Contesting colonial (hi)stories: (Post)colonial imaginings of South East Asia

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the impact of digital technologies upon the material, conceptual and ideological premises of the colonial archive in the digital era. This analysis is pursued though a discussion of creative work produced in the context of an international, multidisciplinary artist workshop in Yogyakarta, Indonesia that used digital material from colonial archives to critically investigate the ways national, transnational and personal (hi)stories in the former colonies have been informed and shaped by the colonial past. The analysis focuses on how the artists' use of digital media contests and reconfigures the use, truth value and power of the colonial archive as an entity and institution. Case studies include: Thai photographer Dow Wasiksiri, who questions the archive's mnemonic function by substituting early twentieth-century handcrafted association techniques with digital manipulation; Malaysian artist Yee I-Lann, who compresses onto the same picture plane different historical moments and colonial narratives; and Indonesian photographer Agan Harahap, who recomposes archival photographs into unlikely juxtapositions disseminated through social media. By repurposing colonial archival material and circulating their work online such a re-imag(in)ing of South East Asia not only challenges the notions of originality, authenticity, ownership and control associated with the colonial archive, but also reclaims colonial (hi)stories making them part of a democratic, expanding, postcolonial archive.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photography was employed by the colonial state and industry to create knowledge of and maintain power over the colonial subject as well as document the success of colonial projects. A marvel of western technology, the camera was used and controlled by westerners imag(in)ing the Orient: formulating pictorial narratives about the exotic landscape and people in the colonies and constructing stereotypical representations about race and 'the wild'. Portraits of colonial subjects, both plain and genres scenes, were originally produced by itinerant foreign photographers and local photographic studios to cater to the tourist demand for photographic souvenirs as much as the curiosity of metropolitan audiences whom they reached as postcards, prints and book illustrations. Postcolonial debates often focus on the intrusiveness and manipulating power of the 'colonising camera' and the ways power-knowledge relationships informed the formulation of a colonial visual culture in which the colonised were 'othered' without being able to take full control over their representation.[1] Whether privately or state owned, much of such imagery is now part of 'colonial' collections kept in museums, libraries, archive centers and universities of former colonial powers, knowledge-producing institutions that defined

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[1] The term 'colonising camera' is used in *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, ed. Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Sylvester and Patricia Hayes (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998). See also *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, ed. Eleanor M. Hight, Gary D. Sampson (New York/ London: Routledge, 2002). The claim of indigenous populations to social representation became more demanding during and after the period of decolonisation as the photographic studio portrait, despite its standardisation and aesthetic and conceptual references to the colonial past, would 'become part and parcel of the newly formulated notions of citizenry and nationess.' Alexander Supartono, 'Post-colonial Photo Studio', in *Action Field Kodra*, ed. Theophilos Tramboulis (Thessaloniki: Kodra/ Thessprint S.E., 2012), p. 176.

what kind of historical memory would be preserved. [2] These metropolitan archives played a central role not only in the establishment of a narrative of colonial 'orthering' but also in the formulation of national consciousness enhanced by feelings of colonial supremacy and pride.

The social life of such colonial imagery took a different turn within the developing culture of re-imag(in)ing the colonies which gained cross-disciplinary momentum in the postmodernist discourse of the 1980s, and the so-called 'archival impulse' of the following decade.[3] Overturning the authority of the colonial rule, postcolonial scholarship has re-examined and re-contextualised colonial photographic material displacing the emphasis from the coloniser looking at the colonised to the former colonial subjects while exposing the artifice and contrivance of colonial archival records.

At the turn of the century, digitisation also altered the performance of the colonial archive anew making archival material accessible to a much wider and geographically disperse audience beyond the spatial confines of the physical archive. In the face of digital dematerialisation, debates around the physical attributes of photographs as objects, long

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[2] See Wayne Modest, 'Museums and the emotional afterlife of colonial photography', in *Uncertain images: Museums and the works of photographs*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 21-42; and Elizabeth Edwards and Matt Mead, 'Absent histories and absent images: Photographs, museums and the colonial past', *Museum and Society*, 11, 1 (2013): 19-38.

[3] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Postmodernism/Postcolonialism', in *Critical terms for art history*, ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 307-22; Hal Foster, 'An archival impulse', *October*, 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 3-22; Marlene Manoff, 'Theories of the archive from across the disciplines', *Libraries and the Academy*, 4, 1 (2004): 9-25.

overshadowed by image content and its indexical properties, gained momentum.[4] A photograph's 'material performance of the past', the torn corners, the scratches, the marks, the faded areas, its delicate state, the verso, the studio stamp, the hand-written message, are but indexical signs that form its biography and material history.[5] Yet, the process of digital standardisation tends to deprive photographs of their social life as their biography and active role in history, inscribed in their very materiality, is often concealed behind system uniformity and archival taxonomy. 'Normalisation', so that digital surrogates are 'readable', and uniformity of size may often result in 'misrepresenting the physical character and relationships objects held by the museum' as well as concealing important information that may have not been originally scanned.[6] Along with concerns around preserving the material culture of archival records, the online open access publication of archival collections raises issues around ownership, authorship and copyright for repurposed archival material.[7]

[4] Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography's objects* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Art Museum, 1997).

[5] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, 'Introduction: photographs as objects' in *Photographs, objects, histories: On the materiality of images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

[6] Janda Gooding, 'Physical to virtual' in *The versatile image: Photography, digital technologies and the Internet*, ed. Alexandra Moschovi, Carol McKay and Arabella Plouviez (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013), p. 161.

[7] See for instance the international conference *Archives 3.0: Archiving the past, anticipating the future*, National Media Museum, Bradford, 24-26 November 2014, programme and abstracts available at

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141002130130/http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/Collection/ArchivesConference, accessed 23/07/2017.

Arjun Appadurai argues that by dismantling the social history of things we retrieve the meaning that was originally inscribed in their forms, uses, trajectories and how different social encounters had structured and restructured them in different historical contexts. Appadurai highlights the fundamental and active role of objects in human relations over their physical role as mere artefacts.[8] By following the trajectory of things and their ability to move in and out of different socio-historical contexts, we can see the shifts in their social, cultural and historical value over time.

This article seeks to examine the 'social life' of colonial archival photographs and the ways such imagery has been recently reconfigured, manipulated and repurposed by contemporary South East Asian artists to contest the use, truth value, authorship, and ownership of the colonial archive. Recontextualised and repurposed online on different platforms, their work becomes part of the expanded postcolonial archive and proposes a reframing not only of the politics of colonial representation, but also of the validity and veracity of the photographic image as evidence and historical record. We specifically argue that the transition from the material colonial archive of the twentieth century to an expanded dematerialised postcolonial archive in the twenty-first century also makes possible a shift in power relations allowing formerly colonised subjects to have unprecedented access to and control over the representation of their history.

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[8] See Arjun Appadurai, Introduction to *The social life of things,* ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 5.

'Archivising' the tourist imagination

Figure 1. Kurkdjian & Co. Photo Studio, "Two Balinese women in the well," c. 1905 from the album *Bali*, ALB-160, page 5, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, Coll. Nr. 60019067.

Two young Balinese women are captured while collecting water from a spring [Fig. 1]. A ray of sunlight penetrates the lush tropical vegetation to caress the bare breasts of the standing woman who looks as if she momentarily paused to pose for the photographer. She returns their gaze looking back at the camera while her companion, sitting on the ground, timidly looks away. The portrait is a typical souvenir photograph produced by the commercial photographic studio Kurkdjian & Co., the initiative of the Armenian photographer Ohannes Kurkdjian (1851-1903) who having worked in Yerevan and Singapore established a large commercial studio in Surabaya during the Dutch East Indies period. As the number of similarly themed photographs in the Kurkdjian & Co. atelier and other local studios' collections indicates, bare-breasted Balinese women was a major attraction to foreign eyes.

However the photograph in Figure 1 is distinguishable from other images of scantily clad exotic women taken in local studios to be marketed as soft erotic material.[9]

Although the photograph is credited to Kurkdjian & Co. Photo Studio, there is strong indication that the studio's portfolio of Balinese women was produced by Thilly Weissenborn, the first female Indonesian-born photographer in the Dutch East Indies.[10] Weissenborn's sensitivity to tropical light, which bore strong Pictorialist undertones, is evident in the photograph in question. Suggestions that the photograph's focus on the sitter's breasts manifests masculine gaze bias may be contradicted by the self-confidence of the young woman: standing firm, staring back at the camera operator, one hand on her hip and the other one carrying a terracotta water receptacle. Her pose states her refusal to be 'othered' as a passive object of erotic phantasy as much as the photographer's intention to showcase the women's 'dignity and self-possession'.[11] Nonetheless, such a naturalisation of the 'exotic'

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[9] For a discussion about the eroticisation of colonial subjects, see Rachen Ama Asa Engmann, 'Under imperial eyes, black bodies, buttocks, and breasts: British colonial photography and Asante "fetish girls"', *African Arts*, 45, 2 (2012): 46-57.

[10] The style and approach of this photograph is consistent with Weissenborn's portraits of Balinese women, see Ernst Drissen, *Vastgelegd voor later: Indische fotos (1917-1942) van Thilly Weissenborn* (Amsterdam: Sijthoff, 1983), pp. 95-99. Anne Maxwell suggests that Weissenborn was influenced by the Clarence White School of Pictorialist photography in the way in which she used light to create 'mood and atmosphere' in her photographs. See Anne Maxwell, 'Thilly Weissenborn's luminious Touch', in *Garden of the East*, ed. Gael Newton (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2014), p. 78.

[11] See Adrian Vickers, 'Thilly Weissenborn: The romance of the Indies', in *Towards independence*: *A century of Indonesia photographed*, ed. Jane Levy Reed (San Francisco: The Friends of Photography, 1991), p. 80. For a discussion of the encounters of voyeurism

bare-breasted woman within local customs and daily life made the image appropriate for general sale, alongside photographs of landmark sites, landscapes, antiquities and local customs that comprised the portfolios that commercial photographic studios in the Dutch East Indies made available to clients and tourists.[12]

The photograph in question is part of an album entitled *Album Bali* (ca. 1905) that originally belonged to the family of Antoine Pietermaat-Soesman, the general manager of the Kalibagor sugar factory in West Java between 1914-1928. Religious rituals, local customs and picturesque vistas of the island adorn the pages of the elaborately crafted album painting an almost paradisiacal world.[13] The quality of the photographs and their uniform presentation suggest that this album was, most probably, commercially prepared by the Kurkdjian & Co. Photo Studio rather than an album compiled by the family. The photograph and the album

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and colonial male fantasies that informed representations of 'exotic' women, see Karina Eileraas, 'Reframing the colonial gaze: Photography, ownership, and feminist resistance, *MLN*, 118, 4 (2003): 807-40.

[12] The existence of different copies of the same photographs with slightly different selections in different photographic albums substantiate this claim, see for example, *Album Bali 1920* (1920, Tropenmuseum ALB-660) and *Album van Limburg Stirum* (1917, Tropenmuseum ALB-528).

[13] For a discussion of how Bali was mythologised as a heaven on earth, see David Shavit, *Bali and the tourist industry*: *A history 1906-1942* (Jefferson, North Carolina: Mc Farland & Co., 2003).

made their way to the Colonial Museum in Amsterdam (today's Tropenmuseum) in the 1920s when the widow of Pietermaat-Soesman donated their albums.[14]

The Tropenmuseum currently houses 2,744 photographic albums (ca 175,000 photographs), 10,000 individual photographs, 80,000 negatives and 7,500 slides and stereo slides, most of which were donated by Dutch, European and Eurasian families that lived in the Dutch East Indies. In the public domain of the museum, these private albums are no longer visual chronicles or tokens of a family's story in the colony. Their social value shifts as they become records of Dutch colonial history, visualising the history of the colonial state, the colony and photography, as the image in Figure 2 aptly exemplifies.

Figure 2. Anon., Slide projection at the laboratory of the Colonial Institute's Tropical Hygiene Department, Amsterdam, 1920-1940, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, Coll. Nr. 60036893.

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[14] The album (Tropenmuseum ALB-160) is one of the five albums donated by Mrs Pietermaat-Soesman. The other four albums are: *Souvenir from Poerwokerto and Kalibagor* (1880-1900, ALB-256); *Souvenir from Poerwokerto, Kalibagor and Banjoemas* (1900-1910, ALB-259); *Views of Different Places* (1890-1910, ALB-362); and *Untitled*, (1920-1928, ALB-264).

Decades after its production the photograph of the two Balinese women was used in a lantern slide presentation in the Tropical Hygiene Department of the Colonial Institute. [Fig. 2]. One could only imagine that bare breasted and barefoot women using terracotta water containers to collect water for domestic purposes were used to illustrate the living conditions in the Dutch East Indies. In the early twentieth century, the introduction of the 'Ethical Policy' (Ethische Politiek, 1901-1942) exposed the living conditions and hygiene in the Dutch East Indies to the metropolitan public and reports, photographs and films on the subject were published, distributed and discussed in the Netherlands.[15] The photograph in Figure 1 is not part of the Ethical Policy's dossier though. Instead, another print exists in a commemorative album for the official visit of Governor General J.P. Graaf van Limburg Stirum to Surabaya in July 1917.[16]

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[15] For a discussion of the Ethical Policy, which underlined Holland's moral obligation for the welfare of colonised subjects, see Robert Cribb, 'Development policy in the early twentieth century' in *Development and social welfare: Indonesia's experiences under the New Order*, ed. Jan-Paul Dirkse, Frans Hüsken, and Mario Rutton (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993), pp. 225–45. For examples of how photography was used by low-rank officials who implemented the policy on the ground, see *Photography, Modernity and the governed in late-colonial Indonesia*, ed. Susie Protschky (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2015).

[16] The photograph was presented together with views of landmark landscapes, portraits of local populations in traditional attire performing daily activities, religious and cultural ceremonies as well as views of the agricultural industries of sugar and rubber. The Kurkdjian & Co. Photo Studio produced the album (Tropenmuseum ALB-528, Coll. Nr. 60022654). The sixty photographs in the album, among which photographs of Bali prominently featured, highlighted important features of Dutch possession and achievements in the tropics.

The original intention behind the making of the photograph in Figure 1 was to record local customs in Bali. In the Colonial Institute's Tropical Hygiene Department, the photograph was detached from the context of the souvenir album to be re-contextualised into the colonial discourse of hygiene in the Dutch East Indies becoming visual evidence for a discussion that was in line with the campaign for better sanitary conditions and clean water in the colony. A close examination of the image in Figure 2 reveals that rather than being actually projected onto the screen the photograph of the two Balinese women was carefully and skillfully inserted into the photographed scene. The reason behind the collaging was most probably the technical inability to capture both the audience in the dark room and the projected image in detail on a single negative. As such we cannot be sure whether the photograph in Figure 1 was indeed projected in the lecture, but the fact remains that in the composite image in Figure 2 the use value of the photograph of the Balinese women was purposefully changed. Not only was the photograph being recontextualised into a discourse of tropical hygiene instead of serving the tourist imagination, but also highlighted western 'cleanliness supremacy' then and in the future.[17]

The abovementioned case is perhaps an exaggerated example of Jacques Derrida's proposition that the 'technical structure of the archiving archive', that is the very methods and technologies of collecting, transmitting and preserving data, affect not only what is preserved for future reference but also the very knowledge that can be produced from archival records. And indeed, at this instance, almost literally, 'archivisation produces as much as it records the event'.[18] The digitisation of the Tropenmuseum collections, available online in the new

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[17] For a comprehensive discussion on the topic, see *Cleanliness and culture: Indonesian history*, ed. Kees van Dijk and Jean Gelman Taylor (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011).

[18] Jacques Derrida, *Archive fever: A Freudian impression,* trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 17.

millennium, as another mode of archivisation offered new ways for knowledge production based on its archival records. The online platform facilitated access to diverse users who would not ordinarily have access to the physical archive in Amsterdam, whilst the digital properties of the surrogates allowed for further dissemination and repurposing of the archival record beyond its institutional context.

Figure 3. Dow Wasiksiri, untitled, from the series *Past to the present and Present to the past*, 2012.

Mimicking the contextual and technical shift in the use and exhibition value of the photograph of the Balinese women, contemporary Thai photographer Dow Wasiksiri created a hybrid image to underline the transformation of the photograph of the Balinese women from an exotic token in the family chronicle in the colony to an object of scientific enquiry in the metropolis. Inserting himself in the photograph, Wasiksiri acts as a presenter from the present to inform audiences from the past on recent events [Fig. 3]. Instead of the educated white man exposing the sanitary conditions in the tropics, Wasiksiri shifts the power-knowledge relations proposed in the original collage and claims agency for the educated Asian man in formal western dress who showcases the ills of the West. The present is symbolised by the colour of the contemporary additions to the archival image: the artist as a speaker, the iconic image of the attack at the World Trade Centre in Manhattan on 11

September 2001, and the digital projector. By using such overt digital manipulation, Wasiksiri visually comments upon the crude hand-crafted manipulation of the photograph in Figure 2 whilst questioning the authenticity and truth value of the archival photograph as historical record and the authority of the archive as an institution. Taking into account that Wasiksiri spent almost twenty years living and working in the West, the composite photograph may also be read as a comment on the artist's own position: an Asian man, literally and metaphorically, in traditionally western 'shoes'.

Wasiksiri's photograph is part of the series *Past to the present and present to the past*, the seeds of which were sown during a ten-day postcolonial workshop facilitated by Alexander Supartono in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in November 2012.[19] The aim of the workshop was to engage invited Southeast Asian artists working with photography to creatively reflect upon photographic practices in the Dutch colonies drawing on photographic and contextual material from the collections of the Tropenmuseum, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the KITLV Archives, Leiden, and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. The collective dialogues led to a unique cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices that explored

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[19] The workshop was organised in conjunction with the touring exhibition programme of the three-year research project *Sweet and Sour Story of Sugar* (2010-2013), initiated and managed by Noorderlicht, and funded by the Mondrian Foundation in the Netherlands. A photographic investigation of the globalisation process through the commodity of sugar in the former Dutch Empire, this interdisciplinary project brought together historical material and specifically commissioned photographic work with view to shed new light on the mechanisms of economic and cultural globalisation through the development of the sugar industry in Indonesia, Brazil, Surinam, and the Netherlands. See *Sweet and sour story of sugar: Sugar in a globalised world*, ed. Wim Melis, Alexander Supartono, Sors Swierstra (Grongingen: Aurora Borealis, 2013).

the interface of photography and (post)colonialism as well as the function and afterlife of the archival photograph in the colonial archive. These dialogues on the politics of (post)colonial re-presentation were further expanded as participating artists developed work using the abovementioned archival material that was subsequently disseminated online via different web platforms and physically in art and photography festivals and museums in Europe and Asia.[20]

In what follows, three bodies of work that merge the colonial past with the postcolonial present will be examined. Dow Wasiksiri, Yee-I-Lann and Agan Harahap capitalise upon the malleability and flexibility of digital archival records and the versatility of digital software to disrupt, subvert and reclaim agency in colonial representations. These artists revisit, adopt and adapt representational practices, mannerisms, iconographic clichés and commonplaces performed by foreign and local photographers in the colonial period to revert history and memory. By circulating their work across different physical and online platforms the artists also test Michel Foucault's definition of the archive as a system of 'discursivity' that defines the axis of what can be uttered and propose their own regime of truth.[21]

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[20] International exhibitions include Noorderlicht Photofestival in The Netherlands (2013), Paris Photo (2013), Art Stage Singapore (2013), the Singapore Art Museum (2015), and the Singapore Biennale (2016) among others.

[21] See Michel Foucault, 'The historical *a priori* and the archive', in *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 126-31.

'Colonising the colonising camera'

In his series *Past to the Present and Present to the Past,* Wasiksiri visually combines iconographic clichés of the colonial society in the Dutch East Indies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and contemporary scenes of the new tourist industry in South East Asia.[22] Confronted with such an odd pictorial juxtaposition, viewers are asked to consider the role of photography in objectifying and defining 'the other' as did the artist himself during his intellectual and artistic formation away from his native Thailand.

The son of a Thai diplomat, Wasiksiri often moved cities and countries during his childhood. In 1963 his family moved to Canberra, Australia, only to move again, two years later, to Wellington, New Zealand, where he finished school and studied architectural design. It was there, at the age of 13, that his interest in photographic portraiture and popular culture began, interests that he would pursue more systematically after his move to Los Angeles in the late 1970s. During his studies in film, photography, radio and television in California, Wasiksiri was intrigued by the constructed photography practices showcased at the Museum

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[22] Using photomontage to repurpose archival material has often been used by artists investigating colonial legacies. For instance, in his series *Moco Polo or Museum of the colonial past* (1997-2001), Australian artist Alan Cruickshank imposes his face on the face of an Aboriginal figure from J.W. Lindt's *carte-de-visite* studio portrait series. In this blatant face replacement, Shaun Wilson argues, Cruickshank integrated 'the absurd brutality of colonialism in nineteenth century photography versus the historical remix of postcolonialism.' Shaun Wilson, 'Remixing memory: The copied image in Australian photography', *Photofile Journal,* 77 (Autumn 2006): 34-7.

of Modern Art in San Francisco.[23] Californian artists tended to regard photography as 'an art of invention' rather than a 'figment of the real world', the kind of 'snapshot' photography promoted by Nathan Lyons or John Szarkowski's 'New Documents' celebrated at the Museum of Modern Art on the East coast.[24] Upon his return to Bangkok in the 1980s, Wasiksiri would adapt the surreal undertones and aesthetic extravaganza of American constructed photography to his professional practice in fashion photography and magazine work under the name Studio Persona.

Having lived a number of years outside Asia, Wasiksiri returned to his homeland with fresh eyes and a keen interest in exploring everyday life in Thailand, its native and imported cultures and historic legacies. The photographic scene in Thailand in the 1980s was dominated by, what Clare Veal has described as 'Thai Pictorialism', an idiomatic camera-club style promoted by the Royal Photographic Society of Thailand since the 1950s in their

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[23] Wasiksiri moved to Los Angeles in 1976 where he completed an Associate in Arts degree in Film and Photography (1978) and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Radio and Television Broadcasting at the California State University, Los Angeles (1981).

[24] For this reinvention of the 'snapshot' in late 1960s American photography and the way this was glorified at the museum of Modern Art in New York see, Alexandra Moschovi, '"So sachlich, dass sie fast fuktional zu nennen ist": Die Neukonstituierung der dokumentarischen Fotografie als Kunst im Museum of Modern Art' ('"So factual that it may almost be called functional": The reconceptualisation of documentary photography as art in the Museum of Modern Art') in *Dokumentarfilm Museum Kunst*, ed. Katrin Mundt and Eva Hohenberger (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2016), pp. 70-93.

intra-muros photography exhibitions and competitions.[25] Thai pictorialism promoted

'attractive, beautiful, lovely, and pleasing'[26] ways of rendering nature in images that would,

in the words of the Society's president, 'stir emotion'.[27] Aiming to humourously undermine

this pictorial mainstream, Wasiksiri's project *Urban Who*, initiated in the 1990s, purposefully

encapsulated surrealist incidents in the street life of Bangkok.

Figure 4. Dow Wasiksiri, untitled, from the series *Local fashion around Kad Luang Market*, 2010-2012.

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[25] Clare Veal, 'Thainess framed: Photography and Thai identity, 1946-2010' (Ph.D. diss.,

University of Sydney, Sydney, 2015), p. 266.

[26] Chao Chongmankhong quoted in Veal, *ibid*., p. 262.

[27] King Bhumibol's recommendation to the executive committee of the Royal Thai

Photographic Society, 12/02/1971, as quoted in Veal, *ibid*., p. 270.

In the same spirit, the thematic series *Local fashion around Kad Luang Market* (2010-2012) explore the aesthetic and narrative opportunities of chance encounters. In this series Wasiksiri revisited the nineteenth-century devise of the photo-booth employed by itinerant photographers operating in colonial terrains. The project originally started in the context of the centenary celebrations of the Kad Luang Market in Chiang Mai, the biggest market in Thailand, but soon expanded in markets in neighbouring countries. Using colourful local fabrics and materials as backdrops, from vinyl to tablecloths sourced at market stalls, the artist asked passers-by to stop and pose for him while by-standers and market workers held the fabric as a makeshift photo-booth. Wasiksiri targeted people who were not interested in fashion as such but who are uniquely interesting themselves combining different styles and materials.[28] Two men pose topless showcasing their elaborate tattoos and piercing holding a yellow floral fabric stretching behind their backs and over their heads [Fig.4] while two young women in traditional sarongs and branded bags look timidly at the camera against a purple patterned cloth held high by two boys. Unlike nineteenth century itinerant photographers, Wasiksiri does not conceal the artifice of his endeavour: his helpers and the market are visible at the edges of the backdrop. At the same time, he encompasses the chance elements and serendipity of street photography: a hasty passer-by walks into the frame at one instance; an impatient toddler walks out at another. This is where the influence of the American traditions of the street and the studio become visible but these are subverted in Wasiksiri's pictorial idiom that is equally a *cling d'oeil* to the region's rich photographic history, referencing historic studio and in-situ portraits of indigenous folk marketed by local commercial studios for the tourist market.

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[28] Dow Wasiksiri, discussion with authors, Newcastle upon Tyne, October 2013.

Figure 5. Dow Wasiksiri, untitled, from the series *The oldest market in Chiang Mai* (2012).

This interest in the roots of Southeast Asian photography is accentuated in the series *The oldest market in Chiang Mai* (2012) in which the artist juxtaposed the triviality and colourfulness of the buzzing people's market and everyday street life with monochrome cut-out figures of studio portraits held in the frame by passers-by. In this series, local people participate in remembering the past by carrying the life size cut-out figurines as if in a pilgrimage [Fig.5]. With this intervention, Wasiksiri interrupts the nowness of the depicted contemporary scene by injecting the past into the present. At the same time, he also contests the truth value and seeming authenticity of the street photograph, an intervention that acts as a prelude to his next series *Conversation with the past* (2013) in which he revisits and subverts pictorial stereotypes in colonial studio portraiture.

Figure 6. Dow Wasiksiri, 'Its plastic but trust me', from the series *Conversation with the past* (2013).

In these composite studio portraits Wasiksiri inserts himself in saturated colour in the archival black-and-white photograph as an agent of the present but also a bearer of modernisation. In the photograph, 'It's plastic but trust me' [Fig.6], he invades a typical studio-based genre scene produced for the tourist market. A young Indonesian woman in traditional batik attire is kneeling on the floor before an unmistakably exotic painterly landscape punctuated by tall coconut trees.[29] She is depicted as a street vendor selling local fruits. This photograph is part of a studio portrait series depicting Javanese customs, produced by a local commercial photographic studio at the turn of the nineteenth century.

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[29] Unknown, 'Studio portrait of a Javanese woman buying fruit from a female market fruit seller', 1870-1900 Tropenmuseum coll. No. 60027239.

Wearing a bright blue suit and contrasting red spectacles, Wasiksiri is kneeling before the woman offering to buy an apple using a gold credit card. The puzzled look in the face of the woman and the artist's purposefully patronising posture and utterance complete the story. In another image entitled 'Fancy a cup of Java', Wasiksiri replaces an elderly female priest from the original photograph sitting cross-legged in the traditional Balinese way between two young Balinese women in a religious ceremony.[30] Carefully planted insignia of global capitalism punctuate the picture: a Starbucks cup and the McDonalds signature logo on a take-away food box make a visual comment on the westernisation of South East Asia and how new mores are replacing old rituals for the younger generation. In the image 'It comes with instructions' Wasiksiri hands a branded toy figure to a young boy posing in western attire and traditional hat (kopiah) next to his father against a western-style backdrop complete with painted lamppost. Visualising the aspiration to westernise the local social elite involved with colonial enterprise, this studio portrait is on the antipode of the practice of localising colonial subjects in 'natural' settings as exemplified in Figure 1.

Unlike his previous series, Wasiksiri takes advantage of the high definition digital copy of the archival photograph to insert his likeness almost seamlessly into the portrait; it is the use of colour that purposefully gives away the contrivance. Wasiksiri exaggerated postures also direct the viewer to the artificiality and orchestration of the colonial studio portrait and how those often absurdly staged images formed the knowledge of the colony in family and corporate photographic albums and the colonial archive.

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[30] C. Gründler, 'Studio portrait of a Balinese female priest with two women during a religious ceremony', 1910-1914, Tropenmuseum Coll. No. 10003742.

Figure 7. Dow Wasiksiri, 'Choose your history', from the series *Reframing the present* (2013).

The question of agency and who has authority over whose representation becomes central in the series *Reframing the present* (2013) in which the devise of an empty passpartout reframes, packages, suppresses, and reveals layers of local history. In the work 'Choose your history', for example, a contemporary family of Muslim Javanese tourists are framed in front of the Hindu temple of Prambanan in Yogyakarta [Fig.7]. Their gaze and posture indicate that they are posing for a souvenir picture but the photographer they are returning their gaze to stands outside both frames. Posing against landmark sights was common practice for the foreign traveller as was the collection of picturesque topographical views, often with local folk indicating scale and enhancing the *couleur locale*. Wasiksiri replaces the view of the monument with a painterly recreation of the exotic landscape and reframes the family in the colonial photographic studio surrounded by props that functioned as insignia of status in the colonial society. It is this very use of the studio backdrop and props that indicates, as Appandurai has argued, the different claims of photographic representation in the colonial and postcolonial period.[31] Moving from the plain, neutral backdrop that attested to the 'documentary realism' of the colonial gaze, the elaborate

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[31] Arjun Appadurai, 'The colonial backdrop', A*fterimage*, 24, 5 (1997): 4-7.

fictional backdrop of the postcolonial era offered sitters the opportunity to symbolically own what was unattainable to them in their social world.[32]

In this complex narrative, the roles of medium and agency, in the presence of the studio camera, visible at the edge of the frame, in the artist's own hand holding the passpartout and the implied presence of the absent photographer, raise questions not only about the authorship and authority of (post)colonial representations. Looking outside the frame, the sitters appear as if they ignore the eye of the colonial camera. By placing them between two backdrops, a real and a painted one, Wasiksiri highlights how decolonised subjects revisit their past to reclaim along with their representation their history.

In another work entitled 'Disorientalism', Wasikiri replaces the object of the tourist gaze in the present with a photograph from the colonial past [Fig.8]. He montages his photograph of a group of Western tourists in the Sultanate Palace of Yogyakarta and Kassian Cephas' photograph of a tram bridge in Progo River outside Yogyakarta.[33] The latter is taken from another album of the Pietermaat-Soesman family entitled *Views from Different Places* featuring the family journey around Java visiting holiday resorts, family members and friends. Most probably, the Pietermaat-Soesman family purchased Cephas' photograph as a souvenir when the family visited the city.

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[32] Christopher Pinney, 'Notes from the surface of the image: Photography, postcolonialism, and vernacular modernism', in *Photography's other histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 202-20.

[33] Kassian Cephas, 'The tram bridge over the Progo River near Sewoe Galoor, photographed from upper stream', 1896, Tropenmuseum Coll. No. 60030023.

Figure 8. Dow Wasiksiri, 'Disorientalism', from the series *Reframing the present* (2013).

Against the backdrop of modern infrastructure, that is, the iron bridge, Cephas staged

three figures in the foreground to illustrate the hierarchisation of the local colonial society:

two Javanese, who sit on the ground, look up at the European, who looks over the bridge.

This was not simply an image that catered to the aspirations of Cephas' clientele. The

Javanese Kassian Cephas was the first native Indonesian photographer at the service of the

court of the Yogyakarta Sultanate, also working for the Dutch Archaeological Union. In 1888

he applied for himself and his sons to be granted legal status equivalent to Europeans.[34]

Wasiksiri's photograph depicts a group of western tourists inspecting the Yogyakarta

Sultanate palace, whilst a Javanese man stands outside the frame oblivious to the scene on the

right. In this elaborately composed picture, Wasiksiri contrasts the object/subject of the

western gaze: in the past it was the modern infrastructure of the tram bridge for colonial

industrialists; in the present it is the traditional architecture of the Sultanate Palace for

tourists; in the past the two Javanese looked up at the western man, while in the present the

Javanese man ignores the western tourists.

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[34] Gerrit Knaap, *Cephas Yogyakarta: Photography in the service of the Sultan* (Leiden:

KITLV Press, 1999), p. 16.

Wasiksiri recontextualises the domesticated industrial landscape from a family album into a public display. He confronted the individual western tourist in their leisure with public discourse of (their) colonial past. The viewers are invited to examine the differences and similarities of their gazes: the colonial gaze over the industrialised colonial landscape and the tourist gaze in the present. This literal and metaphorical framing, whilst adding another layer to this photomontage, evokes the physical context of both photographs. The double framing, in which the local Javanese man stands in between frames, manifests another gaze — that of the viewers of this postcolonial reworking. Exposing the ideological contrivance of the archival records by re-enacting and de/reconstructing colonial portrait and landscape photographic practices, intercepting the past with the present, Wasiksiri endeavours to colonise the colonising camera and proposing a reversal of power.

Picturing power and the power of the picture

In the series *Picturing Power* (2012), the Malaysian artist Yee I-Lann's revisits the colonial use of the camera in claiming territory and creating knowledge about the colony. She investigates photography's embodiment with imperial power, manifested in different colonial projects: from documenting, registering and conquering unknown territories, to the celebration of the colony's modernisation and industrialisation.

Born in Malaysia, but having studied photography and cinematography in Australia, Eurasian Yee revisits, time and again, with a critical eye Malaysia's unresolved relationship with the colonial past.[35] Her hybrid photo-based practice revolves systematically around notions of colonial repression, territorialism, nationhood, historical memory, global and local economies, migration and multiculturalism, social and personal (hi)stories, referencing and/or

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[35] Yee works in feature films as production designer and is also involved with artist collectives and political activist groups.

appropriating material from archives and mainstream culture, as well as everyday objects. Yee considers ideas of shared imagined communities and socio-political histories in the South East Asian region and the individual's place in this imaginary. Her creative interpretation of notions of 'sameness' and 'otherness' in Malaysian culture and the ways these inform one's racial and class identity started with the series *Snapshot I, II, III* (1993) and *Malaysian Vintage* (1997) that challenged the ways that racial harmony was propagandised by the Malaysian government in the 1990s. These issues were again explored in the series *Malaysianna* and *Through-rose-coloured Glasses* (2002). For these series the artist collaborated with the Pakard Photo Studio, which, established by the Chinese immigrants Tam Hong Lan and Foong Han in Melaka in 1959, documented three generations of the local migrant community capturing the multicultural realities of Malaysia. Presented in grid format, hundreds of images from the studio's archive create an immersive environment that brings to the fore typologies of commercial portraiture whose roots are traced back to colonial practices. 'Is there a collective imaginary narrative for South East Asia?' asked her series *Horizon* (2003) and *Sulu Stories* (2005) [Fig. 9]. Using the fluidity of the digital image, perhaps as a comment on the 'seeming constructedness of modern Malaysia' and reaction to the Vision 2020 manifesto of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad,[36] these multi-layered paradoxical tableaux imagine histories of migration, trading, and the impact of the colonial rule against the ethnic territorial narratives of Malaysia and Philippines. Beverly Yong described these imaginative *topoi* as Yee's fluid world 'in which the act of self-imagination, self-mapping, and of empathy, is more crucial than ever'.[37] Yee explained the

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[36] Simon Soon, 'High seas of resistance', *C-Arts*, 16 (2010): 56-60.

[37] Beverly Yong, Introduction to *Yee I-Lann: Fluid World* (Kuala Lumpur: Valentine Willie Fine Art 2010), p. 11.

process behind the making of the *Sulu Stories* and the complex role of the artist-researcher-collector:

> I would journey to the place and photograph the physical vistas, the sea, the sky, the islands. The simultaneous journeys I would take would be as a librarian, a collector, sorter of stories and a researcher using those libraries of information, heavy with baggage, to find a temperament, tempest, temple, template to address Sulu.[38]

Figure 9. Yee I-Lann, 'High Noon', from the series *Sulu Stories*, 2005.

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[38] Yee I-lann, "Sulu Stories", in *Yee I-Lann: Fluid World*, p. 91.
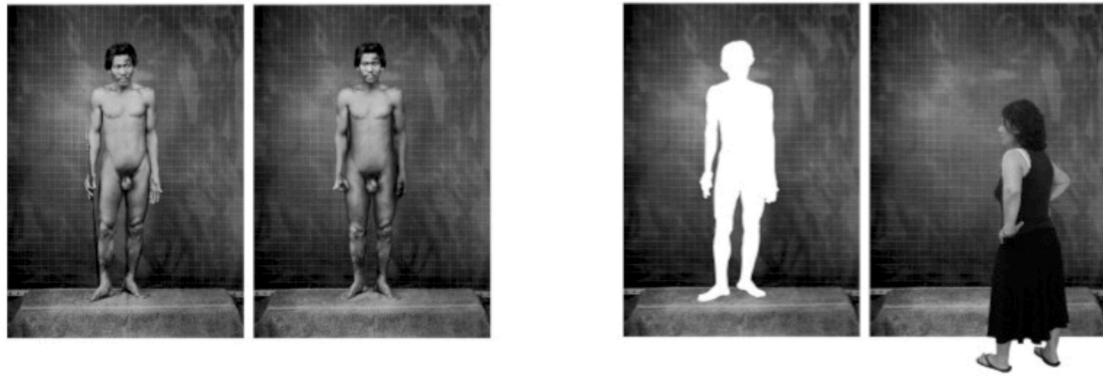
Figure 10. Yee I-Lann, *Study of Lamprey's Malayan Male I & II,* 2008.

In similar spirit, Yee repurposed John H. Lamprey's 'anthropometric' photographs of a

Malayan male (1868-69). Assistant Secretary of the Ethnological Society of London and

Librarian of the Royal Geographic Society, Lamprey devised an 'anthropometric' system to

study the anatomical characteristics of different racial types. Subjects were to be

photographed in frontal and profile positions in full nudity against a dark wooden backdrop

featuring a lattice made of two-inch squares marked by silk threads. Similar to the

metrological grid systems used by artists in the depiction of the human body, this practice

would allow 'the study of all those peculiarities of contour which are so distinctly observable

in each group […] which no verbal description can convey, and but few artists could

delineate.'[39]

Consisting of two diptychs based on Lamprey's original photograph now kept in the

Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain, Yee's work *Study of Lamprey's Malayan*

[39] John H. Lamprey, 'On a method of measuring the human form for the use of students of

ethnology', 1869 quoted in Frank Spencer, 'Some notes on the attempt to apply photography

to anthropometry during the second half of the nineteenth century', in *Anthropology and*

Photography, 1860-1920, ed. Elizabeth Edwards (New Haven and London: Yale University

Press, 1992), pp. 99-107, (103).

Male I and *II* (2009) uses appropriation, manipulation and performance to redirect the gaze of the colonised to the coloniser and challenge the power balance between them [Fig. 10]. In the first diptych, Yee gently manipulates the man's posture so that he stands straight and gazes back to the camera operator/viewer; his first is clenched as if he is talking back. In the second diptych the man has exited the frame leaving his white silhouette to visually converse with the artist who enters the image but stands assertively outside the gridded photo-booth, refusing to be objectified. Yee challenges the authority of the colonial gaze from the position of an empowered Malay woman seeking justice.[40] The artist asserted that the presence of the naked ethnic identity of the Malayan Male through his absence in our own time is most pertinent at a time when 'Malaysian Society is particularly obsessed with framing, measuring, indexing identities and subjugating its populace to notions of racial supremacy and otherness'.[41]

Whilst Wasiksiri's photomontages operate within the convention of photographic framing and perspective, Yee adopted a distinctively speculative spatial approach in her series *Picturing Power* (2013). Against an elongated neutral picture plain, Yee re/decontextualised figures and imagery from archival photographs kept in Dutch colonial archives. In the picture 'Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavours of

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[40] In her monumental series *Orang Besar* (2010) (literally 'Big Person', a term used to described the leadership elite that acted as mediator between the Sultan and common people), the artist purposefully disrupted the male hierarchy of authorship using batik, an artefact traditional produced by women to subvert traditional power structures. Yet again, batik is more modern in Malaysia and thus a kind of 'invented tradition' that also points to the artificiality of culture, see Anthony Milner in 'Orang Besar, bodies politic and political struggle in Malaysia', in *Yee I-Lann: Fluid World*, p. 141.

[41] Yee I-Lann, artist statement 2013.

mankind and thereby put it in its place' she straightened the rigid and ordered sugar cane plantation as a bold horizontal line [Fig. 11]. Here she employs the optical device of the horizon as she did in her homonymous series as a 'canvas a point of negotiation of what is possible or might be imagined'.[42] Yee stated with reference to the series *Horizon* (2003), which she described in retrospect as her strive to gain some perspective on what was to happen in the post-Mahathir years in Malaysia:

> I would use the photographs to surrender the horizon to the "hyper-real"; the image would become my accomplice. I would put a horizon back into our landscape and see what it would tell us. […] I would stitch fragments together, heal wounds, join the imaginary with the symbolic.[43]
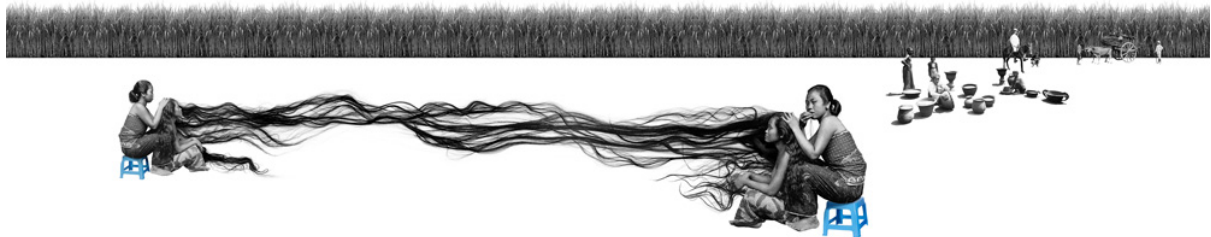

Figure 11. Yee I-Lann, 'Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavours of mankind and thereby put it in its place', from the series *Picturing Power*, 2013.

In the foreground of the image in Figure 11, Yee connects the long, wavy, black hair of two Javanese women, who are being deloused. Loose floating hair is a recurrent symbol of emancipation for the women in Yee's narrative, as for instance in the work *Huminodun* from the *Kinabalu Series* (2007) in which the long wavy hair of a pregnant woman dominate the

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[42] Yong, Introduction to *Yee I-Lann: Fluid World*, p. 9.

[43] Yee I-Lann, 'Horizon', in *Yee I-Lann: Fluid World*, p. 69.

dramatic rural landscape. Yee marks a space with these two lines where she inserts Dutch and Javanese figures in different activities: a group of Javanese folk engaged in pottery making; an inspecting Dutch supervisor sitting on a horse in front of a squatting Javanese male; and another Dutch supervisor overseeing a cow cart laden with harvested cane [Fig. 12]. Stripped bare of the context provided by their original photographic frame and their use value, a practice not uncommon in anthropological and colonial endeavours as exemplified in the Dammann albums in the late nineteenth century,[44] the artist exposes the incongruous nature of staging in these genre scenes.

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[44] Carl and Frederick Dammann's album *Anthropologisch-Ethnologisches album in Photographien* published in Germany between 1873-1876 is an early example of recontextualisation of anthropological and commercial photographs for the purposes of juxtaposition of different racial types. To achieve uniformity on the album pages but also among the different sections, the background of the photographs was retouched. Elizabeth Edwards claimed that the repetition of specific types of images projected a certain kind of truth value on these photographs presenting them as paradigmatic models. See Elisabeth Edwards, 'Some problems with photographic archives: The case of C.W. Dammann', *Journal of Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 13, 3 (1982): 257-61.

Figure 12. Yee I-Lann, 'Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavours of mankind and thereby put it in its place', from the series *Picturing Power*, 2013 (detail).

The modern agriculture industry, symbolised by the horizontal line of the cane plantation, contrasts with the activities of the Javanese women, who appear to spend their working hours looking after each other's hair. In the playfully long title Yee casts aspersion on the ideology of progress brought by the colonisers by focusing on a local pre-industrial activity and the 'cultural code' of photographic practices in the colony. She isolates pictorial idioms formulated within the sugar industry in a non-descript empty space in order to highlight the artifice and ideological baggage of colonial iconography. Delousing Javanese women, for example, is a popular theme present in various photographic albums produced in

the Dutch East Indies.[45] The Dutch man on the horse and the squatting Javanese man in the field are quintessential depictions of colonial power relations to be found in many colonial photographs. The extended and connected hair of these two women and the off-kilter blue plastic stool are an ironic visual response to such pictorial clichés.

The emptiness of the white picture plain creates a geographical and temporal void so the viewer is called to re-examine colonial relations and stereotypes surviving in a non-linear, non-chronological narrative: the portrayal of colonisers as agents of progress juxtaposed with the confinement of locals in their non-productive habit exposes the ideological flaws of colonialism and the 'ambivalent and contradictory status of these photographs as colonial fantasies'.[46]

Figure 13. Yee I-Lann, 'Wherein one tables an indexical record of data-turned-assets and rules like the boss you now say that you are', from the series *Picturing Power*, 2013.

In the picture 'Wherein one tables an indexical record of data-turned-assets and rules like the boss you now say that you are' (2013) the space is defined by the colonial symbols of progress and modernisation *par excellence*: the railway line that traverses the frame and the imposing factory whose tall chimneys punctuate the horizon line [Fig. 13]. On the front plane, Yee 'unfixes' the image of a Caucasian man in white western attire sitting at a desk in what looks like an office. The man is Pietermaat-Soesman and the photograph was taken in his

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[45] See for instance Tropenmuseum ALB-356, ALB-237, Coll. Nr. 60005077 and 60008096.

[46] David Bate, 'Photography and the colonial vision', *Third Text*, 7, 22 (1993): 81-91.

home study to be included along with other photographs of his household and employees in the album *Souvenir from Purwokerto and Kalibagor*. In the original photograph, the walls are adorned with framed photographs of pristine tropical landscapes, of rice fields and rivers as well as Pietermaat-Soesman's portrait at the Kalibagor sugar factory. Yee replaced two of these photographs with a land taxation photograph and a botanical photograph. In doing so she brought colonial administrative and scientific activities in the industrialist's domestic space. In the reworked scene in the background, local barefooted men appear to work an imaginary land, some hoeing, some sowing others gazing at the emptiness being constantly supervised. In both photographs in the Figures 11 and 13, the presence of the colonial supervisor, brings to the fore issues of domination and control of indigenous people that extend to the present day.

Yee often uses the table, associated with the desk of the supervisor at the factory site, to symbolise control and power. This takes the form of the architectural drawing board in 'Wherein one, in the name of knowledge, measures everything, gives it a name and publicises this thereby claiming it' (2013), or of desk tables carried by locals amongst covered cameras on tripods while Caucasian men in western attire pose throughout the frame in 'Wherein one surreptitiously performs reconnaissance to collect views and freeze points of view to be reflective of one's own kind' (2013) [Fig.14]. The darkening cloth over the cameras that dominate the frame in the latter image not only cloaks the devices making them appear mysterious, or even threatening to those surveyed, but also mystifies the mechanism of representation, the knowledge of which belongs to the western photographer sitting at his desk on the right corner of the frame.

Figure 13. Yee I-Lann, 'Wherein one surreptitiously performs reconnaissance to collect views and freeze points of view to be reflective of one's own kind', from the series *Picturing Power*, 2013.

In *Picturing Power* Yee uses distance and proximity, both physical and metaphorical, to point to the ways that distance from the 'other' was a pointer of cultural distinction in colonial photography. The seemingly detached objectivity of the ethnographic record is contaminated by staging and reenactment while the attempt to approach the colonial 'other' is cancelled by the cultural distance imposed by the very process of othering.[47] The physical scale of the series accentuates the ideological conundrums of colonialism, the closer the viewer gets the greater the cultural distance appears.

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[47] See Alexandra Moschovi, 'Distance and Proximity', in *The Changing Faces Commission Project 2005/2006*, ed. Alex Moh, exhibition catalogue (Kuala Lumpur: National Gallery of Malaysia, 2007), 24-35.

History hoaxes

Agan Harahap creates parody invocations of colonial iconography, using visual and factual fragments of authentic information seamlessly integrated with fictional elements that may reveal the falsity of his constructed images.

Having trained as a painter and graphic designer in Bandung, West Java, the Indonesian photographer Harahap (b. 1980) moved to Jakarta in 2008 to work as a digital imaging artist in the one of the largest commercial photographic studios in the Indonesian capital. His technical mastery in digital manipulation combined with artistic urgency resulted in a series of work entitled *Octopus Garden* (2008), which was shortlisted for the Indonesian Art Award competition and exhibited in the National Gallery in Jakarta that same year. Inspired by The Beatles' 1969 song of the same title, *Octopus Garden* is a series of three black-and-white photographs taken in a studio setting, whereby the surrealist nature of the song is visualised in tongue-in-cheek staging: an octopus-headed female figure poses as a fashion model accompanied by another octopus, a jumping rabbit and flying white birds.[48]

Harahap's numerous solo exhibitions and participations in group exhibitions, art fairs, biennials and photography festivals in Southeast Asia and beyond testify to the appeal of his un-orthodox fusion of reality and artifice, whether subverting iconic historic photographs or

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[48] In 2009, the series was included in *CUT 09 Figure: New Photography from Southeast Asia*, organised by Valentine Willie Fine Art and toured in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Manila. Harahap's work was selected again for *CUT 10*, see Eva McGovern, 'Through the looking glass', curatorial essay for *Parallel Universe: Cut2010 New Photography from Southeast Asia*, http://www.vwfa.net/CUT2010/essay.html, accessed 08/05/2017. In 2012 Harahap quitted his job to concentrate on his art in Yogyakarta, the Indonesian capital for contemporary art.

parodying the illusionism of contemporary celebrity culture by 'Indonesianising'

international celebrities and public figures. Harahap seamless doctoring technique builds on a

long tradition of image manipulation, from Calvert Richard Jones' photograph of four

Capuchin Friars in Malta in 1846, whose paper negative revealed an erased fifth person, to

Henry Peach Robinson's composite tableaux and Jeff Wall's 'near documentary'

photographs.[49]

Figure 15. Agan Harahap, untitled, from the series *Superhistory*, 2010.

In his series *Superhistory* (2010), Harahap appropriated well-known photographs of

landmark moments in world history in which he digitally integrated superheroes. [Fig. 15] If

his seamless digital collages perplex the viewer seeing Spiderman taking active part in the

invasion of Normandy, Darth Vader shadowing Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt

and Joseph Stalin at the Yalta convention in 1945, or Superman overseeing the removal of

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[49] See Mia Fineman, *Faking it: Manipulated photography before Photoshop* (New York:

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), pp. 3-4.

artworks from Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria the same year, it is not to satirise or caricature history. In fact the artist claims he 'loves history'.[50] Inspired not by comics by two popular video games amongst Indonesian youths, Call of Duty and Medal of Honour, which draw on World War II battles, Harahap uses references to past and present popular culture to comment upon the reinterpretation and commercialisation of history through absurd 'what if'.[51] Beyond the comic effect of the images that went viral as soon as they appeared on the artist's Flickr page, Harahap's hoaxes primarily point to the photograph's power to manipulate truth. The selection of historical photographs also reminds us that even before the advent of digital software retouching and re-enactment were skilfully used to change history. For instance, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and Hitler had their enemies and those falling out of favour airbrushed from photographs to be erased from history whilst a second watch was notoriously removed from the hand of the soldier who raised the flag of the Soviet Union over the German Reichstag Building in Yevgeny Khaldei's photograph to conceal looting.

It was in the context of the abovementioned workshop in Yogyakarta that Harahap was introduced to archival colonial material from the Dutch East Indies for the first time, encounter that informed the creation of a fictional colonial *Mardijker Photo Studio* a year

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[50] Agan Harahap, Supehero I love history, Flickr page, https://www.flickr.com/photos/31199746@N02/sets/72157622452249309/, accessed 08/05/2017.

[51] Daphne Denis, 'Superheroes at super moments in history', The Photo Blog, *Slate* 30/01/2013, http://www.slate.com/blogs/behold/2013/01/30/agan_harahap_using_superheroes_to_create_a_superhistory_photos.html, accessed 08/05/2017.

later.[52] "Mardjiker", a word deriving from the Sanskrit word *Mahardika*, literally meaning Liberated, was the term used to describe the baptised former slaves and their descendants in Batavia (the colonial name of Jakarta) who working for the Portuguese converted to Catholicism and subsequently to Protestantism under Dutch rule[53]. These populations embraced western culture and religion, but their skin colour prohibited them from accessing a higher social status in the colonial society. Harahap wittingly addresses this 'in-between' social identity in his fictional studio's 'specialisation', that is inter-mixed portraits of Europeans and locals. In the same subversive spirit of questioning the authority of historical photographs, Harahap contests visual and cultural commonplaces in colonial studio portraiture, using digital manipulation to idealise socially-conditioned stereotypical motifs in the representation of Europeans and local subjects alike.

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[52] It is only recently that Indonesian artists and photographers have begun to explore photographic material from the Dutch East Indies period. Landmark studies on photography practice in the Dutch East Indies, such as Anneke Groeneveld's *Toekang potret: 100 years photography in the Dutch Indies* 1839-1939 (1989) and Saskia Asser and et.al. *Isidore van Kinsbergen: Photo pioneer and theater maker in the Dutch East Indies* (2005), were published outside Indonesia and were not widely circulated. The history of Indonesian photography was, until recently, not extensively taught in photography programmes at Indonesian art schools, such as the Jakarta Art Institute and the Indonesian Art Institute in Yogyakarta. Similarly, exhibitions of colonial photographs have been rather rare and are usually based on reproductions instead of original material due to conservation issues.

[53] For a historical description of Mardijkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, see Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, *Being Dutch in the Indies: A history of creolisation and empire, 1500-1920* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp. 31-53.

Figure 16. Agan Harahap, 'Dog whisperer van Kalibagor', from the series *Mardijker Photo Studio*, 2015.

In the studio portrait in Figure 16, Harahap appropriates the in-situ portrait of the sugar factory director Jan Antoine Pietermaat-Soesman siting cross-legged like a Javanese man holding his dogs at the porch of the family house in Kalibagor. [Fig. 17] This photograph is included in the family's album *Souvenir from Kalibagor*, which, like other family albums of sugar industrialists in the Dutch East Indies, evidences the gradual disappearance of studio portrait styles for the colonial elite in favour of outdoor portraits. Mostly taken in their houses, these group portraits included numerous household members: family guests, friends, local helpers and family dogs that otherwise would be excluded in studio portraits.[54] The

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[54] For an in-depth discussion of the in-situ portrait genre among colonial elites see Alexander Supartono, 'Re-imag(in)ing history: Photography and the sugar Industry in colonial Java' (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, St Andrews, 2015), chapter 3: 'Portraying colonial life and business in the Dutch East Indies', pp. 98-140.

regular presence of dogs in those family albums (often with their name inscribed in the accompanying captions) indicates a particular social attitude toward animals as family pets, which often confused local helpers.[55] Harahap accompanied the image 'Dog whisperer van Kalibagor' with a short background story that explained how Jan Pietermaat-Soesman, who was severely attacked by dogs when he was six years old, became a dog whisperer, contextualised with factual biographical information.

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[55] Dogs were regarded in Javanese culture as house guards and accompanied their masters for hunting in the forest. Javanese kings used dogs to feed their captive tigers. See Robert Wessing, 'A Tiger in the heart: The Javanese Rampok Macan', in *Bijdragen to de Taal-en Velkenkunde,* 148, 2 (1992): 288. A former nanny of a Dutch family recalled having to care in the same way for her master's children and pet dogs: 'both were fed milk, taken for walks, and given baths.' Ann Laura Stoler and Karen Strassler, 'Memory-work in Java: A cautionary tale', in *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: race and the intimate in colonial rule*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 184.

Figure 17. Unknown, 'In the rotunda of the General Manager house, Mr. and Mrs. Pietermaat and Ms. Mulder, a lodger', c. 1905, from the album *Souvenir from Poerwokerto and Kalibagor*, ALB-256, page 5, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, Coll. Nr. 60004317

In his reworking of the original photograph, Harahap reinstates the studio portrait in the Pietermaat-Soesman family chronicle, whereby the sugar factory's general manager poses with five dogs and three Javanese men in formal attire. By interchanging native and western poses, the artist tries to destabilise, visually and culturally, the identity of the sitters and blur the boundaries between racial and social hierarchies. In the original photograph, Jan Pietermaat-Soesman assumes the patriarch's position, being placed at the compositional apex of a triangle with two women on either side. Harahap mocks this gendered logic by retaining Jan Pietermaat-Soesman in the compositional centre surrounded by dogs but modifying his sitting posture: instead of cross-legged, he now sits in the manner of Javanese women. In the studio photograph, the three Javanese men are presented confidently staring back at the camera as assistants to the high-profile industrialist, who, in a reversal of roles, is a dog whisperer. Once again Harahap drew inspiration from the popularity of local TV series on canine-behaviourists as owning a dog and employing a professional for their training is a symbol of social status in contemporary Indonesia. Thus Jan Pietermaat-Soesman's reworked portrait provides a critical link between colonial and postcolonial Indonesia whereby certain social hegemonies remain the same.

Whilst European families preferred in-situ group portraits to illustrate their domestic life, studio portraits of local subjects were primarily the projection of European curiosity, whether in the form of scientific inquiry, administrative necessity or for the mere purposes of

one's personal collection.[56] Appadurai has argued that the colonial photo studio was equally the site for locals to 'experiment with modernity' and 'documentary realism' as the studio portraits of indigenous people were both 'types' and 'tokens'.[57] Harahap addresses this ambivalent status of colonial studio portraits in 'Sutirah: The first women animal tamer' (hereafter 'Animal tamer') [Fig. 18].

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[56] The *People of India* project (1868-1875) is an example of how the need of British administration to survey and classify their colonial subjects informed colonial ethnographic projects, and more specifically the 'type' studio portrait. See John Falconer, '"A pure labor of love": A publishing history of *The People of India*', in *Colonialist photography,* pp. 51-83. There is growing scholarly interest on the production and reception of colonial postcards, see Patricia Goldsworthy, 'Image, ideologies and commodities: the French colonial postcard industry in Morocco', *Early Popular Culture,* 8, 2 (2010): 147-167 and Allan Life, 'Picture Postcards by M.V. Dhurandhar: Scenes and types of India—with a difference', *Visual resources: An International Journal of Documentation*, 17:4 (2001): 401-16.

[57] Arjun Appadurai, 'The colonial backdrop', *Afterimage,* 24:5 (1997): 4-7.

Figure 18. Agan Harahap, 'Sutirah: The first woman animal tamer ca. 1885, West Java', from the series *Mardijker Photo Studio*, 2015.

In this composite portrait Harahap caricatures the colonial representation of the exotic woman and the exotic animal from the tropics. Sutirah is depicted in a western-style white dress with her long black hair flowing down her chest, comfortably holding a crocodile as a pet, a *cling d'oeil* to the Europeans being photographed with their pet dogs. Staring back at the camera holding fearlessly the reptile, Sutirah's portrait does not conform to the usual types of colonial studio portraits of local women. Whilst in 'Dog whisperer' Harahap made reference to the modern pet culture in Indonesia, 'Animal tamer' draws upon myths about female figures with supernatural powers found in local folklore tradition. In this light, both portraits operate within the same logic of merging tradition and modernity, the oriental and the occidental, index and icon, type and token.

Here, too, Harahap accompanied the portrait of Sutirah with fictional and factual information, providing along with his fictional heroine's invented date of birth and

information about her talent in communicating with animals, reference to her collaboration with a real historical figure, the German-Dutch zoologist Carl Wilhelm Weber (1852-1937), who went on a scientific expedition to Sumatera in 1899. Unlike the generic captions of 'type' portraits that served to typecast anonymised individual subjects (e.g., Javanese woman, Chinese blacksmith, Balinese dancer) thus allowing their commodification as 'tokens', the caption of 'Animal tamer' is unique in offering a rich cultural context for the named individual.

Harahap posted portraits from the *Mardijker Photo Studio* regularly on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter under the name of Sejarah_X [History_X]. By using online media to discuss and further disseminate his pseudo-archival material, Harahap sought to engage with audiences on a national, regional and international scale in order to reinvigorate discussions about colonialism. At the time of writing (November 2017), Sejarah_X had over twenty-seven thousand Instagram followers, over seven thousand Twitter followers and approximately seventeen hundred Facebook followers. This interaction with diverse audiences online reveals different levels of knowledge of colonial history and consciousness about the truth value and authority of photographic representations among users. For instance, discussion threads for Sutirah's post range from questions of curiosity like 'Is the crocodile her pet? It looks like one?', to comments about the artifice of the portraits and the need to know one's own national history. [Fig. 20]

Figure 19. Screenshot of Agan Harahap's Sejarah_X Instagram page for Sutirah, 26 June 2017.

Capitalising on the momentum of social media in Southeast Asia, Harahap uses the new forms of sociality and personal revelation that social media afford users to un-tangle the mechanics of archivisation of the colonial archive, the ways material is preserved and narrativised. By dematerialising his images for dissemination and using the possibilities of repurposing and public participation that Web 3.0 offers, Harahap interrupts the authority and integrity of the archive asking viewers to think twice about what it is that they see. He offers online users the opportunity to scrutinise, disseminate, exchange, manipulate, and repurpose this material, an active process of civil engagement that requires awareness of colonial and postcolonial histories and may have a transformative impact on their own sense of identity and postcolonial 'relational self'.[58] His work suggests that the postcolonial archive is

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[58] For a discussion of how the dissemination of historic images via Facebook have affected notions of the postcolonial 'relational self' in the Philippines, see Deidre McKay, 'On the

modular and fluid and that is not just about material objects; it consists of all those behaviours that develop around such relationships and exchanges, online and offline. As Deidre McKay argues with regards to the increasing dissemination of historical images on Facebook in Southeast Asia, 'it is not surprising that we find that the anxieties and insecurities of a digital and diasporic age are being assuaged by […] importing the past through historical images.'[59] The value of these images, she continues, 'arises both from the image itself and its grouping, collection, juxtapositions and the possibilities of citing past images, variation, modification and future connections to make new norms for persons and their relations'.[60] Thus initiatives like Sejarah_X become fora to discuss historical cultural and ethnic clichés with view to open a democratic public debate towards a shared/collective interpretation of ethnic history in Southeast Asia that surpasses the law of the 'arche' of the archive. Harahap's Sejarah_X offers an alternative postcolonial archive in which notions of ownership, agency and authority are to be redefined collectively and individually.

None of the three artists discussed above had access to the original archival records they appropriated during and after the Postcolonial workshop in 2012. They worked solely with the digital proxies made available in high resolution files by the archives in the Netherlands. They thus capitalised on the modularity, immateriality and versatility of the digital image to repurpose and alter colonial archival imagery. By doing so, they not only contest and reconfigure the use and truth-value of colonial records. Dow's exaggerated re-enactments, Yee's decontextualised archival fragments and Harahap's seamless visual hoaxes

face of Facebook: Historical images of personhood in Filipino social networking', *History and Anthropology*, 21, 4 (2010): 479-98.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 487.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 488.

attest to the manipulability of archival records, both during their making and their process of archivisation. At the same time, they also call into question and reclaim the ownership of the colonial archive. Thai Wasiksiri and Malaysian Yee used photographic material from Dutch colonial archives to paint the bigger picture of colonialism in Southeast Asia, informed by their sensibility of national colonial histories. Not surprisingly, Indonesian Harahap avoided the grand narratives of colonialism, the colonial gaze, race and power relations, to concentrate on the periphery of the cultural logic of colonialism by focusing on the everyday and the vernacular of colonial society in the Dutch East Indies. Disseminated beyond physical and geographical borders and remixed online this work becomes part and parcel of an expanded postcolonial archive that moves from archiving the past to re-imag(in)ing a postcolonial future.