

Islam in Africa: Intellectual trends, historical sources and research methods

The International Islamic University Malaysia, IIUM (represented by the International Institute for Muslim Unity, IIMU and International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, ISTAC), in collaboration with The Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (FUIW) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), organized an international conference on *Islam in Africa: Intellectual trends, historical sources and research methods*, IIUM Kuala Lumpur, 19-21 July 2011. The conference attracted over a hundred policy makers, diplomats, researchers and scholars from fifteen countries, to further their discussion on Islam in Africa from historical, cultural and global perspectives, and devote special attention to its intellectual trends, historical sources and research methods.

The conference was officiated by Prof. Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmoud, Deputy Rector for Student Affairs, IIUM, and two welcoming addresses were respectively delivered by Prof. Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, the Chair of the Organizing Committee, and Prof. Abdul Hamid al-Harama, the representative of (ISESCO) and (FUIW), who expressed their sincere gratitude and appreciation to all parties who have contributed to the success of the conference. A total of fifty papers were presented by local and international scholars, including six keynote addresses and a roundtable on “Religious Impact on African Literature.”

The first keynote address was delivered by H.E. Al-Imam Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi, former Prime Minister of the Sudan, who highlighted the historical, cultural and global dimensions of Islam in Africa. He also argued that the history of Islam in Africa should be reexamined by competent historians who would be able to crystalize its contribution to the development of African societies. The second keynote address presented by Prof. Rudiger Seesemann, Northwestern University, discussed Islam in Africa through the lens of Islamic Knowledge. In the third keynote address, Dr. Afis Oladosu, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, raised the questions of whether it is true that, like the American experience, there are at least two faces of Islam in Africa in “Aporias of a heritage: Islam in Africa and the

contemporary Muslim world.” He explored how far Islam in Africa has been influenced by the discourse and counter-discourse of Islamophobia. In his keynote address, Dr. Hamidin Abdul Hamid, Chief Executive Officer of Razak School of Government, encouraged comparative studies on Islam and Muslim communities in Southeast Asia and Africa. The fifth keynote speaker, Dr. Al-Haj Hamad Muhammad Khair, Sudan, suggested the reassessment of the history of the Funj Sultanate in the Sudan in the context of the African social-cultural experiences. The sixth keynote speaker, Prof. Chouki El-Hamel, University of Arizona, presented a paper entitled “The Othering of Black Africans in Islamic traditions?” He examined the evolution of the Islamic state under a profoundly Arabo-centric theocracy that took a different path from Prophet Muhammad’s (SAW) ideals. His hypothesis was that the Prophet (SAW) rejected any racial prejudice with respect to the social order that was created and adhered to the Qur’an. However, after his death, the ideal of an egalitarian Islamic *ummah* was more illusory than real. The roundtable focused on religious impact on African literature, where the four panelists, Prof. Ibrahim Muhammad Zein, Prof. Hasan al-Naqar, Dr. Rohani Yusuf, and Dr. Musa Yusuf Oweni, addressed the issue with special emphasis on the works of the Sudanese novelist, al-Tayyib Salih.

The conference also discussed about 50 academic papers, in both Arabic and English. The conference papers covered a variety of topics, ranging from Islamization of Africa to contemporary issues that deal with Islam and politics in this globalized era. The papers that dealt with the spread of Islam in Africa focused on the historical background of Muslim migration to Africa and the means and procedures of how Islam was spread in the continent. They also discussed the crucial role of the Islamic faith in the development of African communities, and studied the challenges that confronted the propagation of Islam, along with its prospects. Islamic heritage in Africa was one of the sub-themes that attracted the attention of the audience, where the papers concerned studied the city of Timbuktu, which occupied a significant space in the history of Islam in West Africa. In this context, they suggested the relevance of Arabic manuscripts deposited in Timbuktu, ancient mosques and other monuments as primary sources for studying African history and history of Islam in Africa. They also recommended that the history

of Muslim scientists and scholars should be included in school curriculum in order to revive the Islamic heritage in the continent and its interaction with other nations. The curricula of Islamic studies in schools and universities received special attention from some paper presenters, examining the challenges and development of Islamic education in Africa. Some papers focused on the teaching and development of *ḥadīth* studies and the Qur'ān memorization methods in Islamic schools while others studied the reflective teaching approach of Islamic education, and also re-examined the history and policy of education in Africa. Therefore, they recommended the gradual amalgamation of the indigenous Islamic and Western education in contemporary Muslim education in the African continent. Some papers addressed the role of Muslim women in Islamic education, and examined the public perception on those who pursued their education in Western institutions. Papers presented on political, judicial and educational dimensions of Islam in Africa addressed the challenges of the implementation of the Sharia Law in pluralistic societies such as Nigeria and Malaysia. Other papers discussed the theme of historical, political and economic dimensions of Islam in Africa, examining the influence of Islam on the socio-political and economic development of African countries with special reference to Nigeria.

The closing ceremony was attended by Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan, the President of IIUM. The conference resolutions were summarized and presented by Prof. Hassan Ahmed, Dean of ISTAC.

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