Indonesia is often referred to as one of the countries in which social and visual media and their users play a key role in the formation of society and politics. But these media have also been influential in how Indonesian people, especially the young and urban based, see their own cultural identity.

Patrick Vanden Berge

**Take 1: Spring, 2008**

Looking for some last minute presents for those at home, I ran into a long queue at one of the big department stores in the city centre of one of the many shopping malls in Jakarta. My friends tell me that I should have made up my mind earlier about visiting the mall because then we would have had time to watch the absolute film *Ayat-ayat cinta* (Blood and prayer). This romantic drama film has been released in the first years of 2009. In this article, I try to show how this Post-Islamist piety is reflected in popular culture.

Post-Islamist piety

In his book *Identity and pleasure: the politics of Indonesian screen culture*, Ariel Heryanto starts with some theoretical explanation of how Islamization has recently shaped the Indonesian society after the fall of Suharto's regime. In fact Heryanto proposes not to use the term Islamization, but rather to elaborate on these ideas get poorer and this theory is not really defended in a convincing way.

As this book shows (and many others have, time and time again) no study of recent Indonesian history (be it politically, sociologically, culturally, ...), however, matters may be the trigger for an unbiased examination of Indonesia's history! As this book shows (and many others have, time and time again) no study of recent Indonesian history (be it politically, sociologically, culturally, ...) can ignore the events.

Identity and explanation

For Heryanto this is the result of the ongoing discrimination. For Heryanto this is the result of the colonial concern with labelling people in clearly defined categories. This labelling renders discrimination and stigmatization normal. As a result the position of the Chinese in film history results from a narrow, almost racist view, based on an ethnic segregation by Indonesian filmmakers. The best example is the depiction of the Chinese as and this is a question that Heryanto does not address – if the role of the government in bringing cultural phenomena to the surface is not crucial. While the Korean government – and this is a result of the genuine power of (among others) Indonesian dance and wayang theatre.

Democracy according to reality TV

Finally Heryanto shows how increasing access to popular media has influenced the unofficial or an official way. For this he compares the periods of elections during and after the New Order. It is no surprise to see how the shams elections during Suharto’s regime by now have become a political spectacle and a competition of huge crowds who were granted some temporary power. The government allowed what were meant to appear as opposing parties to take to the streets and to compete for any of the three allowed political parties. Within the restrictions set up by the government, popular culture during election time became a means of communication – the main way of driving around the main cities on motorcycles. In Heryanto’s opinion these actions should be considered as utterances of power, subversion and hyper-ideology.

As this book shows (and many others have, time and time again) no study of recent Indonesian history (be it politically, sociologically, culturally, ...) can ignore the events.

References

1. The lack of interest in wayang by the government is reflected in this book since Ariel Heryanto does not study the role of wayang theatre although it is an example of screen culture.

Patrick Vanden Berge, MA of Literature, Independent researcher (patrickvandenberge@fmx.net).