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IVAA Discussion Topic

Time : 15 July 2010, 4 pm

Place : Kantor IVAA, Patehan Tengah 37 Yogyakarta

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## **Iconography and Violence: The value of Historical Context in Copy Culture**

Groaning, my friend looked to me for acknowledgement. It was becoming a trend -- face-to-face with Adolf Hitler, we would turn around, suddenly somber, and simper out in search of place that didn't remind us of anti-semitism and the Holocaust. Perhaps I have a different experience visiting Distro shops, since I have Jewish friends who live in and visit Indonesia, and the signature Hitler moustache doesn't have a comedic effect. Inquiring about the use of Hitler imagery, I've encountered a range of responses: "He looks funny", "His leadership was impressive" and "He was a great man". For my Jewish friends, his visage functions less as a critic of Israeli violence, and more as a maniacal call for the eradication of the Jewish religion and race.

During my time in Yogyakarta, I've also witnessed a local response to a Facebook group which supported the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad. The local response expressed an awareness of the power of iconography and visual representation, and international protests inspired Facebook to eliminate the group and its collection of drawings.

While there are active debates about aniconism traditions within Islamic communities, these debates about the powerful qualities of images, I haven't witnessed their extension in a meaningful way to include a concern for other religious groups.

I bring this topic to IVAA because I am curious about the values and meanings Hitler carries as an icon in Jogjakarta. More broadly, in Distro shops, which are seemingly aligned with the intellectual freedom activities of photocopy shops (with the hackneyed philosophy: "Copyright, or right to copy?"), what are the reasons to sell t-shirts bearing such an icon? In a culture of "right to copy" over Copyright, does historical context lose any value? In a place where a person can protest the depiction of Muhammad while wearing a t-shirt depicting Hitler, what is the relationship between violence, historical context, and iconography?

