

RESEARCH NOTE

**REMEMBERING HAMIDIN ABDUL HAMID: HIS CONTRIBUTION TO
AFRICA-MALAYSIA RELATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
AFRICAN STUDIES IN MALAYSIA^{© Σ}**

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ABSTRACT

In this obituary and research note, we dedicate our prayers and peaceful thoughts to the late Associate Professor Dr Hamidin Abdul Hamid (1970-2022), who recently passed away in the late afternoon of September 19, 2022. Malaysians knew him through his national television appearance, famous witty commentaries on national electoral issues, past adjuncts and visiting posts, and consultations. He will always be remembered for his contributions and legacy in advancing African Studies in Malaysia. To colleagues, former students, supervisees, and known associates and academic networks within and outside the circle of History, African Studies, Leadership, and Malaysian elections, his presence is always felt. We are always honoured to know his excellent works in many impactful ways. As part of this tribute to the late Dr Hamidin, the rest of this research note provides updates on current trends in Malaysia-Africa relations and African Studies at Universiti Malaya and in Malaysia generally. We also would like to express our sincere gratitude to SINERGI's Editor-in-Chief, and the rest of her editorial team, UKM Press, and SPHEA, UKM for providing us with the opportunity to share our views on research in Africa-Malaysia relations.

Keywords: obituary, Hamidin Abdul Hamid, African Studies in Malaysia

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NOTA PENYELIDIKAN

**MEMPERINGATI ALLLAHYARHAM HAMIDIN ABDUL HAMID:
SUMBANGAN KESARJANAANYA TERHADAP KAJIAN HUBUNGAN
MALAYSIA-AFRIKA DAN PENGAJIAN AFRIKA DI MALAYSIA**

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ABSTRAK

Dalam orbituari dan nota penyelidikan ini kami mendedikasikan doa, ucapan takziah dan memperingati sumbangan kesarjanaan Allayarham Profesor Madya Dr Hamidin Abdul Hamid yang meninggal dunia pada 19 September 2022. Rakyat Malaysia umumnya mengenali sosok arwah sewaktu hidupnya selalu muncul di pelbagai platform media dan komentar beliau terhadap isu-isu pilihanraya serta politik nasional. Sewaktu hayatnya, beliau banyak menjawat jawatan anjung, pelawat dan konsultasi dengan pelbagai agensi, baik di peringkat kerajaan persekutuan mahupun negeri. Sungguhpun begitu, beliau akan sentiasa dikenang bagi legasi dalam memajukan Pengajian Afrika di Malaysia. Bagi rakan taulan, mantan pelajar dan mereka yang pernah diselia oleh beliau, serta kenalan akademik dan rangkaian profesional, baik dalam atau luar bidang Sejarah, Pengajian Afrika, kepimpinan dan pilihanraya Malaysia, kehadiran sosok ini walaupun sudah tiada akan sentiasa dikenang. Kami merasa bertuah kerana mengenali arwah semasa hayatnya sangat berdedikasi dan cemerlang dalam sumbangan ilmu, kepakaran dan khidmat konsultasi beliau di arkib dan komentar isu pilihanraya. Selain mengingati sumbangan beliau, makalah ini juga menjelaskan perkembangan tentang trend semasa kajian tentang hubungan Malaysia-Afrika dan perkembangan Pengajian Afrika di Universiti Malaya dan Malaysia. Kami juga turut merakamkan penghargaan kepada Ketua Editor SINERGI, dan kumpulan sidang editorialnya, Penerbit UKM, dan SPHEA UKM kerana memberikan kami peluang untuk berkongsi pandangan kami mengenai menyelidikan dalam hubungan Malaysia-Afrika.

Kata Kunci: *obituari, Hamidin Abdul Hamid, Pengajian Afrika di Malaysia*

Introduction

In the late afternoon of September 19, 2022, at 4.30 pm to be exact, the late Associate Professor Dr Hamidin Abdul Hamid (1970-2022) passed away at his family's residence in Semenyih, Selangor (*Astro Awani* 2022a). Pondering over this sad news in his Facebook post was Dr Abu Hanifah Haris, the deceased's colleague from the Department of History, Universiti Malaya (UM). For many Malaysians, Dr Hamidin is well known for his usual TV appearances speaking on Malaysian electoral issues and political discussions (*Astro Awani* 2022b). His last appearance in *Astro Awani* was on September 8, 2022, sharing his views on the fragile relations and tensions between UMNO and PAS during the 15th General Election (15th GE). His regular mainstream and online media invitations were part of his appointment as a Research Fellow with ILHAM Centre, which is one of a few local think-tanks known for their electoral polling forecasts and GE results' discussions (*SumberKini* 2022; *ILHAM Centre* 2022)

Dr Hamidin was born in Mersing, Johor on October 12, 1970. Upon successful completion of his Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM), he pursued and read his Bachelor of Arts (B.A. with Honours) in History at UM. Upon his B.A. graduation in 1994, he began his first teaching career as a Tutor at the same department, maintaining this post until he completed his PhD in 2000 (Authors personal communication with Salina Zainul on November 22, 2022). Given his passion for the history of slavery in Africa and the immediate postcolonial similarities of many African countries with Malaysia after 1957, he was later awarded a postgraduate scholarship and study leave opportunity to pursue his Master of Arts (MA) in Asian History from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, United Kingdom (Hamidin 2003a; 2003d; 2004b; 2005a; 2006a). In 1996, he was awarded the MA and later in 2000 he was awarded PhD in African History also from the SOAS, UK.

Dr Hamidin began his first academic tenure in the Department of History in October 2000 and was later promoted to the post of Senior Lecturer on April 1, 2005 (Authors' personal communications with Salina Zainol on November 22, 2022). On December 31, 2007, he was promoted to an Associate Professorship – an academic position he held until his death at 50. For many students and supervisees, Dr Hamidin is known as one among the few Malaysian-based experts in African Studies. Throughout the years, he taught and gave his lectures in several modules at various degree levels on the subject of precolonial and modern African history, theory, and methods in history; introductory history of the European civilisation; history, international relations, the colonial period and insurgency in Southeast Asia (Hamidin 2002; Hamidin 2007). While teaching at UM, Dr Hamidin was entrusted with several administrative posts at the UM and a few secondment posts for consultation works on various subjects and expertise. He was appointed the Deputy Dean (Research and Development) for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences until March 2006, and later, the Deputy Executive Director (Academic and Research) at the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) until February 2010 (Hamidin 2016b). He was later seconded as the Director for the Interim Team of the newly created National School of Government in Putrajaya until April 2010 and that led him to the

Chief Executive Officer post at the Razak School of Government, which he held until December 2016 (Hamidin 2016b).

Upon coming back to UM in early 2017 and resuming his lectures on African politics, he was later appointed the Director of the Asia-Africa Development University Network (AADUN) (Authors' personal communication with late Hamidin on April 28, 2019). As part of the Asia Africa Conference in Bandung (2005), AADUN was established in 2008, as part of the UM mission to gain attractions of the Asian-African university network and international collaboration with universities in the Global South and to partner with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Apart from directing AADUN, he was also roped in as a Research Consultant for ILHAM and trusted to initiate many networking opportunities for the UM Centre of Democracy and Election Studies (UMCEDEL 2022) based at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences with ILHAM centre. This eventually landed him numerous research and consultation works, as part of a discussion panel and team of groundwork observers for Malaysian elections (Authors' personal communication with late Hamidin on May 22, 2022). Through his academic, administrative, and consultative services for UM and Malaysia, he was entrusted with several visiting, sabbatical, and consultative and teaching posts, including at the Malaysian Studies Department in Cairo, Egypt, Universiti Sains Malaysia, and Universiti Malaysia Sabah. Given his versatile academic works and exposure to numerous influential personalities, Dr Hamidin's unique approach to integrating history, politics and leadership lessons in Africa brought him many eventual opportunities and allowed Malaysians to underscore enduring themes of colonialism, history, nation-building struggles, governance, development policy and leadership mantles in knowledge exchange and solidarity sessions between Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries with potential African counterparts (Authors personal communication with Hamidin's former undergraduate student on October 12, 2022).

Beyond academic duties and university corridors of work, there is no doubt that the late Dr Hamidin was always known for his humble attributes, easy-going personality, and witty comments with former students, colleagues, and professional networks (Authors personal communication with Tun Daim, on October 28, 2022). His constant engagements with his hometown community needs during the hardship of the pandemic and flood seasons were known to many local circles in Mersing, especially for his concern and commitment to be part of the local *Prihatin* mission (*Astro Awani* 2022). While his deteriorated health conditions were known to many, his sudden death due to a heart attack shocked many of his close family members and friends. Our prayers, peaceful thoughts, and tribute of condolences are dedicated to the late Dr Hamidin's wife and family. Alas, he will always be remembered and missed by many for his joyful memories and labour of academic contributions. Through his intellectual endeavours to learn from African society, Hamidin was always known to many for his relentless efforts to enlighten many Malaysian readers on the not-so-distant connectivity of Malaysia with Africa's past and present (Authors personal communication with Mr Khir on October 28, 2022). The next section integrates Dr Hamidin's works and elucidates the current

state of researching Malaysia-Africa Relations and the development of African Studies at Universiti Malaya and Malaysia.

Researching Malaysia-Africa Relations and the Development of African Studies in Malaysia

To provide an overview of research updates on Malaysia-Africa relations or the development of African studies in Malaysia is an arduous task (Azman 2021, 194; Mehden 1965, 342). Moreover, encapsulating a niche corpus of encounters and interactions between leaders and peoples from two regions or continents is daunting (MBaye 2009, 64; Carvalho 2018, 435). Like finding a needle in a haystack, the focused subject suffers from multidimensional and spatiotemporal challenges, whether philosophical or pragmatic (Chew 2011, 16). Part of the present challenge is with the unsystematic motile collections and documentation of past works and pioneers (Compton 2013, 6). Therefore, it will be beyond the scope of this research note to cover every detail and information. Only continued documentary search and conversation will improve our imperfect knowledge and limited understanding (see also Dlamini 2009; Dlamini 2019; Abdullah *et al.* 2017). Three important features serve as our reminders:

Firstly, the time long before modernity and the expansion of a European-centric Westphalian discourse of international relations, foreign policy or diplomatic relations, pre-colonial records, and oral history of interactions across different civilizations, cultures, and world views are evidence of the existence of a body of knowledge (Taylor 2010, 12). Thus, it is essential but sufficient to state the parameter of this note and the illustration of Malaysia-Africa Relations; however, beginning after both states and societies have achieved independence, this research does not dismiss the multidimensional attributes of transnational encounters and multi-layered relations of Malaysia with 54 African countries, be it historical, modern, and ancient as well as more recent political and informal liaisons (Oloruntoba and 2018; Alatas 2021; Hamidin 2003b, Milner 2021; Haron 2018).

Secondly, both Malaysians and different African nationalities (at least since independence) have conversed, interacted, migrated, and exchanged ideas and material values (Haron 2007, 2002a; 1996, Hamidin 2009). Beyond the government-to-government establishment of diplomatic ties, irregular memories, informal conversations, online chats, and popular depictions of brands, and businesses, the transnational transmission of lessons learned, student exchange, family ties, and technological transfer have brought more familiarity with each other in many anecdotes and thoughts (Haron 2018, 2013, 2007, 2005, 2002a, 2001, 1997, 1996,). However, it is essential to acknowledge that without postcolonial elite efforts in propagating past Third World solidarity and post-Cold War's political economy of trade agreements and South-South cooperation, it will be impossible for the present commercial linkages, flight trips, technological transfer, professional training courses, and educational memorandum to bridge Malaysia's *Truly Asia* slogan as a gateway for many Africans to tour other Asian cities with mixed experiences on both sides (Hamidin 1999, 2000, 2003c, 2004a).

Finally, apart from elite and diplomatic ties, today's Malaysia-Africa relations have become more complex and multidimensional (Azman 2021; Stenecke 2016). Unheard of, sweet memories and controversies international student visas, overstay deportation by immigration authorities, and transit for all sorts of human security threats are persistent challenges to be overcome (Sukumaran 2020; *TST* 2021; *UWN* 2021).

Nevertheless, interest and interdisciplinary knowledge inquest of the African region and its connectivity with Malaysia dates to a historic-past and various Malaysian individual experiences in different parts of Africa (Haron 1996; Hamidin 2006a; Campbell 2004). Prior to Dr Hamidin's presence, the past educational training and works of renowned Malaysian and UM historian, the late Professor K. K. Nair in the late 1960s and early 1970s are considered one of the earliest known sources of information (Hamidin 2006a; Nair 1970). While present Malaysian and UM history students had known him through the distinguished award of the *K. K. Nair Memorial Prize* during the UM graduation ceremony, many graduates may not know this former UM historian and his earlier research interest in Africa (Nair 1975, 1986; Nair and Jeshurun 1980). A library search on the UM's *Pendeta Discovery* listed Nair's record of his PhD dissertation on Uganda and his selected writings on African society and their transnational encounters of past and present ties along the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian maritime routes (Nair 1970; Gaynor 2013). Some of his earliest writings on African social, religious, and diplomatic history appeared in the *Malaysian Historical Society Journal* (Nair 1975; Haaland 2014).

Nair was later known for his periodical articles and books on ancient and early modern South Asian diplomatic history and ASEAN-Indochina relations since 1975 (Nair 1988). The Vietnam war had apparently triggered immediate interests among area studies scholars of the Southeast Asia region. In short, researching Malaysia-Africa became part of a rare and limited field of African-Southeast Asia relations, which itself was part of Africa-Asia Relations. Not only do they appear in incomplete works, but they were also subject to global and local changes in shifting Malaysian worldviews about Africa (see also Hasall 1999). Arguably, Malaysian research interests in Africa have existed since the 1970s but it was only through Hamidin's efforts that Malaysia's diplomatic relations with African states, the formation of AADUN in UM and the establishment of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) have reshaped the Malaysian educational terrain as a hub of soft power. This further accelerated the growing popularity of Malaysia as a favorable destination among African students and key African leaders and influential policymakers (Ai Lian 2011). As such, institutions like the AADUN and IIUM mark the formal institutionalization and recognition to reignite Bandung and Islamic spirits and Africa's tangible values to Malaysia's South-South activism (Authors personal communication with former UM Vice-Chancellor, Hashim Yaacob on September 29, 2022).

Post-Cold War transitions and growing irrelevancies of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) have shifted past interest in Third World solidarity and ideological

traits to outcries against western injustice (Chong and Balakrishnan 2016; Dosch 2014; Dhillion 2009; Hashim 1992; Hassan 1992; Milne and Mauzy 1999; Saravanamuttu 1996). Consequently, Malaysian developmental progress and the nuanced and iconoclastic images of our past prime ministers function as a magnet for opening more Malaysian diplomatic missions and economic exchanges with African friends (Saravanamuttu 2010). Inevitably, research interest in Malaysian-African political economy and international business grew. Popular images of Malaysia were fostered within the South-South Technical cooperation assistance and productivity impact programs involving African civil servants and technocrats. These included myriad educational and short courses, and technical training in various Malaysian public universities and government agencies in the 1990s (Ofodile 2011; Devadeson and Chandran Govindaraju 2018). Certainly, Mahathir's OIC diplomacy of the 1990s allowed the utilization of the Islamic card to intensify Malaysia's favorable ties and economic benefits with the Muslim world, including earlier Malaysia-Africa ties, which were predominantly of Northern and Eastern African countries (Defolie 2012; Dhillion 2015; Fischer 2012; Nair 1997; Waikar *et al.* 2021; Zainal 2012). Apart from post-Apartheid South Africa, the humanitarian reputation of the late Nelson Mandela and Mahathir's entrepreneurial views of African markets served well the needs of both countries, coined by Hamidin as "beyond South-South rhetoric." (2009, 36). What has happened since then?

Retrospective Malaysia-African Relations: Selective Overviews

Within global comparative political literature and remnants of the Afro-Bandung conference exists rare but selective themes of small- and large-N comparisons of the Malaysian political system, multiracial power-sharing arrangements, developmental states, and democratic malpractice with critical African case studies (Acharya and Seng 2008; Acharya 2014). This includes comparisons of democratic and affirmative policy between Malaysia and post-Apartheid South Africa (Hwok-Aun 2010). Other themes may include development states and industrialization between Malaysia, Ghana, Egypt, and Uganda (Adem and Thomas 2018). Other sub-political approaches emphasize business competitiveness, the trade imbalance between Southeast Asia and Africa, and the comparative regional performance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Bhattacharya 2018; Carmody, 2013; Koga 2016). By middle of the 1990s, growing numbers of Sudanese, Somalis and other African students writing their defence and strategic studies master and doctoral theses have resulted in monograph publications on Malaysian blue helmet experiences in several UN peacekeeping operations in various African conflict zones (Authors personal communication with Hamidin on July 25, 2018).

Since the early 1990s, Malaysia's trade footprints have remained powerful, and Malaysian crude oils and brands can be found in every African Middle East market and household (Feldholf 2018). After Western multiple economic sanctions, Khartoum and Kuala Lumpur have successfully negotiated PETRONAS's entry into Sudan (Lee 2018; Macfarlane 2022; MacPherson 2016). In the word of the Sudanese, what is Halal in consumption must also be considered permissible in our oil extraction (Mohamed Elfaki

et al. 2012). Before China's Belt and Road initiatives (BRIs), apart from China and India, Turkish Petroleum Cooperation, Indonesia's PERTAMINA, and Malaysia's PETRONAS were considered influential players of petrol and crude diplomacy but often under-researched, especially since the end of Mahathir's first administrations in 2003 (Hamidin 2009; Haron 2018; Azman 2021). Though trade exchange and commercial ties existed, they were overshadowed by a systemic change in global politics and immediate priorities and refined foreign policy orientations (Hamidin 2003b; Balakrishnan 2009).

For instance, in Sudan, after 2018 and the military coup, controversial worldwide news reports of the political crisis in Khartoum also portrayed a struggle to negotiate the exit and departure of PETRONAS, which was already an outcast (Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs October 21, 2021). The Sudanese military removal of Bashir's regime was not sudden to the casual observer of African Studies (Bassil and Zhang 2021). Nonetheless, it shocked many past circles of PETRONAS corporates and former Malaysian diplomatic corps in Khartoum (Maher 2022). Within the well-rehearsed African politics and security literature, apart from the past civil war that gave birth to South Sudan, the Darfur genocide and his Islamist rhetoric of dictatorship, patronage politics, politics of the belly, and personal rules ranked Bashir together with Gaddafi of Libya, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and other infamous African despots and adversaries against democratic reforms and transparency (Bayart 2000; Nimako 2018; Taylor 2022; Peiffer and Englebert 2012). It was just a matter of time (especially since the Arab Spring of MENA) before the asymmetrical civil-military relations of many Arab Muslim and Sub-Saharan African semi-democracies were subjected to foreign intervention and governance reforms (Persaud 2018; Ibrahim 2017). The bitter struggles of the post-Reformasi of Indonesia after 1998 are one of the closest resemblances of the Malaysian understanding of the 2018 crisis in Sudan (Mills *et al.* 2020).

Meanwhile, existing literature on Malaysia-Sudan Relations is limited to past works of Sudanese students and professional experiences in different Malaysian universities and companies (Mohamed Elfaki *et al.* 2012; Eissa *et al.* 2019). African-Asian economic and trade literature assumes the parallel of China's BRI as a common logic for PETRONAS and other Malaysian private or semi-government actors in replicating the existing Western economic exploitations of the African economies (MOFA Officer 1, personal communication, June 18, 2017). There have been a few unpublished diplomatic accounts and notes from former Malaysian diplomatic circles in African cities, including Khartoum (Malaysian Embassy in Khartoum Officer 1, personal communication, August 5, 2018). However, they are reluctant to speak, bound by the secrecy act and constrained by classified diplomatic memos between Wisma Putra and Malaysian embassies in Africa, including Khartoum (Malaysian Embassy in Khartoum Officer 2, personal communication, May 8, 2019). In the final section, we highlight key problems endangering Malaysia-African Research in three unexplored but growing areas of interest.

Current State of Research Disarray?

Research interest in Africa in UM and Malaysia has existed in many forms, depending on individual research training, and specific themes which may not be consistent and limited to UM or Malaysia (Haron 2018). During 2018's second Africa-Asia Conference organised by Leiden University in Dar-es-Salam, individuals from various countries not limited to African and Asian nationalities showed several works that discoursed the two developing regions. In fact, the 2018 *Routledge Handbook of Africa-Asia Relations* brought scholars and book chapters beyond African and Asian-based universities. The only criticism is the present tendency of Malaysian African research to replicate existing neoliberal research footprints of western and Asian economic powerhouses in different parts of Africa's extractive economies (Azman 2021).

There is a tendency of perpetuating prevailing asymmetrical views of African people's inferiority, values, and identity as they are only relevant to the economic and trade needs of multiple Malaysian public and private actors (Tanzanian MOFA officer 1, personal communication, July 11, 2017). Thus, while in the 1990s and early 2000s, Malaysia's PETRONAS diplomacy, and other similar Government-linked companies (GLCs) and private sector companies like Celcom and Sapura were known by the western political economic pundits, they rarely brought meaningful and different experiences of African encounters with Asian economies (Nigerian Ambassadorial officer 1, personal communication, Jun 25, 2018). Nevertheless, irregular patterns of researching Africa in Malaysia and Southeast Asia are marginal compared to the more dominant stereotype of researching China, India, Japan, South Korea, Iran, and Turkey's political and economic hegemony in various parts of Africa (South African Ambassadorial officer 1, personal communication, April 25, 2018).

Therefore, shifting themes from past focuses on cultural, religious, and individual encounters to present appeals of diplomatic ties, political economy, and trade relations between Malaysia and African trading partners are an inevitable product of neoliberal dispossession of knowledge which eventually demotivates African students from coming to Malaysia (Ugandan Ambassadorial officer 1, personal communication, October 25, 2022). Nonetheless, the post-15th General Elections (15th GE)'s Malaysian unity government must revisit and reengage Africa to restore harmony; and multiple sites of African state-society relations should not be reduced to tangible benefits of a predatory nature to scramble Africa for our rumble capitalistic adventures (see also Grabowski and Pugacewiz 2019). Inadvertently, researching Africa must revisit our past and ancestral ties, including Cape Malay diasporas as part of global Malay Studies, remnants of former anti-colonial resistance of past Malay Archipelago figures like Sultan Abdullah from Perak and other ancestors who were forced to exile in Seychelles island by the colonial authorities (*South African History Online* 2022). Similar trade and coastal routes between Africa and Malaysian waters were needed as they served as important mediums for Sufism's early Islamization waves and Malay intellectualism (Haron 1997; Chukwunwye and Hamidin 2014). More valuable lessons from African coastal microstates in their Blue Ocean strategy and adaptation of climate change

policies were highlighted (Chew 2011). Thus, as argued by Alatas (2023), Syed Hussein Alatas' *Captive Mind* inspired worldwide known Pan-African and postcolonial intellectuals like Edward Said, Ali Mazrui, Mahmood Mamdani, Frantz Fanon, and others (see also Rodney 1981; Ayoob 2007). Through these African great philosophers, present Africa produced numerous Nobel Peace Laurette. In sports, Malaysia's football league has provided opportunities for 43 professional footballers from 24 African countries serving in 13 local football clubs. Malaysia can thus provide a new equity model of symmetrical relations with 54 African countries (*The Star* 2014).

Petty University Ranking Exercise and Commodity Values of African Students

Malaysian university obsessions with rankings, and its neoliberal higher learning mantra have reduced African students as commodities for university revenues among Malaysian public and private universities (*Malay Mail* 2019). Their confidence in Malaysian universities, either as publicly sponsored or self-sponsored, implies that postgraduate African students, who are future African academics and policymakers, generally respect Malaysia's higher educational standards. The late Dr Hamidin was profoundly disturbed with present status quo of the AADUN (2022), wherein the name and objective mostly focuses on courting instant memorandum agreements while viewing Africans with the White's Man burden mentality (Hamidin Abdul Hamid, personal communication April 28, 2019).

One of this research note's authors in UM has encountered Malaysian science-based researchers who view the needs for an African research institution and African continent as no more than a passive lab of data collections where intellectual property rights and benefits go to Malaysia first and Africa second. It is within this great travesty, that our present prejudice of researching Africa fits well with Abrahamsen (2017)'s characterization of assembling Africa to see and understand the world. Our past encounters with a few individual African students describe their disappointments with overpromised and compromised educational qualities in many Malaysian universities, including the disappointments of a few former IIUM students who saw the increment of fees as a clear shift from past ummatic solidarity of ummah and emphasis on charity to their present predicament of killing their future with kindness (*Asia One* 2012).

From Graduated Sovereignty to Securitization of African as a National Threat?

Since 2010, there have been increasing numbers of African citizens and students, dominated profoundly by Nigerians and Sudanese students, coming to Malaysia (*Borneo Online* 2011, 2013; *The Star* 2009). Yet there are nearly no recent works that seek to explain and understand African living and studying experiences in Malaysia or any Southeast Asian metropolis, including consequences upon the existing discourse of political demography and Malaysian prevailing views about African migrants in our country (see Daniels 2014; Ong 2000). News reports over the death of a former Nigerian student under the surveillance of the Malaysian immigration authority and media expose over Malaysia's Lim Kok Wing University's failure to secure credential compliance of

their program with many African graduates can no longer be ignored (UNW 2021; FMT 2022).

Growing critical themes of cultural appropriations, sociological accounts, and media reports on experiences of African students, dominated by transnational criminal themes, including Nigerian scams and Malaysia's role as a transit for human and drug trafficking, have brought to the fore immigration and visa security issues in Malaysia-Africa Relations (*Sinar Harian* 2019; *The Star* 2019; *TST* 2021; *BBC* 2021; *CNA* 2022). This includes the conceptualization of African students in Malaysian citizenship studies, especially in connecting existing racial polarization of Malaysian social fabrics, the extreme experiences of a few African students while studying in Malaysia and the brute facts of criminal prejudices of local Malaysians when dealing with Africans. Certainly, it is not a necessary to travel to Africa to learn about-everyday Malaysian encounters with-Africans (*Study International* 2022).

Conclusion

The need to explore many untapped areas of Malaysia-Africa relations is urgent. Understanding relations works both ways and requires equity and social justice. We can no longer be silent over the big elephant in the room wherein we want Africans citizens' research outputs and their accompanying benefits for Malaysia. However, the growing African citizens' presence requires a robust institutional foundation in the form of a Malaysia-African research centre. Relations do not only work bilaterally on a country-to-country basis but are multidimensional. By exploring key theoretical assumptions of paradiplomacy and developing world state attributes, we see the potential of mapping many essential areas of Malaysia-African Relations. For instance, Nganje (2014) mentions post-apartheid liberalization and the moment of openness for South Africa to engage in relations with any country, hence confirming the end of the old and oppressive Apartheid state doctrine. Thus, the conceptualization of multi-layered diplomatic relations allows plausible examinations of various state and non-state actors in multiple and transnational sites mediating Malaysia-Africa relations. In our final reflection and thoughts of past and present research in the sphere of Malaysia-Africa relations, we believe that there is need for future research in exploring paradiplomacy and thus advancing our intricate and multidimensional relations with 54 African countries.

Acknowledgment and Declaration

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