The art of no-seduction: Muslim boy-band music in Southeast Asia and the fear of the female voice

Religion, more often than not, equates the arts of seduction – whether in traditional performances or popular music – with immoral behaviour. The status of music and dance in the Islamic world, especially the fear of its sensual powers, has been heatedly discussed in religious treatises; with its clean-cut performers and moral messages, nabiyd, the Islamic boy-band music of Southeast Asia, seems to epitomise the art of no-seduction. Reality, however, is more complex, as Muslim pop music struggles to combine two competing powers – the eroticism of pop music and the persuasive power of religion. And especially when the female voice comes into play.

Barl Barendregt

One of the most significant developments in present day Southeast Asia is the rise of an Indonesian-Malay Muslim middle class. With its own social aspirations, this group fuels what might be termed Islamic chic – a cosmopolitan lifestyle characterised by new media and consumerism, Muslim fashion labels, popular ‘tele-evangelists’ such as AA Gym, and a range of lifestyle magazines that affirm that it is hip and modern to be a Muslim.

Nabiyd is the musical component of this emergent civil Islam (see also Barendregt 2006). The term nabiyd comes from the Arabic word ‘nabiy’, which means ‘singer’ of a religious song’. In Southeast Asia today it stands for an a-cappella song genre that mainly uses vocal harmonies and is predominant-\[\ldots\]

Between the persuasive power of religion and the eroticism of pop

Inspired by the international boy-band craze of the late 1990s, nabiyd is a perfect showcase for the issues that confront today’s younger Muslim generation. Groups like Indonesia’s ‘N’nda or Malaysia’s Riahan and Rababani have gained superstar sta-\[\ldots\]

Fear of the female voice?

What about Muslim equivalents to female pop singers in the West? Siti Nurhaliza seems to many Malaysians to embody the perfect blend of western fashion and distinctive Malaysian flavour. Siti is often seen as an icon of the New Malay, one who can uphold cultural and religious traditions and still be pro-\[\ldots\]

Why are the powers of the female voice so feared? A summa-\[\ldots\]

References

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