

Muhammad Iqbal Ahnaf. *The Image of the Other as Enemy: Radical Discourse in Indonesia*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2006. 75 pages.

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The literature on Southeast Asian Islamic extremism has grown rapidly since 2001, although in terms of methodology and content it remains limited in scope when compared to other regions' scholarship on radical Islam. The majority of books on this topic are by terrorism experts and journalists. Much of their work is narrative in approach, concentrating mainly on the operational aspects of extremist groups, tracing the "links" between "local" and international jihadists, examining sources of funding, and outlining organizational structures and general doctrinal orientation. Examples of this genre include Zachary Abuza's *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (2004) and *Political Islam and Violence in Indonesia* (2006); Bilveer Singh's *The Talibanization of Southeast Asia* (2007); Sally Neighbour's *In the Shadows of Swords* (2004); and Mike Millard's *Jihad in Paradise* (2004). In contrast to this genre's largely descriptive and empirical literature, the number of works on the ideological or discursive aspects of Southeast Islamic radicalism is small. Noorhaidi Hasan's insightful study *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia* (2006) and Mohammad Haniff Hassan's carefully researched *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudra's Justifications for the Bali Bombing* (2005) stand out as two rare examples of monographs that take us into the thought world of the region's radical Muslims.

In this context, Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf's *The Enemy as Image of the Other* is welcome, as its stated purpose is to describe and analyze the "discourse patterns" and "words and images created by fundamentalists in their publications, speeches, and activities" (pp. 2, 13). It focuses particularly on two prominent Islamist groups: the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI, Indonesian Mujahedeen Council) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI, Indonesian Party of Liberation). In analyzing radical discourses, Ahnaf is especially concerned with notions of "The Other" and the way in which such views fuel an "enmity mentality" toward perceived foes of Islam, as well as build identification with "an Islamic system" (p. 16).

Ahnaf is highly critical of the fundamentalist agenda, which he sees as resting upon flawed exegesis and distorted perceptions of contemporary reality. He argues that fundamentalists' verbal and visual constructions of "the enemy" are implicitly violent and provocative because they instill "anger, hatred, resentment, suspicion, distrust and hostility" (p. 53). In analyzing this discourse, he draws heavily on the work of several postmodernist and liberal Islamic scholars. His hermeneutical thinking owes much to the South African Muslim intellectual Farid Esack, and he also cites frequently the international affairs analysis of the US-based Pakistani academic Akbar Ahmed. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence also features prominently and greatly shapes Ahnaf's views on the ways in which language can be manipulated, not only to advance a particular set of interests but also to legitimize aggression toward "The Other" (p. 45).

The most effective parts of the book are the later sections, where Ahnaf examines specific elements of the radical discourse. He assembles an illuminating array of quotes from radical leaders and publications, and then proceeds to analyze the use of

language and imagery. He adduces vivid examples of fundamentalist demonization of non-Muslims and assertions of perpetual conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. He also notes the tendency of radical Muslims to assert in totalitarian terms the superiority of an Islamic law system as a solution to the world's problems. In each case, Ahnaf mounts a counter-argument. He points out that many instances of anti-Islamic violence cited by fundamentalists are often not religious in nature, but rather ethnic or separatist—in some cases, the violence is within Muslim communities and not at all interfaith related. Moreover, he questions the efficacy of Islamic law, arguing that many parts of the Muslim world where sharia is comprehensively applied are beset by chronic social, political, and economic problems (pp. 50–52).

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the book is the analysis of fundamentalists' use of religious texts. Ahnaf lists nine common sectarian assertions and the Qur'anic verses most often cited as scriptural support for these. He then argues that the selection of texts is misleading as it ignores other passages in the Qur'an that enjoin Muslims to adopt a tolerant, pluralist, or quietist position. Ahnaf places side-by-side contrasting Qur'anic quotations regarding non-Muslims and contends that fundamentalists always adopt the more literal and severe verses, while overlooking or discounting those verses that are relatively moderate. This, he argues, is an "abuse of the Qur'an" as it deliberately misrepresents the full range of God's instructions on how to interact with those outside the Muslim community" (p. 57). Some parts of this critique are rather too brief to be entirely persuasive, but Ahnaf nonetheless brings sufficient normative conviction and scholarly rigor to his analysis to make this a stimulating read.

Other sections of the book are less commendable. The opening chapters are intriguing but undermined by poor structure and inadequate descriptions of terms and radical organizations. Key words are given scanty and sometimes subtly deprecatory definitions. For example, "Islamic fundamentalists" are described as "clinging" to radical and totalitarian views about the necessity to order the world according to Islamic law (p. 1), as if holding such views is desperate and unsustainable. "Salafists" are rather unsatisfactorily described as focusing on the "purification of Muslims' faith through promoting righteousness and eradicating sin" (p. 3), whereas self-ascribed Salafists would emphasize their strict following of the example of the first three generations of Muslims. Other key terms such as "radical" are not defined at all.

Ahnaf's grasp of historical detail as well as Islamic terminology is not always sound. He wrongly states that Abu Bakar Ba'asyir is a veteran of Darul Islam from the period when it was led by Kartosuwiryo, but Ba'asyir only joined the organization in the 1980s, more than twenty years after Kartosuwiryo's execution (pp. 4–5). The account of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia contains some dubious statements, most of which are not referenced. For example, Ahnaf states that "HTI has no organizational structure, central figures, or top leader, in contrast to MMI, which has a strong, nationwide organizational network" (p. 6). HTI, in fact, had a well-organized but underground structure from the late 1980s, and since its public emergence in 2000 it has grown rapidly across Indonesia under the guidance of a very competent centralized leadership. Indeed, it is far larger in membership and better administered than MMI, contrary to Ahnaf's assertion. He also wrongly asserts that Islamic parties have never gained more than 37.5 percent of the vote at an election (p. 62), overlooking the fact that the six Islamic parties at the 1955 election got 43 percent. *Jahiliyah* is rather

loosely translated as “sick society” (p. 8) rather than the more common “ignorance” or “neglect” of God’s law by humans. He refers to Islamic Youth Defence (p. 3), seemingly a mistranslation of Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders’ Front).

Also, for a book published in 2006, the information seems surprisingly out of date. The most recent election referred to is that of 1999, and several of the parties mentioned have been defunct since at least 2003. The text refers to “new parties,” such as the Justice Party (Partai Keadilan, PK), Muslim People’s Party (Partai Ummat Islam, PUI; also known as the Islamic Community Party), and the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP). PK, in fact, transformed itself into a new entity, PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice Party), in 2003; PUI ceased existence as a separate party following the 1999 election; and PPP was not a new party at all, having been established in 1973 at the Soeharto regime’s instigation.

Finally, Ahnaf’s referencing is repeatedly inadequate. Often major narrative or analytical statements contain no endnotes setting out supporting data, and many times the references that are included direct the reader to works that are at best tangential to the issue in question. Moreover, some of the major texts cited by Ahnaf, such as those of Bourdieu, are missing from the bibliography.

Ultimately, this is a useful but flawed work. Ahnaf’s critique of radical Islamic discourses contains a number of insights not found in other literature on Southeast Asia, and, unlike many of the terrorism scholars, he does more than assert the case for moderate Islamic interpretations—he presents considered arguments. But his unreliability on historical and political narratives and weaknesses in translation and citation make this a less satisfactory work than it should have been.