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## Editorial

This June 2024 issue of IJUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies comprises various topics particularly related to Islamic history and civilisation, as well as Islamic philosophy and political ideas. In addition, a few contemporary issues such as women empowerment, the rights of indigenous people and Covid-19 pandemic are included therein.

The first article, “In the Middle Kingdom: A Historical Survey on the Arabs and Persians’ Ventures in China, 600s–1300s” by Aditya Pratama Widodo is a historical survey concerning the ventures made by Arabs and Persians to China during the Tang, Song and Yuan eras via overland and maritime Silk routes. Using primary texts written by various Arab and Persian geographers, sailors, traders and travellers, as well as Chinese and European chroniclers as main sources of references, not only does the work seek to demonstrate the high spirit of adventure and sophisticated knowledge of sea navigation possessed by Arabs and Persians, but also their contributions to the trade relations between West Asia and China, and socio-cultural developments related to Muslim community in China. The work is a good reading for students of ancient and medieval history, in particular, of Middle East and China.

The second article by Fachrizal Halim “Rereading the Biblical Story of Sarah and Hagar: A Note for Interfaith Activists” examines the biblical narrative on the relationship between Sarah and Hagar of the household of Abraham in the book of Genesis chapters 16 and 21. In contrast to the life study of Sarah and Isaac (Ishāq), the story of Hagar and Ishmael (Ismā‘īl) received very little attention, hence resulting in a biased and prejudiced view towards Hagar, Ishmael and his descendants. The author seeks to present the historical and cultural context of the Sarah-Hagar story and refute its narrow interpretations which can reinforce theological or political supremacy held by Jewish community, exemplified for instance, in the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. The article argues that not only the rereading the story of Sarah and Hagar in its proper social and political context will result in a better understanding of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar, but improve interfaith relations particularly between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Also dealing with the relation between different communal or religious groups, the next article by Muhamad Nor Aiman Bin Mohd Nor Zaidi titled “The Role of *Muwalladun*, *Mozarab* and Jews in Paving the Way for Coexistence in Andalusia 912 CE-1110 CE: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of *La Convivencia*” seeks to explain the unique interaction between *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews, either between themselves or with the Arab ruling class. The author argues that the conditions that the groups lived in had led to a peaceful coexistence era known as “*la Convivencia*” under Muslim rule in Andalusia or modern Spain primarily due to social assimilation and acculturation. Not only does the paper briefly explain the origin of individual groups, but also their traits and roles in the socio-economic and political developments of Andalusia.

To continue with the history of Muslims in Andalusia, Noor Syuhada Binti Shahidan and Nurul Shahirah Binti Majlan discuss the role of women in “Women of Andalusian Court: Kingmakers, Advisors and Regents”. In contrast to the common political narrative that

emphasise on the role and contributions of men, the paper aims to shed light on the political roles played by court women as kingmakers, advisors and regents in Andalusia. Although their number was few and far between, the fact they played such important roles and inflicted, in some occasions, serious implications in political realm like power succession, through their acts and decisions, indicates a breakaway from cultural norms and defies general expectations of women of that time. This work showcases the high level of intellect and capability of Andalusian court women in politics, hence presenting another side of the history of Muslims in Spain.

The next article also deals with the issue of women, this time in Nigeria. “A Historical Look at the Transformation Agenda: Patriarchal Structures, Hegemony and the Fate of Nigerian Women” by Dauda I. Jimoh assesses the effects of Nigeria’s 5-year development plan implemented during the era of President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015), known as the Transformation Agenda pertaining to women’s empowerment. The plan, as explained by the author, was hampered by some reasons such as patriarchal structures and hegemonic control, neo-liberal economic system and bureaucratic inefficiencies. As rightly put by the author, to address the issue of women’s empowerment, a holistic approach is required. While this may take time, to identify the reasons that impede gender equality in Nigeria and acknowledge them is the first step forward towards improving the state of women in the country.

“The Reformation Encounter: Martin Luther's Assessment of Islam and the Turks in the Aftermath of Constantinople's Fall” by Abdulwahed Jalal Nori and Sarkawt Tawfeeq Sidiq discusses Martin Luther (1483–1546), the founder of Reformation movement in Europe and his views of Islam and Turks (Ottoman Empire), the latter for the reason of being the ones who pushed their way into the 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. It was on the basis of his theological and political reasons, coupled with the political developments at that time, that Luther made his comments, which were in general, condemnatory. Interestingly, the Pope and Catholic Church were caught up in his remarks, being viewed to be equally evil and to be opposed as the Turks. In short, Luther’s comments and views conform to the medieval European mentality towards Islam and Muslims at that time, an era characterised by an antagonistic relation between the European and Islamic civilisations.

A more contemporary topic next is titled “Challenges of Online Learning Faced by IIUM Malay Undergraduates during COVID-19: A Case Study” by Nur Atiera Binti Yunus and Iyad M. Y. Eid who examine the challenges of online learning encountered by Malay undergraduate students studying at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) during the global pandemic of COVID-19. Using a qualitative research technique and semi-structured interviews for collecting data, several challenges of online learning have been identified. The findings contribute to the accumulation of knowledge pertaining to the pandemic, which can be used as a source of reference by relevant Malaysian agencies to cater for the needs of students of higher learning institutions in the country.

The following article also deals with challenges facing a particular group, in this case, the Ogoni people of Nigeria. “The Challenges of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Nigeria: From Environmental Movement to Movement for Self-Determination” by Adam Umar Musa and Idris Saminu explores the problems encountered by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the country’s environmental justice movement founded in 1990 which strives for the economic, cultural and environmental

rights of indigenous Ogoni people. Leadership crisis, MOSOP's ethnic-based nature and recent radical approach of the movement have been pointed out as the obstacles towards achieving the goal. To realise the goal, apart from unwavering commitment by the government, negotiations and peaceful engagements between MOSOP and concerned parties are deemed necessary.

Shifting towards Islamic ideas and views, "Islamic Ethics and Liberal Democracy: A Critical Analysis of Mustafa Akyol's Perspectives" by Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky and Inaz Ilyas focuses on the ideas of Mustafa Akyol, a contemporary Turkish scholar who involved in reforming Islamic political thought, through the examination of his major work, *Reopening Muslim Minds: A Return to Reason, Freedom and Tolerance*. The findings of the paper indicate that while Akyol demonstrates in his work, a clear intellectual framework on how Islam coincides with the idea of liberal democracy and contributes to shaping modern multicultural societies, he fails to critically examine certain related ideas, namely modernity and liberalism. He also fails to provide a conclusive discussion on Islamic theological and political movements. That said, his ideas which also contain the call for a rationalist interpretation of Islam, as put by the authors, paves the way for an honest dialogue on the relation between the religion and liberal democracy in the future.

Another piece of work on the ideas or thoughts of Muslim scholars is by Mehmet Vural titled "Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Traditionalism". The paper highlights the primary problems dealt by the Muslim society today, as viewed by Nasr, a contemporary Iranian-American philosopher. They include the modernist and secular worldview, and the secular view of nature, science and technology which led to anthropocentrism, unprincipledness, reductionism, progressivism and evolutionism with adverse setbacks on humanity. To counter these problems, Nasr advocates the rediscovery of intellectual Tradition which carries eternal wisdom, a measure if taken, would resolve many individual and social problems present in the modern society. Indeed, the paper is an interesting read given the various socio-cultural, economic, and political problems facing the Muslim world today.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all contributors and reviewers who involved in this June issue. It is hoped that the valuable ideas and engaging works of the contributors or authors will enrich the existing knowledge and benefit readers and students of history and civilisation worldwide.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to all members of the Editorial Board, our Editor Dr. Mohd Helmi Mohd Sobri, Associate Editors Dr. Alwi Alatas, Dr. Mohamad Firdaus Mansor Majdin and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rabi'ah Aminudin, and Assistant Editor Sr. Norliza Saleh, without whose efforts and dedication, the publication of this issue will not become a reality. Thank you.

**Fauziah Fathil**  
**Editor-in-Chief**  
**June 2024**