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Traditional Islamic Religious Education Institutions: Source of Conflict or Peaceful Co-existence?

In the post-September 11 period, considerable attention has been paid to the alleged links between (a) traditional Islamic religious education, and (b) militancy, extremism and anti-Western attitudes among Muslims. As a result, calls are being made to revise and modify the curricula of traditional Islamic religious education institutions in countries such as Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and even in Western countries.

This paper argues that the current debate ignores (a) the considerable diversity that exists in traditional Islamic religious education institutions; (b) the variety of models of traditional Islamic religious education that exist in Muslim communities across the world; and (c) the emphases given to various aspects of traditional Islamic religious education in different social and political contexts. The paper presents a variety of models of traditional Islamic religious education that exist in a range of Muslim communities, in both Western and non-Western contexts, and then argues that in many cases factors other than traditional Islamic religious education are responsible for the presence of militancy, extremism and anti-Western attitudes. It then provides an example of a traditional Islamic religious education institution that has been successfully developed in Indonesia which could be a useful model for those who are keen to develop such institutions that promote peaceful co-existence (within an Islamic framework).

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