

# Intellectual Discourse

Volume 27

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2019



Special Issue

**Religion, Culture and Governance**



**International Islamic University Malaysia**  
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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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Volume 27

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2019

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**Intellectual Discourse**  
**Vol. 27, Special Issue, 2019**

*Theme*  
***Religion, Culture and Governance***

*Guest Editor*  
***M. Moniruzzaman***

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## **Note From the Guest Editor**

### **Religion, Culture and Governance**

#### **M. Moniruzzaman**

The contemporary world has developed specialization in every field of life and society. The tremendous development in every aspect of human life and society deserves detailed attention with exclusive focus to understand the complexity of life and society at their micro levels. This specialization has contributed to the detailed understanding of various aspects of life and society on the one hand; but on the other it has also compartmentalized those aspects in such a way that those various aspects of human life and society have become foreign to each other. As such the understanding of human life and society from a holistic perspective has become difficult.

Since the rise of modernity religion has been consciously cornered at the private space as enlightened liberation of human being. Earlier religion defined the entire boundary of human life and society, but the modernity stripped it off from its public role in politics, economics and society. This started with the very fundamental question of epistemology of knowledge posed by modernity. Whereas religion posed that true knowledge and ultimate truth originate from transcendental divinity which should have the legitimate right to define and guide the human being and the society, modernity altogether questioned the divinity itself and searched for the epistemology of knowledge in the human being instead. In this process religion was reduced from divinity to anthropological metaphysics arguing that religion itself emerged from the human psychology of fear and seeking console in the imagined supernatural. Thus modernity saw little or no relevance of religion in human life and society. Religion became a mere cultural and anthropological artifact in modernity.

Similarly, culture has been regarded by modernity as an object of study of human life and society that belongs to the distant past in the traditional society. Being part of the tradition, it has intimate relation with religion in influencing or shaping each other. Modern in-depth scholarship on culture is inclined to view it as an object of study of primitive anthropological artifact which in the distant past had shaped the meaning of human life and society but lost its potential subsequently. In modernity culture is a symbol of primitive irrationality. Rationality has displaced culture from its traditional role to mold a society to a mere object of anthropological attribute.

And finally politics and government, the most public space of human life, has been understood by modernity as a territory of pure rational and legal vocation. In this rational territory religion and culture turn irrelevant. Under the aura of universal secular that dispels particularistic divine and cultural specificities politics and government are bound by standardized laws, rules and regulations. Political role, therefore, becomes something beyond religious and cultural demands and expectations. In this way politics and government are neutral and universal for all while religion and culture are particularistic and subjective for a few.

Even though such has been the understanding about religion, culture and government in the age of modernity the evolution of human understating kept changing. The 'modern' has already graduated to postmodern in the developed world, and the understanding about these aspects of human life and society has taken a new perspective in which a re-look into the interactive role of these elements assumes a central importance. Religion and culture are now considered political rights bringing them into the public space where the concept of 'government' has taken a wider dimension of 'governance' recognizing the role and importance of religion and culture in public space and incorporating them the governance process. Indeed, the earlier trend of compartmentalization of various aspects of life has grown a tendency of unification.

This special issue of the journal recognizes the importance of this unification tendency and beliefs that the governance of human society based on pure secular exclusivism is an artificial imposition which deserves revision. The articles selected for this special volume shed light

on this belief directly or indirectly from various perspectives- political, religious, economic and international relations.

The first article brings forward how Islamic religious aspects of customer care in banking in Malaysia compensate, compliment or compete the conventional customer care service. Noor Mahinar and Norhashimah Binti Mohd Yasin in their article “Demystifying the Contractual Duty of Care of Islamic Banks in Malaysia” explain that the general relationship between a bank and customer is contractual in nature. For conventional banks, the banker-customer relationship is based on the debtor-creditor relationship with the bank earning a profit from a spread made between interest charged on the borrower of funds and interest paid to the depositors. In Islamic banking, due to the different contractual transactions of Islamic banking operation, it is based on a multi-contractual relationships. However, bank consumers perceived that banks enhanced their profits by treating consumers unfairly and failing to take responsibility when things go wrong. The authors’ study examines the duty of care of conventional and Islamic banks towards bank consumers. They also look into the Islamic banks’ duty of care from the perspective of *maqsid al-Shari’ah*, to those who use their services. Adopting the content and comparative analysis methodology, the authors provides an exploratory analysis on the duty of care of both conventional and Islamic banks. Findings of this study include that misconduct by banking industries remains rife and that unfair treatment of customers are frequent. As for Islamic banks, the *maqsid al-Shari’ah* based duty of care is found missing in their Islamic banking operation. The author suggests that the duty of care for both banks should be reformed to improve bank consumers’ experience. For Islamic banks, an improved standard is useful in performing their duties based on Islamic values.

The second article by Norhaslinda Jamaudin entitled “Good Governance in Malaysia: Assessing Public Perceptions on the Implementation of National Transformation Policy, 2011-2016” argues that the attainment of good governance is often perceived to bring political stability which in turn, facilitates sound and effective government administration. In the case of Malaysia, the author maintains that good governance serves as the core element in public policy reforms. This can be seen through the implementation of National Transformation Policy (NTP) which was introduced in 2010. The NTP comprises of

two major plans, namely Government Transformation Plan (GTP) and Economic Transformation Plan (ETP). Since its inception, the NTP has brought unprecedented changes in policy management through the establishment of the National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) and National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs). The NTP has been commended due to its inclusiveness which is in line with good governance practices. The NTP addresses fundamental policy issues in areas such as public transportation, socio-economic improvement, public sector performance and political stability. Nurhaslinda in this study has found that the implementation of NTP has been reasonably accepted by many, despite nuances on the policy outcomes. The NTP embraces good governance principles as the study confirmed the positive association between these two. This transformation agenda seems to be the genesis of Malaysia's road to good governance. However, there is still a long way to go to fully achieve the goal.

The third article entitled "Religion, Society and Gendered-Politics in Central Asia: A Comparative Analysis" by M. Moniruzzaman and Fahmida Farzana has highlighted the intermixing of politics, society, culture and religion concerning women in the five central Asian Muslim republics during the post-Soviet era. The authors have argued that women political participation is understood to be a part of civic rights but their participation is hindered by various factors. Numerous researchers have found that Islam as a religion, Muslim social culture and tradition inhibit women from political participation. However, there are a number of Muslim majority countries where women occupy the highest public offices and head ministries. How can this contradiction be explained? The authors in this article examine women political participation in Central Asian Muslim republics by looking at socioeconomic, parliamentary representation and informal participation factors. The study argues that socioeconomic factors in the republics still do not allow much liberal public space for women to take part in politics; however, in terms of parliamentary representation the republics maintain a record that sometimes fair better than many mature democracies.

The fourth article deals with an emerging market of halal food industry, a clear mix of religion, economics and culture. Sigid Widyantoro et al., in their article "Halal Food Industry in Southeast Asia's Muslim Majority Countries: A Reference for Non-Muslim Countries" attempt to discuss Halal food industry in Southeast Asia and its global role. The



authors argue that not only that halal food requirement pushes for in Muslim countries, the increasing number of Muslim tourists in non-Muslim countries opened an opportunity to make Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei to become reference for non-Muslim majority countries in developing this industry. This study focuses on: (a) understanding halal food, (b) how Muslim majority countries regulate policy regarding halal food standardization, (c) and, the opportunity to implementing the similar regulation to the non-Muslim countries. The need to accommodate Muslims' food requirements abroad especially in non-Muslim countries found that some countries have already been promoting halal food. The authors argue that the growing demands for Halal food for Muslims either visiting or living in non-Muslim countries can open opportunity for global spread of halal food industry.

The fifth article by Fahmida Farzana and Zahurul Haq entitled "Malaysia's Political Orientation in Diplomatic Neutrality" has explored diplomatic neutrality in Malaysia foreign relations. In practical terms, the word "neutrality" means a policy of avoiding interactions with nations that are engaged in armed conflict, or of trying to cure war while avoiding their contamination. In Malaysia, politicians and government officials often use expressions such as that Malaysia will continue its stance of neutrality, or that it wants to remain neutral and friendly to everyone. The authors have critically examined this stance of Malaysia's on diplomatic neutrality, with particular focus on its past and present. They argued that neutrality is used as a political concept to avoid conflict with major powers. Malaysia will remain effectively neutral so long as there is no major outbreak of any war in the region. It exercises its rights through endurance and avoidance.

The sixth and the last article authored by SM Abdul Quddus and Nisar Uddin Ahmed entitled "Policy and Strategies for Quality Improvement: A Study on Chittagong City Corporation, Bangladesh" takes a look at the good governance of local administration in Bangladesh. They maintain that the overall policy and strategies of an organization i.e. employee policy or employee development strategies, resource management as well as monitoring and control strategies characteristically have an effect on the quality management of the organization. These policies usually also have impact on the stakeholders i.e. satisfaction of the wider community and employees of the particular organization. The authors examine the policy and strategies of Chittagong City Corporation

for quality improvement and how these policy and strategies impact on the needs of its stakeholders. This article is guided by the EFQM model as the theoretical underpinning that provides specific enabler criteria of quality management of organizations such as employee policy, development of partnerships and resource management, and the monitoring of strategies. These enabler criteria help to explain the ways in which total quality management (TQM) is implemented in any organization. Data for this study was collected from a total of 142 participants, including selective officials of the Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), city dwellers, government officials and civil society representatives by using a structured questionnaire. The authors in this study found that the CCC has failed to convey clearly its quality mission and objectives to its employees at all levels.

I hope that the wide variety of the selections in the volume presents a multidimensional perspective to look into the inter-relationship between religion, culture and governance in different parts of the world. The fact that good governance is a buzzword in this era the publication of this special volume has seized the opportunity to present a timely evidence of the importance of studying society, culture, religion and politics holistically.



# In This Issue

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**M. Moniruzzaman**

Religion, Culture and Governance

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