

Editorial:

RADICALISM AND POLITICS OF RELIGION

Radical Islamism has become the “sexiest” issue in the international scholarship of religion since the September 11 tragedy in 2001. It has been associated with a number of terrorist attacks not only in the West but also in Muslim countries. Every single of radical Islamism has caught the interest of not only scholars and policy makers but also general public. Interestingly, the general assumption that religion is the source of peace has been seriously challenged, not by non-religious communities, but by the violent practices of particular religious groups, however small they are. Indeed, there are certain groups striving for Islam but by using acts which could give awful image on Islam itself and against humanity.

Many scholars have tried to explain these phenomena, most of which using economic, cultural and political analyses. Without disregarding such efforts, Ali Mabrook tries to trace the basic ideology which leads to the (ab)use of religion as legitimacy for committing terrorism and violence on the one hand and for perpetuating despotism and authoritarianism on the other hand. This ideology is “absolutism”, which is rooted, according to Mabrook, in the dogmatic system of Ash‘arism, one of Sunni theological school. Taking for granted that this system is not only theological, Mabrook argues that it was vulnerably useful for ideological and political purposes. He also suggests that the only solution to get out of Muslim/Arab crisis is to replace the tradition of absolutism with the “culture of consciousness”. This can be achieved through deconstruction of Muslim/Arab mind, apart from the critique of their political practices. Mabrook has shown in his article that the Ash‘arite dogmatic system which has dominated most (Sunni)

Muslim world should be seriously scrutinised and deconstructed to unearth the progressive elements of Islamic legacies applicable for contemporary Muslim demand for reform.

In Indonesia, radical Islamist groups have been proliferated since the collapse of Soeharto regime in 1998. Some could be traced back to the *Darul Islam* or *Negara Islam Indonesia* (NII—Indonesian Islamic State) movement existing since Soekarno era, but some others are transnational movements, or local movements inspired ideologically by certain Islamic movements in the Middle East. They are small in number, indeed, but insistent in their endeavour to dominate Islamic discourse in the country. Recently, they gained some success in enforcing the dissolution of Ahmadiyah. The Government issued the Joint Ministerial Decree on the ban of the dissemination of Ahmadiyah teachings openly, but not the ban of the organisation itself. Some Islamist movements are not satisfied and demanded more. They organised demonstrations to force the president to issue the Presidential Decree to ban Ahmadiyah one and for all.

Observing closely these movements are interesting. There are two important Indonesian regions witnessing the rise of radical Islamism, viz., Solo and Maluku (Moluccas). Solo, a town in Central Java, has been known as the place where radical movements, both Islamic and communist, emerged since the Dutch colonial era. In the New Order, a *pesantren* in this region, Ngruki, was known as radical *pesantren*, because its leaders, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir were associated with radical Islamist movement, *Negara Islam Indonesia* (NII—Indonesian Islamic state). In post-New Order, especially after Baasyir's return from Malaysia, *pesantren* Ngruki became again the symbol of radicalism. Some Muslim terrorists, such as Amrozi, Ali Ghufron, and Imam Samudera, have some relationship, directly or indirectly, with *pesantren* Ngruki or with Sungkar and Baasyir. Today, Solo has been presented by international and national media as one of the most important sources of radical Islamism. Muhammad Wildan has competence in discussing the proliferation of radical Islamist movements in this town. He was graduated from *Pesantren* Ngruki and has conducted intensive fieldwork research on this subject for his PhD dissertation, of which this article is a part. His study is important

to answer national and international curiosity about the role of Solo in the context of the development of radical Islamism in Indonesia.

Unlike Solo, Maluku was a battleground of Muslim-Christian conflict in post-New Order Indonesia, especially from 2003. The conflict, in which thousand people from both sides were killed, reflected the radicalisation process of both Muslim and Christian communities on the one hand, and the weakening of the state on the other hand. Badrus Soleh focuses on the existence of radical religious groups, especially Islamist, in the region, and compares them with those in other regions, argues that the growth of local nationalism and instability of States in Southeast Asian regions have brought about the rise of religious radicalism and paramilitary forces in Maluku, which challenge harmony, peace and multicultural relations. Badrus also argues that local communities, both Muslim and Christian, mostly preferred to negotiate their differences in a peaceful manner. Most radical groups were influenced by external *jibadi* groups, mainly the *Laskar Jihad*. To Badrus, *Laskar Mujahidin* is “a radical Muslim network that is the product of the radicalisation of local Muslims as a result of the activities of radical activists from outside Maluku” established in 1999. Laskar Mujahidin comprises of Mujahidin Kompak, former members of the Darul Islam and the Jama’ah Islamiah group active in Maluku and Poso. Other researchers believe, however, that Laskar Mujahidin is a paramilitary group under the aegis of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) established in 2000. Despite this difference, it is important to highlight Badrus’ argument that Laskar Mujahidin will continue to pose serious challenge for Indonesian security, and that Indonesia needs stronger regional and international cooperation through the ASEAN and Asia Pacific security networks.

The above phenomena raise a question about the state policies on religious diversity. Islamist movements generally claim that the Government should adopt representative policy on religious affairs. In this representative logic, Muslim should get most the cake, because they are majority. This demand has been voiced since before the Independence in 1945. The founding fathers agreed on the view that Indonesia is not an Islamic state, although the majority of its citizens are Muslims; but it is not a secular state either. It is a “Pancasila state”

that allows state's engagement in religious affairs, without being trapped in a theocratic mechanism. State policies on religious diversity have been changing from regime to regime. During Soekarno era, religious pluralism was highly respected. Confucianism was considered officially as the sixth recognised religions. In the New Order period, however, the State recognised only five religions: Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism; Confucianism was therefore excluded. The latter was recognised again in post-New Order era under Abdurrahman Wahid. Mujiburrahman examines the State policies on religious diversity in New Order period. He argues that the State policies were directed mostly by Muslim interests, which were mainly driven by their fear of Christianization. This fear has led Muslims to consistently insist the Government to accommodate their five demands: (1) restriction on establishing new places of worship; (2) restriction on religious propagation, and control of foreign aid for religious institutions; (4) Islamic religion classes should be given to Muslim students studying in Christian schools; (5) inter-religious marriage should not be allowed. Dialogue and inter-religious harmony, which were endorsed by the Government as well as religious leaders, are other issues discussed in his article.

Apart from religious diversity, Indonesia is engaged also in managing *hajj* services, but not in other religious pilgrimages. Unlike other Islamic devotions, *hajj* is a complex enterprise. It does not only involve religious piety, but also tourism and its associated business necessary to deal with massive parties of pilgrims, embracing transnational relations, central and local governments, flight and other travel agencies, pilgrimage guidance units, catering agencies and hotels to the pilgrims themselves in its scope. Nur Ichwan analyses the politics of *hajj* services during Soeharto era, and traces also the genealogy of *hajj* monopoly by the Government. He also examines '*umrah* (small *hajj*)' services in the same period. He argues that the complexities of *hajj* (and '*umrah*') services were not so much caused by religious aspect but rather by political and economic motives.

In this present edition, *Al-Jāmi'ah* provides also other interesting articles on women's issues, particularly polygamy in contemporary Muslim countries, particularly Malaysia, written by Raihanah Abdullah,

and on the relationship between Islamic sciences and social and human sciences, and critical account of the hadith “*Allāhumma bārik lanā fī shāminā wa fī yamaninā* (O, Allah, bless us in our Sham and Yemen), two Arabic articles written respectively by Layth Suud Jassim and Eeman Mohd. Abbas and by ‘Ammār Jāsīm Muḥammad al-‘Ubaydī.

Enjoy reading this edition!