

**Between m-governance and mobile anarchies:  
Pornoaksi and the fear of new media in present day Indonesia**

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*Proposed law against pornography and indecency, ch. 1, art. 1:*

1. Pornography is a substance in the media or through communication devices that is made with the intention to converse sexually exploitive, abusive or erotic ideas.
2. Pornoaksi is the act of sexual exploitation, abuse or erotica in public.

**Brief Introduction**

Part of this paper was written as a contribution to the Asia Culture Forum 2006, which recently took place from 26-29 October in Gwanju, South Korea. This paper is in fact a third take on a larger project I am preparing under the working title 'Between M-Governance and Mobile Anarchies'. This project aims to cover some of the lesser known stories that relate to the much-celebrated cellular revolution, stories that especially deal with the tactics of those at the other side of the digital divide. These stories are especially taken from Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia or the Philippines where (as elsewhere) modernity to large parts of the population has become synonymous with a mobile lifestyle. This life style comes with a number of unintended effects though.

In a first paper which was presented at the Asian Modernities Conference in Hong Kong 2005, I focussed on the representational values of the mobile phone, especially its inclusion in so-called phone ghost stories, which in my opinion not only shed a light on how society is trying to domesticate a new technology that is the cell phone, but also provides us with condensed presentations of the way in which many Asians encounter the obscure entity called modernity. A second contribution was presented at a conference in Beijing in September 2005 and similarly focussed on how cell phone technology in many Southeast Asian countries is taken up in government policies serving as an icon of genuine democracy and the strive towards a more open and civil society. At the same time reality is that part of the population continues to be excluded from such an open society. That paper also focussed on the strategies (black markets, cannibalised phones, cell phone hackers) of the digitally less-well-off as to still partake in a mobile modernity. The present paper finally focuses again on the ways the cell phone is being represented in public debates, in this case exclusively Indonesian society. It does so by taking a look at how mobile phones and new media more generally are seen as a threat to Indonesian society, especially the younger generation.

## VIRGINS?

In 2004 Starvision released the block buster movie *Virgin*, a film that for months resulted in packed cinemas all over Indonesia, but also a film which caused considerable controversy among the public. The film showed a, too many unknown reality within Indonesian society, in portraying the lives of three 16-years old Jakartan high school girls as seen through the eyes and diaries of one of them;<sup>1</sup> Biyan, a girl who desperately tries to keep her virginity in a climate where this is seen as old fashioned and not trendy at all. Trying to break taboos the film thus focuses on the new sexual reveille among Jakartan teens and the role new media especially mobile phones played in all of this. The film was tremendously popular among the young which seemingly could relate to what was being depicted here but the film not surprisingly also managed to shock many others who did not recognize the vulgarities and provocative language and behavior being portrayed (one of the girls survives as a sex worker whereas another ends up starring in a porno vcd). They saw the lifestyle featured here as not concurrent with Eastern values. The director of the film Hanny R Saputra, however, was quoted saying ‘the times are changing, we have to dare opening our eyes, we should dare to see that we are wounded, and that reality today is indeed as such.’ Nonetheless, fear soon rose that the film might be taken as an all the rage role model for teenagers trying to ape a metropolitan and ‘western inspired’ life style. Screening of the film was as a result prohibited in various provincial towns. In the opening scene, the three friends Ketié, Stella and Biyan are depicted in a café somewhere in one of Jakarta’s posh shopping malls:

Ignoring the other visitors of the café, Stella suddenly puts her mobile phone with camera into the blouse of her school costume, taking a picture of her own breasts. Having done so, she does a similar thing to her friend Biyan who is seated next to her. ‘I told you, yours are much bigger...’ Then Ketié enters the scene and Stella again uses her cell phone camera. ‘Ha-ha, it turns out that Ketié has the biggest of all.’ The three girls burst out in laughter...

This contribution won’t go into the details of the film *Virgin*, nor its reception and the controversies it stirred locally. In starting from the just mentioned openings scene it will

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005 the film was, contrary to the usual procedure, adapted into a novel, which pretended to be written by Biyan Bawantara, the main character in the film.

rather focus on the way cell phones have more recently been represented in different domains of popular culture in ways that most Indonesians would call obscene and not Asian-like. In doing so I hope to highlight some of the moral anxieties today's youth culture in Indonesia is at present causing and the supposed role of new media therein, presenting some of the ways especially mobile phones are being used in expressing a new sexual renaissance. In my conclusion I will briefly turn to the question to which extent such practices might be considered a uniquely Indonesian phenomena, and if it's really the mobile phone which is to blame or if other things are at stake here. To answer these questions we, however, should first look at the role cell phones have up to recently played within Indonesian society.

#### BOMBS, HOAXES, AND ELECTRONIC ELSEWHERE

Elsewhere (Barendregt 2006) I have written on Indonesia's 1998 student protest, which brought an end to the Suharto regime, and how these rallies have widely been dubbed as 'the Revolution of Small and Mobile Media'. Years after the initial euphoria, and call for reformation and autonomy this transition brought about, Indonesian students are reported to still use SMS messages, reminding the people of the initial targets that were set when Suharto was toppled. The mobile phone had in the process for many gained a somewhat symbolic value, standing for the new openness that was preached by so many and being iconic for the new civil society Indonesia would become. Such ideas were even further articulated when in June 2005 the current Indonesian President, who had promised to fight fraud and corruption, made public his private phone number. SBY, as the president is nicknamed, soon received up to tens of thousand of text messages by concerned citizens who were willing to contribute to the new open climate. In Indonesia the image of the cell-phone is omnipresent. It is promoted in a wide range of mostly upmarket glossies magazines exclusively devoted to the phone, which increasingly act as 'missionaries of modernity'. The mobile is also featured in two out of three advertisements, in participatory TV and SMS quiz shows. While only an estimated 20 to 30 % of the Indonesian population is by now thought to have one him or herself, a cell phone is a generally aspired part of a modern and hip lifestyle, especially to young urban Indonesians, who will be the focus of this paper.

In Indonesia mobile technology over the past few years has also shown a more disturbing face. Since the tsunami, numerous SMS rumours have sparked panics in different parts of the country, causing thousands to flee their homes for higher grounds. In September 2004, SMS messages rumoured that three cars filled with explosives had been brought into Jakarta. When the message was exposed as a hoax, the police urged people not to believe things that came through SMS (*Kompas*\_21-9-2004, 24-1-2005). As in neighbouring countries, the rise of the cell-phone has also led to obscene calls and harassing text messages, in Indonesia known as ‘SMS terror’, as well as experiments with cyber-ad phone-sex, on which more below.

Mobile technologies in Southeast Asia are more generally often associated with piracy, pornography and political violence. Asian governments generally seem very concerned about the new possibilities inherent in cell phone technology and ‘are cracking down on [especially] SMS services that have become a powerful communication tool for consumers. SMS is used to organize protests, generate rumours, aid in crime, and possibly trigger bombs requiring least resources’ (Technofusion Weblog 4-9- 2005, <http://blogs.ittefaq.com/tech/>). Since May 2005, for example, all Thai users of pre-paid phones have been required to register. The authorities claim that this procedure is part of initiatives to stop terrorists from using mobile phones to set off bombs. The *Bangkok Post* (25-4-2005) quoted an assistant to the ICT minister as stating that as many as 80% of the bombings in Thailand over the past year used mobile phones as triggers, the majority with prepaid SIM cards that could be purchased anonymously anywhere. Malaysian authorities similarly asked phone companies to register all holders of pre-paid services ‘after text-messaging gossip-mongers spread a rumor claiming the premier's ailing wife had died’.<sup>2</sup> As from late 2005 the Indonesian Ministry of Telecommunications now also request registration but enforcement of this regulation still proves to be difficult.

The new mobile technologies have led many to wonder about the downside of modern technology. Many are puzzled by the technology that cell phones represent and at the dawn of the twenty-first century the phone in Indonesia has become haunted by ghosts.

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<sup>2</sup> Technofusion Weblog (4-9-2005), <http://blogs.ittefaq.com/tech/>

Newspapers regularly tell of people receiving unsolicited messages, urging them to contact a ghost, a werewolf or a deceased relative. New but as yet little understood mobile technology has thus contributed to the fear of new electronic elsewhere. Such fears are widely reflected in Indonesian popular culture and are fed by supernatural reality shows, novels and urban lore. Raul Pertierra and I (forthcoming) argue that such tales shed light on the cultural perceptions about the new technology that the cell-phone represents. Such stories are condensed presentations of the way in which many Indonesians encounter the obscure entity called modernity. The mobile phone, moreover, seems at the same time to be an anchor in a society that is constantly in flux and increasingly mobile in character. Its portability roots a mobile identity.

In spite of their ambiguous attitude towards mobile communication, as being both longed-for and haunted, to many urban Indonesians modernity has become equivalent to mobility. In Indonesia one cannot overstress the representational value of mobile phones. Owning a cell phone is a much-aspired part of a modern and hip lifestyle, especially to young urban Indonesians. Mobile culture is as elsewhere primarily youth culture, and not surprisingly many speak today of the 'fingertip generation' (*generasi jempol*), a generation which according to many however has lost its direction. Talking about the decline of the generation of 1998, student activists in one newspaper recently complained that disappointingly this generation soon fell for market capitalism, the cell-phone no longer being a weapon of the weak but the ultimate symbol of hedonism and consumerism (Jawa Pos 27-12-2004).

#### FROM THE GENERATION 1998 TO FRAGRANT LITERATURE

Whereas many Indonesians aspire a mobile life style, the mobile phone's image has indeed been changing recently, again due to wider developments in society, but as we will see still related to the supposed climate of new openness already mentioned above. Some of these changes have again been first signalled in youth culture, this time not students but the work of a group of new young female writers which appeared on the literary scene shortly after the fall of Suharto. These women, writers such as Ayu Utami, Djenar Maesa Ayu or Fira Basuki, have often been grouped together as 'fragrant

literature' (*sastra wangi*) or Indonesian-style chick lit, although most of these writers would detest such a label as a marketing man's fantasy. These writers are widely held responsible for increased dissemination of a new sort of youth culture and its open stance towards ideas on sexuality, sensuality and also pornography that until recently were largely absent in the Indonesian public sphere. Their work pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable, even in the post Suharto era; 'It's hard to imagine the author's counterparts in Iran or Pakistan (or for that matter, in neighbouring Malaysia) writing freely about oral sex, homosexuality, or unabashed Western-style consumerism. In that sense [the writers' work] reflects Indonesia's unique position in the Islamic world (Dhume 2006).' Fragrant literature is especially popular among the young urban middle class and especially students and school kids are appreciating the novels which according them reflects their life and their worries but also the long oppressed sexuality of especially young women.<sup>3</sup> Many teenagers moreover appreciate the new literature for their use of a more informal language which they themselves know from texting and chatting practices. One girl was quoted by BBC News (October 9, 2003) as saying that the novelists are 'much closer to our lives. We don't really connect with the old books anymore.' 'These were the media with whom the fragrant literature writers grew up and which not surprisingly features in their books. But new media are not only representing new openness, they are also the crucial carriers of its expression. An example is the novel by Novita Estiti, *Subject: Re*, an e-mail novel, consisting of the e-mail correspondence and chat logs of two persons, "superpurple" (Nina in Jakarta) and "magneticfields" (Yudha in Australia), that shows us the unfolding and subsequent declining relationship between the two characters. Sexuality may be a primary or secondary theme, but is always present.<sup>4</sup>

Not surprisingly these and other books have triggered a debate on Indonesian youth culture and it's seemingly obsession with things vulgar, obscene and pornographic, and many conservative elements, not the least Islamist groups, feel that by now liberalization of society has gone too far. They fear that a young generation is more and more being

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<sup>3</sup> Compare the books by young authors such as Chun Sue for similar interests in Chinese society.

<sup>4</sup> See also her various web logs, <http://verypurpleperson.blogspot.com/>, where she comments on the fact that to her annoyance her book is being sold as a 'Originally Made in Indonesia Chick lit,' e.g. popular fiction written for and marketed to young women.

exposed to the moral evils of late capitalism, consumer society and that the 1960s sexual revolution in the West has now somehow reached Southeast Asia. The same openness that therefore allows fragrant literature to flourish also spurs increasingly conservative Islamic opinion. 'Indonesia's paradox is that its new tolerance includes a greater acceptance of intolerance (Dhume 2006:78).' Not surprisingly it is exactly the same new and mobile media that initially enabled a more open and civil society that now ironically are being re-evaluated by conservative groups, blaming videoCDs, the Internet and mobile phones for corrupting the young.

#### NEW MEDIA, NEW SEXUALITIES AND MORE OBSCENE POSSIBILITIES

It is remarkable how especially the introduction of computer mediated communication devices and new mobile technologies in many Asian but also Western societies have led to (the expression of) new sexual identities among the younger generation and how these new sexualities by the older generations more often than not has been very negatively evaluated. Newspapers therefore habitually quote the need not only to fight pornography but also the infrastructure that allows it; the videodisc, Internet and as we will see below, increasingly mobile phones.

In Indonesia the influx of cheap Video CD (VCD) technology (the average VCD costs nothing more than about 50 cents) has done much to change the existing media landscape. One of the unforeseen effects has indeed been a resurgence of pornographic imagery, both imported from the West but also from other Asian countries. Some years ago I was shocked to see small coffeehouses have their own private matinees where people of the neighbourhood, including old man, women but also children at very cheap prices could watch porn movies, even during daytime.

VCD technology was also responsible for spreading the fame of an otherwise very traditional Balinese folk dance genre named *joged bumbung* (often translated as 'porno dance'),<sup>5</sup> but also more disturbing videos have been disseminated through the VCD. Most

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<sup>5</sup> See 'Indonesia's skin wars', Time Asia Magazine, April 3, 2006.

famous among such locally produced porno VCDs is an amateur movie which in 2001 became known as 'Bandung, Sea of Love' (*Bandung Lautan Asmara*), after the town where the video was shot. The video was a self-made movie by students from the local ITENAS technological University partaking in a sex party. Nothing would have happened were it not the friend of one of the students involved got hold of the tape and brought it to a rental to transfer it to VideoCD. A copy was made by one of the owners of the rental and in the weeks after the video suddenly appeared in local road side shops. Similar scandals has since been following, students from Bandung more recently again seeking ill repute when the shops were hit by a second VideoCD, 'Dago Girl' (*Gadis Dago*, after a street in Bandung), which became widely distributed as the 50 minute clip was soon uploaded to the Internet. Locally produced porno movies are very popular and especially when just being released VideoCDs are sold at often very high prices, until a next scandalous movie shows up and people go for the next 'hot thing', one salesman of such movies was quoted (Pikiran Rakyat Juli 8, 2005).<sup>6</sup>

The production, distribution and sharing of pornographic materials has of course as we all know become much easier and more anonymous through the Internet. Although relatively few Indonesians have broadband Internet connections at home, Internet cafes have mushroomed in many Indonesia towns and cities over the last decade. At present clients of such cyber cafes are being monitored once they open suspicious websites. Most of these cafes have private booths equipped with PC and web cam. Matra magazine of April 2005 describes chat rooms specialized in cyber-sex mentioning how often girls make use of these private booth doing online striptease shows after online viewers have transferred some money to her account. If she does not have a bank account she can be paid by transferring electronic pulses to her cell-phone pre-paid account, which is a new service that has developed in the last year and a half or so. Whereas its easy to blame the new technology for enabling such indecent behaviour some claim that pornography has

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<sup>6</sup> In another famous scandal in October 2003 prominent fashion photographer Budi Han was sentenced to one year in jail over the secret filming of seven models in a changing room at his studio and then transferring the materials to VCD. The film, which included famous top model Sarah Azhari and MTV VJ Shanty, showed the women in various stages of nudity (see <http://www.sp18.com/2005/02/05>, last accessed September 2006).

actually been *the* driving force in the development of technologies from the printing press, through photography to video, satellite TV and the Internet.<sup>7</sup>

The new internet era has as some claim brought us a trend of ‘porn *from* the masses *for* the masses.’ Cheap technology, such as digital cameras, handy cams and as we will see below, cell phone cameras, have made such self-made movies not only much cheaper, and therefore accessible to many, but people apparently also feel much less embarrassment as ideally such materials are private and recordings are not shared with others. One might even wonder to which extent such self made movies might be considered pornography as long as they are kept to themselves. In a sense, a definition of pornography is always a subjective one, much depending on the context in which it is received and by whom but also partly depending on the creator’s intentions. And to the background of a new open Indonesian society and its intense use of new mobile media a definition of pornography has indeed more recently become a problem.

#### THE ANTI PORNOGRAPHY BILL

Indonesian history has known its own debates on pornography, ranging from traditional court poetry to nowadays advertising soap on national television, an overview of which is outside the scope of this paper though. The country for decades has had its own anti-pornography legislation, which nonetheless, as many complain, hardly ever has been enforced. In what they see as an increasing immoral climate in which mysticism (read ‘paganism’), violence and pornography are now openly shown on television, and young kids are continuously being exposed to such evils, there is now a call for especially a bill fighting pornography. Various civic organizations, such as the Movement for Women Concerned about the Media (Gerakan Perempuan Peduli Media), The Alliance to Save Our Children (Alliansi Seamatkan Anak) or the Alliansi Masyarakat Antipornografi dan Pornoaksi have over the past few years been founded with the sole purpose to fight pornography in magazines, newspapers, soaps and youth culture. Early 2005 President

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, a highly interesting article on the English language version of Wikipedia covering the history of pornography up till the present.

Susilo Bambang Yudoyono declared that he would call for maximal measures as the present situation was no longer tolerable. Newspapers quoted a worried Minister of Youth who had just reported an incident to the President of third grade high school students engaging in collective masturbation after having watched a porno VCD. Since then the Indonesian Parliament has been discussing what has become known as the Rancangan Undang Undang Anti-Pornografi dan Pornoaksi (henceforth ‘Antipornography bill’).<sup>8</sup> Most countries have laws regulating the pornography industry and the Indonesian debate therefore seems to be a very much rational one. With a general consensus that such a new law is needed, there is however considerable disagreement when it comes to defining what pornography actually is. More widely accepted it pertains to any behavior or images that might be considered sexually provocative. But should it also include, for example, traditional arts in which nudity inherently plays a role, the tradition of many Balinese woman still bathing nude in the river or even the wearing of traditional Javanese costume, the shine through *kebaya*, which leaves parts of the female body uncovered while pronouncing others?

The chairman of the Indonesian Council of Ulama indeed seems to argue as such (Kompas March 13 2006), saying that ‘Indonesian customary clothing which shows those parts of the body that must be kept covered and hidden from the view of people outside of one’s immediate family are best stored away in museums. They have to be considered ‘pornoaksi’ and should be dealt with under a newly to be developed anti pornography bill. Gadis Arivia, a well-known women’s right activist and founder of the journal *Perempuan* (‘Woman’), is openly questioning his use of the word ‘pornoaksi’, which term often is used when it comes to condemning supposedly indecent acts; ‘I looked it up in the dictionary but could nowhere find it. It is part of a political game, political sex as it were. It is an eagerness for forbidding, an act of intimidation, not protection. In talking about the anti-pornography bill a ‘cultural revolution’ is now taking place, which forces upon us an imported culture that is not ours’. She does not stand alone in this. Some have

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<sup>8</sup> Pro and contra anti-pornography bill groups have since hit the streets. In April 2006 a *Karnaval Budaya* was organized, a massive rally in which intellectuals teamed up with artists, transvestites indigenous people organizations and celebrities to refuse the proposed bill. Among this crowd were also the former first lady Ny Shinta Nuriyah, and the current miss Indonesia. In May, however, Islamic organizations teamed up for the ‘Million Community Action’ (*Aksi Sejuta Ummat*), supporting the Parliament’s campaign against pornography, an act which was soon followed by a new fatwa by the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI).

condemned the proposed antipornography bill as ‘a third Bali bomb’ (Time Asia April 3 2006), which after the two previous attacks will have a devastating effect on tourism and the country’s economy. Others criticize the present antipornography lobby and its use of the term ‘pornoaksi’ by insulting them of ‘parnokrasi’, combining paranoia with a political system that tries to control its citizens.<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly the youth has become a prominent player in the game of sex politics. Not only the young are seen as one of the most vulnerable groups that need to be constantly protected, they are also active players which are either according to many newspapers agreeing with the new measures or responsible for a to be condemned youth culture.

The whole debate has recently been intensified by two cases, the first one being the case of dancer singer Inul that actually made pornoaksi a publicly used terminology. Inul Daratista, from Pasuruan, east Java, then 24 years old, taught gymnastics before becoming a pop singer. She had been popular for some time when the illegal distribution of an amateur VCD showing her erotic up and downward movements suddenly rocketed her to nation-wide fame in 2001. Her dance-style was soon compared to that of a drill, giving her the title of *Ratu Ngebor*, ‘Queen of Drill Dance’. Ever since, Indonesians have been divided into pro or contra Inul camps.<sup>10</sup> The Inul craze has led to a genuine dance revolution, with today artists being known for erotic dance steps such as the divine movement, the vibrating breast, or the Bulldozer dance, much to the annoyance of conservative groups which perceive of them as vulgar entertainment for the lower social strata.

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<sup>9</sup> See weblog, Indobangkok@yahoogroups, ‘Pornografi, pornoaksi, parnokrasi’, March 8, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> In a similar way, Furong Jiejie, or Hibiscus Sister, recently shot to fame when seductively-posed photographs were posted on the bulletin boards of two of China’s most prestigious university campuses. Hibiscus Sister (or Lotus Flower as she prefers), in an interview with the *South China Morning Post* on the supposed media ban of her weblog, laughed at the idea of being a threat to officialdom – ‘she just wanted to dance, and sing and write heartfelt, meaningful prose.’ This example makes clear how otherwise familiar strategies for seduction have found new space on the internet. See <http://www.freemuse.org/sw11740.asp>, for a detailed discussion of the Inul affair.

A second event that even more so boosted discussions about the anti-pornography bill but also surfaced some of its anti-modernist, and anti western sentiments,<sup>11</sup> was the call for a ban of the Indonesian language version of Playboy magazine. Few weeks after the first issue had been released in April 2006 it caused public outrage and the editorial headquarters were even destroyed by a fundamentalist group called the Islamic Defenders Front. Ever since, and without much success, the authorities have looked for ways to ban the magazine, the latter ironically being impossible with the new freedom of press regulations that came about after 1998. Surprisingly, and I do not yet know how to read this, the first issue of the Indonesian Playboy magazine was launched having a double cover. Folding the actual cover, which depicted a semi nude model, the magazine had a second and fake cover bearing the title of *Ponsel* (Cell phone) magazine.<sup>12</sup> To the background of an already oversensitive discussion on pornography and pornographic action the national media suddenly started to focus on what seemed to be the new possibilities of the cell phone and especially cell phone cameras, in further producing and disseminating materials that are pornographic in character.

#### MOBILE PORNOGRAPHIES

The technology of the cheap hand-held camera has liberated the pornographic film maker from his studio, some argue, and cell phone cameras might be even further adding to this process, resulting in a new sort of mobile pornography. The pornography as well as the telecom industry seems to be aware of such developments and seemingly wants to tap into this market by selling contents. Pictures of porn stars that can be displayed at phones can be freely downloaded and a variety of moan tones are today on offer by different providers.<sup>13</sup> Just this October 2006, the second Mobile Adult Content Congress was

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<sup>11</sup> The Indonesian State Minister of Youth and Sport was by Asia Media (June 3, 2005) quoted as saying that in fighting pornography 'people need to be protected from the negative influences of outside cultures.'

<sup>12</sup> In practice the covers are not all that different as cell phone glossies in Indonesia as a rule use sexy and sparsely clad models on the front of their magazines but also in promoting new products during launch sessions.

<sup>13</sup> Instead of a standard ring tone or song, moan tones cause a cell phone to make deep, ecstatic moaning noises when one receives a call, as one who has an orgasm See <http://www.urbandictionary.com>, last

staged in Reno, Nevada. Quoting from the website, the conference's main target is to 'shown that the top mobile searches are for ring tones and adult content. There is a tremendous opportunity for revenue growth while realizing the added social responsibility to control and monitor delivery.' Although initially not welcomed by the telecom industry, the potential market for adult contents is estimated to reach an annual \$1.4 billion for the current year, 2006, with a predicted rise of over \$ 3.3 billion by 2011 (Gibson 2006). Not something to miss out on. However, it seems highly unlikely such services soon will freely prevail in present day Indonesia or for that sake any other Southeast Asian country, considering current debates on pornographic action, at the same times mobiles *are* at present in Indonesia widely instrumental in disseminating porn.

Such contents both in the form of animations, or wall papers are widely available at cell phone counters but also at shopping malls, where they are a favorite among especially a young mostly male audience. In recent years, Indonesian society has similarly become familiar with the pink services industry. Although some Indonesian newspapers regularly contain advertising for these services, some more explicit than others, by Indonesian standards this is something quite new. As in Indonesia, neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Thailand are increasingly trying to fight the production and sale of pornographic contents, in Cambodia the Prime Minister recently even agreed to support banning 3G technology all together from the country for a decade, since they might be used for porn.<sup>14</sup> But today's cell phone user is no longer solely consumer but increasingly a producer, both in a textual as well as visual sense.

At the Asian Modernities conference in Hong Kong last year, Angel Lin (2005) explained how migrant workers in Southern China made extensive use of texting, not only to gain the most updated information about the job market but also to create an alternative social space in which (sometimes radically) different sexuality and romance norms and practices can be tried out. Similar things are happening in the Philippines. Pertierra et al (2002:90) explains that part of the popularity of the mobile phone is that you can text

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accessed October 2006. Or <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6873237/>, where Dennis Adamo, head of Wicked Wireless is quoted as saying 'Rock stars make music tones, porn stars make moan tones.'

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20060526/1444249.shtml>, last accessed October 2006.

things that you cannot easily say: it is more anonymous and there is a disjunction between the meaning and the intention of what is being conveyed. Pertierra briefly talks about sex texting, the sending of sexually implicit jokes or pictures as well as virtual affairs. Also in Indonesia texting has proved to be a fertile ground for a modern art of seduction. The newspaper Kompas of 4 April 2005 commented on several cases of people who were turned down by their lovers, husbands, or wives due to harassing text messages they had received inviting them to *em-el*, e.g. making love. As pointed out elsewhere (Barendregt forthcoming) these phenomena are not necessarily imported from the West as there are considerable continuities with older literary traditions and especially traditional courting poetry.

Texting sexually implicit messages should however not be a public case as long as they do not harm anyone. But what if they become public? Mobile to live TV offers the possibilities to viewers to text messages to a show which then run live on across the TV screen in front of thousands of viewers. As in many countries such shows appear on TV during the night hours, and one can easily imagine that such shows might give the opportunity to express things not accepted in daylight circumstances. To give the example of Dutch Television is illustrative as here such messages are often blatantly obscene in character, encouraging other viewers to engage in dirty talk or inviting them to come over in real time and real place to engage in sexual acts. Unlike many other countries little experience with participation TV yet exists in Indonesia, but although recently being launched on Indonesian television severe warnings are already made against those who use messages pornographic in character. Their cell phone number will be immediately blocked.

However, texting is innocent when compared to the new visual capabilities of mobile devices which have elicited a greater content demand among mobile phone users; a demand which as it now turns out often is pornographic in character. Mobile phones that come with a camera have led to a new form of mobile voyeurism that seems to have become a plague all over Indonesia. These phenomena are however by no means unique to Indonesian society. Mobile Society, a Malaysian cell phone journal in January 2005

published an interesting interview with a self-confessed phone voyeur, who roamed the Singapore MRT in search for victims, afterwards putting the pictures on a membership web site. No one seems save anymore. The Lampung Post of April 24, 2006 reported how a man received nude images on his phone as somebody had incidentally hijacked his phone's Bluetooth connection. And the latest thing is a mobile phone equipped with a modified Sony chip that serves as an X-ray camera (Tren Digital, 20 December 2004), for purposes that will be clear considering the above.

It is in noteworthy to see how Internet and mobile technologies are increasingly interacting in producing self made pornography. In one case, known as 'Nude Pics of A Cilegon Student' (*Foto Bugil Pelajar Cilegon*), 28 pictures of two naked school kids in West Java had been taken with a cell phone camera and were distributed via the Internet, to be sold at very high prices at Internet cafes services where virtually everyone could upload them to one's cell phone (Liputan 6.com, April 26, 2006); the photos for months were a bestseller. In other instances private photos were circulating after the phone had been to a service centre. These are, unfortunately but some of many incidents of cell phone pornography which recently has occurred in Indonesia, incidents which according to the national media are only a tip of the iceberg and should warn us for a new dirty youth culture that is about to emerge. Some illustrations might serve here to sketch the contours of this new youth culture.

#### CELLPHONE STRIPTEASE, PULSE GIRLS AND OTHER SCANDALS

For the last two years the national media have regularly been reporting cases of cell phone porn, especially the distribution of so-called *pilem bokep*.<sup>15</sup> Tempo Interaktif of April 25 2005 reports as such an 'indecent act of cell phone use' (*adegan mesum mobil*) that took place in Medan, Northern Sumatra. A third grade high school girl is here said to have undressed herself for various male class mates. One of the boys captured this act of

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<sup>15</sup>*Bokep* is a slang word (*bahasa prokem* in Indonesian). It is actually an abbreviation, BF, taken from the previously used term Blue Film. BF is read Beh-Ef, which in its pidgin form is read as Beh-Ep. The slang word Bokep is obtained by inserting ok in between Beh-Ep (see also <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/bokep>).

voluntary striptease with his cell phone camera and in no time the short clip was distributed to other cell phone users. This news shocked the nation and soon led the Indonesian authorities to urge parents routinely inspect the phones of their children. It was however only a first glimpse of what was to come.

In Mojokerto, Central Java a former beauty queen saw her title withdrawn as cell phone nude pictures of her started circulating in October 2005. The girl denies that it is her on the pictures and the police started an investigation. The girls life is however ruined.

In April 2006, two school kids were arrested in the Sumatran town of Pekanbaru for having produced 'just grown up cell phone porn' (*rekaman porno ABG*). In this case the movie of only 27 seconds portraying the two making love in a bath room of the girls' parents had been exchanged by cell phone owners for the last few weeks, but only caught the eye of the authorities when being distributed over the Internet (Riau Pos April 16, 2006). One month later again two Sumatran university students were arrested in Pekanbaru after being recognized on a self made movie performing oral sex inside a car (Detikcom, August 27, 2006). The two were soon send home, but the clip was already downloaded by hundreds of cell phone users.

In May 2006 yet another incident was reported as students from East Kalimantan apparently do not want to stay behind. Phone users in Samarinda town circulated a new video clip that was named 'University Mulawarman also knows how to stage sex parties' (*Unmul juga bisa pesta seks*). While school teachers felt really ashamed, students interviewed showed their phones while girlfriends proudly told how many porn films were stored inside (Pos Metro Balikpapan May 14, 2006). The two students involved in the 3 minute clip were eventually arrested by the local police.

Many more stories could be presented here, with stories baring names of a scandal such as 'scandal of the veiled girl of Mataram', leaving little room for the imagination. Some of the news coverage at length portrays the apparent negligent behavior of some of the students who have been (literally) caught in the act. Sukendar et al (2005) describe a case

of two students, not even lovers but just friends, who in the middle of the fasting month are found in the class room by their friends performing oral sex to each other. While one of the viewers reportedly runs out to throw up, another student quickly takes his camera and decides to film the whole scene.

The same article reports how most of the peers of these students are not even surprised or shocked by the event but see it as part of a wider trend in which it becomes increasingly acceptable for Indonesian youth, especially Jakartan students and school kids, to engage in free sex. The girls who are up to this are even known by the name of 'Pulse Girls' (*cewek pulsa*) : for 200.000 rupiah (about 20 euro) they sell their body in order to buy either credit for their pre-paid phones or other fashionable items. Sex they see as '*gaul*', which means talking about the right things, having your own opinion and a modern and exciting lifestyle.

In many aspects these pulse girls reminds us of the three Jakartan school kids being portrayed in the movie *Virgin*, with which we started out this contribution. The three friends Keti, Stella and Biyan are similarly easy going, using filthy language and wearing the latest fashion even as this means they have to sell their bodies for this. Sexuality is an important theme in their lives, either through the observations of Biyan who becomes a fragrant literature novelist, or for Stella, who when bored loves to watch porno movies or Keti who deliberately or not becomes a porn star herself when auditioning for an advertisement of soap.<sup>16</sup> Or ..., as depicted in the opening scenes to the film, when taking pictures of their own breast by using their cell phone cameras.

As a result of all the negative news coverage such a new Indonesian youth culture has become a worry for many politicians and as a consequence not only shops doing cell phone uploads,<sup>17</sup> but also numerous schools and campuses in Sumatra, Java and other

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<sup>16</sup> Similar to Biyan being modeled as a fragrant literature novelist, also the soap advertisement seems based on real life events. Fitzgerald (2002) writes about an Adult VCD called 'Shower Soap Casting' (*Kasting Sabun Mandi*): 'The nine young models, cameramen and production house involved became the focus of public and police attention because it was claimed that the film was 'pornographic'.

<sup>17</sup> One cell phone shop in Bandar Lampung, Sumatra was closed after the police found nearly 86.000 photos and 14.000 one minute films, which were meant to upload to mobile phones (see Kompas January 15, 2006). The photos and films were mostly purchased by a young crowd which paid anything between 2.000 and 10.000 rupiah for a photo or clip.

islands of the archipelago have been raided over the last two years. In April 2005 ‘Operation Affection for School Kids’ (*Operasi Sayang Siswa*) was launched,<sup>18</sup> in which local police forces by surprise entered three high schools to inspect each individual cell phone for its contents. Students were allegedly in total panic when police officers had suddenly entered their class rooms (Jawa Pos April 6, 2006). In a similar action in Kotabaru, Kalimantan eleven phones were taken and several students were forced to leave the school after pornographic materials had been found in their phones. Starting October 2006, some schools now even forbid their students to take cell phones with cameras when entering the school yard. Understandably many argue proper sex education a better means to fight the perverse impact of pornography.

The consequences for school kids and their families once being arrested are often depicted as dramatic. The kids are sent from their schools and often a whole family is stigmatized. Newspapers and TV reels are eager in condemning in what they see as cell phone pornographic action, associating such indecent behavior with premarital sex, abortion and often as western perversities not congruent with Asian values. Stories are not seldom exaggerated by the media, inserting a typical cocktail of urban lore that consists of free sex parties, drugs and alcohol. Needless to say that we are dealing here to a large extent with fears and representations of such fears, and not in all instances these stories necessarily seem to reflect true practices.

One might therefore wonder if the stories presented in the Indonesian media are indeed as many argue only a tip of an iceberg or the other way around, if their occurrence isn’t highly exaggerated. My own fieldwork in Central Java affirms what is depicted in some of the stories as true, but we do not yet have an idea of the exact scale we are talking about nor do we know much of such stories are typically confined to the larger Indonesian cities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Another of these raids in February 2006 was euphemistically named *Operasi Cinta Kasih*, ‘Operation Giving Love’.

<sup>19</sup> One North Sumatran student interviewed, for example, confessed she was very shocked to hear all these stories. At her school all students bringing phones had been inspected by their teachers. In the class room the phones had to be switched off, to be switched on during breaks or when returning home. Most students still use fairly simple phones, and do not even have a camera. ‘I am still using a cell phone of the 3100 series (BB: Nokia) that I will only use to communicate with my parents.’ Other students confirmed a similar use (Waspada, May 2, 2005).

The frequent occurrence of mobile porn stories in the press in many cases has unquestionably led to simulation of such practices and not surprisingly the mobile phone has increasingly become iconic for other things than the political liberating force it once was known for. Whereas the phone, however, is not necessarily liberating or revolutionary in character (see for example, Barendregt 2006, but see also Pertierra 2005), nor can its introduction be solely held responsible for all of the pornographic practices mentioned above. It is more likely that talking about the mobile is in many cases an easy means to contemplate on processes that are otherwise hard to grasp. Mobile porn stories are as much about the phone as about its users and the ideas these users are trying to come to terms with: in the Indonesian case the new openness and new sexualities associated with it. Sex is by many considered to be a life style that is gaul, prestigious and socializing, or to summarize it in one word, *moderen*. At the same time Indonesia remains the nation with the largest Muslim population in the world, and while generally moderate, conservative forces seem on the rise. The dilemma of 'pornoaksi' is thereby neatly summarized by a participant of the Indonesian language plasa.com mailing list: 'for those who easily feel desire do not have faith, but those who do not feel desire are not considered normal, that is what confuses me.'<sup>20</sup>

#### SOME CONCLUSIONS

The definition of what one considers obscene can differ among persons, cultures and eras. But, when is pornography considered as such and under what circumstances are we dealing with mere mobile forms of sexual pleasure, exchanged by its users? Where intimacy and individuality ceases to end and when things sexually pleasant become public (such as SMS being used in participation TV) and therefore possibly obscene and pornographic? Interestingly, our notions of the public and the private are increasingly challenged by new and especially the mobile media as the latter have the capacity to bring the personal into the public arena and the other way round.

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<sup>20</sup> Plasa.com, online discussion on Pornografi dan Pornoaksi, March 23, 2006

As most Indonesians would argue cell phone porn is symptomatic for a wider moral crisis of a nation which is otherwise very Asian in character, and with a majority of the people being even Muslim (Waspada February 2, 2006). The present discussion on pornographic action and the ways especially new media are instrumental in disseminating it is however by no means exclusively an Indonesian one, but symptomatic for many Asian neighbours which are trying to come to terms with modernity, both in its good and its worrisome aspects. Gaonkar (1999:15) argues that cultural modernity does not invariably take the form of an adversary culture that privileges the individuals need for self expression and self realization over the claims of community as it has done in the West. Still many cultural forms, social practices, and institutional arrangements do in the wake of modernity surface in other places as well. It is striking how the introduction of computer mediated communication devices and new mobile technologies in many Asian societies have led to the expression of new sexual identities. It is not strange that many groups, including the national media, have so ferociously reacted to what they see as pornography. It is as Brigman (1997:149) observes exactly 'because of our anxieties about sexuality, pornography is open to attack in its own right and can be used as a symbol – a lightning rod – for those threatened by changing attitudes regarding proper sexual behaviour, abortion, homosexuality, and other life style issues.'

The fear for both the new media and the new sexualities it is associated with is intensely fed by the depiction of the mobile in popular culture. Once more we must bear in mind that these services did not spring up due to the new cellular possibilities, but specifically fit into the new atmosphere of anonymity and the 'cool' it provides. Most of the examples under study here are equally present in other societies which recently have got to know the possibilities of mobile media, but the Indonesian context is an extremely sensitive one and therefore explains why some expression of a new mobile youth culture are intensely criminalised at the moment. In Indonesia mobile-practices and the new possibilities they offer came into being within a wider climate of political and cultural reform. This explains why the phone has become iconic of the new openness of the post 1998 Indonesia. Now the initial euphoria slowly is ebbing away, the Indonesian Dream is also

reported to have its darker sides, of which the resurgence of pornography is but one. In its aftermath also the mobile is being re-evaluated.

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