

Communal Consumption of VCD/DVD and Social Change in the Urban *Kampung* Community Indonesia

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Abstract

This study looks at the consumption of video disc among the viewers in such urban middle-lower class community settlement in Surabaya, Indonesia. The entertainment consumers in urban Indonesia have been spoiled with cheap abundance piracy productions of foreign and national films, TV soaps, dramas, and other audio visual materials in the form of VCD and/or DVD in the market. Apart from this feature, the consumption of sexual scenes and pornographic materials has become the so-called 'common secret' among those social class communities in their everyday of media consumption. They do not just buy the discs, but also rent and swap each other within the *kampung* neighbourhood environment. Applying an ethnography method, this study observes the discourse of cultural consumption of the middle-lower class community toward the audio-visual productions of VCD and/or DVD in such neighbourhood alley and the practice of communal consumption. The result shows how those *kampung* communal viewers have experienced as spectators of a "dish of entertainment" in their particular class context, as well as practicing the mode of communal imaginative experience in the contemporary cultural liberalisation in Indonesia post-authoritarian era.

Keywords: urban *kampung* community, cultural consumption, communal consumption, spectatorship

1. Introduction

The television (TV) set, nowadays, cannot be separated from the life of urban middle class *kampung* community in Indonesia. When we walk along in the narrow and dense *kampung* alley, we could see how the TV set is obtrusively positioned within the open lounge interiors and has a decorative value for the *kampung* households in urban areas. The TV set is one of the display pieces of the "household arts," suggesting the set is regarded as not only a utilitarian object or as a technology which is problematically associated with a particular class taste, but also that it has a socio-economic function for every household in this community. Along with the TV set, a Video Compact Disc (VCD) and/or Digital Video Disc (DVD) players have become common and prominent in many *kampung* households. Unlike the VCR, which was not popular for middle to lower classes of Indonesians, the VCD/DVD is widely owned, particularly since the late 1990s.

The ownership of VCD/DVD players amongst the middle classes in Indonesia has been accelerated with the massive selling of pirated video discs in the street markets and the increase of small video disc rental outlets in and near the middle to lower class housing complexes, especially in major cities such as Jakarta and Surabaya. The VCD player, especially the non-branded Taiwan-made models, has become affordable and the discs have become extremely cheap, particularly when compared to the cost of going to the movies. The discs can be rented for only 1,000 to 3,000 rupiahs (equal to US\$ 1 cent - 3 cents), watched a few times, and swapped or shared with friends and neighbours, whereas the movie ticket is around 50,000 rupiahs (equal to US\$5).

I was attracted by several short line advertisements in local newspapers selling VCD players cheaper than those sold in the major electronic shops in Surabaya. The advertisers promoted the players as products of Taiwan just off the ship. I called several of the places advertising these players, and found they were mainly Chinese households situated in particular areas of upper middle class housing estates in West and North Surabaya. I finally bought one from a Chinese seller. It cost me 300 thousand rupiahs (equal to US\$30) whereas the branded players such as Sony or Samsung sold in the legal market cost more than one million rupiahs. The one that I bought had a brand name 'Digitech' and I saw many different "unknown" brands in that "private market" and other similar places. Many similar ads selling Taiwan-made or China-Made VCD players straight off the ship appeared after that. Later, some small electronic shops in the city began selling such non-branded players and continue to do so. Although this is a quirky example, this personal experience, I suggest, illustrates how the symptom of VCD fever becomes manifest as a common urban cultural orientation surrounding television installation in the home and its importance for family life in the 2000s of Indonesia.

The persistence of VCD fever over the last five years in Indonesia echoes, to a certain extent, the popularity of the VCR in the 1980s (see Kitley 2002: 217-220). However, if the installation of VCR (*Betamax* was the most popular) in the 1980s reflected exclusive private and middle class consumption, the phenomenon of VCD fever in the 2000s is more a phenomenon of *rakyat* (people's) consumption. This advanced technology is more popular among the middle to lower classes rather than the upper class families, which prefer to have LD (Laser Disc) or

DVD players (*Kompas*, 9 August 1999). The installation of a VCD player for its compatibility with the television set at home suggests that the so-called 'second-wave' of television installation has arrived in contemporary urban *kampung* communities in Indonesia.

In an effort to examine the cultural significance of television consumption and the practices around the set in contemporary quotidian life of the urban *kampung* communities in Surabaya, this study explores how the notion of "communalised mobility" becomes apparent in the practice of consuming VCD among the *rakyat*. By examining the way *kampung* households use the VCD set day to day, the focus of this part is on the socio-cultural meaning of the VCD and the engagement of the *kampung* housewives with the set. This study also attempts to interrogate the practice of communal (neighbourhood) *kampung* women watching VCD that reproduce a local cultural form, which I show later as "privatised-communal pleasure." This is to suggest how the practice of VCD/DVD consumption represents a distinct picture about the communality and media usage within the local practice

2. VCD/DVD in contemporary (*kampung*) Indonesia: Neo-entertainment of the people

One afternoon in the hot weather of Surabaya, I stepped into a small house near Kampung Gubeng, which was running a business in renting videodiscs. The owner, Amin, uses his living room to display his videodisc collections for rental on the flattened plywood shelf attached to the wall. The collections consisted of about a hundred video CDs. When I asked him what kinds of video CDs are popularly rented from him, he said mainly *Campur Sari* (contemporary Javanese pop songs), or *dangdut* (Malay music) karaoke are popular among others. Korean and Japanese dramas and pop songs, the Japanese children's anime and sports such as *Formula One* car race and soccer are also popular. Amin continued that adult (porn) films are rarely rented, as he thought that people might be shy to rent; people tend to buy adult (porn) films rather than renting them. He said that those who rent the adult films from his place are usually middle aged males. They will ask the same question as to the VCD traders on the street, "*Mas ada barang?*" (Bro, do you have an item?), or "*Mas ada 'full'?*" (Bro, do you have 'full'? 'Full' means completely porn, not semi porn¹), or if they ask for Western porn films, they said, "*Mas ada Bule?*" (Bro, do you have 'Bule'? *Bule* is what many Indonesians call 'white man').

Pornography video-cassettes or CDs in Indonesia are also known as '*film blue*'. However, people wanting to obtain such films, now tend not to use the term 'blue film' as this term is too well-known, so they use other terms such as those mentioned above. As people are still fearful, nervous, or embarrassed about buying or borrowing pornography, the deals must also be made in a disguised transaction. Amin explained that he did not display pornography discs on his shelf, but he has small collections, which he will show only if the borrower asks for them. Some male university students sometimes ask him about the controversial video CDs reported in the public. These video CDs contain pornographic recordings of college and high school students or Indonesian models or such "home video recordings" of sex acts; for instance, a video recording of two ITENAS (Institute of National Technology) students in Bandung, West Java, who participated in sexual activities. This recording is well-known as '*VCD Itenas*'. Other similar sex act home video recordings are available, such as '*Bandung Lautan Asmara*' (Bandung Sea of Love), '*Sabun Mandi*' (Bath Soap), '*VCD Pempek Palembang*' (Palembang Fishcake) and '*VCD kamar mandi*' (Bathroom), a recording obtained with hidden camera of models and celebrities inside the women's room in a reputable photo studio in Jakarta, and many others.

The VCD/DVD player² is not only affordable for the middle to lower classes, it is also perceived as cheaper entertainment medium than the movies or the exclusive karaoke pubs. In many major urban centres of Indonesia the VCD players and the discs are marketed widely³. The VCD machines, particularly those imported from Taiwan, China, and Korea, cost between 300 thousand rupiahs to 400 thousand rupiahs⁴. Many unknown brands of the VCD machine, often called counterfeit brand products (*barang tembakan*), such as *Sonsang* to mimic *Samsung*, *Seico* to mimic *Seiko*, *Mithochiba* to imitate *Toshiba*, *Shark* to imitate *Sharp*, *Sankyo* to mimic *Sanyo*, and so forth, are commonly seen in the electronic market. If the original branded VCD or DVD players are marketed for about 700 thousand rupiahs to two million rupiahs, then those counterfeits are so much cheaper than the branded ones; that middle to lower class people prefer to buy them.

Corresponding to this expansion of cheap VCD machines, there have been massive video CD home productions and distributions as well. Many pirate video CDs and illegally produced video pornography are circulated and offered cheaply to the consumers. The price for the videodiscs, particularly those pirated copies, was 2,500

¹ The Indonesian police department popularly uses terms "Porno" and "Semi Porno" to categorize pornographic items. These terms then are also used by the Indonesian press.

² The VCD/DVD player or machine sold in Indonesia is mostly set up for VCD and DVD discs compatibility and MP3

³ It was reported in *Kompas* daily (9 August 1999) that the numbers of VCD player in Indonesia had reached four million in 1999.

⁴ Equal to US\$40 to US\$50 with exchange rate US\$1= 10,000 rupiahs.

rupiahs (without disc box) or 5,000 rupiahs (with the box), whereas the original copies cost about 15,000 to 60,000 rupiahs. Moreover, the videodisc traders are everywhere on the street stalls, in every open market situated in the crowded major town shopping centres, in small traditional markets, at pedestrian crossing bridges, at the bus stands, and in crowded *kampung* districts. Particular places, such as *Glodok* in Jakarta and *Tunjungan Center* (TC) in Surabaya, are the popular central VCD markets, especially for pirate videodisc copies. Even in the electronic and video CD market of *Glodok* Jakarta, many street vendors there sell pornography video CDs openly on their mobile shelf.

The videodisc industry in Indonesia, which grew largely outside the legal frameworks, has enabled wide circulation of illegal productions of the latest world movies, Chinese (Mandarin)-language films, and pornography. Government attempts to close down the pirate copying studios; and, illegal pornography studio productions, and burning of tons of pornography video CDs are reported in the national press almost everyday. These government ‘sweepings’ represent the untiring attempt to control the growth of (illegal) small videodisc industries and pornography distributions in Indonesia.

The massive marketing of VCD players and the recorded discs in the urban centres of Indonesia is echoed in rural areas. The use and circulation of video CDs are commonly seen in everyday life of the people. *Kompas* daily has reported that even in a remote village called *Desa Serbajandi*, located 95 kilometres from Medan the capital city of North Sumatra, 80 percent of the households possessed a VCD player. (*Kompas*, 18 July 2001: 14) Although, many of *Serbajandi*’s residents own a VCD, which costs 400 thousand rupiahs, this does not mean that the villagers are rich. VCDs are bought because they are cheaper than the digital repeaters at about one million rupiahs, which are needed to catch the broadcast of private national television. (*Kompas*, 18 July 2001) Moreover, having a VCD player among this community is perceived more prestigious for the family’s status than having the digital repeater.

Like *Serbajandi*’s people, families in *Kampung Gubeng* Surabaya, where my fieldwork was taken place, also revealed that the reason they bought a VCD or DVD player was mainly for a possession/status marker for the symbolic status within their neighbourhood. Just like one family in the *kampung* of my fieldwork, the housewife explained that she got a VCD player because she does not want to be behind her neighbours who already own one. This housewife also bought a VCD so that her son would not have to watch children’s cartoons at the neighbours, which would embarrass her. Sometimes, this woman herself or her son invites friends or neighbours to come and watch video CD together in her house. This practice is much more “valued” than if her family goes to the neighbour’s place, except on those occasion when this *kampung* woman and her neighbours have planned to watch a video CD together, and pick one particular neighbour’s house to sit and watch, just like the practice of watching porn recordings, which will be examined in the following part.

The VCD or DVD player is no longer perceived as a luxurious household technology by the *kampung* people. According to the *kampung* housewives interviewed, having a VCD or DVD is now common; it is even viewed as a companion of the television set. Another *Kampung* woman interviewed declares that she bought a VCD player as many of her neighbours already possessed this digital technology. She says, “Having a VCD is just about having it, it is common [...] indeed it is not expensive. Everyone has a VCD. [I use] the VCD for entertainment, if [I] am bored with TV, [for] karaoke, and [for watching] blue [sic] [movies] with my husband.” This woman’s view was shared another housewife and mother of single girl, her next door neighbour; this mother of single girl explained that she has a VCD for watching movies, which she can easily rent, so that she does not need to go to the movie theatre that is expensive. For this mother and her daughter, by renting the film disc for just 1,000 rupiah, they and the students, who board in her house, can watch the film together. “The VCD is people’s entertainment (*hiburan rakyat*), for only pay 1,000 rupiah, many people are able to watch the film. If in the movie theatre, everyone pays for herself.”

VCD/DVD fever among urban *kampung* communities has brought a “new” culture into the quotidian communal media life. Once, I saw several industrial workers living in a small boarding house in a crowded *kampung* lane in the Surabaya industrial area, *Rungkut*, watching a *dangdut*⁵ video music CD of the controversial female *dangdut* singer, *Inul Daratista*. The similar types of video music CDs are frequently played and watched in *Kampung Gubeng* and its surroundings. A *dangdut* video music CDs, karaoke of pop Indonesian ballads, and *Campur Sari* (contemporary Javanese pop songs) sung by *Didi Kempot*, and Korean pop songs are the most popular VCD music played by the *Kampung Gubeng* families. Also pirate video discs recorded from certain television programs such as *dangdut* shows, *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppet), and *Campur Sari* broadcasts on TV have been marketed and circulated widely. This reproduction of those TV programs, to some extent, has sustained the circulation of traditional/local cultures and the persistence of lower class taste, when such programs are peripheral to consumer capitalist oriented programs on the private national channels. The high circulation of

⁵ *Dangdut* is recognised as traditional Malay music. The name of *dangdut* is taken from the musical instrument of ‘*kendang*’ More on study about *Dangdut* music see Andrew Weintraub (2010)

those video CD copies also suggests that the traditional “pop” cultures are still in demand and massively circulated among the mass market in contemporary urban Indonesia, particularly among the middle to lower classes. Heryanto (2011) suggests that since the spread of VCDs and DVDs and the growth of television industries in the country, the existence of small cinema houses has been economically troublesome, and the cinema goers tend to reduced significantly.

The popularity of VCDs and DVDs has also contributed to the “new” form of mass entertainment over the last five years in Indonesia. The VCD or DVD has been used as an entertainment medium for people traditional/local ceremonies such as wedding parties, male child circumcision celebration, or even for national Independence Day celebration. VCD shows, especially the *dangdut* karaoke, have become more popular than traditional entertainment mediums such as mobile movie screenings (known as *Layar Tancap*), *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppet show), or *dangdut* live music performance, which tend to be more expensive than renting the VCD/DVD, especially for the middle to lower class people. Kampung Gubeng residents told that a VCD show is also commonly used for the *kampung*’s ritual ceremony, wedding and male child circumcision celebrations. Usually, they play the karaoke at the beginning and, when only adult males remain, they play Western action films or Chinese action and Kung Fu movies.

Along with this trend in urban *kampung* communities, the VCD show has also become popular in rural areas to attract the guests to wedding parties in the villages. Once, I received a wedding invitation of a friend, who would be married in a rural area, about 100 kilometres from Surabaya, the capital province of East Java. The invitation card stated that the entertainment for the wedding celebration would be ‘karaoke and VCD.’ As hiring shadow puppets performers is expensive now, and only the rich village people can afford to hire them, the mobile VCD rentals including the player, the films, the karaoke sets, and the sound systems have flourished in the local regions.

Hence, this advanced audio-visual technology in Indonesia has introduced a “new” style of life especially for the middle to lower class communities. The accessibility of entertainment from VCD can also be seen as a form of media democratisation. In other words, people can choose their own entertainment according to taste and interest and it is affordable in the public market places. The availability of VCD among the people, also appears to offer “freedom” to access videodisc alternatives to such “sensitive” visual materials. When people find that their entertainment interests are not catered for by the capitalist television producers who give only a small proportion of airtime for traditional/local cultural performances, they find alternative media. Moreover, the popularity of VCD and its availability have brought “freedom” of expression and entertainment for the people when people’s interests and appreciation for their local and class cultures have not been accommodated by the commercialised television. When the commercialised media systems do not provide a wide range of informed opinion on the important social and political issues of the day, and people continue voiceless, consuming video CD thus becomes a choice to entertain themselves and to become as if people are ‘a-politic,’ as stated by one of the lower class people below:

Politics might torment people. However, do not forbid people to express themselves. [This] includes enjoying free VCD in the middle of the hurly-burly and the toing and froing of the [traditional] market visitors. This is relaxing entertainment. (Quoted from Syarifuddin, a resident of Padang, West Sumatra as cited in *Kompas*, 8 July 2001)

3. Communalised mobility and social change

It is obvious that audio visual technology has affected a new lifestyle among the middle to lower classes. They start to talk about films like *Titanic*. This film that gained the 1997 Oscar was seen by the housewives in the crowded compound houses in Cipinang area, East Jakarta. In a narrow lane along the drainage canal, they talk about Rose, the character in *Titanic* played by Kate Winslet.

Sugeng, a young man from Klaten, Central Java, who is labourer in a soap factory at Cakung, East Jakarta, uses VCD as entertainment with his roommates. They like VCD music *Campursari* from Didi Kempot to rock music from Jamrud [rock band].

Meanwhile, Daru, a four-year old kid, knows very well the story, music, and songs of classic musical films such as *Sound of Music* (1965) and *Wizard of OZ* (1939). Both are legendary musicals which people still talk about. He also likes the war film *Memphis Belle* starring Harry Connick Jr, and Walt Disney cartoons such as *Mickey Mouse* or *Donald Duck*. (*Kompas*, 8 July 2001)

These newspaper examples of the quotidian practice of consuming videodiscs in contemporary Indonesia suggest the cultural significance of VCD/DVD as a vehicle that has driven the middle to lower class communities away from their everyday domestic lives and into a world of entertainment that they could not access previously, and could not obtain from the mainstream television broadcasting programs designed by the capitalist television stations. The urban *kampung* women in that Jakarta area were able to talk about characters and story lines of Western movies, whilst the urban *kampung* women in Kampung Gubeng that I observed, have used VCD as a

“new toy” to experience karaoke, which previously only existed in the karaoke bars or pubs, and to transport them into a world of romantic (sexual) quests, that through the communal imaginative experience, enable them to express their pleasure in the sight of the naked female body, which I will show later.

Raymond Williams (1975), in his classic work *Television: Technology and Cultural Forms*, suggests that television is a medium of twentieth century culture that involves an essential paradox which he labels “mobile privatisation”: the technology of communication has enabled opportunities for mobility and travel and for the development of a sense of community, whilst at the same time, television has increasingly emphasised popular leisure in the privatised space of the family home. In line with this view, Shaun Moores (1996) adds that domestic TV consumption entails audio-visual contents entering the family home from a distance and thereby, raises the notion of household as “phantasmagoric place.” “As well as permeating daily routines and colonising domestic geographies, communication technologies help to transform the time-space relations of social life by instantaneously mediating between inside and outside – articulating the private and the public, or the local and the global.” (Moores 1996: 23)

Williams has developed the concept of mobile privatisation in regard to the rise of industrialisation in a modern world and the development of broadcasting, radio first in the 1920s, as a technology that has become a major industrial production. As well, he has seen the development of complex technology, eventually called “consumer durables,” as socially characterised by the paradox which connects to modern urban industrial living: mobility and privatisation of the self-sufficient family home. From the development of those consumer machines, broadcasting i.e. television, in its applied form, was a social product of this distinctive tendency of *mobile privatization*. (Williams 1990: 26) Extending Williams’s work on mobile privatization, Lynn Spigel (2001) has inverted the term into a related ideal of *privatised mobility* to emphasise the peculiar shift through the portability of the television set and the cultural discourse of television use within the post-war American middle class family. Spigel’s argument is based on her analysis of advertisement depictions of the portable television marketed in post-war America, which for her, had signified the notion that the television set (with its portability) promised to bring “the interior world outdoors” rather than incorporating views of the outdoor world into the domestic family space. “Now, rather than experiencing the domicile as a window on the world that brought public life indoors, the resident experienced the home as a vehicular form, a mode of transport in and of itself that allowed people to take private life outdoors.” (Spigel p. 72) I would like to take William’s and Spigel’s works and combine them into what I call ‘privatised-communal mobility’ in which VCD offers not only its portability to bring “the interior world outdoors,” it also introduces a mode of mobility that allows people to share their private viewing experience with neighbours and acquaintances or with more people in celebrations and ceremonies.

Indeed, the development of portable television that promoted bringing “the interior world outdoors” can be extended beyond the case of the television per se; the development of advanced digital audio visual machines such as VCD can also be seen as promising the marginalised urban community as well as the rural to experience looking at the world outside communally. As the player is affordable and the video CDs marketed massively, the *kampung* and the rural communities are now watching various entertainments offered outside their family home and experiencing their private practice as communal practice outdoors. Thus, the compatibility of VCD player with the television set has allowed the *kampung* and the rural people to expand their imaginative experience by watching Korean and Western movies – as well as *Formula One* races as in the case of Kampung Gubeng– and that is “mobility” within the communal. The practice of VCD watching, in addition, has opened up a new set of cultural fantasies and pleasure – as in the case of watching pornography recordings described below – as well as experiences of the nostalgic and localised – as in the case of consuming Indonesian traditional/local pop culture.

In 1962, when public television broadcasting first entered into the Indonesian family home, the audiovisual revolution started in Indonesian society. The society has now become used to a situation in which television broadcasting is a central socio-cultural institution within the familial everyday practices. Since its early stage of development, television broadcasting in Indonesia had been utilised as a powerful form of social integration and regime control over the people. Along with the development of the industry, it has also been seen as socially, commercially, and at times politically manipulative. The popularity of VCD and DVD players and the massive distribution of pirate videodiscs on the market, thus, have offered, especially to the middle to lower class customers, copies of the latest world movies, world sport championships, as well as other illegally produced “local” pornography and films and video previously banned by Soeharto’s New Order regime. The easy availability of pirated video CD recordings sold in street markets has enabled the people to find banned films and videos, from the film *Schindler’s List* to the documentary video titled *Kalimantan’s Killing Field*, which pictures the inter-ethnic war between the Dayaks and the Madurese in Kalimantan, and the recent documentary video of the secret campaign of the former New Order’s military chief, General Wiranto. The illegally produced films and videos in circulation include several theatrical live performances of prominent leftist Indonesian artists such as the monolog of Butet Kertaredjasa titled *Raja Rimba Jadi Pawang* (King of the Jungle Becomes Tamer), which

was banned by the Indonesian Film Censor Institute (LSF) in 1999 (*Kompas*, 16 August 1999). Hence, the VCD has challenged the restrictive media policies and services managed by the Indonesian state authorities and its apparatuses.

In contrast to the “centre-controlled” television broadcasting, the consumption of videodiscs is a dispersed, distinguished “privatised-communal” practice which gives the audience control over what is happening on the screen. In addition, the affordability of VCD and DVD player and the disc have caused fear within the burgeoning video industry, mainly the production house companies who supply programs for private television companies, and the government, because they thrive “the exogenous culture” (Kitley 2000: 218). Like the VCR fever in 1980s Indonesia, as explained in Kitley’s (2000) work, the circulation of this culture within the Indonesian cultural space is seen as challenging the state’s construct of distinguished and autonomous national culture. At the same time, the flood of pirated and counterfeit video CDs and the growth of the home video recording industry in Indonesia remain complex and involve issues of national and international copyright.

Now in the transition to capitalist democracy, the thrust for conversion from a centralised television broadcasting system to more scattered ones is not only political, but also economic. The capitalist development of national private TV stations and their wide distribution enable greater control and organisation of the market for a given production. The television is thus devoted to production only in so far as to make distribution technically possible and attractive for the segmented market in the country. As such, television programming has shifted from schedules designed with a family audience in mind – as in the case of State channel TVRI and early private channels such as RCTI, TPI, SCTV, and IVM – to those which attract “audience share”, the aggregate ratings of segmented individuals according to demographics. As a new form of commercialised sponsor-TV station relations evolved, and with the increasing importance of Nielsen rating measurements in the contemporary Indonesian media and advertising industries, television broadcasting, particularly national private channels, has increasingly developed prime time programs with individual demographics in mind, – attempting to draw, for instance, women age fifteen to fifty by targeting them with programs that suit their taste.

As the private television industry now favours identifying audiences as individual consumer types rather than as a family and/or communal unit, so too the distribution of programs on daily prime time is stereotyped, monocultured, and hegemonised according to the primary tastes of targeted individuals, ensuring the programs are marketable to advertisers. This practice fails to consider the cultural significance of the practice of communal television viewing among the middle to lower class audiences. The VCD/DVD, therefore, can be seen as opening up the possibility of those particular class communities sustaining and differentiating their style of consumption of the video digital recordings. The VCD/DVD favours the communally mobile consumers over the stable individual and the private space. If television signifies the concept of mobile privatisation, in a sense that the mobility is not simply a metaphor, but also integral to the economic logic of the capitalist television industry that has designed programs to suit the individual demographic segment; the VCD use within the middle to lower class communities, I believe, tends to challenge the privatisation of television use and to emphasize the communal practice of mobility.

4. VCD and gendered realm in the *kampung*

Indeed, VCD now signifies the persistence of ‘*hiburan rakyat*’ (people’s entertainment). The affordable price of the player, added to the flood of pirated disc recordings⁶, have placed VCD or DVD as ‘merry-cheap entertainment’, especially for middle to lower level social groups. In *Kampung Gubeng*, for instance, people use VCD or DVD not only for entertainment such as watching films, sports, or local performances, but also for religious practice in the recital of Koranic verses.

However, the use of new technology in the home is incorporated within the social organization of the relations between the public and private spheres and within the domestic sphere itself. It has also posed a crucial consideration, which is closely articulated with gender relations, particularly when the determining effect of the structure and size of the domestic space available is the basis of consideration. With restricted physical environment, the aural barriers afforded by the use of VCD and/or DVD in the *kampung* household bring the significance of the gendered organization of domestic space. The following illustrations suggest the occurrence of a gendered realm in relation to the use of VCD within the physical spatial of the *kampung* home.

One Sunday afternoon, Lin’s family members and her male relatives sit around watching a video CD of the Formula One (F1) car race. They, especially two males about 20 years old, comment and talk about the Ferrari team. Lin with her two small sons and her older daughter, her sister, and her 70 year old father, who are also

⁶ It was reported that the distribution of pirate VCD copies in the market in 1999 was up to 40 million copies (*Kompas*, 9 August 1999). For instance, the data launched by the Indonesian Association of the Recording Industry (ASIRI) stated that the legal production of VCD karaoke in 1998 was 1.335.390 copies and doubled to become 2.615.460 copies in 1999. (*Kompas*, 16 August 1999) However, in the market, the numbers of pirate copies for the karaoke were more than that. It was estimated that up to 20 million copies circulated.

watching the race, only listen to them and do not know anything about the race and the Ferrari. Sometimes, the females ask a bit about the race. After about 15 minutes, the females, especially Lin and her sister, Wok, get up, grumbling that they are bored and dizzy watching the race; they could not enjoy watching such a show. Lin is moaning in Javanese Surabaya dialect, “Huh...that is just like a man! [They] like to watch [car] racing, how could they enjoy watching [car] racing? Singing (she meant karaoke) is better. Look, after this, they will watch action [film], man’s [world] again.” Although Lin owns the VCD, she admits that she rarely uses it. Her sons and her male relatives use it frequently. She watches the VCD only when these people switch on the player or she sometimes watches with her female neighbours.

Similar to Lin, Ari, Tin, and Mik also explain that their VCD player is frequently used by their children to watch children’s animation movies or for karaoke, confirming what Morley (1986) found in his work *Family Television* that multi set technology like video (VCR) is primarily used by the males of the family. Morley states that father and sons, occasionally daughter and least often mother are in control of this video technology within the household. A related argument was developed by James Lull (1988) who notes the “masculinization of the VCR” suggests that the emergence of video as a “new” household technology requires “extension of the masculine roles of installing and operating the machine.” Therefore, the responsibility to operate the machine becomes “a kind of male pleasure.” (Lull 1988: 28-29) Although, in this study, I did not investigate the depth of “extension of masculine role” in relation to the VCD machine, I believe the lesser engagement of those *kampung* mothers with the VCD player is because their daily time is mainly consumed for routine domestic work and child caring, and chatting with neighbours. They spend more time only for talking and gathering with their social web. Tiring domestic tasks have limited the mother’s space in front of the TV set and the VCD player, and therefore, these *kampung* women appear to sacrifice their own pleasure by allowing others do take the control of the VCD console in their own homes. As Ari says,

When we first bought this VCD, I was excited and curious how it looks like. When I saw [it], I could not imagine how the [visual] picture is going to be. But then I know that VCD is not different from television. So, I think I don’t need to rent the VCD [disc] and I never rent it. I just join in watching the cartoon [movies] VCDs played by my son, it’s enough for me...Yes, I had watched VCD blue [sic][films] with neighbours such as the [titled] *Itenas*, *Kamar Mandi* (bathroom), and [female] actresses in the toilet⁷, but they are not so porn films.

Sharing and swapping VCD films around Kampung Gubeng’s neighbourhood are common. Sometimes, especially among the young males, they rent the film and share the rental cost then watch it together at one person’s place. This also occurs among the females, especially the housewives, whose place in the home is occupied by the males and children; although they do not go to the rental place and choose the disc, but borrow from one of the housewives, who got the video CD, then watch together is another alternative to enjoy the VCD entertainment outside the home.

Just like one afternoon at 2 pm, Mamik told her neighbour friends Askumayah and Titin that she bought the “controversial” VCD of the hidden camera recording several Indonesian celebrities changing clothes in the women’s, which they call ‘*VCD Femy*’ (Femy is the name of one of the celebrities recorded in that reproduction). They then decided to watch the videodisc in Asum’s home, where these three women gathered at that time. Before they watched the video, Mik took the initiative to invite several other women, who are usually members of their web. This invitation was agreed to by Tin and Asum; later Mik called Lin and Umi. Asum’s place is preferred, because it is considered the “safest” place as there is no single male living in this house. Asum’s husband has married again (polygamy) and spends more time with his second wife. He only comes sometimes for a visit, not staying anymore in Askumayah’s. So, those *kampung* housewives perceived the house as the right place to do such “business”.

Before they turned on the VCD, Mamik looked outside and said, “Is there any man who can see us here?” Then she shut the front door. The recording was of five popular female celebrities changing their clothes and underwear in the toilet of one photo studio for a photo casting for magazine publications. This kind of offence and visual harassment mainly shows nudity. The recording was gained from a camera hidden in that toilet. It even shows these celebrities changing their panty liners and urinating.

After ten minutes watching the show, Mik commented that she felt pity for the celebrities. She continued that she was disgusted with the way the celebrities’ bodies were criminally captured by the camera. However, she also commented on the celebrities’ bodies, saying that indeed their breasts are alluring and that is why males slobber. Similar comments were uttered when these women watched the second porno video recordings of VCD ‘*Sabun Mandi*’ (bath soap), which was bought by Tin. The video recordings show an adult male and a teenager female having sex in one motel in Surabaya. The choice to watch porn video at a certain time and place is from the

⁷ When I did this interview, there was a public issue on the circulation of VCD about the activities of several Indonesian female celebrities inside the toilet of one photo studio in Jakarta. The activities were recorded by a camera hidden in that bathroom. The case was already finalized with the imprisonment of the perpetrator.

considerations of securing them from male interference. The *kampung* women choose to watch pornography privately not simply because they will be ashamed to be seen doing so by the local neighbours, as watching pornography is still culturally taboo and politically restricted.

Such a situation seemed to develop greater hostility among the women's feelings when the females watched the same visual recording with males, as happened at Pak RT's house. The next night the same VCD was swapped and played in Pak RT's house (RT an acronym for *Rukun Tetangga* or head of the *kampung* administration⁸). At that time, the viewers were Pak RT (male), his wife (43 years), his daughters (Pin was 22 years and Mega was 13 years), his son (Wit was 17 years) and Ing (36 years), who lives across from Pak RT. Unlike the circumstance among the housewives, though the front door was also closed, the reason was that Pak RT was anxious that the *kampung* people should not see his family watching pornography, as the video CD was played at 7.30 pm when the people were still buzzing around. As a typical male viewer, Pak RT blamed those female celebrities for their ignorance and lack of looking after themselves. Although the female viewers in that room did not confront his view, they looked shy and were less talkative when the video was on. Pak RT's oldest daughter, Pin, only expressed pity for those celebrities, whilst Pak RT's wife and Ing were only able to agree with Pin. Suddenly, when Wit, Pak RT's son was laughing watching the show, Ing started feeling embarrassed. Women feel embarrassment and empathy at the same time, when males who watch the video with them have oppositional readings to the females. Since those female viewers realise that Pak RT is not only male, but also holds such "political" power (as the *kampung* administrative head) as well as the head of household (as elsewhere in Indonesia) for the family, the women, thus, seem to suppress strong expression of their feelings.

The practices of consuming those controversial home video productions are examples of the dynamic use of VCD and/or DVD in the everyday cultural discourses of middle to lower *kampung* community in urban Indonesia. This feature also suggests that the communal consumption of VCD/DVD within the *kampung* community has constructed a distinctive feeling, expression, and their sense of commonality in consuming such content productions circulated into cheap videodiscs.

5. Conclusion

If television, which is installed in a central living room space of the *kampung* households, is used primarily as a family activity and neighbourhood gathering, the VCD player has encouraged a wider audience, just like wedding ceremonies or other ritual celebrations. The portable VCD player, in fact, creates a space for communal audiences away from inside the home to the outdoor *kampung* space. It also facilitates communal consumption. The videodisc, in short, signifies another form of communal iconography amongst the middle to lower class community in contemporary Indonesia.

The huge number of video CDs sold in the market, particularly those pirate versions, has brought an array of video watching as a desirable experience to be had communally and outside the home. While all the national private television stations in Indonesia continue to promote television as "home theatres" that promise family togetherness and shelter from the evils of urban life, the VCD seems to oppose that capitalist television industry promotion. The practice of watching VCD, particularly among the middle to lower class community, suggests three conceptions of videodisc watching. First, watching VCD is a 'semi-private', even an "illicit" space, for watching pornography. As the pirate porn videodiscs, particularly in the street markets, are marketed as a "new toy" hidden but widespread, the consumption of pornography tends to be practised with particular friends and acquaintances in a secure place. Second, watching VCD is also a 'gendered semi-communal' activity in which particular gender groups i.e. women, who have created their own secure space and time, use the VCD as a vehicle to transport them from the mundane domestic life into a world of sexual quests and communal adventure in desiring and contesting the female bodies pictured. Third, for particular occasions, VCD watching is 'communal practice' where friends, relatives, invited guests, and other people come as spectators of a "dish of entertainment" as well as practicing the mode of communal imaginative experience.

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