sure@sunderland.ac.uk.

Cultural antinomies, creative complicities: Agan Harahap's digital hoaxes

Dr Alexandra Moschovi, University of Sunderland, and Dr Alexander Supartono, Edinburgh Napier University

Networked image; postcolonial archive, virality; digitisation; appropriation.

Introduction

A teenage girl in traditional Javanese kebaya and batik sarong poses smiling timidly against a nondescript, interior background. [Fig.1] The snap, saturated by the characteristic magenta hue of old, colour photographs, first appeared online in 2015 as an *objet trouvé* on the blog *Melman and the Hippo* that belongs to the Indonesian artist Agan Harahap. The caption states that this is a photograph of young Rihanna celebrating Kartini Day, Indonesia's Women's Day. For those in the know, a closer look reveals that the girl in the fading photograph is indeed the pop idol Rihanna. Harahap informs his readers that this is an authentic photograph of the singer as a child taken when she was still working as an umbrella taxi kid (*ojek payung*) in the streets of Yogyakarta to help her family make ends meet. The artist quotes an interview of a tearful Rihanna who explained in fluent Javanese how her pop chart hit *Umbrella* was inspired by one of her childhood friends, a co-worker who was struck by a lightning while providing umbrella services to passers-by on a stormy day (Harahap, 2015). Some respondents to the post who saw through the falsity of the artist's claims played along; others seemed confused: 'is this really true,' one reader asked.[1]

The photograph in question belongs to the series *Our Memory Album* (2015-2018) in which the artist digitally inserts the faces of international celebrities into old family snaps from Indonesia. Harahap sources the snaps from local social media accounts taking advantage of the ignorance of social media users who do not know how to resize their photographs or set the privacy settings on their accounts, thus making publicly available high-resolution photographs of their family life (Harahap, 2018a). Along with the photographs' files, Harahap also appropriates the personal stories attached to them in order to provide a truthful context for the Indonesianisation of the celebrities in his digital reworkings.

Our Memory Album was presented in physical form in the group exhibition *Why are We Doing What We are Doing?* at Mizuma Gallery in Singapore in 2016. In this re-imagining of the work beyond the online, live context of social media, Harahap presented the images in different sizes in elaborately decorated, domestic frames. The artist's original idea to present the images arranged in a photographic album was deemed impractical in the context of a commercial gallery exhibition; instead an 'academy style' installation was employed to mimic displays of family

photographs in domestic settings (Harahap, 2018a). The photographs continued to exist in digital form online, available as a series via the portfolio platform Bēhance with a laconic artist statement describing the project as the artist's long-standing pursuit to 'collect and reveal the connections between celebrities and their relation to [his] homeland, Indonesia' (Harahap, 2018b).

This article explores how creative repurposing of networked photographs and online interactivity may open new channels and networks for the critical re-evaluation of mainstream culture and subcultures, identity politics, history and power structures. The analysis focuses on the work of Agan Harahap, who uses strategies of appropriation, digital manipulation, allegory and irony to make unexpected visual and contextual interventions in popular and archival imagery, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, the public and the private.

Over a decade, Harahap built an international reputation and social media following as a visual appropriator/pasticheur and cultural provocateur. His work draws on cultural and political antinomies in postcolonial Indonesia, shifting cultural and social behaviours in contemporary networked societies, and the impact of media and celebrity culture on people and communities, using the malleability of digital photography, the fluidity of the networked image and the architecture of participation of Web 2.0. His visual hoaxes are distributed nationally and internationally taking advantage of, and at times hacking, the instrumentality of a range of different online platforms to ignite public dialogue. The audiences' participation in sharing and commenting hints at the endless realm of possibilities for how these networked images, stored in the über-archive of Google images, may be circulated, recontextualised and repurposed. The online public interaction reveals different levels of subject awareness, trust and engagement: some users are totally deceived by Harahap's skillful hoaxes; others react to his absurd scenarios by openly challenging his claims or searching the web to source the original material he appropriates. Harahap's digital interventions purposefully interrupt the authority and integrity of the archival record and challenge the authenticity of the personal snaps by calling viewers to think twice about what it is that they see while raising questions about the validity and veracity of the photographic image as evidence and historical record.

Against the documentary grain

Harahap began exploring the mutability and malleability of the digital photograph in the context of his professional practice as digital imaging artist at Tarzan Photo Studio in Jakarta where he mastered the skills of digital retouching and layering of photographic images. Having trained in painting and illustration during his studies in graphic arts at the Design and Art College (STDI) in Bandung, Harahap drew upon his knowledge of pictorial synthesis and graphic design to create his first surrealist tableaux entitled *Octopus Garden*, which earned him the prestigious Indonesian Art

Award and a place on the wall of the National Gallery in Jakarta in 2008. It was not long before Harahap's fabrications would capture the imagination of curators and gallerists beyond national borders, through participation in transregional photography festivals and exhibitions across South East Asia, Japan, Europe, Australia and South America.

Harahap's self-evident but seamless digital manipulation, which accentuates the artificiality of the photograph, marked a rupture with the stagnant tradition of documentary photography that dominated the photography scene in postcolonial Indonesia for over half a century. With its roots in Japan's propaganda photographs, circulated by the news agency Domei during the 1942 Japanese occupation of Indonesia, documentary photography became the visual parlance for the country's revolution and independence since 1945, a vehicle to capture and disseminate the picture of the new nation. The boom of print media in 1970s Indonesia, fuelled by oil economics, offered local photographers a new professional platform but did little to advance photographic practice in the country, primarily favouring sensational content over experimentation and reflection. Like red-baiting in McCarthy's America, the censorship imposed by the military directorship of Suharto (1966-1998) in all aspects of public life, indelibly impacted on Indonesian photography that became largely apolitical and detached from artistic experimentation and self-expression (Supartono, 2006, pp. 10-12). The advent of the political upheaval of the *Reformasi*, the riots and mass demonstrations in the country's urban centres leading to Suharto's resignation in 1998, signaled the beginning of a new era in which Indonesian photographers would, at last, enjoy political and creative freedom exercised in the context of newly emerging photography festivals, galleries and clubs.

Coming into age in the new millennium, Harahap used constructed imagery to problematise the established pictorial traditions and clichés that characterised documentary and commercial photographic practice in Indonesia in the previous century. His practice specifically went against the grain of classic documentary photography and the postwar humanist traditions as exemplified in the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Robert Capa and Eugene Smith that had influenced postwar photographic practice in the wider Southeast Asian region, but also art documentary, the 'new documents' of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Gary Winogrand that were celebrated as self-expression on the walls of the modern art museum (Sekula, 1984; Rosler, 1989). Harahap's digital work marked a new direction for creative photographic practice that equally challenged the nation's cultural preconceptions about race, gender, national identity, sexuality, faith, and class. Such a tentative movement towards staged and constructed photography was diagnosed in the early 2000s across South and Southeast Asia: the voluminous publication of the 2006 Noordelicht festival *Another Asia* attests to these changes: among classic humanist documentary series spring staged self-portraits in drag (Michael Shaowanasai, Thailand), surreal landscapes (Yee I-Lann, Malaysia), and studio explorations of femininity (Achinto Shadra and

Pushpamala N., India; Wawi Navarroza, The Phillipines) (Mellis, 2006). As Alexander Supartono noted examining the workings of contemporary photographic practice in the region

> the conscious, uniform departure by contemporary Southeast Asian photographers from the traditional genres and applied practices of the colonial period that first established the transnational Southeast Asian scene may well be the core of a new national identity in the postcolonial era (2014, p. 19).

The 2000s witnessed the media convergence of the computer, wireless communication technologies and the camera in the camera phone as a connected image-making device. Being ubiquitous and versatile, the smartphone signaled the beginning of a new 'moment' for photographic practice (Gómez-Cruz and Meyer, 2012), which was marked by the 'mass amateurisation of photography and its renewed visibility online' (Rubistein and Sluis, 2008, p. 10). It has also been instrumental in developing new forms of participatory culture, from sharing and annotating content to online activism, and a novel alertness to what may be deemed noteworthy that has shifted people's perception of the everyday (Moschovi, McKay, & Plouviez, 2013, p. 19). Harahap examines the currency of the networked snapshot in today's visual culture and global information economy, as a marker of status and evidence of presence as much as a type of sociality. The increasing 'visualisation' of everyday experience, which, as Martin Hand suggested, makes 'the visualisation of public and private life bound up with relations of power, expertise and authority' (2012, p. 9), offers a fruitful ground for Harahap's cultural critique. Exploiting the dynamic of the 'network effect', that is the drive of individuals to be part of an information society, being constantly connected (Hassan, 2008, p. 2), Harahap has been using the Internet as a deterritorialised network to reach diverse audiences beyond the physical space of the art gallery and the museum.

Through the glass of popular culture, darkly

Since his first independent projects, Harahap had always demonstrated a particular interest in popular culture and the ways it permeates all aspects of social life. In 2009, inspired by the video games Call of Duty and Medal of Honour that drew on World War II battles and which, at the time, had become a fad for Indonesian youths, Harahap created historical paradoxes to comment upon the commercialisation of history (Harahap, 2009). The photographs in his series *Superhistory* are digital collages of historical photographs sourced online in which popular superheroes have been digitally inserted. Yet, these tampered records were not meant to be seen as a parody of history despite their humorous currency that was a key determinant in their virality and usability as memes. They were perceived and constructed as a hyperbolic critique of the ruthless appropriation and

spectacularisation of history in mainstream culture, whether in TV series, cinema, or video games, whose narrative is often an odd hybrid made of factual and plausible elements while historical events and references are fictionalised (Chateau, 2011). At the same time, the seamlessness of Harahap's digital manipulation that blurs reality and artifice points to the elasticity of the photograph even before the advent of Photoshop. In the context of political propaganda several iconic historical photographs had been manually retouched such as Yevgeny Khaldei's photograph of a soldier raising the flag of the Soviet Union over the German Reichstag Building whose second watch was airbrushed from his wrist to conceal looting, or the disappearance of Nikolai Yezhov who was retouched out of a photograph in which he featured at the side of Joseph Stalin, after Yezhov's execution in 1940 (Przybylski, 2017). Harahap's absurdly doctored scenes—Darth Vader featuring alongside Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin at the Yalta convention in 1945 and Batman giving the order of the day to English paratroopers in the Greenham Airfield on 5 June 1944—not only went viral when circulated on his Flickr page, counting by March 2018 221,588 views (Harahap, 2009). They also gained the artist international critical attention and recognition giving these repurposed images an afterlife beyond cyberspace as physical objects in the museum's white cube (Denis, 2013; Daily Mail, 2012). Following the lineage of appropriation art, which gained new momentum in the digital era, Harahap's work is equally successful in the international art market: a large-scale copy (120 x 181.5 cm) of his digital reworking of a historical photograph of Iwo Jima in which Hulk appears to inspect a war-torn landscape was sold in a Sotheby's Hong Kong auction well above the estimated price in 2012.[2]

Harahap is particularly critical of how Western mainstream culture has been adopted and adapted in Indonesia. His work often targets the public's obsession with celebrities, which powered by tabloids, online news outlets and social media communications, impacts on people's notion of self, race and national identity. 'For people who live in "third world" countries like me, Western celebrities are role models in many ways,' Harahap explained, 'Their daily lives are followed and emulated by the public' (Harahap cited in Mallonee, 2015, para. 4). Referencing the Instagram phenomenon in the 2010s, Harahap decidedly concentrated on social media narcissism and the ways pictorial clichés, borrowed from celebrity culture, pervade the social media profiling of Indonesians.

Building on the idea that celebrity status is achieved through the accumulation of 'attention capital' (Rojek, 2001) and taking advantage of the photograph's evidential power, Harahap circulated photographs of himself socialising at his home with James Hetfeld, the lead singer of the heavy metal group Metallica. The artist used the group's long-awaited 2013 concert at the National Arena in Jakarta and the social media hype as a pretext to publish a series of photographs of himself and the group alongside an explanatory post on his blog *Melman and the Hippo*. Quoting the new

forms of sociality and personal revelation that social media afford users, Harahap fabricated a 'true-confession' story about himself combining fictional narrative and factual information. He claimed that he, too, was a celebrity once, owing to high earnings from his artwork. This wealth enabled him to rub shoulders with many Western celebrities during his international travels, including Lars Ulrich, a known art collector, who introduced him to the other members of Metallica. After spending time with the group, living the high life of sex, drugs and rock n' roll, the 'confession' continued, Harahap went bankrupt and returned to Kebon Kosong in Jakarta to start life again. It was there in his humble dwellings that he allegedly received a picture message from Hetfeld asking him to meet (Harahap, 2013). Harahap authenticated his story with a series of photographs of him posing with Hetfeld and Ulrich in 2010, a blurry camera phone portrait of Hetfeld holding a hand-written note asking for his address, and artless snaps of himself and the singer in the former's home in Kebong Kosong as old friends catching up over cheap vodka.

Arguably Harahap's story did not have the success that Amelia Ulman's spoof selfie project *Excellences & Perfections* of her attempt to make it as an 'It girl' in Los Angeles, would have on Instagram the following year, becoming an internet and curatorial 'sensation' once her hoax was revealed.[3] Although Harahap carefully adopted and adapted the pictorial language of paparazzi flash photography, amateur snaps, and iphoneography, minute details in his story and images gave away the hoax causing widespread debate that expanded beyond the blog on the artist's Twitter account and other online platforms (Harahap, 2013b). While there were several online users who fell for Harahap's 'heartfelt' story, there were many others who successfully scrutinised the images for signs of digital manipulation. Within hours after the original post, users tracked online Harahap's original source photographs and presented them in discussion threads as proof of the artist's falsified evidence.[4] For Harahap this discussion is an organic part of the work in his effort to make viewers think how the self is constructed in social media: 'We always want to be seen as more cool and more stylish,' he stated. 'And so we become our own celebrity photographers, letting people know what we're wearing, where we're hanging out, what we're eating, and who our friends are' (Harahap cited in Mallonee, 2015, para. 6). The hyperbole of the story and the doctoring of the images point to the artificiality, the staging and exaggeration of social media 'everyday life' narratives. Harahap treats Web 2.0 and social media as a kind of 'social, economic, technological and intellectual "imaginary"' (Marwick, 2013, p. 7) that affords cultural participation beyond social elites and allows users to be prosumers rather than mere consumers of cultural content. Social media offer the artist an insight into the demographic data (social background, race, ethnicity, gender, religion) of his audience and the ways people present themselves and interact with each other online, influenced by the attention economies and strategies used in marketing—self-branding and livestreaming among others—that can turn ordinary people into 'micro-celebrities' (Marwick,

2013, p. 10). It is upon observations of these social patterns and behaviours, which he knows only too well being a celebrated social media persona himself, that Harahap's poignant critique of contemporary visual culture relies.

Harahap expanded his punditry of celebrity culture in the series *And Justice for All*, a *clin d'oeil* to the abovementioned project for the title of the series was borrowed from Metallica's homonymous album in 1988. In these dystopian scenarios media icons, international actors, singers and other celebrities, visit Indonesia only to find themselves in unexpected settings, in public toilets, squalid brothels and dubious healing shops. Some are caught misbehaving and are arrested by the local police: the singer Rihanna is caught in an alcohol raid; actress Angelina Jolie is interrogated handcuffed guarded by expressionless Jakarta police officers [Fig.2]; and boxer Mike Tyson poses behind bars sharing a cell under the bewildered eyes of his local inmates. Here Harahap appropriated again the style of both paparazzi and police photography: the harsh flash, the snatch aesthetic, the compositional accidents. He sourced all photographs online via Google images and various local police station blogs, which often feature, unknowingly, high-resolution photographs of their officers' daily activities. The series is part of the body of work *Visit Indonesia* (2012-2014), which was first presented in physical form at the Indonesian National Gallery in Jakarta in the exhibition *Manifesto* in 2014 and later that year in the survey exhibition *Afterimage: Contemporary Photography in Southeast Asia* in Singapore Art Museum where the pseudo paparazzi snaps featured as larger-than-life, colour-saturated digital prints. *And Justice for All* was presented on the online portfolio platform Bēhance on 14 December 2014 where was viewed, by March 2018, by 26,046 viewers and liked by 976 users (Harahap, 2014a). This is Harahap's *tour de force* as digital artist; like a postmodern complicity gesture the work he produces also exists in the very platform and format that he aims to subvert.

In the context of the Indonesian presidential elections in 2014, Harahap fabricated a series of images picturing the then Indonesian presidential candidate Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi) and members of his team in the company of international celebrities, including artist Ai Wei Wei, US president Barak Obama, former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, designer Karl Langerfeld and celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay. In a statement Harahap explained that his interest in this particular political race for the presidential seat derived from a desire to expose the unreliability of new media spreading slander which, shared uncontrollably online, had divided the nation (Harahap 2014b). *Postcards for Jokowi* is a parody of the employment of social media in election campaigning while voicing the artist's support for Jokowi as a viable alternative to the military candidate. The series was disseminated online across different platforms, while the artist circulated printed postcards and made available high-resolution files to Jokowi's team for use in the campaign and, through an online link, to the general public to print at will. He envisaged that 'these works can

be stored as memories that we have lived and engaged in the most festive democracy party in the history of the Indonesian nation.' (Harahap, 2014b).

Re-inventing the colonial archive

A young, Caucasian woman, wrapped in a long, batik sarong, folded around her waist, assumes a venereal pose on an altar bed also covered with batik fabric [Fig.3]. The otherwise unadorned studio scene includes a basket filled with tropical fruits and a brass bowl, typical for chewing-betel. Studio and in-situ photographs of semi-clad Javanese women are a pictorial commonplace in European archives and museums with colonial collections. However, there is something odd about the depicted scene in the historical photograph. Western women who lived or spent time in the colonies often adopted local costume, but being seen and photographed with bare shoulders and bare-footed was a social *faux pas*. Using digital tools, Harahap changed the identity of the Javanese woman who was depicted in the original photograph by Fotax Photo Studio to that of a European, superimposing a Caucasian female head onto a Javanese female body with meticulous skin tone adjustment. By doing so, the artist aimed to reprehend how Western male sexual desire and imagination fed the commercial market of erotic photographs of indigenous women in the colonial period.

The photograph is part of the series *Mardijker Photo Studio*, a fictional local studio supposedly active in the Dutch East Indies at the turn of the 20th century specialising in culturally inter-mixed portraits: Westerners appearing in local attire and postures and local folk assuming Western mannerisms. *Mardijkers*, 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 who, working for the Portuguese, converted to Catholicism and subsequently to Protantism under Dutch rule. Those populations embraced Western culture and religion, but their skin colour prohibited them from accessing a higher social status in the colonial society (Bosma and Raben, 2008). Concentrating on portraiture, the studio platform allows the artist to creatively revisit attributes and changing traits of colonial representation in Java: from race to class; from the colonial agroindustry to colonial lifestyle; from family portraits to exotic trophies. His hybrid portraits challenge presuppositions about race and class by reverting stereotypes in a similar manner that Maud Sulter's 1980s series *Zabat* contested racial mythologies presenting creative black women posing as Greek muses, Ingrid Pollard's *Pastoral Interludes* reclaimed national identity and landscape for British black women in the 1990s, and Jason Evans' series *Strickly* (1991) in which surprised visitors at Tate Modern's exhibition *Century City* (2001) featuring young black men styled as British country gents (Kinsman, 1995).

The series comprises of more than 100 works that Harahap disseminates internationally via different online photo sharing platforms and social media, with a total of more than 36,000

followers across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, under the name Sejarah_X. Each photograph is usually accompanied by a make-believe background story, in which Harahap combines folklore traditions, common local knowledge, and historical facts [Fig.4]. These absurd scenarios vernacularise colonial portraits and events, thus making the photographs appealing to audiences who otherwise have little interest in photography and colonial history. Discussion threads, comments and reposts of and for the *Mardijker* series generate widespread debates and advance popular discourse on Indonesian colonial history beyond academia. This online interaction not only offers a demographic and social mapping of historical knowledge of the country's colonial past, but more importantly, affords new perspectives in topics that Indonesian history books did little to address, as for example the sexualisation of Javanese women in the colonial era.

As was the case in other colonies, erotic studio portraits of local women was a significant source of income for commercial photo studios in the Dutch East Indies. In the era of the European conquest, studio portraits of naked, colonised female subjects was part of the process in which 'the Orient was penetrated, silenced and possessed' (Stoler, 2002, pp. 43-44). For instance, as early as 1860s, Woodbury & Page, a well-known studio with a long list of highly-respected clients in Batavia (present day Jakarta) already included a studio portrait of a bare-chested reclining young Javanese woman, entitled "Woman of Java, ca. 1868" in one of the firm's 'people and custom' album (KITLV Leiden, Coll. Nr. 85045). By the early 20th century, studio portraits of long haired, young Javanese women in full nudity were available for general purchase from commercial photo studios in Java and were in great demand in the European market (Groeneveld et al., 1989, pp. 78-81). The original photograph that Harahap appropriated in Figure 3 is part of an album generically titled *Album with Photographs from the Dutch East Indies*, which was published by Fotax, a Surabaya-based photographic studio in 1924. Part of the collection of the Netherlands National Museum of World Culture, the album (TM-ALB-0060) contains 177 photographs depicting mainly Java's urbanscape including a number of outdoor portraits of local folk going about their daily life. The photograph in question is the only studio portrait. It is preceded by a photograph of a Javanese mother bathing her two children and followed by a photograph of riverside housing. The photograph is clearly at odds with the narrative of the album, a fact that explains its function in the album as a marketing gimmick and thus highlights its popularity and versatility. By posting the appropriated version of the photograph on various online platforms, Harahap mimics the circulation of such photographs and their recontextualisation in different photographic albums in colonial times.

Harahap's archival hoax presents an out-of-kilter representation of women in the colony to encourage viewers to pay attention to the details of the photograph. One Instagram user commented upon the unusual size of the 'white woman's toes'. The remark points to the fact that Harahap

purposefully orientalised the Occident in the Orient by localising the Western female rather than westernising the Javanase body. The face of the Caucasian female was sourced from a photograph in one of the many photographic albums of Dutch families who lived in the Dutch East Indies, now kept in the Netherlands. In doing so, Harahap simultaneously addressed the way in which Western pictorial traditions exemplified in well-known paintings such as Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (1814), influenced aesthetically photographic portraiture in the colony.

In the *Mardijker* series, Harahap challenges the notion of the colonial archive as an institution, a repository and a system of gathering, storing and exchanging knowledge that was used as an instrument of colonial power. He gives forgotten archival material a new life, one that equally contests the ideological apparatuses for knowledge production and the archive as the process that determines what may be said, classified and stored (Foucault, 1994). Capitalising on the momentum of social media in Southeast Asia, Harahap utilises what Clay Shirky (2010) described as the public's 'cognitive surplus' to extend the rewriting of colonial history from below and present collective narratives in which the formerly colonised are no longer excluded. The decentred production, dissemination and repurposing of digital material online not unrestricted by copyright creates a new popular archive and a cultural community that visits, evaluates and recirculates the content. This participation creates cultural content that is of personal, communal, public and civic value (Shirky, 2010) to various online and offline communities in Indonesia and beyond. Such an active engagement with historical materials can have a transformative impact on people's sense of identity and postcolonial 'relational self' (McKay, 2010).

Harahap's interest in the colonial archive is part of a recent turn of Indonesian contemporary art practice towards colonial history.[5] While colonial collections have been institutionally neglected after the country's decolonisation, the accessibility and searchability of the digital archives of major colonial collections such as KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) and the National Museum of World Culture, to name but a few, have offered a new uncharted terrain to Indonesian artists like Harahap, Abednego Trianto and Adytama Pranada to research and re-evaluate colonial records.[6] Using strategies of appropriation, assemblage, digital manipulation and restaging, these artists reclaim colonial history mining the colonial archive not for historical information, but for those cultural clichés that informed the colonial imagining of the colony and its people, and which, as Stoler has suggested, often concentrated on race and sexuality (2009).

Gaining popularity in the virtual world, the *Mardjiker* series was exhibited in full, for the first time, in 2015 in the Netherlands in the exhibition *Making Oneself: Postcolonial Photo Studio from South and Southeast Asia*, part of the Noorderlicht photo festival. Unlike their online presentation on Instagram, where each photograph is experienced individually accompanied by a

background story, in their exhibition setting the photographs are usually presented enlarged and framed, devoid of contextual or other information, thus calling viewers to make connections between the different images and draw their own conclusions. In early 2016 the *Mardijker* series was presented by 2902 photo gallery in the high-profile, commercial art fair Artstage Singapore and later that year in the Singapore Biennale, the largest regional art event in Southeast Asia. The series was shown in the context of Chobi Mela photography festival in Dhaka in 2017 [Fig.5] and the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum in Berlin the following year. It is notable that to date all major exhibitions of the *Mardijker* series took place outside Indonesia whereas online discussions triggered by the series' dissemination online are almost exclusively in Indonesian. The background story of each photograph, which is only available in Indonesian and exclusively provided online, plays a central role in Harahap's subversion of Indonesian colonial history and in triggering discussion on a national level. International curators, critics and viewers seem to pay more attention to his creative intervention on the photographic representation of Indonesian colonial history and the ways he challenges the authority of the colonial archive. Harahap identified the knowledge base and behaviours of his diverse audiences and adjusted the nature of his work accordingly. For Indonesian digital natives and immigrants, who tend to socialise online, the networked images and their narrative offer a trigger for discussion and engagement in a way that no physical display of the work in a gallery context would achieve. For international audiences, he mutes the images, as such discussions could have little relevance outside Indonesia, and turns them into familiar pseudo-archival objects. By presenting them as generic types and silencing their political voice, the artist makes his images accessible to international viewers who may or may not be versed with postcolonialist issues and debates.

In Harahap's hands networked images, whether sourced from Google images, institutional archives or personal collections made public, become instruments of critique of past and present visual culture. By disseminating his work online, Harahap democratises art practice beyond the trammels and limitations of the art world and affords online communities with the opportunity to take part in an active process of civil engagement that may offer new routes to counter power and 'networked social movements' (Castells, 2012). Initiatives like Sejarah_X become fora for public debate proposing an alternative postcolonial archive in which notions of ownership, agency and authority are to be redefined collectively. Harahap's digital hoaxes exaggerate cultural antinomies, clichés and behaviours only to make us stop and think not only of the politics of visual representations today, but also about agency and ownership asking how we consume digital context and how digital platforms consume us.

[1] Nadia Assyifa, discussion thread (Harahap, 2015).

[2] See Entry 258, Agan Harahap (b. 1980), Super-History Series: Iwo Jima, February 1945 (Hulk), UV Print on aluminium plate dBond, 120 x 181.5 cm. Executed in 2010. Estimate: 18,000—25,000 HKD. Lot sold: 35,000 HKD. Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings catalogue, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2012/modern-contemporary-sea-paintings-hk0387/lot.258.html (Retrieved: 22 March 2018).

[3] In winter 2016, eighteen months after Ulman's public revelation, the series *Excellences and Perfections* were included in two major group exhibitions *Electronic Superhighway*, at the Whitechapel Gallery, a survey of the interface of computer technology and art since the 1960s; and Tate Modern's *Performing for the Camera*, an examination of the fusion of performance and photography in contemporary art (Caplan-Bricker, 2016; Sooke, 2016).

[4] See the post and discussion thread 'Sisi Lain James Hetfield (Metallica): Ingat Teman Lamanya Dari Indonesia (The other side of James Hetdfield [Metallica]: Remembering his old friend from Indonesia)' *Kaskus,* 29 August 2013. Retrieved from https://www.kaskus.co.id/thread/521f68a5f8ca17c902000004/sisi-lain-james-hetfield-metallica-ingat-teman-lamanya-dari-indonesia/ (Retrieved: 23 March 2018).

[5] Harahap had the opportunity to examine, for the first-time, the actual prints of the photographic material he had been using in the *Mardijker* series in the collections of the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam and Leiden University Library in 2016. Although the artist admitted that having a first hand experience of the original material made him consider anew the materiality of photographs, he continues to work with digital files available online (Harahap, 2018a).

[6] See KITLV collection at the Leiden University Library available at https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/search?type=dismax&islandora_solr_search_navigation=0&f%5B0%5D=mods_genre_authority__ms%3A%22Photographs.%22&sort=mods_titleInfo_title_ss%20asc; and the National Museum of World Culture collection available at https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/#/query/99916a0d-badc-478c-960c-1fe438dd59d0

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