

*Study of the Message of Feminism and Post-Colonialism in Babad Diponegoro Painting  
Pupuh Sinom XIV by Isur Suroso*  
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A B S T R A C T

*In the painting about Babad Diponegoro entitled "The Garden Of Earthly Prosperity In Ground Zero" by Isur Suroso, contain meaningful messages. Every sign in the painting contain messages that represent different meaning. A lot of signs in the painting visualized feminism and pos-tcolonialism.. There are many contradictive but interrelated between signs. There are abundant messages about colonialism time in 19 century. The representation of the Prince Diponegoro, Prince's grandmother, and abdi dalem are deformed to emphasize the message about post- colonialism and feminism. The message about feminism in this painting represented by showing women domination among men.*

**Keyword:** Babad Diponegoro; post-colonialism; Feminism

## INTRODUCTION

*Babad* Diponegoro was formally chosen by UNESCO as "Memory of the World" in 2013. *Babad* Diponegoro, which literally means the History of Diponegoro, is an autobiography book that written as *pupuh* (poems). In each *pupuh* tells about life story of the Prince Diponegoro. *Babad* Diponegoro was written by Prince Diponegoro himself when he was captured and exiled by the Dutch in Manado in 1831/1832.

In February 1 to 24, 2019, an exhibition was held entitled "*Pameran Sastra Rupa Gambar Babad Diponegoro*" (Chronicle of Diponegoro Visual Art Exhibition). According to the theme of the exhibition, all the artworks were visualized from *pupuh* (poems) in the Chronicle of Diponegoro Book. The poems visualized in the exhibition are stories of Prince Diponegoro's since he was toddler, until the time he arrested/yielded to the colonialist (VOC).

One of the artworks in the exhibition is entitled "The Garden of Earthly Prosperity in Ground Zero", this artwork is the second painting from Chronicle of Diponegoro series of story. The painting is explicitly full of feminism and post-colonialism message. In this study, I will discuss how the message of feminism and post-colonialism are represented by signs inside the painting.

Inside "The Garden of Earthly Prosperity in Ground Zero" Painting that painted by Isur Suroso, there are signs that contain many meaningful messages. Each sign in the painting contains a message to signify about post-colonialism and feminism. To analyze the message inside each sign, the writer will conduct a semiotic analysis using Ferdinand De Saussure model to analyze the artwork.

Inside the painting of Prince Diponegoro by Isur Suroso, there are many signs that visualize feminism. At first, feminism was a movement that demanded equalization between women and men. But over time feminism has grown to be more specific, because the equality echoed by feminists still has many gaps that make feminism fragile and easily broken. In recent times feminism has expanded rapidly in various countries with the discourse of equality in the political and social levels. The discourse is in line with what was stated by Ann Brooks, Brooks (1997) states that feminism is a form of movement that rejects patriarchal hegemony (the dominance of leadership by men).

Along with feminism, Isur Suroso's paintings are also quite full of the message of post-colonialism. Post-colonialism does not utterly discuss what occurred after colonialism. Boehmer (1995) states that in

Post-colonialism involves a condition of society during the colonial period toward postcolonialism in the process of forming the social order. In this state, there is a process of cultural acclimatization, in which the colonial culture which is considered as a higher imperative is accustomed to the local culture to develop new socio-cultural levels. In Isur Suroso's painting titled Prince Diponegoro, the message of Post-colonialism is inevitably portrayed through the form of the signs observed on the objects inside the painting.

By implementing the Ferdinand de Saussure semiotic analysis method, the painting will be analyzed using sign signification at the signifier stage.

The signifier is the stage where the sign describes its actual meaning. The representation of the signifier portrayed in the painting will be interpreted with various points of view. The signifier that resembles visually in the artwork will be analyzed in order to know the significance of feminism and postcolonialism at the signified stage (Danesi, 2010).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prince Diponegoro is the son of Sultan Hamengkubuwana III with one of his concubines. He lived in Tegalreja together with his greatgrandmother to study religious education and refused to be elected king after his father's death, "*Kang buyut tan kenging pisah, sinambi winulang iki, langkung kerta*

*tegalreja, mapan kabeh tiyang prapti samya angungsi tedhi, ingkang santri ngungsi ngelmu, langkung rame ngibadah, punapadene wong tani, henengana kawarnaha ing Ngayogya*" (Pupuh sinom XIV, Babad Diponegoro). In this *pupuh* it was explained that Prince Diponegoro learn about religion intensively under the guidance of his greatgrandmother



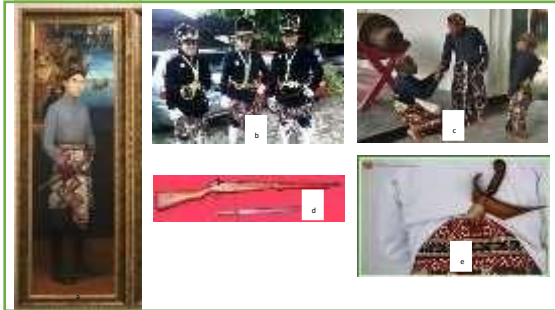
**Picture I.**

Painting of the childhood of the Diponegoro prince, the little Prince Diponegoro learned to recite the Qur'an with his great-grandmother "The garden of earthly prosperity in ground zero" 130x150 cm (3 panel) Oil on canvas in 2019 (private collection).

The painting entitled "The Garden of Earthly Prosperity in Ground Zero" is the second painting from the series of *Babad Diponegoro* visualization artwork. This painting is divided into 3-panel frames which are joined into one display with a hinge between each frame. The painting is a combination of realism and surrealism styles. This artwork displaying human objects as the foreground. The human object is the point of interest of the painting that visualized in a realism style, while the background is drawn in a surrealist style that portrays the situation of the kingdom neighborhood at that time.

The first panel portrays a man as *abdi dalem* (royal servant) with a Chinese face look. the *abdi dalem* standing with two weapons in

his hand, a *keris* (Javanese royal dagger) in the right hand, and on the other hand hold dagger of Arisaka rifle. Arisaka rifle is a weapon that popularly used by the Japanese army when colonizing Indonesia in the years 1942-1945.



**Picture 2.**

a. panel image 1, b. the clothing of the Manggala Yudha soldier, c. *abdi dalem* of Jogja *keraton*, d. Arisaka rifles and daggers, e. *Keris* and the royal servant belt

Wielding a dagger with the right hand and the front of the body is a signifier that the *abdi dalem* is in the battle stance. Instead of portraying other fighting stance, in this painting portrays contradiction. The left hand of the *abdi dalem* also wields arisaka dagger. This condition makes the two weapons in his hands inefficient to use. Wield Arisaka Dagger in the left hand is an inappropriate form of imitation of the use of weapons from the Japanese colonial era. Which the dagger equip with arisaka gun instead of wielding it with hand.

The uniforms used by the *abdi dalem* are mentioned as laken suit models, which are typical clothes of mataram kingdom high royal servants. *Laken* wear by *abdi dalem* who are on duty. These suit uniform are

usually mentioned to as *baju ageng* . But unlike the rule of wearing *baju ageng* that should be unattached, in this painting portray *baju ageng* inserted into the lower part clothes and tied with a belt. The belt that portrayed in this painting also did not use the belt of typical high royal servants. instead of using a belt for the high royal servant, the belt in the painting normally used by soldier royal servant that mention as Mandala Yudha soldiers. Mandala Yudha soldier is a sort of soldier infantry formed by the palace in the 1970s due to the warrior infantry previously banned and dissolved during the Japanese colonial era.

The royal servants wear batik cloth called *jarik* as part of the apparel. *Jarik* is a batik cloth that wore as lower limb apparel. The royal servant is wearing the *jarik* along with *baju ageng* while they are in duty. The pattern on *jarik* called batik, the pattern varies depending on the status of the royal servants and the types of activities or ceremonies. In this painting, the batik pattern is *Ceplok parang* . this pattern philosophy is to gather or unite and it used for wedding ceremonies. Commonly, the *jarik* wear by hight *abdi dalem* cover the lower body from limb to ankles. In this painting, the *jarik* is portrayed to wear from limbs to the knee. This is similar to the use of the *jarik* on Mandala Yudha Soldiers. Along with the footwear, the painting uses long socks paired

with leather shoes, that similar to Mandala Yudha Soldier's wear.

In the first panel of the painting foreground, it is very explicit that the painter was deeply influenced by post-colonialism of the VOC (Dutch) and Japanese eras. The main object of the paintings in this panel gets a significant reconstruction of signifiers from the common portrayal of *abdi dalem*. These portray that visualizations that were constructed are the signifier of second world war post-colonialism that occurred in Indonesia. The signifiers are shown such as the use of Mandala Yudha soldiers as the reference of the *abdi dalem*. In the other hand, the use of Arisaka's dagger as a weapon is influenced by the Japanese soldier in the second world war. The portrayal of the *abdi dalem* is a unification between the soldier and the administrators of the palace. the portrait of *abdi dalem* in this panel influenced by the royal guard of the British royal family who stands to keep the royal family always in safety.

The background of the main object simply portrayed the lives of inhabitants of the seashore. People live in wooden boats and broken wooden houses on the cliff. It shows three men sitting crosslegged, That portray people on a discussion. This picture also shows the well-being of coastal inhabitants who live by the sea and become fishermen.

In the first panel, the signifiers interpreted anti-patriarchy in feminism. It is illustrated by the signified that the *abdi dalem* is not in a state of battle stance, but only as a groom's man in the marriage ceremony of the royal family. This was visualized by the use of a *Jarik ceplik parang* and the use of two weapons in the hands of the *abdi dalem*. The panel also visualized post-colonialism signifiers by using infantry figures Mandala Yudha and Arisaka Dagger . As a signified of assimilation between local culture and colonial, where the colonial wear their army with uniform and weaponry.



**Picture3.**  
panel image 2, b. VOC colonial school c. children of the Qur'an era VOC colonial d. Queen of England: Queen Victoria in the 19th century

Unlike the other panels next to it, panel 2 has a width of approximately 75cm in width. This panel is the main panel that portrays the childhood of Prince Diponegoro. The painting visualized the time when prince Diponegoro was raised by his greatgrandmother. There are two human subjects in this panel, different from other panels that only portray a single person each. On the other hand, this panel is set as the main panel because the royal family portraits set.

After the sultan died, Prince Diponegoro was asked to replace his father Sultan Hamengkubuwana III to become a sultan (king). The king died when prince Diponegoro in young age. Prince Diponegoro refused and preferred to learn deeper religion. To learn a deeper religion, he lives with his great grandmother in the rural area far away from the royal neighborhood.

This panel portrays Prince Diponegoro learn with his great-grandmother guidance. On this panel, there are two characters in the main objects in the picture. First-person is Prince Diponegoro who is studying on the bench, and his great-grandmother standing before him. Prince's great-grandmother portrays read a book that seems to be guiding Prince Diponegoro.

On the other hand, the background of the painting portrays fertile agricultural land, and a group of people who look on a boat is busy with their own business. This portrait is a visualization of the *pupuh sinom XIV*. This *pupuh* (poems) tells about rice fields in the area of Tegalrejo. Tegalrejo was the residence of Prince Diponegoro when he was young. In this panel it is illustrated that Prince Diponegoro learns to recite the Qur'an with his great-grandmother. Prince's great-grandmother Diponegoro was portrayed as a young woman with a range of ages 25-35 years old. In this painting, it is portrayed that her grandmother wore a luxurious light blue gown and white silk outfit. This outfit style is like a British royal

woman in the 19th century. Prince's grandmother also used bun hair like a royal woman in Java. The figure of Prince Diponegoro's great-grandmother is a contradictory portrait of the life of a Muslim boarding school, where women in a boarding school must wear a hijab to cover their head, this portrait is different from the depiction in a painting.

The contradiction is in the portrait Prince Diponegoro's great-grandmother is a signified of the message of post-colonialism and feminism. The message of postcolonialism was present at the signifier stage, the great-grandmother's dress related to portraying the figure of the *keraton* (kingdom) and *pesantran* (Islamic boarding house) women rather than visualized with the clothes of British Royal woman in the 19th century.

The signifier of feminism was visualized by the great-grandmother of Prince Diponegoro where she was teaching Prince Diponegoro to *ngaji* (recite the Qur'an). This portrait is a contradictory form of gender inequality at that time, where women were considered worthless to study and get an education. The message of feminism was constructed with a clear signifier of the portraits of Prince Diponegoro's great-grandmother. She portrays as a teacher figure just like the women emancipation figure in Indonesia R.A. Kartini.

The portraits of Prince Diponegoro, show unusual thing is the way he holds the Qur'an. Students commonly read the Qur'an by placing the book on the table and recite it meanwhile the finger or pointing on the Qur'an. The portrait in the painting looks the way he holds the Qur'an refers more to the learning process at VOC colonial schools.

On this panel, the message of Prince Diponegoro's religious life was less emphasized by the artist. The artwork more emphasized the message of Post-colonialism in it. This can be noticed from the way the prince's great-grandmother dressed in outfits like the British Empire contrasted to the life of the *pesantren* and Javanese royal family. Likewise, with the portraits of Prince Diponegoro, the signifier of Dutch post-colonialism showed very clear. The portraits of him who was studying the Qur'an but visualize as learning like in a VOC colonial school.



**Picture 4.**

panel image 3, b. royal servants c. female police d. Lee Enfield's Rifle SMLE

The third panel portrays the presence of a female *abdi dalem* who uses a long-barrel

weapon and the background of this panel is the most gloomy scene, where bones and destruction are portrayed. The background of this third panel could be a post-war image that emerged many casualties in the Mataram Empire (Jogjakarta now). In this panel, the main focus is the object of the female *abdi dalem* carrying a Lee Enfield SMLE rifle which is the standard rifle used by British infantry in the first world war. this rifle is a semi-automatic rifle that can fire 30 bullets at once. But in this painting, the rifle has a scope or binoculars to make it easier to aim at targets over long distances. But Lee Enfield is not a weapon for sharpshooter or sniper use.

The dresses that are used are the same as the male *abdi dalem* in first panel, from the signifiers shown here the artist wants to display the message of feminism by presenting the social politics equality between man and woman. The portray of the woman *abdi dalem* in third panel encountered a very drastic reconstruction. The royal *abdi dalem*, in general, used *kemben* (Javanese traditional outfit) and *kebaya* (Javanese traditional dress), here they were shown as warriors like female special police in Indonesia today.

## CONCLUSION

Isur Suroso's painting entitled "The Garden of Earthly Prosperity in Ground Zero" is the result of visualization of the *Pupuh Sinom XIV* which narrates about the childhood of Prince Diponegoro who was learning to recite Quran under the guidance of his great-

grandmother. There are many contradictive in this painting, both contradictory and interrelated, including the message of feminism with postcolonialism, surrealism with realism, and other visualizations that are interrelated and fulfill each other.

Visualization of pupuh sinom XIV by Isur Suroso in his paintings has a pretty solid post-colonial message. Although the visualization shown is more inclined to British colonialism rather than the VOC colonialism. Which at that time Indonesia was still colonized by VOC and just colonized by Britain in the next century. The Portrait in the painting is attached from the painter's attempt to equalize the palace with the European Royal. Representatives of the *abdi dalem* (royal servants), Prince Diponegoro, and the prince's great-grandmother get broad deformation changing from dress, apparel, accessories, and gestures.

The message of feminism in this painting is shown by rejecting patriarchal hegemony which is still very solid in the *keraton*. The representation of gender equality is illustrated by the figure of a woman *abdi dalem* and Prince Diponegoro's great-grandmother. Illustrated with a woman *abdi dalem* who has socialpolitical equality with a man *abdi dalem*. it also portrayed Prince Diponegoro's great-grandmother who became the figure of an educated woman who was teaching Prince Diponegoro. The figure of the woman in the

painting seems to explicitly reject the patriarchy in the *Keraton*.

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