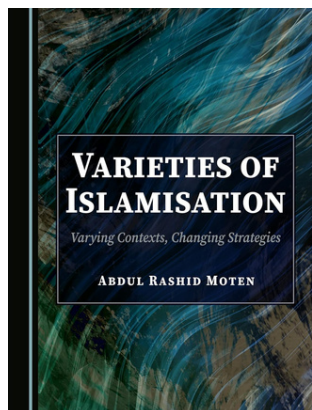


CENTRIS E-BULLETIN

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From the Editor's Desk

Dr. Zahid Zamri

Head, Research and Publication, CENTRIS, IIUM

The Ontology of an Intellectual

In the study of political sociology of intellectuals, there are numerous definitions given by scholars on the concept of intellectual. Such ontological definitions vary from one another, especially on the question of whether an intellectual should “attach” themselves to society or should be treated as an exclusive group that must be detached from the masses.

For the former, aside from personal endeavours of advancing specialized expertise (which is a must), an intellectual must also devote his or her intellectual activities to solving the issues faced by a particular marginalized group within society. The tasks of the intellectual are to advocate for their rights and to make them consciously aware of the problems that are affecting them. Together, both the subalterns and the intellectual will organically grow by learning from one another in a reciprocal manner in their attempt to change the status quo.



● From the Editor's Desk

Why are these intellectuals trusted with such tasks? It is because they possessed the “requisite“ intellectual capacity to guide the masses. They have the apposite knowledge that laypersons do not have. They are the “subject matter experts.” This is not to claim that they are cleverer than others. It is simply because they know certain specialized or professional matters that others don't, especially in probing for what are exactly the problems faced by the people and what are the effective ways to solve them. Of course, in doing that they have to know about the real situations on the ground in which they must learn about it from the people. If not, the solutions provided will simply not work.

Another reason is because of the unique position that these intellectuals have within society. They are “blessed” with the ability to move up and down between the socio-economic structures of society. For example, an academic of a university can dwell with the grassroots masses, talk and learn from them, and at the same time bring their matters to the upper-class political elites that rule the country so that the problems can be solved.

For the latter, to certain extent such detachments can be summed up in the words of Ernest Gellner, which is “*La Trahison de la Trahison des clerics*” or “The Treason of the Treason of the Intellectuals.” For intellectuals, to totally leave the masses to deal with their problems alone is an act of treason. What is more, to view or treat oneself as cleverer and more exclusive than others are clearly not in line with Islamic teachings. It will only lead to the feeling of arrogance in our heart.

Hence, Muslim intellectuals must try to master both spheres of knowledge as practiced by great Muslim scholars of the past. Only then it can be said that they have fulfilled the true ontological definition of an intellectual.

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