

The Role of ISJ: Recent Conversations

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Introduction

As reported by both Durrani and Tar (both in this Volume), ISJ continues to provide a forum for conversation and intellectual engagement. Such conversation is varied, but thanks to emails, we are able to respond to our global audience. An example of such conversation is reported in the following pages. In January 2008, few days after the publication of the first issue of ISJ, the Editorial Board received an email from Eddie D'Sa, a founding member of the *New Diaspora*, the Editor of *Goan Digest* and a community activist who congratulated ISJ team for establishing the journal. D'Sa's comment and ISJ's response (Shiraz Durrani) are produced below:

From Eddie D'Sa, January 2008

Eddie wrote: "I'd [like] to congratulate you (editors) for publishing the first issue of the new online journal Information, Society & Justice. It [ISJ] has an ambitious mission..." While generally pleased with the remit and content of the first volume of ISJ, the Commentator was also measured and critical. He agreed with some of our ISJ's stand:

I had time to look at...[the editorial] which provides a broad overview. You start quite appropriately that "Today's world is riven with turbulence, chaos, injustice and inequality...". *You are right* to say that the Western mindset treats "the majority (non-Euro world) with contempt and derision; they can be invaded at will etc". *It's the imperial mindset - the drive to dominate and loot resources* [emphasis added].

As you say, colonialism has ravaged and dislocated lots of societies but there is no remorse for past horrors, no thought of reparations. On the contrary, they are busy rehabilitating empire and re-writing imperial history. The question then is: How does ISJ respond to this issue? How does ISJ directly challenge Gordon Brown's brazen declaration that the British empire has nothing to apologise for? Whatever has happened to his "moral compass"? (D'Sa, Email Correspondence)

But then, D'Sa also disagreed with some of our stands:

With a frequency of just two issues a year, there is the risk of a time lag before responding to difficult issues, some of which may cry for a prompt reaction. [There are] quite a few articles and smaller pieces vying for attention...

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You also wrote that libraries tend to stay “neutral”, that is, outside ongoing social struggles. But how can public libraries do otherwise? They have no autonomy to speak of. They are state institutions and have to conform to state policies...

Finally, D’Sa did not hesitate to offer some suggestions:

I am glad you have stressed that ISJ does not seek to compete with existing periodicals like *Race & Class*. But I'd like to suggest that ISJ goes further and work in tandem with progressive journals (print or online), network on core issues and even develop common strategies to resolve problems.

It would be nice if ISJ and some of the others could meet periodically at a jointly organised seminar or public meeting to debate a specific issue such as Islamophobia, the state assault on asylum seekers or civil liberties, and how to deal with the nasty tabloids that can prey on the weak and vulnerable with impunity. I think ISJ should also consider active links with UK organisations like BLINK and LIBERTY, and some sort of association with the Home Office, the home of much hurtful and unfair green papers (Eddie D’Sa, Email correspondence, January 2008).

ISJ’s Response – Shiraz Durrani, 13 January 2008

In response to the Commentator, ISJ’s Coordinating Editor, was no less engaging (the response is worth citing *in toto*):

1. Many thanks for taking time to give your very useful comments on ISJ. You certainly raise important issues that are relevant for all of us. I will put your comments to the Editorial committee. A number of points at this stage:
2. We are planning a launch event for ISJ - provisionally on 01 May at London Met (6.00 - 9.00 p.m.) where we have invited some progressive organisations with whom we have very supportive relations. As you say, we need to work with more organisations - we hope to invite others to this launch so as to look at the possibility of more joint work. I hope you (and others) can join us on the day to chart a joint way forward. I will send more details of the event later.
3. Meeting periodically - an excellent idea. We can connect this with the DASS Debates and Lectures series. Will certainly look at this.
4. [On] Number of issues: we had initially thought of 3 issues per year, but decided not to take on board more work than we can manage at this stage, given our limited resources and voluntary work. We would like to move to quarterly publishing, and will start looking for some sponsorship for this (without losing our independence). Also, a possible print version [is being considered]..
5. It is indeed a big challenge in what you say: ‘how does ISJ respond to this issue? How does ISJ directly challenge Gordon Brown’s brazen declaration that the British Empire has nothing to apologise for?’ Initially of course by creating a creative space for engaging such challenges. But it is also important to create a bank of alternative ideas, views and experiences as a resource bank. ISJ has not yet done this, but hope future issues will take on a committed stand on issues.

6. Libraries: you are correct about libraries. But many senior Librarians in Britain are rather removed from politics and social reality, while many younger Librarians are very progressive and are looking at ways of become 'active' in many ways. Perhaps ISJ can have a role in legitimising activism.... Many librarians and library organisations in USA are more progressive than their counterpart in UK, e.g. the Progressive Librarians Guild in USA publishes a journal called 'Progressive Librarian' whose past issues are available on-line. The Library Juice Press is also publishing my new book "Information and liberation: Writings on the politics of information and librarianship" later this year. They are also publishing a collection of articles on "neutrality" this year. We hope these can create a new outlook among librarians in UK. While it is true that their livelihood depends on their jobs, there is still much they can do within government policies to change current outlooks and practices....

It is small changes and initiatives that can perhaps make long term changes. ISJ is just one small step... (Shiraz Durrani, Email exchange).

The foregoing exchange shows how we are engaging with our global audience. The conversation continues...

References

Durrani, S. (2008) "Debating and documenting Africa" *Information, Society and Justice*, Volume 1 No. 2, June 2008: pp 209-220.

Tar, U. A. (2008) "ICTs, development and peace" *Information, Society and Justice*, Volume 1 No. 2, June 2008: pp 93-98