

Ali A. Mazrui: A Great Man, a Great Scholar

In 2013 Ali A. Mazrui gave a lecture in Muscat (Oman) about Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, in which he suggested that Obama was a great man but not yet a great president. Mazrui said we would have to wait and see if Obama would become a great president. I think Mazrui was right. But we would not have to wait any longer to say: Ali A. Mazrui: A Great Man, A Great Scholar. On 12 October 2014, Ali Mazrui passed away at the age of 81. Mazrui was indeed a great man and an extraordinary scholar. This essay is a special tribute to him.

Keywords: Ali A. Mazrui; Power; Scholarship; Africa's Triple Heritage; Media; Postcolonialism

Introduction

I first met Professor Ali A. Mazrui on 13 June 2002, in Binghamton, New York, when my family and I arrived in the United States after I was appointed as a research associate in the Institute of Global Cultural Studies (IGCS) at Binghamton University. I was at the time teaching political science in Japan. We had barely finished unpacking our baggage in our hotel room when the phone rang. It was from Professor Mazrui himself! I was pleasantly surprised when I heard the charismatic voice on the phone, a voice that I had heard before only on TV and radio. I knew we would eventually speak with him in a day or two, but I never expected he would call minutes after our arrival. In any case, Mazrui warmly greeted us, welcoming us to Binghamton, and suggested that we could come over to his office if we were not too tired. It did not take us long to accept the offer. Minutes later there we were, at IGCS, in the Office of Albert Schweitzer Chair, as Mazrui was also known, a great scholar whom I admired a lot. It was an indescribable experience.

How I felt when I met Mazrui for the first time probably came close to what he said he had felt when he met one of his intellectual heroes, American political scientist James Coleman. Mazrui met Coleman in 1964 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.¹ Mazrui was intimately familiar with Coleman's scholarship before he met him. I had also known quite a bit about Mazrui's scholarship before I met him. I had just completed the manuscript for a book on him. The book, *Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained: The Worldview of Ali A. Mazrui*, was published under my authorship in 2002.² Mazrui said there was an element of hero-worship in his response when he met Coleman. So also was my own experience when I met Mazrui.

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Imaginary dialogues

Let me begin with two imaginary dialogues about and with Mazrui. I suppose, first, a social scientist approaches me and says: since I never heard about Ali Mazrui, describe him for me in one or two sentences. I will be tempted to retort: can there be a social scientist who has not heard about Ali Mazrui? I allow for the possibility that this social scientist was from another planet before I concede that the question has nevertheless an immediate relevance: how could we describe Ali Mazrui in one sentence? I decide to summon up the judgments made by South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Ghana's Kofi Annan. In 1995, Mandela wrote, Ali Mazrui is "an outstanding educationist and a freedom fighter."³ In 2000, Kofi Annan described Mazrui as "Africa's gift to the world."⁴ I say to myself, I have found the answer to the intriguing question. Ali Mazrui is "an outstanding educationist and freedom fighter, and Africa's gift to the world."

The other imaginary dialogue is with Mazrui himself. In his *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, we recall that Mazrui let his fictional characters, all dead, speak to each other.⁵ But on this occasion I wish to speak directly to Mazrui in my imagination. I ask him: what do you think about the description of you by Mandela and Kofi Annan? His answer from "After-Africa" would have been something like this. First and foremost, let us bear in mind that Mandela's description of me is *mission-oriented*; and Annan's description is *mission-neutral*. If Mandela and

Annan were massively exaggerating about my place in the "Herebefore," Mazrui would add, their exaggeration was intellectually respectable. Indeed, there are important elements of truth in their description of me. The fact that one is in the "After-Africa" and the other still in the "Herebefore" is also only of marginal relevance from the point of view of the matter under consideration.

On obituaries and testimonials

The New York Times published Ali Mazrui's obituary by Douglas Martin on 20 October 2014: "Ali Mazrui, Scholar of Africa Who Divided US Audiences, Dies at 81." If Mazrui was to read this obituary, I thought, he would probably say that Martin has committed the two sins of the media in the age of globalization: *the sin of commission* and *the sin of omission*.⁶ First, a factual error was committed in Martin's piece, *the sin of commission*. The error was concerning the individual who sent Ali Mazrui to Britain for his secondary education. Martin wrote it was the the governor of a school in Mombasa, Kenya; in fact, it was the Governor of Kenya, Sir Philip Mitchell, who did so. There was also *the sin of omission* pertaining to Mazrui's 1986 TV series, *The Africans*. Martin mentioned in his piece what Lynne Cheney, who was at the time Head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, had strongly objected to the "anti-Western tone" of the TV series. But, advertently or inadvertently, Martin "omitted" a relevant statement made by the then Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts. In the US Senate, Kerry spoke in favor of the showing of the TV series to the American audience.

I agreed with Mazrui's imaginary stance, but I did not wish to stop there. I wanted to do what I thought Mazrui would have done (more eloquently) under the circum-

stances. I decided to point out this *sin of omission* and set the record straight. Shortly after we laid Mazrui's body to rest in Mombasa, Kenya, I wrote the following letter to *The New York Times*:

Dear Editor,

Douglas Martin's "Ali Mazrui, Scholar of Africa Who Divided US Audiences, Dies at 81" (Oct. 20) appears to minimize Mazrui's legacy, however inadvertently. Martin suggests that Mazrui's 1986 TV series, *The Africans*, was about Africa and nuclear weapons. It was much more than that. If Mazrui had said in the 1980s that Africa should go nuclear, it was an idea which he quickly abandoned, and since then, he has written extensively on a wide range of topics. Martin mentions Lynne Cheney's strong reservations about the series which her institution partially funded. For "balance," Martin should probably have also referred to what the then Senator John Kerry said about Mazrui's TV series: "While I cannot endorse all of the conclusions [of the TV series]...its showing has provided the American people with an all-too-rare look at Africa from an African perspective."⁷ Additionally, such a quote could have reinforced what the title implied.

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Unfortunately, the letter I wrote was not published by *The New York Times*. But, separately, I drew the editors' attention to the aforementioned *sin of commission*, (more politely, of course). Even if *The New York Times* was entitled to its own opinion, I reasoned, it was not entitled to its own facts. The editors quickly added the following at the bottom of the online obituary: "An earlier version of this obituary referred incorrectly to the person who was impressed by a speech Mr. Mazrui gave on the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, leading to new educational opportunities. It was the governor of Kenya, not the governor of the technical school where he was working as a clerk." The newspaper also sent me a standard "thank you" note. Sometimes I wonder whether committing a factual error in journalism, as in some other vocations, is viewed as a more deadly sin than omitting a "relevant" fact. Or, would it be the case

that a "relevant" fact – like beauty – is itself in the eye of the beholder? In any case, I was gratified to know that in cyberspace "my" correction will remain attached to Ali Mazrui's obituary. It is a lasting expression of gratitude and appreciation. As Mazrui's intellectual biographer, it is also a good way for me to be remembered, if I am.

As I saw him

Let me now speak briefly to Mazrui's love of writing, his commitment to scholarship, his view of power and himself, and our relationship. We all knew Mazrui as a prolific writer, but perhaps few of us knew why he loved to write. The reasons, as he put it, included the following:

...this tremendous urge to communicate...This is why I write at all, why I write so much, why I write on such varied subjects. I have a constant urge to try and share with others what I think are glimpses I have had... When I want to communicate any particular thought that has occurred to me, a) I want to work it out and b) I want to communicate it to others. I have to work it out. I work it out in the writing. Having worked it out, I want somebody else to know what occurs to my mind, to my being.⁸

It is also widely known that Mazrui traveled a lot. What is perhaps less known is that he never came to campus even when he was in town unless he has a class, a meeting, or a special appointment. In addition to my weekly conversations with him in his beautiful house in Vestal, where we discussed current affairs and official business, Mazrui often communicated with me and our other staff through the fax machine. The more than 5,000 pages of hand-written correspondence with him which is currently at my disposal is, I think, another testimony to Mazrui's love of writing.

Ali Mazrui had a solid commitment to scholarship. When we were preparing a manuscript for the third volume of the Mazrui and His Critics book series, a suggestion was made by our editorial assistant that we should consider excluding those critiques of him which were "rude and unpleasant." When he learned about the idea, his reaction was quick and unequivocal. He said: "Excluding unpleasant material is good manners, but is not good scholarship!" And we obliged, of course.

Mazrui's most favorite quotation was from a book by his mentor at Oxford, John

Plamenatz: "The vices of the strong acquire some of the prestige of strength."⁹ He used different variations of this quote more frequently than any other in his writings. In my view, the fact that this was his most favorite quote meant at least three things. It meant that he understood well the nature of power. It meant that he became skillful in navigating comfortably through the corridors of power. And it meant that he did not have to distort facts for political purpose. It was perhaps such awareness about the nature of power which enabled him to be both a confidant and critic of some of Africa's postcolonial leaders. Mazrui had met with many prominent individuals of our time including those who are/were regarded as pariahs by the mainstream thought from which they deviated. (See Appendix).

Did Mazrui have a clear idea about what he sought to achieve or whether he had achieved it? Did he know that someday he would be so influential to be named one of the top one hundred public intellectuals in the world, as the *Foreign Policy* magazine did in 2005?¹⁰ Mazrui also made it to the list of David Horowitz's 2006 book, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*¹¹ — another proof of his wider influence. In 2007, I thus asked Mazrui if he knew he would one day become such a great man. He said:

You are asking me if I ever realized that I was an African genius!! My answer is that I am convinced I fall short of a genius, although I have had fans who have regarded me as a genius from my days at Makerere in Uganda...I am flattered that there are people in the world who value me so highly, but let me pray that at least one of my children or grandchildren rises to the real ranks of which I have been so prematurely elevated.¹²

In a letter addressed to Mazrui on 6 October 2013, about one month before he was hospitalized (on 10 November 2013), I sought to reflect on the shared benefits of our scholarly bond. The letter, which was also copied to some academic departments at Binghamton University, included the following passage:

In the past seven years, you have given me the opportunity to work with you closely, allowing me to explore different areas of inquiry. The topics range from Africa's experience to Japan's predicament and from the end of the Cold War to the

rise of China. But your vast scholarship, too, has been a stimulating research project for me. In this context consider, for example, my two books which were published in 2013, and the other two, which are forthcoming before end of the year. These books are either about you, or are co-authored with you, or have in them a chapter by you – also a clear evidence of the fruitfulness and maturity of our intellectual partnership.

I was trying above to draw up the balance sheet of my association with him.

As he saw me

Many people knew Mazrui longer than I had known him. But I was perhaps closer to him in many ways from January 2006, when I arrived at Binghamton University, until he died in Vestal, New York, at around 8:12 pm on 12 October 2014. In this timespan I was almost always with him. I have been the Associate Director of IGCS which he created in 1991. I also traveled with him extensively, either as his driver or his health escort. Sometimes we jointly presented papers at conferences. So, was I Mazrui's "right-hand man," as one of his sons used to call me? An intriguing question! But Mazrui himself seemed genuinely appreciative of my contribution to the Institute. He wrote in 2012: "I can say categorically that one of the most valuable things which have happened to the Institute of Global Cultural Studies in the last two decades has been the appointment of Seifudein Adem." But why should I believe what he said about me? The answer is simple – he didn't have to say it. Furthermore, since I was in charge of the affairs of the Institute when Mazrui was on his extended lecture tours in the US and abroad, including the teaching of his classes (and my own), what he said does sound true.

Mazrui also gave me the opportunity to develop intellectually. He allowed me to learn more about him and his scholarship in various settings. As I said above, sometimes I escorted him during his lecture tours. I was, therefore, eager to know what Mazrui thought about my familiarity with his scholarship. The answer came on 12 February 2012, when I received from him an email message titled "Mazruiana for Heirs," accompanied with a list and copies of virtually all of Mazrui's books, articles, lectures, reports, tapes, and so forth. He wrote: "When I am gone you may find this 'guide to Mazruiana'

very helpful for the record." The email was also copied to some of Mazrui's sons and relatives. The gist of the message was this: "...you are the primary heirs—though Seifudein may know more about my work than most of any family-members!!" I was delighted because I understood what he meant. I also felt flattered. This was how Mazrui saw me in the evening hours of his life.

About me, Mazrui had made other observations too. On one occasion, he told me I was often successful in disguising my originality. At first I did not know whether he was suggesting that that was a good or a bad thing. On another occasion, he wondered why I was often too deferential. In response, I said, that was perhaps due to my Ethiopian upbringing and my extended stay in Japan (for thirteen years).

I cherish the time I spent with Mazrui. It afforded me the opportunity to study him and his ideas closely, which stimulated the growth of my own intellect. I have come to know what I had not known before, including some things about myself, and I have learned many things from him. Most of all, what I learned from him, I hope, was learning how to learn.

Mazrui's words of wisdom

Mazrui came from a great family. But, I think, he achieved greatness rather than being born with it. In any case, in 2008, I asked him if he had any advice for his younger followers. His answer was short: "I had vindicated the old English adage: 'If at first you don't succeed, try and try again.'"¹³

He was alluding above to a 1949 incident in Mombasa, Kenya. He nearly failed Cambridge High School Certificate Examination. The result he obtained – a third class grade – proved to be not good enough for his admission to Makerere College in Uganda. Mazrui became, in his own words, "a 'school leaver' – someone who had failed to get beyond secondary education."¹⁴ The Kenya Government had nevertheless a different idea. It suspected Mazrui had more potential than the result of the exam showed and gave him a second chance in 1955, sending him to England to complete secondary education. Mazrui did not disappoint. He went on to earn his first degree with distinction from University of Manchester in 1960. His second and third degrees

were, respectively, from Columbia University, USA, in 1961 and from Oxford University, UK, in 1966. Mazrui taught at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, from 1963 to 1973, at the University of Michigan from 1974 to 1991, and at Binghamton University, New York, from 1991 to 2014.

An appeal to Pan-Africanists

Ali Mazrui had observed:

The absence of the written word in large numbers of African societies was...bound to create a sense of isolation to some extent in a temporal sense, keeping one African century from another in terms of stimulation and interaction, suppressing innovative heresies, burying genius under the oblivion of the dominant consensus of a particular age.¹⁵

Mazrui was explaining above the factors which might have contributed to Africa's scientific marginality. The good news is that literacy is now spreading in Africa.

Another piece of good news is that Mazrui had left behind thirty-nine books and hundreds of essays (published and unpublished) in which he mesmerized his readers. When *The New York Times* announced the death of Ali Mazrui, describing him as the "Scholar of Africa Who Divided US Audiences," it was a testimony to his unique ability to mesmerize and stimulate. But how well-known are Mazrui's ideas in Africa itself? Not as much as they should have been. Luckily, however, an annotated bibliography of Mazrui's most significant works from 1963 to 2003 was published in 2005 by the South African Librarian Abdul Samed Bemath.¹⁶ Mazrui's intellectual outputs from 2004 to 2014 have been similarly compiled by Bemath for inclusion in a book that is to be edited by this author and published in 2016.

The appeal, therefore, is to pan-Africanist individuals and organizations worldwide with the financial wherewithal to make the two books available more widely in all languages all over Africa. The books will help to track down Mazrui's extensive publications in which he treated wide-ranging issues with uncommon verve and flair. There is little doubt that the issues will continue to be relevant to postcolonial Africa. And the easy availability of these books could go some way towards ensuring inter-generational transmission of an eloquent African voice, Ali Mazrui's voice,

which is a voice of not only consensus but also dissidence. *The New York Times* portrayed Mazrui as a scholar who "divided US audiences." Mazrui should be allowed to stimulate African audiences, too.

Conclusion

In his only work of fiction, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, Mazrui wrote:

Death is one more ceremonial transition. It constitutes a passing in some ways no more fundamental, and certainly no less fundamental, than the transition from pre-adulthood to the full status of the adult. Death is not an interruption but a continuation.¹⁷

This means Ali Mazrui is not dead after all – he only changed his address! I wish to hope so in any case. I knew Mazrui was a great scholar before I met him in 2002. After working with and for him for many years, I could now say he was a great man, too.

Notes

1. Mazrui, "The Makerere Conspiracy," 59.
2. Adem, *Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained*.
3. Quoted in Mazrui, "A Destiny in Five Dimensions," 16.
4. See Mazrui, "On Boundaries and Bloodline." Appendix 4.
5. Mazrui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*.
6. Mazrui, "Africa's Role in Globalization."
7. Congressional Record No. 144. [Part III]. October 17, 1986.
8. Mazrui, "The Trial of Christopher Okigbo," 100.
9. Mazrui, "Islam and the West," 2.

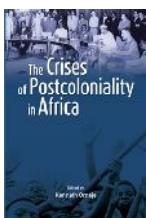
10. *Foreign Policy*, October 14, 2005. [Online.]
11. Horowitz, *The Professors*.
12. Adem, "Ali A. Mazrui: Witness to History?"
13. Ibid.
14. Mazrui, "Growing Up in a Shrinking World," 474.
15. Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations*, 100.
16. Bemath, *The Mazruiana Collection Revisited*.
17. Mazrui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, 37.

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The Crises of Postcoloniality in Africa

Edited by Kenneth Omeje



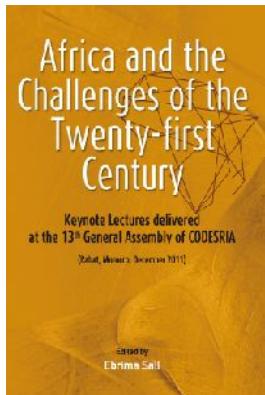
The Crises of Postcoloniality in Africa is an assemblage of transdisciplinary essays that offer a spirited reflection on the debate and phenomenon of postcoloniality in Africa, including the changing patterns and ramifications of problems, challenges and opportunities associated with it. A key conceptual rhythm that runs through the various chapters of the book is that, far from being demised, postcoloniality is still firmly embedded in Africa, manifesting itself in both blatant and insidious forms. Among the important themes covered in the book include the concepts of postcolonialism, postcoloniality, and neocolonialism; Africa's precolonial formations and the impact of colonialism; the enduring patterns of colonial legacies in Africa; the persistent contradictions between African indigenous institutions and western versions of modernity; the unravelling of the postcolonial state and issues of armed conflict, conflict intervention and peacebuilding; postcolonial imperialism in Africa and the US-led global war on terror, the historical and postcolonial contexts of gender relations in Africa, as well as pan-Africanism and regionalist approaches to redressing the crises of postcoloniality. 'In this book, the colonial trope of Africa is subjected to critical analyses from the points of view of postcoloniality. The result is a varied, complex, and interesting exposition of the contemporary challenges and dilemmas of Africa from the many standpoints of postcolonial theory. It makes a useful contribution to our understanding of modern African politics.'

Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century

88 pages ISBN ISBN: 978-2-86978-601-1

Keynotes Lectures Delivered at the 13th General Assembly of CODESRIA, 2011

Edited by Ebrima Sall



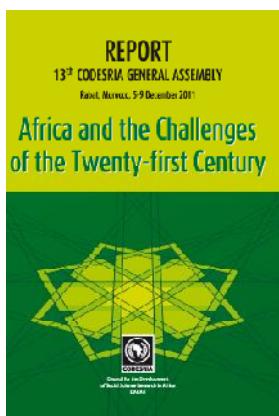
The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, CODESRIA, held its 13th General Assembly, 5-9 December 2011, in Rabat, Morocco. The theme of the scientific conference was: "Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century". Some of the reasons that influenced the choice of this theme were to do with how Africa should position itself in the new global political and economic order in the context of an increasingly complex neoliberal globalization. Changes in intercultural relations at the global level, climate change, poverty, rapid urbanization, the ICTs revolution, the emergence of knowledge societies, the evolution of gender and intergenerational relations, the role of religion in modern societies, the emergence of a multi-polar world and the phenomenon of emerging powers of the South are some of the realities of our world that are widely and extensively discussed by both academics and policy-makers. This book contains the statutory lectures of the 13th General Assembly. Each one of them speaks to major challenges that Africa and the Global

South are facing in this second decade of the 21st century: neoliberal globalization; capital flight; the land question; gender relations, with a particular focus on matriarchy; and universalism.

REPORT

13th CODESRIA General Assembly

Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century



The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) held its 13th General Assembly 5 – 9 December 2011 in Rabat, Morocco. Held every three years, the General Assembly is one of the most important scientific events on the African continent. More than 600 participants from various disciplines and from about 30 African countries took part in the 2011 edition, during which partners and donors of the Council were also present. This triennial event offered African researchers the opportunity to reflect together on the main challenges of the world and, in particular, those confronting Africa and the social sciences. The theme was "*Africa and the Challenges of the Twentyfirst Century*".

In choosing the theme "*Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century*" for the 13th General Assembly of CODESRIA, the Executive Committee wanted to share not only the concerns but also the hope of building a better Africa in a better world. Five key lessons can be drawn from this General Assembly: diversity, commitment, recognition, in-depth scientific debate and the culture of audacity.

The diversity aspect was manifested in five dimensions:

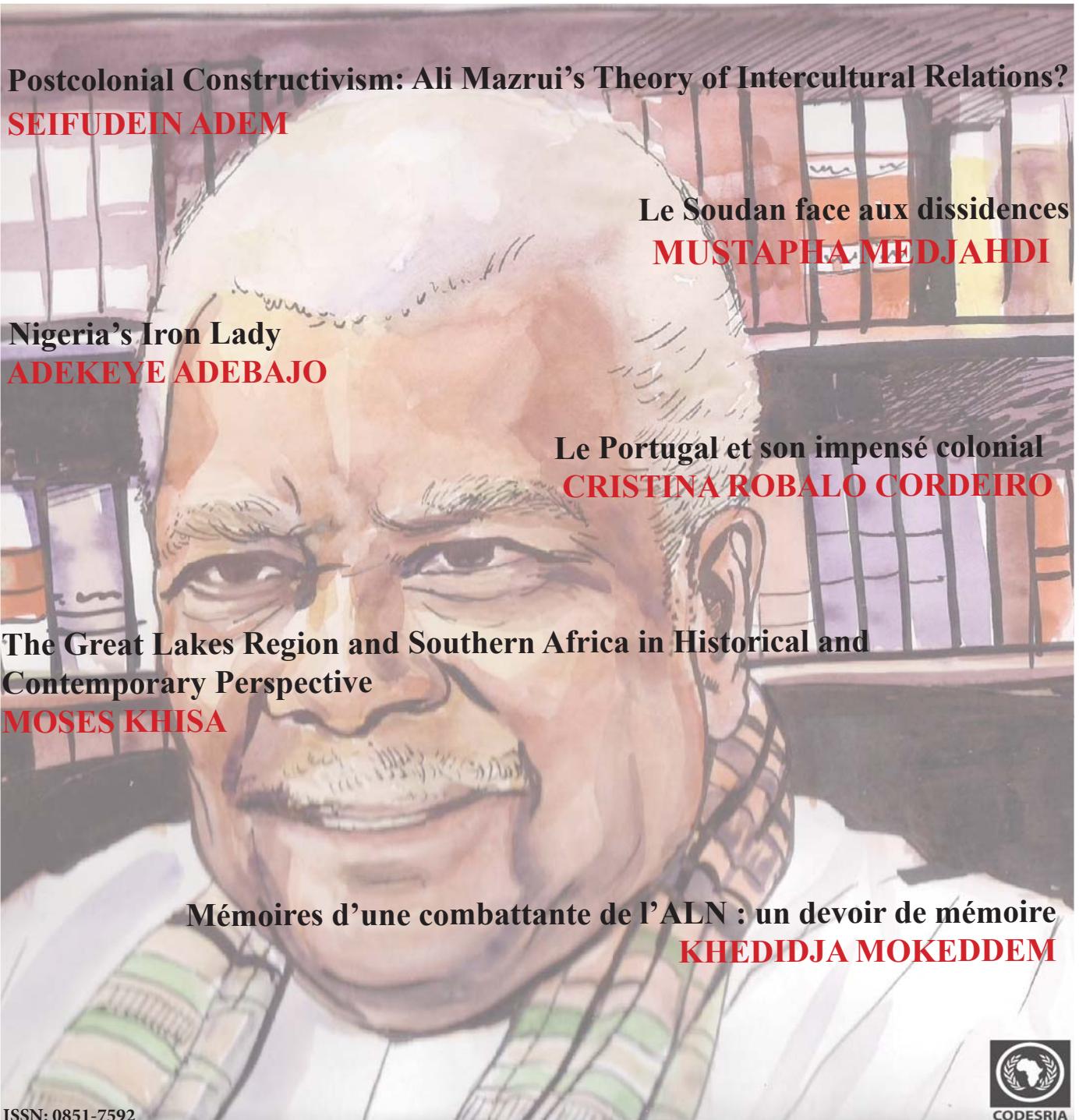
- The geographical dimension: the participants came from thirty African countries, but also from Europe, Asia, North and Latin America;
- The multidisciplinary dimension: all relevant disciplines of the social sciences and humanities were represented – History, Anthropology, Philosophy, Sociology, Literature, Economics, Management Science, Information Science, Political Science, History, etc;
- The linguistic dimension: besides English and French, Portuguese was also used, and Arabic was introduced for the first time. This was a good sign towards connecting all the working languages of African researchers;
- The generational dimension: In addition to the presence of renowned scholars and researchers both from within and outside Africa, the 13th General Assembly registered a strong presence of young researchers of the third and fourth generations. This diversity promises to bridge thegap between all generations of researchers in Africa, with the new learning form the aged and experienced, and vice versa. Young researchers were therefore encouraged to invest more in developing new ideas for a better Africa; and
- The gender dimension: the 13th General Assembly of CODESRIA was also marked by a good presence of female participants and, more strongly, the emergence of two females as new President and Vice-President of the Council.

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Postcolonial Constructivism: Ali Mazrui's Theory of Intercultural Relations?

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Nigeria's Iron Lady
ADEKEYE ADEBAJO

Le Soudan face aux dissidences
MUSTAPHA MEDJAHDI

Le Portugal et son impensé colonial
CRISTINA ROBALO CORDEIRO

**The Great Lakes Region and Southern Africa in Historical and
Contemporary Perspective**
MOSES KHISA

Mémoires d'une combattante de l'ALN : un devoir de mémoire
KHEDIDJA MOKEDDEM