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Editorial

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One objective of *Intellectual Discourse* is to engage scholars in dialogue on Islam and other faiths. This is much needed especially after the incidents of September 11, 2001 which have further heightened the hostility of the West towards Islam.

The West has tended to look at the history of the world from the vantage-point of European history and Western cultural experiences, viewing other civilisations as an appendage to its history. Such a myopic picture has resulted in a biased perspective towards other civilisations, especially Islam. According to Asad (1954), this prejudice towards Islam and Muslims is rooted in the Crusades that took place at a time when Europe was experiencing a new cultural beginning.

The Crusades represented Europe's earliest attempt to view itself under the auspices of cultural unity; for the first time, differences between states, tribes and classes were replaced with the politico-religious concept of 'Christendom' (since Europeans at the time largely professed the Christian faith). Thus, the First Crusade was embraced with much enthusiasm. And, when Pope Urban II (1095) urged the Christians to make war upon the 'wicked race' that held the Holy Land, he expressed, without knowing, how Christians were to relate to Muslims.

More importantly, the Crusades can be perceived as a 'clash of civilisations' – where the Western mind was manipulated to abhor Islam and the Muslim world. For the Crusades to gain legitimacy, the teachings and ideals of Islam had to be painted in the worst light possible and its followers depicted as depraved and perverse. During this time also the view of Islam as a religion of vulgar sensualism

and violence came to be stamped in the Western mind and remained as such. It should be noted that at the time, the spirit of independent inquiry has yet to be borne, thus, it was easy for those in power to sow the dark seeds of loathing for a religion and civilisation that was very different from the West (Asad, 1954).

This age-old Western hatred for Islam, which is religious in origin, persists subconsciously to the present. Research in social cognition on attitudes and attitude formation shows how a person may completely lose the (religious) beliefs imparted to him, but some particular emotion connected with those beliefs may remain, irrationally, in force throughout his life. Once formed, attitudes can exist at two levels; explicit and implicit. With regard to Islam and Muslims, the shadow of the Crusades still hovers the West – that is why the association between Islam/Muslim and negative attributes (a religion of violence/Muslims as terrorists) has remained. This association is an inevitable consequence of the process of social categorisation.

Writings on Islam by a number of Westerners have only added fuel to the negative perception of Islam and Muslims. For example, Lewis (1990), in *The Roots of Muslim Rage* argues that Muslims believe in dividing humanity into "themselves and others" and their "hatred is directed against us." Huntington echoes Lewis in identifying mainly Islam (and occasionally Chinese) as the enemies of Western civilisation. Thus, a perpetual conflict between the two civilisations will continue because the essential "…problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power" (1996, p. 217). And, the events of September 11, 2001 have not helped either.

The Muslims, on their part, are also equally to be blamed. Though Islam asked its adherents to maintain good relations with non-Muslims (see Badawi, 2005; 2007), this is often not practiced. Some of them have also been engaged in vilifying Christianity and the West. With few exceptions, they have not presented the true essence of Islam to the West.

Therefore, each side promotes and perpetuates a kind of binary vision, "us" vs. "them," associating all the desirable attributes to "us" and attaching all the pejoratives to "them." It is this distinction

that can be seen to lie at the hearts of many conflicts between the West and Islam. Until and unless we are able to go beyond this polarisation, problems between the two perpetual foes will remain unsolved – such labels usually fail to explore the complexities of the issue.

In this issue, the first article by Lhoussain Simour analyses how Akbib through his travel-inspired-narrative *Tangier's Eyes on America* (2001) actively engaged in a counter discourse to resist the Western-Orientalist tradition in order to assert his Moroccan identity. In taking an invertive and counter hegemonic stand to the "Other," he is giving voice to the traditionally silenced voices of the long silenced and misrepresented Orient. While this may be seen as empowering the "Other," such categorisations between Self and Other, as I have argued above, in reality, only exacerbate differences between people rather than making them aware of their common heritage.

Abdul Rashid Moten's article argues that while terrorism is age-old, there is still no one definition that is acceptable to all. Moten gives a welcome change to understanding terrorism by providing Muslims' view of the issue, after considering the social-behavioural and the American perspectives. He ends by making a plea to Western powers to cease their policies of victimising vulnerable populations, of sponsoring terrorists, of siding with Israel, and of denying others their rights to liberty and sovereignty.

In the next article, Mohammed Ali Al Oudat and Ayman Alshboul examine the regime security strategy named *Jordan First* that has been launched by the country as part of its democratisation process. The authors, however, argue that this process is only a façade; Jordan is still a constitutional monarchy where the king holds absolute power.

Christianity and Islam are both revealed religions, each with its own sacred text. In his article, Azman Mohd Noor examines the scriptural bases of stoning for adultery in these two religions. Both religions prescribed stoning to death for adultery. Implementation-wise, however, this law is not practised in any Christian country, and the few Muslim countries that want to execute this law are also shying away from doing so. Spahic Omer's article draws a number

of lessons that we can learn from the architecture of Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Madînah. According to him, the Prophet's mosque embodies the teachings, values and principles of Islam as a way of life by showing how it relates to the function–form relationship, respect for the environment, cleanliness, comprehensive excellence, promoting just social interactions, safety, among others.

In the research note, K. Helmut Reich argues that dependence on the brain (aka rationality) alone cannot lead us to a satisfactory life. More work is needed on how the brain and religion are related, and the perpetual conflict between religion and science does not help. Reich, however, is optimistic, believing that dialogue may hold the key to a better relation between the two.

To conclude this editorial, I would like to reiterate the importance of dialogue between the different religions as a way of knowing and understanding the other. In spite of the claim made by secularisation theory (that in the face of scientific rationality, religion would lose its hold on people), religion continues to be significant in people's lives. And, while most of the world's states (78 percent) are secular, most people (78.3 percent) still belong to one of the world's five largest religions (Dubois, 2007). Therefore, dialogue between religions, especially between the West and Islam, is much needed to elevate each from its narrow-mindedness.

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