Emergence and development of the *Intellectual Discourse*: A personal narrative

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Starting an academic journal is a challenge and careful thinking is required before embarking on one. A journal provides a home for new research and provides a forum for an increasing amount of research being conducted in an emerging field. A journal can nurture, consolidate, and promote the research culture within the community by raising issues, discussing controversies and by helping researchers to make their work public. It may allow researchers within that community to engage more fully with the global discourse. Thus, establishing a journal is both challenging and rewarding.

It has often been observed that the formalities of setting up a journal are easy and this explains for a plethora of many low-quality journals. The difficult part is to build a high-quality journal that helps achieve the stated goals and operates stably and successfully for many years to come. This requires identifying and defining the scope with a clear idea of the size of the target audience and their expectations of the journal. Next in importance, perhaps, is the appointment of an editorial board composed of well-established scholars who will inspire confidence among the readers of the journal. The board members must be committed to the success of the journal through submitting articles, soliciting submissions for the journal and suggesting scholars for peer reviewing of articles submitted. The journal's reputation will ride on the standing of board members until a substantial article base has accrued. Assembling an eminent editorial board is usually followed by decisions

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on a design for the journal, financial investment, and the employment of a full time member of staff to administer the journal.

Intellectual Discourse took a long time to meet the criteria required of a credible journal. Based upon participant observation, this study analyses the developmental trends of the journal over an extended period of time. Such a study has not been attempted but it is essential to preserve the history as well as to understand the process of continuity and change over time.

Intellectual Discourse

The idea of establishing a journal of the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) was conceived by the second Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman. AbuSulayman, all his life, had been mildly denouncing the epistemological imperialism of the West, pleading instead for the de-westernization of knowledge and its replacement with an Islamic epistemology. He believed strongly that Islamization of knowledge, which is the niche area of IIUM, ought to be widely and freely accessible to all. His particular concern was the sharing of this knowledge with all the scholars of the Muslim world.

The task of establishing the journal was assigned to the Dean of KIRKHS, Professor Dr. Anis Ahmed, who welcomed me, on July 1, 1992, with a warm smile and a firm handshake, requesting simultaneously me to contribute a paper for the soon-to-be published journal. On my request, a manual type-writer was made available. My handwritten manuscript was transformed into a printed paper and submitted for publication. Three weeks later, the paper was sent to Prof. Sharif al-Mujahid, then the head of department of communication and recipient of many awards for his academic contributions, who had been appointed editor of the new journal. The title of the new journal was, according to Anis, "Dialogue" but being informed of several journals carrying the same title, he agreed with the suggestion to call it "Discourse" which was subsequently amended by AbuSulayman, to read "Intellectual Discourse." This title refers to the exchange of thoughts and ideas on a particular subject, which is, Islamization of knowledge.

According to Anis Ahmad, the decision to establish the journal was made in August 1990 and an editorial board, comprising Professors

Abdallah Botchway, Abdul Rahman I. Doi, Hassan Langgulung, Mohd. Kamal Hassan, Anis Ahmad and Dr. Eric Sikander was set up (Intellectual Discourse, 1993: ix). As some of these members soon left the University, Sharif al-Mujahid was appointed the editor but without any assistance. He relied upon some of his junior colleagues like Muhammad Al-Ghazali, Abdullah al-Ahsan and I. I was assigned to copy-edit the manuscripts accepted for publication with the implied promise of being rewarded as an Assistant Editor.
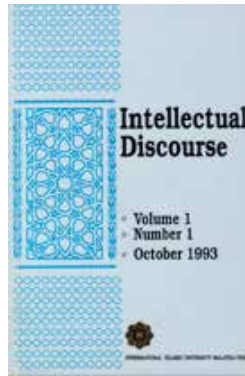
Sharif al-Mujahid, after consultation with the team, defined the scope of the journal as follows:

> The *Intellectual Discourse* is an academic, refereed journal, published twice a year, by the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University, Malaysia. It stands for rigorous intellectual analysis, and for insights, rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, while addressing contemporary issues. It aims at promoting new research focussing on the contributions pertaining to the Islamic heritage, made by Muslim scholars of the past. Above all, it seeks to provide a forum for addressing issues dealing with Islamisation of human knowledge in all its ramifications, leading to the strengthening, and, ultimately, crystallization, of the current process of Islamisation (Intellectual Discourse, 1993: ii).

Intellectual Discourse was the journal of the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences. However, the team members of the journal worked as if it was the journal showcasing the University. On the completion of editing the manuscripts, Sharif al-Mujahid wrote the editorial with painstaking care. He borrowed the cover design from a brochure explaining the courses offered at the KIRKHS (See fig. 1). The manuscript was almost ready for the press except for proof-reading and transliteration. However, the file remained in my custody until Sharif al-Mujahid's term at the University expired and he left for Pakistan.

Prof. Anis took an active interest in getting the journal published without delay. He asked that the file be handed over to his office so that it could be sent to the press. The file, as stated, was not ready for the press. Going by my experience in Nigeria, the publication process was supposed to be a laborious process, consisting of producing print-ready material by hand-setting, letter by letter, individual lines and

pages. Oblivious to the fact that computers had rendered manual type-setting obsolete, I volunteered to sit with the type-setter, taking care of typos and transliteration. The Dean smiled at my naivety, and insisted on having the transliteration completed before sending it to the press. I complied with his request, submitted the file, and the following week, the maiden copy of the *Intellectual Discourse* was on the Dean's table to be launched by the President of the University, Anwar Ibrahim, the Finance Minister of Malaysia.

Figure 1: The cover design of the maiden issue of the
Intellectual Discourse

Source: Intellectual Discourse website at http://journals.iium.edu.
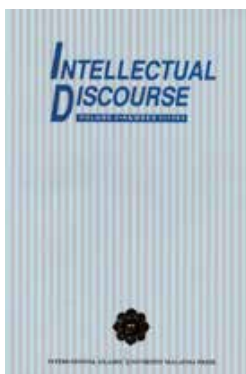my/intdiscourse/index. php/islam (Accessed May 1, 2017).

The joy of receiving the first two copies of the maiden issue was beyond words but it soon turned into dismay. The articles were filled with typographical and grammatical errors, giving the impression that the editorial team had done nothing to ensure professionalism in the articles they published. Such errors could have a negative impact on readers' perceptions and create a lasting impression and diminish the reputation of the journal. Second, the journal was lop-sided. I conributed a full-length article, a book review and a conference report. Noticeably, the copy-right page contained the names of the editor and editorial board, some of whom were not associated with the journal. The editorial, written by Sharif al-Mujahid, appeared under the name of the Dean with a "Note of appreciation" which, among others, stated:

> … Prof. Sharif al-Mujahid, Dr. Muhammad Al Ghazali
> and Dr. Abdul Rashid Moten helped us in materializing

the project and preparing material for the first issue. We record our heart-felt appreciation for the efforts of these colleagues. Most of the above colleagues have returned to their home countries, their names may not appear on the Advisory Editorial Board of this issue but their efforts, in making this project a success, will always be remembered… The Editorial for this issue was written by Prof. Sharif al-Mujahid (Intellectual Discourse, 1993: ix).

Intellectual Discourse under Z.A. Ansari

Prof. Z.A. Ansari edited the second issue onwards with a self-designed cover page (see fig. 2). He had little idea of the painful saga that lay ahead. For his first issue, he relied extensively upon his research assistant and submitted the journal for publication to the Director of IIUM Press, Abdullah al-Ahsan, who had alerted him about the many typos and grammatical errors. He learnt his lesson and since then did not trust anyone except himself. He did request and succeeded in getting a secretary to whom he assigned exclusively administrative responsibilities. He would call his friends and colleagues to submit papers but with rare success. Those who wrote well would not submit their paper to *Intellectual Discourse*. One Canada-based Professor on sabbatical at the International Islamic University Malaysia was preparing his paper for submission to a journal in the U.S. Z.A. Ansari came to know about that paper, grabbed it and published it in the *Intellectual Discourse*. This happened twice during his tenure as the editor.

Figure 2: Cover design of the journal by Z.A. Ansari

Source: Intellectual Discourse website at http://journals.iium.edu. my/intdiscourse/index.php/islam (Accessed May 3, 2017).
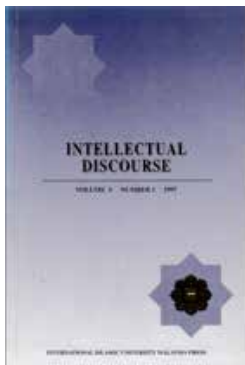
To be sure, Z.A. Ansari did not have a range of collaborators such as copy editors, production staff, editorial board members, and authors. With the exception of a part-time copy editor, Z.A. Ansari had to do all the jobs by himself with occasional calls to his friends for assistance. I joined the editorial board of *ID* for Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994. For the following issue, Vol. 3, No. 1, I was appointed the Book Review editor.

The problem was not simply the paucity of papers submitted. Few manuscripts received were not publishable in their original form as their authors could not communicate their intention effectively. Many authors did not know the referencing system; many more would not cite appropriate references. The tragedy was that those who submitted papers for publication were not willing to go through the cycle of submission, review and re-submission. The paper once submitted was considered final. A paper once returned with comments for improvement would never come back. Ansari, therefore, adopted the method of inviting the writers to work with him to develop their manuscript into a publishable form. One article on medieval history of Islam was 97 pages long. The author was requested to cut it down to size but refused saying "Do what you want to do." One of Ansari's colleagues worked on the paper and brought its length down to 42 pages. Ansari edited it further and managed to shorten it to about 9,000 words, a publishable length.

Z.A. Ansari had all the freedom to run the journal as he wished but no assistance in any form, other than an honorarium for each issue of the journal, was provided. Occasionally, those in higher authority would intervene and make some changes. Thus, the cover design was changed in 1995 on the urging of the Director of IIIT, London (See fig. 3). The new cover was designed by Saddiq Ali. Ansari was asked to mention the name of the designer and he obliged in the 1996 issue of the journal. In 1997, Ansari's printer was stolen from his office and despite several reminders, the printer was not replaced. He ended up paying for it himself.

Z.A. Ansari was the editor of the journal from 1993 to 2001 and succeeded in bringing out 15 issues including the first volume issued in 1993 (see Table 1). Most of the issues contained an editorial. Research articles containing original analysis that added to current knowledge consumed most of the pages, ranging from 3 to 6 articles per issue. These articles contained background information, the methods used,

a description of the results, and an analysis of what the results mean in the context of contemporary knowledge. These articles were written either from an Islamic perspective or they dealt directly with issues confronting the Muslim world. Book reviews ranging from 2 to 5 and conference reports appeared regularly.

Figure 3: Cover design by Saddiq Ali

Source: Intellectual Discourse website at http://journals.iium.edu.my/ intdiscourse/index. php/islam (Accessed May 3, 2017).

While working as an editor, Z.A. Ansari was also shouldering the responsibility of heading the department of psychology. The two responsibilities took a heavy toll and his health soon started to decline. He requested for his replacement as the editor of the journal and suggested Professor Syed Ashiq Ali Shah, a fine scholar, as the new editor. No action was taken on his request for almost a year by which time two issues of the journal lapsed. Finally, Ansari met the Rector, Professor Mohd Kamal Hasan, who agreed to relieve him of the responsibility of editing the journal.

Table 1: Journal Features during the editorship of Z.A. Ansari

Yea	Vol.	Issue	Reflection	Article	Article	Book Rev	Conf Report	Research Note
1994	2	1			4		2	1
1994	2	2			6		1	1
1995	3	1			5		4	1
1995	3	2			5		4	1
1996	4	1&2	Yes		5		3	1
1997	5	1	Yes		4		3	4

1997	5	2	Yes	1	3	1	3	3
1998	6	1	Yes	1	3		3	2
1998	6	2		--	5		3	1
1999	7	1	Yes	--	4		3	
1999	7	2		--	6	1	3	1
2000	8	1		--	5		4	
2000	8	2		1	6		4	2
2001	9	1			5		5	

Source: Intellectual Discourse website at http://journals.iium.edu.my/
intdiscourse/ index.php/islam (Accessed May 8, 2017).

Intellectual Discourse under A. Rashid Moten

Literally, Ansari forced me to take over the responsibility of editing the journal in 2002. I drafted the letter of my own appointment and also the letter thanking Ansari for his contributions. The Dean simply signed the two letters. I relied upon the research assistant for the first issue of the journal and showed it to Ansari. He did not comment that it was bad, which it certainly was, but merely that I needed a good and skilled research assistant. I got the message and vowed wholeheartedly to ensure that the image of the journal would not be damaged.

The immediate problem was that the journal was lagging behind by three issues. Friends suggested combining the two issues of 2001 into one volume and 2002 into one volume. It had happened once during Prof. Ansari's editorship in 1996. In order to regularize its appearance, the editorial board then had decided and published only one volume by combining issue numbers 1 & 2 of volume 4. I was determined not to repeat the same and hence decided to publish four issues in 2002, retaining the original issue and volume numbers. From 2003 onwards, the journal was published regularly with two issues per year. However there were many more problems to grapple with.

The major problem was that the *Intellectual Discourse* was outside the mainstream milieu and was being published in the hope that it would be read and recognized internationally. This goal seemed too distant. The fourth Rector of the University, Dr. Syed Arabi Idid, a Professor in the Department of Communication, suggested getting the journal indexed to increase its visibility. Consequently, attempts were made to list the journal in international bibliographic databases and in 1995 it was

abstracted in *International Political Science Abstracts* and the *Muslim World Book Review*. The number of databases gradually increased but it took 6 years to get it abstracted in SCOPUS. These indexing agencies gave the journal some level of visibility. These efforts were augmented by efforts at widening and maintaining international contacts through reciprocal advertising and exchange of subscriptions with other journals such as the *America Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, *The Muslim World Book Review* and Pakistan-based *Islamic Studies*.

Despite indexing, the number of manuscripts received was small. The University's drive to achieve the "Research University" status was opportune. The Rector, in particular, pleaded with the University community to write and publish in journals and books. The members of the editorial board also became more active in systematically soliciting manuscripts. However, potential authors of papers were less experienced in producing publishable articles. The most common task that I faced each day as editor of the *ID* was the screening of manuscripts submitted for possible publication. Most papers were turned down because their quality was extremely poor to merit further attention. Some manuscripts were lengthy, consuming over 100 pages. Given the paucity of articles, the editor had to spend weeks cutting the manuscript down to size and literally re-writing the paper. Some papers contained useful information but suffered from manifold problems: awkward wording, incorrect grammar or punctuation, inadequate literature review, incomplete references, and the like. The editor took care of such papers, corrected the language, checked references, and upgraded the manuscripts before they were sent out for peer review.

As an editor, I was alerted to the need to change the cover design which is the best tool to promote the journal. The cover comprises not just the front cover but a set of elements that also includes the back cover and the spine (edge). So I thought of the design and consulted an expert working in the press which printed the journal. This new design appeared in Vol. 13, No.1 (2005) issue of the journal (see fig. 4) which to date remains unchanged. The design conveys the essence of the journal and the institution that promotes it. Its message is clear, readable, and is also aesthetically appealing.

I was also aware of the need for an editorial board that would help shape the future of the journal as well as provide the transition to the

future. Unfortunately, I did not inherit the team that had been in place. For the earlier issues, there was the editor and a book review editor. The page also contained the names of the members of an editorial board and an international advisory board; perhaps it was just for display. However, one member of the editorial board, Professor M. Kamal Hasan, was active and reviewed many manuscripts. The members of these boards were, in general, not informed of the roles they were supposed to be playing. In any case, they were scholars of high repute and hence helped raise the profile of the journal. Nevertheless, there was a need for scholars to assist the editor in carrying out his responsibilities. Consequently, in addition to a book review editor, two Associate Editors' posts were created. They were to provide expert advice on content and acceptance of articles. All editors agreed to solicit and review manuscripts and advise on journal policy. They all agreed to work towards meeting the publication schedule.

Figure 4: Cover design by A. Rashid Moten

Source: Intellectual Discourse website at http://journals.iium.edu. my/intdiscourse/index. php/islam (Accessed May 9, 2017).

I was the editor of the *Intellectual Discourse* from 2002 to 2009 and published 16 volumes in all (See Table 2). No issue, with the exception of vol. 10, no. 2, contained an editorial reflecting the opinion of the periodical. The emphasis was on articles written by scholars with informed arguments on topics or questions that were relevant and of interest to the academic community. These articles ranged from 3 to 7 per issue. The issue which contained 7 articles was the first special issue of the journal on "Iqbal and his universal vision." There was also an increase in research notes, making a valuable contribution on an

aspect without necessarily following a strict paper outline. There were only two review articles synthesizing current research on a specific topic. Being editor of this journal has been highly taxing but extremely rewarding and is the most significant achievement of my academic career. Nevertheless, it demanded a lot of energy to keep everything running smoothly.

*Table 2: Issues of Intellectual Discourse published during
the editorship of A. Rashid Moten*

Year	Vol.	Issue	Editorial	Articles	Review Article	Book Rev	Conf Report	Research Note	Comments
2002	10	1		4		4	1	1	
2002	10	2		7			1		Special issue on Iqbal
2003	11	1		3		3		2	
2003	11	2		4	1		1		
2004	12	1		5		4			
2004	12	2		3	1		1	2	
2005	13	1		3		5	1	1	New cover
2005	13	2		3		4	2	2	
2006	14	1		4		5		2	
2006	14	2		4		4	2	1	
2007	15	1		4		4		1	
2007	15	2		3		6	1	1	
2008	16	1		3		4	1	2	
2008	16	2		4		4		1	
2009	17	1		4		4		2	

Source: Intellectual Discourse website at http://journals.iium.edu.my/ intdiscourse/ index.php/islam (Accessed May 10, 2017).

The journal under Noraini Mohamad and Kabir M. Solihu

In 2009, a decision was made to handover the editing responsibility of the journal to Noraini Mohamad, a Professor in Psychology with an excellent publication record. Professor Noraini joined the *Intellectual Discourse* as an Associate editor in 2008 and assisted the editor in many ways to improve the quality of the journal. She seemed like the right person for the jobs she had complete knowledge of all the different facets of the *Intellectual Discourse*. She took to editing with an enthusiastic heart and mind and came up with the first volume which had six articles and four book reviews (see Table 3).

Volume 18 in 2010 saw a major change in the method of formatting the information sources used in articles. From the beginning, the journal has been using the Chicago (Turabian) style, using a footnote which linked the material that needed to be sourced with the source information, usually through superscript Arabic numerals. This system makes a bibliography, more or less, redundant. However, Noraini, coming from the Psychology department, decided to change the system and adopted the APA style which, to her, would make the journal appear more competent and authoritative. This system involves in-text citation which is used by readers to find the full source information provided in the reference list.

The second issue of Volume 18 saw the English abstracts of all articles translated into the Malay language. This was a novelty and was a University requirement. The Malay abstract was to assist in the dissemination of information into and from Malaysia to other countries where the Malay language is widely used. This job was assigned to Dr. Saodah Wok of the Department of Communication who has been serving as an Associate editor of the journal since 2004. The next issue (Volume 19, No. 1) was a special issue. I was thrilled and honoured by Prof. Noraini's request to guest edit the special issue devoted to "Tradition and Modernity in Muslim Countries." I wrote to all my friends to contribute to this special issue and some of them did oblige. The papers were duly reviewed and eventually, the issue was published which contained 5 articles, 2 "research notes" and 3 book reviews from scholars, none of whom were serving members of the International Islamic University Malaysia. The issue contained the latest work on the assigned topic, containing a valuable up-to-date reference source for researchers interested in that area. I wrote a lengthy editorial which looked like an article and Noraini allowed it go as an "introduction." In other words, while I guest edited the issue, Noraini was still deeply involved in seeing that the journal maintained the quality and that the issue helped raise the profile of the journal among the members of the scholarly community. It is satisfying to note that the journal's indexing in Scopus began with this special issue.

Noraini, undoubtedly, possessed the skill and personality which was well suited for the editorial job. But she eventually found it difficult to maintain a sustained focus on other professional activities while being editor, with the result that her to-do list in the area of psychology

was slowly but steadily growing longer. Thus, she began to think of relinquishing the post. She was persuaded to delay her departure so that there would be plenty of time to find a replacement and to allow some potential overlap with the new editor to help make the transition as smooth as possible. One year would give the next editor time and opportunity to ease into the position by first working as an associate editor. She eventually worked out with the new editor and came up with a transition plan that was agreeable to everyone involved.

Table 3: Issues of Intellectual Discourse published during
the editorships of Noraini Mohamad and Kabir M. Solihu

Year	Vol.	Issue	Editorial	Articles	Book Review	Conf Report	Research Notes	Comments
2009	17	2		6	4			
2010	18	1	Yes	5	4	1		APA system
2010	18	2	Yes	5	5			Abstract tr. in Malay
2011	19	1	Moten	5	3		2	Special Issue/ SCOPUS
2011	19	2	Yes	5	4	2		
2012	20	1	Yes	4	4	1		Moten/ Kabir
2012	20	2	Yes	4	4	1	1	
2013	21	1	Yes	5	4	1	1	
2013	21	2	Yes	4	6	3		Idid/Kabir

Source: Intellectual Discourse website at http://journals.iium.edu.my/ intdiscourse/ index.php/islam (Accessed May 11, 2017).

Dr. Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu took over as the editor of the journal in 2012. He was then an Associate Professor. To strengthen his hand, Noraini suggested that I create and assume the post of the Editor-in-Chief. I worked as the Editor-in-Chief for a year before I was transferred to the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization which ended my active association with the journal.

Kabir Solihu promised to work relentlessly to maintain the quality of the journal by publishing scholarly articles on issues related to Islam and the Muslim world. Throughout his tenure, he remained true to his words. Every single issue of the journal contained an editorial which briefly explained certain concepts from an Islamic perspective before describing the features of articles contained in the issue.

Kabir Solihu had the support from the University which came out with the *Journal Publication Policies and Guidelines* (IIUM Press, 2014) to improve the management and quality control of the IIUM journals and to upgrade their standards to the level of internationally reputed journals. The booklet specifies the structure of the journal and defines the roles and responsibilities of the Editor-in-Chief, Editor, Associate/Assistant Editor, Section Editors and language or Copy Editors.

Kabir Solihu was internet savvy, thereby surfing the Web, using e-mail, downloading files and updating applications. As required by the University, he updated the website of the journal and followed an Open Journal System (OJS) platform which is capable of paper processing, monitoring and controlling and which can be freely downloaded and customized. Most importantly, he struggled and succeeded in uploading all the past issues of the journal in the "Archive." The website of the journal was well-maintained and updated on a regular basis by himself. With all these features, it can safely be concluded that the journal took a definite shape.

Conclusion

Intellectual Discourse is a periodical publication in which scholarship relating to Islam and the Muslim world is published. It is peer-reviewed or refereed. The content typically takes the form of articles presenting original research, review articles, and book reviews. *Intellectual Discourse* gives researchers a venue to impart their knowledge to one another especially with regards to Islamization of knowledge which is the niche area of the International Islamic University Malaysia.

Intellectual Discourse is subsidized by the IIUM and hence does not accept advertising, page and image charges from authors to pay for production costs. The editors of the journal are the teaching staff of the University with one or two paid staff assisting in the editing. Nevertheless, the journal depends almost exclusively upon the editors, all of whom learned the art of editing on the job. The editorial team needs assistance in learning the journal's workflow and the editorial office system. Although the journal has always been published by the IIUM Press, *Intellectual Discourse* is an international journal and its aims and scope are of interest to the academic community worldwide.

The journal since its inception has consisted of peer reviewed content. It has an ISSN number registered with the International ISSN Centre. It has been published on a regular basis except once when the two issues were combined in one volume. All the articles carry abstracts in English with its translation in Malay. The cover design has been changed many times to keep up-to-date and though it took some time, the journal has come up with a comprehensive web-site. It has taken the journal about two decades to establish its credibility.

References

Intellectual Discourse. (1993). "Intellectual Discourse" 1 (1) at http://journals. iium.edu.my/ intdiscourse/ index.php/islam (Accessed May 10, 2017). 1(1): ii.

IIUM Press. (2014). *Policies and Guidelines for IIUM Journal Publication*. Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.