Don’t forget to remember me

No matter how many books one reads about a country and its inhabitants, or how many photographs one has seen, there is no better way of experiencing a far-off land than by watching a film. Movies, dramas, documentaries, and even tourist propaganda pictures offer a much more deeply felt insight into another person than any amount of print is able to provide. Documentaries usually have a specific aim in mind and are geared to a clearly delineated audience and are therefore edited in such a way that the message comes across as clearly and mono-dimensional as possible. Despite all the audio-visual means we have at our disposal at present, the written word is still the most employed vehicle for the dissemination of thoughts and ideas.

Dick van der Meij


Novel outlook

The KITLV is known, of course, for its enormous output of the written word and not intended to stand on their own. No information about the reason why we are looking at this instruction is provided is also very interesting. Reciting the Quran on the second floor of a mosque and the way it’s gone forever. It’s gone forever, this instruction is provided is also very interesting. Reciting the Quran on the second floor of a mosque and the way it’s gone forever.

“"We tend to forget the importance of every-day life but once it’s forgotten, it’s gone forever""

The materials shown in the DVD were recorded between 2003 and 2006 and show snapshots of daily life in Jakarta, Delanggu (East Java), Paya Kumbuh (West Sumatra), Kawal (Bintan Island), Sintang (West Kalimantan), Bittuang (Central Java), and Surabaya (East Java). Unfortunately, no information is provided on when the filming of individual scenes in these various places took place and so at times it is not easy to understand where we actually are. Some scenes seem to link up to the previous one and would have us believe we are still at the same place, but sometimes we appear not to be there anymore. No information about the reason why we are looking at what we see and not at other things is given and this is a pity because it may lead to a distorted picture of what daily life in Indonesia really is.

Of course, daily life in a country as big as Indonesia is a fluid and fragmented notion. What do we want to show? Deciding what daily life entails for a big metropolis such as Jakarta is of course much more difficult than for a small place in Central Sulawesi, although the daily reality of the people there is also extremely difficult to understand. The host of anthropological materials on many Indonesian sites sufficiently attests to that.

Hard realities

For me the film shows expertly how hard daily life in Indonesia is for many people; how incredibly hard the people labour to make ends meet, and how small the scale of life for many people is. We need only reflect on the life of the smith who makes the tools for tilling the rice fields. He works on his metal tools from six in the morning until six in the evening, day in day out. And what about the people who process the ice needed to preserve fish, who have to deal with heavy, cold material and yet again day in day out, we cannot but marvel at the dexterity of these men. The film reveals the importance of motorbikes and other means of transport and gives us the daily reality of the becak drivers who literally live in and with their bike taxi. The film also shows us the importance of small-scale industry and the role of street side restaurants in sustaining life. It reveals the variability of daily life in the various places but also the similarities over the vast area of Indonesia.

It is interesting to look at places other than those where most tourists tend to go. Not looking at beautiful Bali but rather at the harsh conditions in the ice factory is an important contribution to our perception of the country. Fun in daily life is also clearly shown and the short interview with the man whose photograph adorns the case of the DVD clearly shows that no matter what, Indonesians are able to enjoy life under the harshest of circumstances. The sparkling eyes of this person will be remembered long after many other scenes will have sunk into the dark recesses of our memory.

Islamic life

The part on Islam is also quite interesting. The restaurant owner who has already been to Mecca four times and who is planning his fifth trip with his family reveals the deep religious feelings of Indonesian Muslims. The large photograph in his restaurant made in Malaysia of the Nabawi Mosque in Medina which can be made to show the mosque at various times of the day and which has a device to sound Quranic verses also attests to his deep religious sentiments. The small children learning to recite the Quran on the second floor of a mosque and the way this instruction is provided is also very interesting.

Sometimes I would have liked to jump into the film to ask questions. For instance, the little 10 month old (belas bulan jalan is unfortunately wrongly translated as 11 months old) boy from Ternate with the name Shevchenko leaves me begging for more information on the choice of this unexpected name. I would also have loved to interview the Muslim man I mentioned above who has been to Mecca four times already for the reasons why he feels the need to go there so often, etc.

This is no doubt a very important document and I sincerely hope that other DVDs that will show us other parts of the archipelago and other religions, industries, schools and a host of other fragments of this fascinating country will soon follow it. However, it is to be hoped that in future little more professional attention will be paid to the end product. The quality of the shooting varies, sound quality varies too, and sometimes it’s gone forever. In future little more professional attention will be paid to the end product. The quality of the shooting varies, sound quality varies too, and sometimes it’s gone forever.

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