

## *Conference, Symposium, and Panel Reports*

### **Reform of Education in Muslim Societies**

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), in partnership with Istanbul University's Faculty of Theology, organized the Reform of Education in Muslim Societies conference on March 18-19, 2016, in Istanbul, Turkey. The conference opened with memorial lectures by Hisham Altalib (vice president, IIIT) and Fathi Malkawi (regional director, Arab World) for Jamal Barz-inji (d. 2015) and Shaykh Taha Jabir Al-Alwani (d. 2016), respectively. This session was moderated by Yaqub Mirza (president and CEO, Sterling Management Group, Inc.).

#### **Session I: Contemporary Ethics of Islam**

Ziauddin Sardar (chair, Muslim Institute, London) began his "Education Reform: From Islamisation of Knowledge to Integration of Knowledge" by relaying three remarks from the imprisoned Anwar Ibrahim, a main force behind the education reform project: (1) the crisis of education is universal, (2) Muslims should confidently engage with the West on equal terms, and (3) the discussion of reforming education needs to involve all of society. The crux of his paper was the shift from the "Islamization of Knowledge" to the "Integration of Knowledge." Contending that western disciplines are inherently biased toward western values and cultures because they are socially constructed and reflect their originators' worldview, he said that the best way to progress is to launch "a multigenerational project" to integrate the best of both cultures.

Abdelwahab El-Affendi (head, Political Science Department, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Qatar) spoke on the "Obstacles Facing Education Reform." He pointed out that Muslims send their children to very expensive international schools that conduct their classes in English and teach western values. We cannot teach "our children texts in English and French and hope [that] someday they will produce material in Arabic," he proclaimed.

Jeremy Henzell-Thomas (Centre of Islamic Studies, Cambridge University) discussed his "Towards an Expanded Glossary of Key Terms." Citing the need for a common understanding of modern terms and concepts, he remarked that our recognition of various types of intelligences and ways of

thought compels us to focus on developing creative and critical thinking skills among all students and to realize that such efforts must be rooted in core Islamic concepts yet go beyond the “cozy coma of isolation and the lame duck mentality of playing endless catch-up with the West.”

Murteza Bedir (dean, Faculty of Theology, Istanbul University) moderated.

## **Session II: Higher Education in the Muslim World**

M. Kamal Hassan (former rector, International Islamic University Malaysia [IIUM]), shared his experiences in “Islamisation of Human Knowledge as Understood in the Context of IIUM.” He explained that IIUM has been conducting “integration in our own way”: being flexible in terms of curriculum development, sometimes taking a comparative, harmonization (between civil law and the Islamic legal system), complementarization (requiring students to take Islamic studies classes along with their professional coursework), or non-integration coexistence (teaching Islamic and western courses separately) approach. He emphasized that “Islamization” had always meant “integration,” and thus it is not necessary to drop the former.

Mbaye Lo (assistant professor, Practice of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, Duke University) presented “Muslim University Models in the 21st Century.” After surveying African and Arab Islamic higher educational institutions and explaining how and why they were established, he concentrated on the Islamic Revival Movement during the 1980s and the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) approach. He pointed out that two-thirds of the universities in the Middle East are private, that most of them are branches of western institutions, and that the people of the region habitually blame all of their problems on external sources, which is indicative of their own lack of critical thinking and multiculturalism.

Sari Hanafi (professor and chair, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies, American University of Beirut) spoke on “The Janus-like Face of Higher Education and Research in the Arab World,” in which he made a strong case for producing “visible” knowledge. He declared that “Arab knowledge is invisible” because the Arab world has no research portal and the most cited researchers are westerners – “tourists” in the Arab world – because they are producing “visible” knowledge.

Recep Kaymakcan (professor of religious education, Sakarya University), Ismail Demirezen (member, Faculty of Theology, Istanbul University), and Alpaslan Durmus (PhD student, Marmara University) commented. Abubaker Al-Shingieti (executive director, IIIT USA) moderated.

Mahmut Ak (president, Istanbul University) welcomed IIIT and its conference participants during the dinner session and gave a brief talk on the uni-

versity. Altalib reciprocated by thanking him and his colleagues for hosting IIIT and for partnering with the institute to organize the event.

### **Session III: Islamic Legacy in Education**

Marodsilton Muborakshoeva (lecturer, Department of Graduate Studies, Institute of Ismaili Studies) spoke on “Challenges in Higher Education and the Role of Muslim Cultures and Civilizations in Developing a New Paradigm in Education.” After stressing that handed-down oral knowledge should not be discounted and that western methodologies need to be understood, she suggested that Muslims avoid attaching “Islamic” to everything, that contemporary scholars re-learn how classical-era scholars reconciled reason with revelation, and that such a holistic approach to knowledge helps create well-rounded individuals and permits diverse educational methodologies.

Mehmet Pacaci’s (Ambassador of the Turkish Republic to the Holy See) “Can Muslim Higher Education have a True Goal?” questioned why Muslims could establish such great schools, universities, and madrassas in the past but not today. He contended that those societies’ ultimate goal was to govern themselves according to Islam’s principles, and thus individuals qualified to hold the necessary positions had to be produced. According to him, this is no longer the case because the modern nation-state is secular in nature.

Fathi Malkawi and Selim Argun (member, Faculty of Theology, Istanbul University) served as discussants. Ermin Sinanović (director, Research and Academic Programs, IIIT USA) moderated.

### **Session IV: Future of Higher Education**

Keri Facer (professor, Educational and Social Futures, University of Bristol, UK), was unable to attend. John Sweeney (deputy director, Center for Post-normal Policy and Futures Studies, East-West University, Chicago) presented her paper: “Reimagining Higher Education.” In it, she outlined her Connected Communities project and discussed the four models of integration: divide and conquer, relational expertise, remaking identities, and colonization and confusion. He remarked that “none are preferred, but serve as provocation for integration of knowledge. The aim is to disrupt assumptions, ask new questions, and generate ‘strategic knowledge.’”

Recep Senturk (director general and dean of graduate studies, the Alliance of Civilizations Institute, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakif University, Istanbul) presented “How to Overcome Intellectual Dependency in Education.” He declared that the Muslims are so reliant on the West for “theories, concepts, and methodologies” that they are producing practically no university texts. “That means we’re not using our minds to address our issues,” he exclaimed.

Amaarah DeCuir (adjunct professor, George Washington University and Northern Virginia Community College) presented her research paper “Our Place at the Table: Women’s Roles in Higher Education in the Muslim World.” She focused on two key elements: (1) applying a critical feminist lens to look at power structures that can explain why women’s realities should be defined by women and how realities of women’s lived experiences can stand on their own, and (2) the influence of Alice Eagly’s social role theories, particularly women’s communal attributes. Stating that women are wholly underrepresented in Muslim higher education and exploring why this is the case, she closed by making several recommendations.

Jan Arminio (director, Higher Education Program, George Mason University), Ovamir Anjum (Imam Khattab Endowed Chair of Islamic Studies, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Toledo), and Ahmet Temel (faculty member, Department of Islamic Law, Istanbul University) served as discussants. Ismail Latif Hacinebioglu (faculty member, Istanbul University) moderated.

Due to his inability to attend, Bekir Karliga’s (senior advisor to the Turkish prime minister on the Alliance of Civilizations) keynote address was read aloud by his assistant, Cuneyt Ozpilavci, at lunch. In it, he stated that the Islamic world is suffering from an ongoing “mindset problem” in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. After tracing its origins, he remarked that the only solution is to undertake a radical educational reform. But according to him, Muslims have neither taken this matter seriously nor are they willing to invest the hard work and the necessary time. These are the real roots of the problem.

### **Session 5: Dominant Paradigms in Higher Education**

Martin Rose (officer of the British Council; visiting fellow, the Waleed bin Talal Center for Islamic Studies at Cambridge), who was unable to attend, sent a recorded presentation of his paper, “Universities, the Job-Market, and the Jihad.” In it, he made the following points: (1) Recent research shows that about 44% of MENA’s “jihadis” are engineers and that very few come from the social sciences and humanities, with the exception of Islamic studies; (2) unemployment is often connected with radicalization, although “unemployment is low for engineers and high for social scientists”; and (3) that whereas questioning and opinions are encouraged in the social sciences and humanities, engineering and the scientific disciplines are more matters of fact and thus given to “black and white” thought processes.

Timothy Reagan (dean, College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine (Orono), shared his research in a paper entitled “Islam

and the Challenge of Language in Education.” A linguist with a strong interest in education and epistemology, he stated that language plays multiple, essential roles, including the means through which we learn about and conceptualize the world around us; however, it is not neutral. After discussing the concept of whether language determines or merely influences thought, he mentioned the fact that all attempted translations of the Qur’an are considered as no more than “interpretations” speaks to the “powerful and unusual place of the Qur’an among other sacred literature.”

Henzell-Thomas, Deborah Boehm-Davis (dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences; professor of psychology, George Mason University), and Hamit Er (professor, Department of Religious Education, Faculty of Theology, Istanbul University) served as discussants. Aydin Topaloglu (member, Faculty of Theology, Philosophy, and Religious Studies, Istanbul University) moderated.

### **Session VI: Discussion and Recommendations**

In the interest of time, this two-part session was condensed into one. It was co-chaired by Iqbal Unus (coordinator, Reform of Education Project, IIIT US) and Ermin Sinanović. Among the recommendations were the need to create an inventory of reforms in education worldwide to track successes and failures, create intellectual capital, produce knowledge, resurrect the Muslim Education journal, ensure that all participants share the same vision, evaluate what has been done so far, include female academics and students, and undertake translation projects.

After these scholars finished, Omar Kasule (secretary general, IIIT) delivered concluding remarks. He recalled how important this project was to “our departed leader, Jamal Barzinji” and thanked all of the individuals and teams that worked on the conference, as well as the presenters and discussants. He reiterated IIIT’s vision and commitment to the ummah’s renewal via education and reform.

Anas al-Shaikh Ali (director, IIIT London Office) and Hisham Altalib thanked and recognized individuals from Istanbul University’s Faculty of Theology, Turkish and British colleagues, and the IIIT UK, Turkey, and US teams. On behalf of Istanbul University, Bedir and Recep Guloglu (vice president, Istanbul University) offered tokens of appreciation to Ali and Unus. The exchange of gifts and souvenirs signaled the end of the conference.

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