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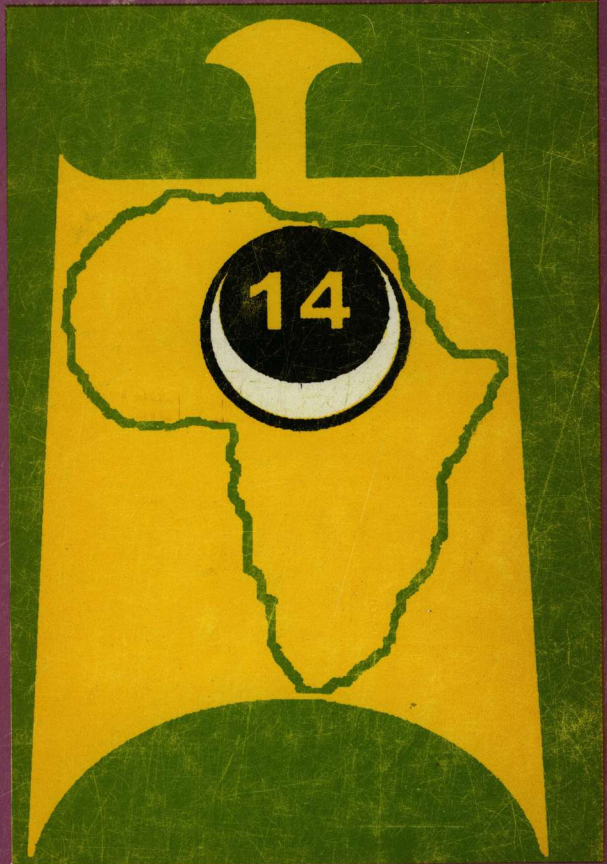
# **The International Conference ISLAM IN AFRICA**

**L'Anniversaire de Quatorze Siècles de l'Islam en Afrique**

## **La Conférence Internationale ISLAM EN AFRIQUE**

**26-27 Nov 2006**

**6-7 Thu-al Gaida 1427**



**6th Book - Conference Papers**

**6ème LIVRE - ESSAIES**

## THE INTRODUCTION & DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC LANGUAGE IN MAURITIUS

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NAJMUL HUSSEIN RASSOOL\*

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Mauritius is a small island economy comprising 720 square miles situated in the Indian Ocean about 500 miles east of Madagascar. The Arab sailors could be the first Muslims to have visited Mauritius. A map drawn in 1153 by the famous Arab geographer, Al Sharif El-Edrissi, shows clearly the position of the Mascarene Islands including Mauritius under the name of Dina Arobi. The main religions are Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The Muslims represent 17% of the total population of 1.2 million people and their presence in Mauritius can be traced back to the passage of Arab and Malay sailors, under the Dutch occupation, the French Administration and the British rule. Since their arrival in Mauritius the Muslims established mosques to preserve their faith and identity and contributed to a large extent to its socio-economic development. It has been observed that in post-colonial Mauritius, linguistic practices play an important way for all Mauritian citizens to construct, assert or redefine their ethnic, religious and national identities. Muslims used Arabic and/or their ancestral language(s) in their religious practices and also, to define and maintain their religious identity. The spread of

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\* LECTURER AND CONSULTANT MAURITIUS.

Islam in Mauritius can be largely attributed to the study of the Arabic Language, though initially limited to the reading of the Holy Quran.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the influence of the Arabic Language in Mauritius since its introduction and its development in shaping the Islamic culture and practices in the Muslim community of Mauritius. The future prospects of promoting the Arabic Language in that part of the globe are also examined in the context of globalisation and trade liberalisation.