

will always be able to dig out new perspectives in our effort to understand how much the Cold War has shaped the region politically and culturally. It is in this respect that this book has made a significant contribution and must be taken seriously by anybody who wants to embark in such an endeavor.

Fox, Richard, *Critical reflections on religion and media in contemporary Bali*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011, xvi + 339 pp. [Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions 130.] [Enclosed DVD, 45 min.] ISBN 9789004176492. Price: EUR 126 (hardback).

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Richard Fox' *Critical reflections on religion and media in contemporary Bali* is an erudite study that focuses on the articulation of Balinese religiosity through different kinds of local media – television, texts, and dramatic performances – in order to make a more general methodological point, namely to demonstrate how our conceptualization of media affects our interpretation of the historical development of religions. Fox argues that conventional information theorists see media as external to the message, as 'inert conduits' (p. 5) of content rather than what Latour called 'actants', though Fox does not use the jargon of science and technology studies.

Fox's reflections benefit from the collection of 1,500 hours of Indonesian television recordings and the transcriptions of 277 programmes on Hindu Dharma that were compiled over a period of eight years (1990-1998) for the Balinese Historical and Instructional Study Materials Archive (BHISMA). The compilation came about in collaboration between scholars from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London and staff from the Indonesian Academy of Arts (STSI) in Denpasar. Fox has worked with the materials since 1996 and has succeeded Mark Hobart as Deputy Director of BAJRA, the NGO that has managed the archive and has made its materials available for Indonesian as well as international scholars. Fox's more nuanced attention to media has discovered uncanny aesthetic parallels between the performance of national citizenship under Soeharto and the public display of indicators of local citizenship since the onset of the multi-vocal, yet pervasive nativist 'Ajeg Bali!' ('Strengthen Bali!') discourse in post-New Order Bali. This is an important observation all the more because most Balinese studies scholars writing on the 'Ajeg Bali!' phenomenon have completely left out the role of the media, as Fox rightly criticizes.

Highlighting the performative dimension of Balinese religion, he first turns to the medium of television, abstracting from the recordings the following five performative genres: (1) addresses by Hindu intellectuals or official Hindu Dharma representatives to the television audience; (2) moderated discussions on Hindu topics; (3) situation dramas dramatizing religious perspectives on everyday problems in modern Balinese society; (4) dramatized discussions – or programmes incorporating short situation features along the lines of situation dramas; and (5) *pasantian* meetings, in which tutored recitations and study of sacred Old Javanese texts serve as religious instruction of the television audience.

Having discussed the televised *pasantian* meetings, Fox then revisits the Orientalist discourse on the mediation of religion through Old Javanese texts. Critiquing the treatment of Old Javanese texts as privileged media in Orientalist accounts on Balinese religion, he argues that these texts merely constitute inert media for the preservation of ancient grandeur. As Balinese references for contemporary local religious developments, they are strangely absent. While Orientalist scholarship fetishized Old Javanese texts, Balinese literary practices were generally deemed inferior. Not at all concerned with meeting the literary criteria of Western Orientalists, the Balinese have treated their literary heritage as blueprints for dramatic performances to the extent that representations of the sacred history or mythic past contained in Old Javanese manuscripts have continuously been rearticulated in dance dramas in such a way that they bear upon the lives of the audience. Fox's analysis of a *Topeng Pajegan* performance on the mythic creation of the traditional Balinese villages that, in 2001, were juridified as *desa pakraman*, is a case in point. He demonstrates how the performance renders literary content meaningful in the context of contemporary local politics determined by the 'Ajeg Bali!' discourse. Thus, his argument has come full circle.

The book contains twenty-five illustrations with scenes from television recordings featuring addresses, discussions, dramatic performances, and *pasantian* meetings. It comes with an exceptionally well-produced DVD with 45 minutes of footage on the *Topeng Pajegan* performance that is analyzed in the book. I recommend Fox's work as indispensable for everyone working on contemporary Bali with one caveat: due to the somewhat convoluted way the various strands of the argument unfold, it is not easy to read.
