

## Editor's Introduction

This Special Issue of Asian Cultural Studies brings together a set of 10 papers written by scholars from various academic disciplines on the most timely theme of Islamic militancy in Southeast Asia.

The core articles were originally prepared by four academics (Professors Azyumardi Azra, Abdul Rahman Embong, Omar Farouk Bajunid, and Temario C. Rivera) who participated in the international symposium on "Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Contested Visions of Justice and Community." This was hosted on 19 February 2005 by the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies of the International Christian University (IACS) and the Center of Excellence Program (COE) "Research and Education for Peace, Security and Conviviality." Six other articles were contributed by scholars and researchers addressing various dimensions of Islamic militancy in the region.

Consistent with the most recent political developments on Islamic militancy in the region, the papers address various aspects of Islamic militancy in four Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. Indonesia is home to the world's biggest Muslim population and important developments in Islamic religious and political practices in the country have had significant repercussions on its neighboring Islamic communities. With its politically dominant Muslim majority and an impressive case of economic development, Malaysia has also had its own share of Islamic radicalism. Both the Philippines and Thailand have relatively small but concentrated Muslim populations in their southern borders with long histories of armed conflict and separatism which remain unresolved up to the present.

The Indonesian experience of Islamic militancy is examined by Professor Azra and Masdar Hilmy. Azra stresses that the Islamic tradition in the region continues to be peaceful and moderate but at the same time calls on the moderate practitioners of Islam to be more assertive in preserving and advancing this tradition. In a careful elaboration of the theological constructs of Islamic radicalism, Masdar Hilmy provides an important distinction between pure *salafis* and *salafi jihadists* in post New Order Indonesia.

In the Malaysian context, Abdul Rahman Embong clarifies the proper usages and references of contested terms such as "political and militant Islam" and explores possible approaches in engaging militant Islamic practices. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan provides a focused study of the rise and fall of *Al Arqam*, one of the new Islamist organizations in postwar Malaysia. Norani Othman examines what she considers to be the most important question that confronts contemporary Muslim women: how reformist or progressive Muslim women's groups can become an effective countervailing force to Islamic fundamentalism and political Islam.

In the Philippine case, Temario Rivera identifies the major historical and

political turning points in the emergence of the three Islamic armed movements and examines viable options for addressing the conflict. Carmen Abubakar provides a socio-political study of the direct participation of Muslim women in electoral politics at the local level in two Muslim provinces and analyzes its interface with the political culture in these communities. In his research on the Sama community of the Muslim province of Sulu in southern Philippines, Ikuya Tokoro analyzes the complex interplay of cross-border migrations, Islamic resurgence and local “traditional” religious practices.

In the ongoing Muslim militancy in South Thailand, both contributors counsel against a simplistic approach to the problem which routinely puts all blame on the Muslim militants. Omar Farouk Bajunid stresses the need to situate the problem within its overall historical, cultural, social and geo-political context including the antagonistic leadership style of the current Prime Minister Thaksin. Finally, Saroja Dorairajoo also argues that there is no one mastermind to the violence and militancy in South Thailand because several interest groups have operated to create a climate of fear and terror that has negatively affected both Muslims and Buddhists in the region.

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