

Originally commissioned by the New York Foundation for the Arts(www.nyfa.org) for their 'rants and raves' column. due to word-count restraints, the entire piece couldn't make it on their site. this topic, in fact, has been edited/damn-near censored by every publication/interview i've brought it up in except for in Veronique Mortaigne's piece in Le Monde(1998) and Nebulisa's African Sun Times interview (1999). Republished at <http://ambassadors.net/archives/issue26/opinions3.htm>

1) Egypt: a Brief thought on North African colonialism or "de-Nile" of/to Vulcanize or Afro-Asiatic Mokkaassar

North Africa is under the Arab umbrella now. Egypt, for example, has officially been the 'Arab republic of Egypt' since 1971, 1300 years after the original Arab invasion. surely as Israel's expanding threat grew, so did the need for the surrounding nations to come together under one banner. there have been many attempts in history at forming a Pan-Arab league. when it was for the sake of peacefully unifying quarelling peoples, liberating Palestine and dissolving colonialism and imperialism all over N. Africa and the Middle East it was truly a noble feat. but what happened as a result is that alot of fundamental Aboriginal/pre-Arab cultures have been disregarded or generically assimilated.

the original colonialist became the colonialized to become once again the colonialist.

the fact is that many N. Africans are not entirely Arab if at all: the Gnawa of Morocco, the Berber- the Tuareg- the Kabylie of Algeria- , the Copts, the Nubians... Egypt, like the other N. African countries, has always been made up of incessant waves of foreign conquests/migration in some form or another: Persians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Turks, Romans, French, Arabs, British, Assyrians, Kushites, Babylonians, and yes, Nasser, even Jews... and perhaps even Spacemen! and let's face it, they've all tried to claim Egypt as their own. and despite their misgivings they've all made it what it is today--to try and extricate one thread would be to destroy the entire textile. from a cultural point of view, the fabric has fused, Vulcanized. politically though, that kind of Idealistic Unity(which in fact is quite Real) doesn't make for profit and therefore it is more opportunistic to proclaim it solely an Arab republic. economically, it would gain nothing from being called an 'African' country, which as far as i'm concerned is what it is First. it wouldn't be such a problem if the Aboriginal Cultures of N. Africa were not so unappreciated in their own countries. the interest in them comes mostly from the outside rather than from within the country of origin--- from Black scholars, uprooted mestizos, the sanitized French museum, the German anthropologist, the British cultural center, the 'world' music festival where musicians are paid to play barefoot in galabeyyas for rich Scandinavians while after the gig they're rocking pepe jeans and nikes, the hip producers begging to have their tracks laced with some Gnawa soul authenticity...{reminding me of what is being done to the Aboriginal People of America. nearly wiped out, then corraled & pieced back together for some archive.} undoubtedly, the people of the Arabian Peninsula brought with them a cache of knowledge, Science, Poetry...that Illuminated the world . and the African-Arab marriage in particular has bred an incredible breadth of culture (Music that i fanatically promote worldwide, Mathematics, Science, Medicine, Spirituality, Art, Philosophy, Meta-Physics, Architecture, etc). but it has been fraught with strife, one partner just being too domineering.

examples of this: the Algerian guy in Paris who was getting fresh in French. i snapped something back in Arabic, thinking he looked pretty F.O.B. [also assuming a certain unspoken comradry between Arabic-conquered/speaking peoples dispersed in the West--the Yemeni & Palestinians in the N.Y. bodegas appreciate even my primitive Arabic]. i was shocked by his explosive reaction. 'ena mabakallamsh el a'aaa'arabeyy!!'(i don't speak aaaarabish'), overpronouncing the "a'ayen" in a derisively exaggerated manner. he went on spurring some insults in French. a nearby table of Maghrebeen burst out laughing, somehow knowingly. as it turns out, my man was a Kabylie, some of the most fiercely resistant people to the Arab conquest, insisting on speaking their Vernacular instead. they are not alone. the Nubians became ever more insistent on retaining their Pre-Arab language after the slap-in-the-face of the Aswan High Dam from 1960-71 forcing 90,000+ people from their homes(on a tour bus with the Nubian-Egyptian singer Mohamed Mounir going to a show past the Pyramids, his brother Mahmoud explained to me his intense need to go back down home to open a cultural center for preservation of the Nubian language). the Copts of Egypt and Ethiopia in a usually more passive way have been resisting for 14 centuries, Berbers protested vehemently in 1980 against the mandate making Arabic the official language of Algeria... and then there's the late-night arguments with my Sudanese friends in Cairo, a couple of whom consider themselves absolutely & completely Arab(those more devoted to the Prophet) and the rest who consider themselves a mix as they very well are. the dictionary defines an Arab as anyone who's primary language is Arabic...oh, if it were only so easy...!

why is it so important for the world to consider Egypt African? (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria & Morocco are more likely than Egypt to be identified as African countries). because Africa must be given it's due, unabridged props. in the broadest sense. because Africans and Europeans have been in 'de-Nile'- claiming the 'real' Africa begins sub-Sahara (and here's what's really messed up-- i don't know too many Egyptians that claim to be Africans. you're likely to hear, 'i'm an Arab' or 'i'm a descendent of the Pharaohs' or 'i'm a Muslim' before you hear 'i'm an African'. is it because Egypt is physically connected by the Sinai to the Middle East? or does the tug of the Mediterranean sea pull too hard? or has Africa been purposely truncated to curb it's mind-blowing riches or have the various colonialists brain-washed Egypt with their standards of Eurasian beauty and power?) peoples' conception of what Africa looks like has to be revised to include the North African populations Pre-Arab & Post-Arab. [like Pan-Arab efforts that united the Arab-conquered lands, this is a Pan-African-Derived movement that is not based on territorial expansion and dominance, but on geographical, anthropological and continental fact]. African-Americans have been quick to realize this. maybe that's why combining this Music with Hip-Hop feels so good.

i find that one of the only sanctuaries is in the Music i do where the arguments and influences can battle themselves out, convulse, break bread together, get bashed into place in an inspiring, juicy pulp, still alive and kicking as sonic plasma should be. Afro-Asiatic Mokkaassar.

epilogue: it's time for anyone who has roots in that part of the world to step up and represent correctly. but, do we in the West, have to dumb down to Americans' cultural illiteracy by coming up under one generic umbrella (it's way more complex than that, what about Iranians?) to shed a positive light on a part of the world that is deeply misunderstood and unfortunately misrepresented in the West more than ever? all of us here in the West that would be considered 'moderates' or 'liberals' by this ignorant U.S. govt. can help it. but not at the expense of not also recognizing the variety within what is politically known as the Arab world. some people in

the movement fear that such discussions will detract from the show of unity and solidarity and hurt the cause. it is not to fracture unity, but to EXPAND the world's notions about who we are, how broad and deep this 'we' really is. just in the same way that Egypt has to be reconfigured into the African dialectic as a whole to expand peoples' notions of what Africa means. it is the truth. otherwise, this kind of homogenization is nothing short of colonialization/ imperialism.

p.s. my father is Italian(Tuscan from Rome) and my mother is Egyptian(Sa'aidi Copt from Cairo) and i was born in Italy where i grew up partly, but mostly in Ohio, WV & Pittsburgh (Rustbelt, U.S.A.). in our household, we were only allowed to speak Italian which my mother learned fluently. my father, however, never learned Arabic. he used to joke that he bought my mother from a Bedouin caravan for 4 camels and a donkey. a sort of domestic colonialism(a whole other essay). the roman emperor's dream of pharaonic war booty... (and the rest of the rants...)