

Celebrating Samar Habib, an ‘Africanist’ Scholar Par Excellence

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The year 2013 cannot be easily forgotten in the history of the *Nebulae* journal family. The year marks the resignation of Samar Habib, Chief Editor of *Nebula*, and the abrupt stoppage of the publication of the parent journal in the *Nebulae* journal stable after eight and half years of existence, a period during which the *Nebula* journal also gave birth to two sister journals, *African Nebula* and *Nebu[Lab]*. Given these significant developments, it appears timely and auspicious for this current issue to briefly highlight the contributions of Samar Habib, founder and publisher of *Nebula* as well as *African Nebula*'s co-founder and publisher, to the promotion and dissemination of African intellectual production. Over the years, Samar has consistently and deservedly earned the reputation of a highly distinguished feminist scholar and unique ‘Africanist.’ Indeed, she has contributed immensely to the promotion and development of global multidisciplinary scholarship generally, and most significantly, to the dissemination of African intellectual production for almost one decade.

With a PhD from the University of Sydney, Samar has made significant contributions to research on gender and sexuality in Arab and Western world contexts. She is the author of several academic works, including *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007 & 2009); *Islam and Homosexuality* (Oxford, Denver, Santa Barbara: Praeger 2010), *Arabo-Islamic Texts on Female Homosexuality* (New York: Teneo, 2009). Her critical translation of the Lebanese novel *Ana Hiya Anti / I Am You* by Elham Mansour (New York: Cambria) was published in 2008. She has also published articles and shorter academic works in *Feminist Approaches*, *EnterText*, *ISIM Review*, *History of Feminist Thought* and *LGBT Transnational Identities* among others. In addition, Samar has published a number of creative works including the novel *A Tree Like Rain* (Sydney: Nebula Press, 2005) and *Islands in Space* (Sydney: Nebula Press, 2008). Her second and latest novel, *Rughum and Najda*, was published by Oracle Releasing in West Hollywood in 2012. She has delivered several public lectures in Australia, Turkey, the UK, Canada, the US and Palestine (SOAS, 2012). Apart from the University of Western Sydney where she lectured until 2010, she has also served as visiting professor at San Francisco State University and was also an affiliated scholar at UC Berkeley, researching gender and sexual minorities in the Middle East and North Africa. Currently, Samar is a Research Associate at the Centre for Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

She started editing for the English edition of the English–Arabic journal *Joussour* at the age of 19. In 2003 as a graduate student, she co-founded, *Philament*, a University of Sydney's arts and culture journal. As publisher and founder of *Nebula*, Samar inspired the floating of *African Nebula*, a sister journal which she co-founded and has been publishing online since 2010. Interestingly, the two *Nebulae* journals radiate that sense of spaciousness that is vintage *nebula* mainly because they reflect intellectual diversity at its best and showcase the varied human systems of thoughts and theories of knowledge. At the last count *Nebula* had published 25 issues and over 330 academic articles in less than a decade. About a quarter of these articles emanated from the African continent. *African Nebula*, an offshoot of the parent

Nebula, also rolled out six issues and published over 45 articles mainly by African and Africanist scholars between 2010 and 2013.

Compared to other thriving Nigerian-based journals, *African Nebula* is unique in several respects. First, it is associated with its Australian-based parent journal, *Nebula: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship*. Second, it has an Australian ISSN for its online version because it was registered in Sydney. Third, the online version is also hosted and published in Australia. Finally, except when there is a need for a special themed issue, at least half of the contributors to any volume are drawn from outside Nigeria, this is in order to adequately reflect the journal's international scope. Thus, in spite of the fact that it is the official peer-reviewed journal of the College of Humanities and Culture at Osun State University, Nigeria, *African Nebula's* registration, contents, editorial board, journal policies as well as mode of operation have unarguably conferred on it the status of an international journal of repute. Indeed, it is a luminous example of the success of international academic collaboration, in terms of journal publication, between the North and the South.

Apparently, the birth of *African Nebula* was the natural outcome of Samar's consistent and vigorous advocacy for the widespread dissemination of Nigerian, nay, African intellectual production. 'There is absolutely a great need for scholars from Nigeria to be able to publish in international academic journals,' she says. Indeed, she was shocked and at the same time impressed with the sheer volume of submissions from Nigerian scholars. For her, this tendency demonstrates the fact that 'the demand for academic publication by Nigerian scholars is not met by the avenues currently available for academic publication.' Samar was particularly interested in hosting special issues of *Nebula* on Nigerian studies but the dearth of committed and selfless editors with the requisite expertise who were willing to work with her made this dream unrealisable.

A highly distinguished scholar, Samar's contribution to the dissemination of African scholarship is also very remarkable because its timing coincides with the current wave of academic globalisation, a phenomenon that has further reinforced the unequal structures between the North and the South in terms of knowledge production and dissemination. Samar's remarkable commitment to the dissemination of Africa's intellectual production through the publication of articles emanating from the African continent in *Nebula*, on the one hand, and her intellectual, moral and financial support for the floating and publication of *African Nebula* on the other, makes her an 'Africanist' scholar in her own right. This becomes more significant when cognisance is taken of the fact that Samar is primarily and essentially an Arab feminist scholar. Thus, consciously and unconsciously, Samar through her publishing outlets has been playing critical roles in the ongoing attempts to redress the imbalance that characterises the neo-colonial politics of academic publication and marginalisation.

Samar, like every true Africanist, does not hide behind the veneer of racial prejudice and academic arrogance in her interactions with people across continents. Her scholarship as a poet, author, teacher, editor and publisher, bears eloquent testimony to the fact that knowledge is best pursued when it is ultimately directed at the search for truth and human happiness. Personally, my scholarship, and I am sure that of several other scholars, have benefitted immensely from our association with this committed 'Africanist.'

It is apparent that Samar stands tall when it comes to the dissemination of African humanities intellectual production. As a matter of fact, she has demonstrated a remarkable passion to

advance the cause of original and rigorous research on Africa, and also ensured that they meet the best global publication practices. This has made it possible for the global audience to access contemporary research on Africa. It has also encouraged closer academic cooperation and engagement between African scholars and their counterparts outside the continent. Thus, Samar, through her journals, has exhibited a profound level of passion for the advancement of the frontiers of African humanities knowledge and engagement. She is, therefore, eminently qualified to be admitted into the pantheon of the greatest Africanists of the twenty-first century. Thus, on behalf of the Editorial Board of *African Nebula*, I wish to acknowledge and salute Samar's tenacity, selflessness and resolute commitment to the promotion and dissemination of African scholarship. Most significantly, her moral, professional, technical and financial supports have been pivotal to birth and sustenance of *African Nebula*.

Notwithstanding Samar's resignation, it is interesting to note that Samar's passion for multi-disciplinarity continues to resonate with this current issue of *African Nebula*. No wonder, this present issue of *African Nebula* draws its five contributors from four different countries and the issues raised dovetail into language, digital communication, history and literature. For instance, Sarada Thallam analyses the writings of two African-American women writers, Harriet Jacobs and Adrienne Kennedy. The paper argues that their works challenge patriarchy and contemporary Anglo-American feminist discourses. It uses as its critical framework postcolonial theories of "othering" as enunciated by critics like Said and Spivak, to demonstrate the way in which Jacobs and Kennedy manipulate standard American English, to highlight the linguistic power of African-American women's writings.

In a slightly related article, Roshnavand and Movahedian argues that before the beginning of the twentieth century, black Americans underwent an all-encompassing process of 'otherization' and 'inferiorization' which saw them as inhuman, heathen and demonic. Under the tenacious hold of oppressive hegemonic discourses, they were forced to internalize the dominant negative stereotypes and thus, over time, came to detest their black skin colour and African racial origin. In such circumstances, the idea of Africanism which reached its zenith in a post-World War I nationalist climate came to the rescue. This paper tries to show that the vogue of Africanism was not a genuine call on the part of subalternized Negroes for a physical or cultural return to their ancestral homeland; rather, it was merely an instrument in the hands of black Americans through which they strived to prove their intrinsic worth and the legitimacy of their quest for equality and justice. The article concludes that black Americans' Africanist project was carried out in the context of Americanism as a way to find admission into mainstream society.

In the third article, Wale Oni explores some fundamental theories, models and perspectives used by scholars in communication studies as frameworks to understand and discuss the field of computer-mediated communication, which is an offshoot of mediated communication aspect of the communication studies. He discusses the academic landscape of communication technology and presents some of the notable perspectives, models and theories that scholars in new digital media studies have employed in their analyses. His approach seems to suggest an advocacy for a remarkable emphasis on the fundamental theories of computer mediated communication within the purview of communication studies, a trend that is the norm in the developed world but a rarity in Nigeria and several African countries.

From a largely historical perspective, Joseph Lon Nfi investigates the militancy of French-Cameroon immigrants which found its best expression in the Pan-Kamerun Movement during

the first few years after the Second World War in the then Southern Cameroons. His article explains why protest migrants from French Cameroon still desired a connection with their places of origin. By relying on an avalanche of data from archival and secondary sources, the author reveals that the militancy of French-Cameroon migrants in the movement was not because of the dream for a Greater Kamerun or the British neglect of the socio-economic development of the Southern Cameroons, but because of their status as “strangers” and other related problems which they faced. The study concludes that they championed the course for a Greater Kamerun because they wanted to be citizens in their new homesteads.

In the last article, Temitope Balogun examines the low-usage of Yorùbá language among some selected secondary school students in Yorubaland, Southwest Nigeria. The paper considers and measures the knowledge of Yorùbá language among respondents in three Yoruba speaking states in southwestern Nigeria. The results of the data show that Yorùbá language enjoys low patronage among the respondents. Many of the respondents found it difficult to express themselves freely in Yorùbá language. They were also unable to provide meanings for selected Yorùbá proverbs, words, and expressions. The author concludes that Yorùbá language stands the risk of gradual extinction if urgent measures are not taken by all stakeholders concerned to arrest the dwindling fortunes of the language.

Individually and collectively, the five articles make interesting reading. The Editorial Board is, therefore, pleased to deliver this edition of *African Nebula* which is specially dedicated to Dr Samar Habib.

Happy reading!