatly influenced by their economic, social and political status in society.

Shahida was a lifelong partner and fellow-traveler to the late Prof. Archie Mafeje whom she met during her years in The Hague. They got married in 1979. Eventually Mafeje, exiled from apartheid South Africa, also settled in Cairo and taught in the Department of Sociology at Cairo University. Shahida is survived by her dear daughter, Dana, and grandson Yassin whom she always affectionately referred to as "little Archie" in affectionate memory of her beloved Mafeje. Her passing leaves a major void in our community but her life of commitment to justice, equality, and freedom will remain with us as an eternal legacy to be cherished and celebrated across Africa and around the world among those whom she impacted and inspired with her example. **Adieu Shahida!**