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Religious Extremism Factors and Preventive Strategies: *Al-Istishraq* (Orientalism) as Impetus to Religious Extremism

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Abstract

Al-*Istishraq* is one of the subversive elements that have been corrupting Muslims into becoming radicalised, since the times of colonialism until present times. They denied the contribution of Islam in knowledge and civilizations resulting precedence in Muslim civilization becoming unclear. *Al-Istishraq* succeeds in misguiding and affecting integration among Muslims as Muslims blindly follow the ideologies. Prevention on such matter is challenging as scholars fail to provide comprehensive guidelines. The extremism numbers are alarming. It raises hatred and destruction of others. This article shall briefly review the impact and cause of *al-Istishraq*, and Muslims weaknesses in comprehend the spread.

Keywords: *Al-Istishraq;* Islamic knowledge; Muslims, orientalism; religious extremism

1.0 Introduction

The term *al-istishraq* (in English is orientalism) is from Arabic word *al-istishraq*. Its root word *ishraq* is added with letters *alif, sin* and *ta`* means the quest for light or guidance from the East, as in the sun rises from the East (Che Hussain, 2008). The term *dirasat al-istishraq* (oriental studies) is a from Western scholarship (adopted from Islam) that study Eastern values and various disciplines of knowledge such theology, archaeology, religions, literature, politics and economy from a Western perspective. Through *dirasat al-istishraq,* the West has surreptitiously planned implicit strategies of *ghuzwah al-fikr* (intellectual corruption) to weaken the minds of Muslim society. Such consistently renewed plans are to ascertain that the *dawlah Islamiyyah* (Islamic state) is not established until the end. The current scenario has seen Muslims being ceaselessly bombarded by accusations of terrorisms and condemnations by the West.

Ironically, there arise groups of Islamists who have been taken in by the Western deception to misguidedly retaliate with terror and *shadid* (hard) approach. The rise of self-destructive religious extremism is a goal of such Western agenda that has become a hidden fire that may fuel endless conflicts among Muslims in particular.

History of religious conflicts indicated that they were triggered as a consequence of mutual suspicions between various religious adherents, and due to unbridled fanaticism. The rises of religious extremists are also a consequence of the capitalist economy and

blaming what is perceived as unjust state and authority. Religious extremism is not a phenomenon among Muslims only, but also those of other religions as well.

There are extremists among the Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. The Buddhist in Myanmar lately became notorious for their inhumane treatment of the Muslim Rohingyas. Although religious extremism has become identical with various religions, yet in global discourse, it is often associated with Muslim extremists, mainly post 9/11. All Muslims must stop the *al-Istishraq* surreptitious corruption of *jihad* (holy war) as an only way to spread Islam to the world.

2.0 Endless Terrorism

Conversation on religious-based terrorism is becoming virulent among various world communities irrespective of age, education and religions. It brings negative perception and cynical view of Islam, particularly to the misconception of *jihad*, even among Muslims themselves.

Previous research on Western conspiracies against Islam, particularly the 11th September in New York (Hirschkorn, 2003), saw it as an excuse to attack Islam, purportedly disguised to eradicate terrorism in several Muslim countries (Wintour *et al.*, 2001), such as Afghanistan, Iraq and now Syria. It is becoming more evident that presently, the hidden hands are still at work in some Muslim countries such as Iraq, Iran, Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt (Fraser, 2013) Libya, and Syria (Blight *et al.*, 2012).

Genocide is being committed against Muslims, especially against innocent public members. This atrocity has compelled some Muslims to take up arms to defend themselves. However, this has been manipulated as terrorism by the West. Those Muslim countries inflicted by various conflicts are still have not found their peace and bloodshed among the Muslims continue.

The West saw the Muslims reactive self-defence as terrorism, and this is viewed as *al-makr* (deceived) by the West. It perverted the view of *jihad* with their misperception of terrorism as inherent in Islam. This medium is a severe misconception of the message of Islam because Islam itself means peace. Peace as in the Arabic word is "*salam*". Islam, therefore, is not terrorism.

Research also revealed an injunction by Allah S.W.T that relate to *al-makr* issues that Muslims must unite to correct the misperception propagated by the West to destroy the credibility of Islam and the nation (Zaini, 2014). Dr Abdullah Azzam initiated the call for global jihad in the 1980s (McGregor, 2003). Even though he was killed in 1989, the call was still being echoed by groups such as the al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden (McGregor, 2003). The global *jihad*, according to Abdullah Azzam (2013), should be based for the sake of Allah the Almighty, and Islam only, excluding all forms of national sentiments that blind oneself.

According to Abdullah Azzam, *jihad* is an obligation that must be performed by Muslims, after the attestation of *iman* (faith), preceding other pillars of Islam. According to Ibn Taymiyyah (2001), *jihad* is as "There is none more obligatory after attesting your iman to Allah SWT, more than repelling enemies who attacked your honour and religion."

Oppressions and injustices in Muslim societies have raised their spirit to engage in jihad in several countries in the Middle East, even establishing several global jihad movements (al-Zawahiri, 2001). These movements, also came about to fight all forms of foreign interventions, giving birth to a series of armed conflicts such as in Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan and several other countries. These groups were called *al-mujahidin* by many Muslims. Unfortunately, many Muslim revolution movements were labelled as terrorists by the United States and their allies, causing other countries just to follow suit, including Arab countries.

In the Palestinian issues, the West biased view was evident when their staunch ally, Israel committed atrocities on the Muslims in Gaza, and it was not labelled as terrorism at all. This medium is significantly different when the Palestinians were labelled as terrorists when they rose against the Israeli occupants when they are actually only defending themselves, their rights and lands.

This is due to the fact that terrorism is defined according to the Western powers vested security interests (Kapitan, 2004). Hamas victory in the election 2006 had increased the concern of the West over the intifada movement against Israel, causing it to be declared as terrorists (Beinin & Hajjar, 2014). Now wreaking havoc in the Middle East is a change called ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) that also call for international al-jihad. ISIS even declared the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria (Withnall, 2014). However, ISIL has been notorious with gross radicalism and extremism, shocking in the brutal killings of their captives and kidnapped victims and public members (*CBS News Website*, 2014). Such radicalism is of grave concern that is totally opposed to the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

3.0 *Al-Istisyrâq* Orientalism as Impetus to Extremism

In "Buhuth fi al-Tabshir wa al-Istishraq", a work on missionary and orientalism by Hasan `Abd al-Ra'uf, the term orientalist is generally referred to non-Arabs who study knowledge of the orient such as language, religion, history and cultures. While, a renowned scholar, Edward W. Said (2011) defined orientalists as those who study Eastern or oriental knowledge from Western thought and values. A more generic term that is a scholar is presently used to identify orientalist works.

Al-Istishraq may begin at the family level, then educational institutions, down to the public, and up to the level of government leadership. The elements in *al-istishraq* are firstly motivated by religion, secondly by knowledge/scholarship, thirdly due to economy, and fourthly, politics. Many undesirable issues have aroused, for the motives of *al-istishraq* are to surreptitiously capitalise on the weaknesses of among Muslims that lead to division among Muslim society**.**

How did the *al-istishraq* influence Muslim minds? The *al-istishraq* used a hermeneutic approach originated from the Western Judeo-Christian religious thought. This influence turned some Muslim religious school system to be *shadid* (hard) with daily activities solely for the other-worldly aim to attain paradise.

Children who are too young to understand the *ghaybiyyat* (metaphysic) matters are literally taught to fear, and not with proper gradual understanding befitting their age. Overly literal and simplistic reactions based on irrational fear or favour of heaven and hell are by Muslims of various ages are consequences intended by *al-istishraq*.

Some of the Muslims primary education is focusing more on literal and simplistic either-or matters purportedly lead to rewards of either heaven or hell. That all Western created subjects and theories must be destroyed at once by the use of force. That task is made obligatory to all Muslims; that, those taking exceptions shall be punished in hell. These so-called rules are regarded as *a fatwa* (a ruling on the point of Islamic law) and must be implemented without fail (Muhamad, 1981). Delightfully, *al-istishraq* deemed Eastern society as easily influenced by their deceptive baits.

Targets of *al-istishraq* are children, women and youth who are fanatics for rewards of paradise. Young children are raised and brainwashed into radicalism, through a diet of condemnation, terrorism and punishment for their daily physical and psychological consumption. Worse, when children also become second liners to their *mujahid* (holy warfighter) parents in fights in Syria and Iraq (Utusan Malaysia, 2014). It is greatly alarming to watch the viral video of Muslim children being trained to use firearms, declaring they free of any citizenship and burning of their passports.

Propagators of *al-istishraq* also charade themselves as intellectuals with pleasant personality and articulate speech delivery (Abdul Mun'im, 2001). These projected personas of an *al-istishraq* orientalist are often attractive to women who could be misguided by such appearances.

4.0 Recurrence of Bloody History

There is a need to include in our education, courses such as comparative religions and Islamic thought, particularly the ethics of war in Islam. This knowledge may help Muslims, particularly in Malaysia re-evaluate their understanding of *jihad al-qital* (fighting a holy war) in defence of one`s country and religion without the use of the radical approach. There is a need to clarify to Muslim society, issues of terrorism, radicalism and extremism *vis a vis* Islamic injunctions. Particularly to those with the potential to carry out *jihad al-qital* as encouraged by Islam. There is a need to correct negative public view on the issue of *jihad*, such as the stereotype and paranoia, in proper Islamic perspective. There should be exposure of the insidious plan by certain groups to intimidate Muslims and ensure Western hegemony on Muslims and the world generally. All political, economic, social and academic manipulations must be checked. Muslims must be made aware of these issues. There is a need to include in our education, courses such as comparative religions and Islamic thought, particularly the ethics of war in Islam. This knowledge may help Muslims, particularly in Malaysia re-evaluate their understanding of *al-jihād qitālin* in defence of one`s country and religion without the use of the radical approach. There is a need to clarify to Muslim society, issues of terrorism, radicalism and extremism *vis a vis* Islamic injunctions. Particularly to those with the potential to carry out *al-jihād qitāl* as encouraged by Islam. There is a need to correct negative public view on the issue of jihad, such as the stereotype and paranoia, in proper Islamic perspective. There should be exposure of the insidious plan by certain groups to intimidate Muslims and ensure Western hegemony on Muslims and the world generally. All political, economic, social and academic manipulations must be checked. Muslims must be made aware of these issues.

5.0 Statistics of World Peace

Table 1.0: List of Less Peaceful Countries due to Terrorism and Conflict

Position by Countries			
1.	Bahrain	10..	Mali
2.	Azerbaijan	11.	Burundi
3.	Saudi Arabia	12.	Mexico
4.	Ethiopia	13.	Venezuela
5.	Chad	14.	Israel
6.	Eritrea	15.	Palestine
7.	India	16.	Colombia
8.	Philippines	17.	Turkey
9.	Egypt	18.	Lebanon

(Source: Global Peace Index 2017)

Table 2.0: List of Least Peaceful Countries due to Terrorism and Conflicts

Position by Countries			
1.	North Korea	9.	Somali
2.	Russia	10.	Yemen
3.	Pakistan	11.	South Sudan
4.	Dem. Rep. Cong	12.	Iraq
5.	Ukraine	13.	Afghanistan
6.	Central African Rep.	14.	Palestine
7.	Sudan		
8.	Libya		

(Source: Global Peace Index 2017)

Table 3.0: Country with most attacks, 2014, global terrorism database.

No.	Country	#Attacks	# Fatalities
1.	Iraq	3925	13076
2.	Pakistan	2146	2409
3.	Afghanistan	1820	5411
4.	Ukraine	889	1396
5.	Somalia	862	1582
6.	India	859	488
7.	Yemen	760	1349
8.	Libya	729	690
9.	Nigeria	713	7774
10.	Philippines	597	472

(Source: Global Peace Index 2017)

In comparing extremism perpetrated between Muslims and non-Muslims, an issue that should be emphasized is the concept of `extreme` itself. Extremism and radicalism are taken from the word *al-ghuluw* (excessive). According to the *New York Times,* cases of extremism committed by non-Muslims have caused twice as many deaths compared to those perpetrated by Muslims, particularly in the United States, driven by racism, bigotry and anti-government. Many other cases are neither committed by nor related to Muslim extremists nor jihadist (Scott Shane, 2015); such cases instead involved the Christians, Jews, Hindus and others. Statistical evidence will show that extremist attacks related to *al-jihad* are only half of the offences committed by the Christians or right leanings perpetrators.

Indeed, it is unfair to see terrorism solely from the view of colonialists and Western powers. Both are also committed acts of terrorism in conflicts such as wars, purported to eradicate other terrorism with their brand of terrorism. Their oppression and excesses often went beyond the harms perpetrated. This can be seen in the number of deaths and casualties inflicted by Western armies in Muslim countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and others.

Recent history will attest that the Western powers have destroyed almost 37 countries in pursuit of their vested interests that involved nearly 20 million victims, with subsequent casualties are continuing. By comparison, the highest incidences of terrorism perpetrated among the Western powers, the United States are far ahead in causing deaths and destructions.

6.0 Conclusion

Thus it is evident that the *al-istishraq* (orientalism) has surreptitiously been subverting the Muslim nation, shaken their faith and open the way for terrorism. Even though *al-istishraq* is often associated with *jihad* (holy war), it is not its only focus. It also sows other elements to subvert Muslims and society, such as the creation of negative perceptions of people of different religions toward Islam. Prophet Muhammad emphasised that to maintain peace and harmony the Muslim community must have embraced true *tawhid* (unity of God) to be able to understand the meaning and pure forms of *al-jihad* and *al-salam* for the benefits of the Muslims nation. *Jihad* is undoubtedly not the practice of terrorism as perverted insidiously through *al-istishraq.*

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