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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

### **An Approach to A Study of Islamic Black Africa & Islam in the African Diaspora**

In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful, may Allah send His blessings upon our master Muhammad, his family and Companions and give them peace.

The fact that the relationship between *Islam* and Africa predates what we have come to know as Islamic history (*hijria*) demonstrates clearly that you cannot really discuss the history of Africa and Islam in a short brief. Additionally, in order to understand the present problems in Islamic Africa one is obligated to have a deep comprehension of its history. No prognosis about Islamic Africa can be formulated about it except after understanding the cultural, spiritual, political and social factors that underpin its history. The fact is that Islam was the source of the emergence of the most enlightened period in African history and civilization. Under Islam, Africa produced an exhaustive, matchless, fresh and succulent civilization, able to unite diverse ethnicities while showing regard for the distinctive personalities of each. Islam contributed to the civilization and development of Africa, and Africa contributed to the dissemination and preservation of Islam. This last statement is extremely important since HISTORY or events are the Self Disclosure of the Acts of Allah ta'ala in creation. In other words, the symbiotic relationship between Islam and Africa is not coincidental or accidental; having said that, I will limit this small paper to seven important points.

[1] First, that there is a recognizable and definable relationship between Islamic Africa and the indigenous African Muslim communities of the Americas. No real solution to the problems in either can be worked out without referring to the other either

- a - spiritually,
- b – politically
- c – economically or
- d – culturally

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[2] Secondly, in order to understand the history Islam and Africa, we would present as a given a deep understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the Early Community (*as-Salaf*) and Abyssinia. A study of this significance must include four central issues which define the relationship between Islam and Africa.

- a- The strategic location of Abyssinia to the *Hijaz* and Palestine and the implications this had on recurrent Prophetic emigrations to Africa from Abraham to Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless them and grant them peace.
- b- The importance of the self image of the Abyssinian, and the role that this identity construct had on the emergence of Abyssinian branches of the three Abrahamic communities on the African continent.
- b- The importance of the letter of Prophet Muhammad to the Abyssinian King which reinforced the identity construct of Abyssinians, affirmed its legitimacy, but more importantly established for them...
- c- ...the right of autonomy and the need for political independence distinct from but in unity with the larger Muslim polity.

[3] Thirdly, the region of Islamic Africa is among the most ancient of territories in Islam, in as much as Islam penetrated Africa, as we said in the first period of Islam, and thereafter by the 5<sup>th</sup> century *hijra* (11<sup>th</sup> century CE) there emerged high Islamic government and civilization that was continual and persistent, implementing the *shari`a* throughout its history up until the coming of the European Christian imperialist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The implication of such an assertion raises three points:

- a- The penetration of Islam in Africa included every sector of human life: spiritual, intellectual, social, political, and economic and even in the unique architectural/construction system and a distinctive textile industry.
- b- This civilization was a supplement and complement to general Islamic civilization, where the general can never be understood without a comprehension of the specific.
- c- This abundant history had mainly remained unknown to the general Muslim world, leading to misreading of correct strategies for the advancement of Islam throughout the world.

[4] Fourthly, the majority of the Islamic-African heritage remains hermetically sealed in the form of rare Arabic manuscripts; which have yet to see the light. Arabic language was and still is the language of learning and culture in Islamic-Africa, where most if not all of the indigenous language under Islamic influence was written in Arabic script.

- a- these Arabic manuscripts were produced in innumerable metropolis of learning and government
- b- Covering every known science of human achievement: the religious sciences, the political sciences; the social sciences, medicine, linguistics, poetry and history.
- c- This magnificent spiritual and cultural legacy awaits sincere researchers that can work together in formulating the real history of these African Islamic governments and people, making it relevant for the electronic age.

[5] Regrettably, the majority of the research and scholarly works that deal with this area of history has been written in the language and ideation of the European Christian imperialists, for the purpose of:

- a- Attaining the imperialistic and colonialist goals and aspirations of the Europeans on the African continent. The fact is that the most impregnable barrier against European imperialism was Islamic Africa. This fact informed the critical approach which western academics have had to Islamic Africa with the aim of deconstructing the underlying principles behind the emergence of Islamic polities on the continent.
- b- Although the European scholars have taken complete control of the rare manuscripts concerning history of Islamic Africa; they were not sincere in their employment.
- c- They mostly distorted the meanings of these rare treasures, because many of them were either soldiers or adventurers who did not specialize in historical research, nor were they free of Euro-centric prejudices prevalent during that time.
- d- Many of them lacked the linguistic skills to understand the Arabic, the Fulbe, Hausa or other languages essential to intellectually embrace the original objective of these manuscripts and the culture that engendered them.
- e- The result was that their writings perpetuated historical fallacies about Islamic Africa, such as exaggerating the role that Islam played in the slave trade and the development of a myth of Arab hegemony over African people.

[6] When we look at the present situation in Islamic Africa, we witness a silent struggle being waged between Islamic spirituality and civilization, on the one hand and Western European thought, culture and civilization on the other. **THERE HAS BEEN A CLASH OF CULTURES** in Islamic Africa for the past 5 centuries!

- a- The European Christians/secularists embarked upon the encircling the region using the chains of European politics and culture.
- b- With the assistance of the World Council of Churches (today the so-called International Aid groups: such as OXFAM, etc), the western powers laid down clear policies and detailed programs designed to destroy the links and relationships between Africa and Islam in general and African people and their Arab brothers in particular. In regions of Africa where these two people and cultures encountered each other, the western powers ignited the flames of division between them preventing the proactive synthesis which defined their relationship in the past. The crisis in Dar Fur is a perfect example of fault lines between the two which have been exasperated and increased due to meddling from western powers.
- c- European linguist, anthropologist, sociologist and historians systematically disfigured Islamic African civilization, in print, while European military might stomped out the remnants of African Islamic hegemony on the ground. The latinization of African languages previously written in Arabic script as well as the present existence of the US's Africom forces on the continent is proof that this policy is still alive and well.

- d- The western powers also inseeded the Africans with the disease of arrogant nationalism, rallied around fictitious borders, flags and national anthems created by Europeans in European metropolis, using European languages.
- e- The poison of western thought and Christian fundamentalism was unleashed on the African continent; disconnecting Africans from their own spiritual sources and inspiration.
- f- This also caused the reemergence of tribalism and ethno-centrism, with all of the resulting disorder that presently plagues Africa, culturally, socially, politically and economically.

[7] Seventhly, the Islamic Call is African and Allah ta`ala has given the African a unique mission in inviting the world to Islam. This is evidenced by the fact that Islam presently is growing fastest in two places: [1] Africa; and [2] among its Africa and Latino descendents in the Americas. This is only a fulfillment of that most profound prophetic tradition: "The Call to Islam is among the Abyssinians. (*ad-da`awa fee'l-habasha*).” Thus, the Islamic call in Africa depends upon sincere individuals, whose success depends upon a deep and exhaustive study of the history, culture and mores of the people who are the object of the Call. The Call to Islam must be accompanied with a deep historical background of the people’s civilization, intellectual and scientific life, which would enable the Islamic Callers to envision the best cultural and political approach into the personalities of the people we are trying to reach with Islam.

- a- To this end there must be a proactive relationship between Islamic Africa and the African Muslim population in the Diapora.
- b- The emergence of high Islamic civilization in Africa for more than 14 centuries provide the key cultural fuel for the emergence of autonomous and viable indigenous Muslim communities in the western hemisphere.
- c- In the struggle for independence and dignity among African American Muslims in particular and African Muslims in the western hemisphere in general there are profound lessons for the resurgence of Islam in Africa.
- d- Many of the problems in Islamic African societies revolve around the rights of national minorities and likewise the key element in the struggle for human rights for indigenous African Muslim communities in the Americas particularly revolve around their rights as national minorities. The advances in one area would mean the advances for the other.
- e- Thus, the future of Islamic Africa and African American Muslims is irrevocably intertwined. We cannot allow a gulf or chasm to develop between us. The solution to one is the solution to the other.

In conclusion, I was fortunate to be present in a lecture held at the US Ambassadors home in Khartoum, Sudan in celebration of African American history month, February of 1985. The lecturer who was invited to speak that evening was the renowned erudite Prof. Dr. Muddathir Abdel Rahim al-Tayyib. In his extraordinary address he systematically delineated the influence which African traditional, Jewish, Christian and Islamic spirituality had upon the millenarian and Pan African movements in the Americas, but also the impact that the Pan African struggle among Africans in the Diaspora of the west had upon the independence movement in Africa. His enlightening lecture made a profound impression upon my understanding of the symbiotic relationship between Africans and the Africans of the Diaspora and this relationship is of prime importance to the multiplicity of interest which the US has in Africa and the views it has of the impact these multiple interests have on its chief historic national minority – African Americans.

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