Prof. Laurie Sears Weighs in on Oscar-nominated Documentary "The Art of Killing"

Submitted by Eric W. Johnson on March 10, 2014 - 6:09am

Historian of Indonesia, Professor Laurie Sears recently participated in a Critical Asian Studies roundtable on debates surrounding the Oscar-nominated documentary The Act of Killing. The documentary follows Anwar Congo and other death squad leaders involved in the 1965 military overthrow of the Indonesian government. According to the official synopsis of the film:

*They helped the army kill an estimated 1 million alleged communists, ethnic Chinese, and intellectuals in less than a year. As the executioner for the most notorious death squad in his city, Anwar himself killed hundreds of people with his own hands. Today, Anwar is revered as a founding father of a right-wing paramilitary organization that grew out of the death squads. The organization is so powerful that its leaders include government ministers who happily boast about everything from corruption and election rigging to acts of genocide. The Act of Killing is about killers who have won, and the sort of society they have built. Unlike aging Nazis or Rwandan genocidaires, Anwar and his friends have not been forced by history to admit they participated in crimes against humanity. Instead, they have written their own triumphant history, becoming role models for millions of young paramilitaries. The Act of Killing is a journey into the memories and imaginations of the perpetrators, offering insight into the minds of mass killers.*

In "Indonesia Roundtable: The Act of Killing" Professor Sears and other scholars take on different elements of the debates that have sprung up around this controversial film. Profesor Sears' article "HEROES AS KILLERS OR KILLERS AS HEROES?" as well as the other contributions listed below will be available online for free until the end of March 2014.

- Robert Cribb, *THE ACT OF KILLING* (pages 147-149)
- Jacqui Baker, *REMEMBERING TO FORGET* (pages 150-156)
- Adam Tyson, *MULTIPLE ACTS OF KILLING* (pages 157-161)
- Ariel Heryanto, *GREAT AND MISPLACED EXPECTATIONS* (pages 162-166)
- Gerry van Klinken, *NO, THE ACT OF KILLING IS NOT UNETHICAL* (pages 176-178)
- Katharine McGregor, **INSIDE THE MINDS OF EXECUTIONERS: Reimagining the Loss of Life in the 1965 Indonesian Killings** (pages 189-194)
- Saskia E. Wieringa, **SEXUAL POLITICS AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR MASS MURDER IN THE ACT OF KILLING** (pages 195-199)
- Sylvia Tiwon, **LUST OF THE EYE: The Act of Killing and Aesthetic Sensibility** (pages 200-203)
- Laurie J. Sears, **HEROES AS KILLERS OR KILLERS AS HEROES?** (pages 204-207)

**People Involved:**  [Laurie Sears]

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