

# **“Harta Tahta Siapa”, Deconstruction of Priyayi - Wong Cilik Binary Opposition in Photographic Works**

## **“Harta Tahta Siapa”, Desconstrução de Priyayi - Wong Cilik Oposição Binária em Obras Fotográficas**

**Eko Budhi Susanto<sup>1</sup>**

**Yasraf Amir Piliang<sup>2</sup>**

**Setiawan Sabana<sup>3</sup>**

**Intan Rizki Mutiaz<sup>4</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

*In the photographic archive of the Dutch East Indies there is photographs of Javanese kings. Among the photos are portraits that were actually made to depict the figure of a king. The photo production was staged in such a way as to present the image of the king. “Harta Tahta Siapa” is a photographic work that deconstructs the visual codes of the king in photographs as a form of expression of the postmodern society towards the priyayi - wong cilik binary opposition. This work does not want to side with one of these social classes, but instead tries to dissolve it. The stages of work began with analyzing photos of Javanese kings and sorting out the visual code in them. The visual codes in the photo are then transformed into the social life of the lower classes using visual metaphors.*

**Keywords:** *Binary Opposition; Deconstruction; Dutch Indies Photography Archives; King of Java.*

<sup>1</sup> Doutorando FSRD, Bandung Institute of Technology

<sup>2</sup> Doutor pela Faculdade de Belas Artes e Design no Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB).

<sup>3</sup> Doutor em Arte Visual e Design in the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB).

<sup>4</sup> Doutor na Padjadjaran University.

## RESUMO

No arquivo fotográfico das Índias Orientais Holandesas há fotografias de reis javaneses. Entre as fotos estão retratos que, na verdade, foram feitos para retratar a figura de um rei. A produção fotográfica foi encenada de forma a apresentar a imagem do rei. “Harta Tahta Siapa” é um trabalho fotográfico que desconstrói os códigos visuais do rei em fotografias como forma de expressão da sociedade pós-moderna em direção à oposição binária priyayi - wong cilik. Este trabalho não se coloca do lado de uma dessas classes sociais, mas sim busca dissolvê-las. As etapas do trabalho começaram com a análise de fotos de reis javaneses e a classificação do código visual delas. Os códigos visuais da foto são então transformados na vida social das classes mais baixas por meio de metáforas visuais.

**Palavras-chave:** Oposição Binária; Desconstrução; Arquivos Fotográficos Das Índias Holandesas; Rei de Java.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, Javanese people have recognized the social stratification of priyayi and wong cilik. The priyayi are usually associated with the aristocratic group or honorable jobs, while the wong cilik are associated with commoners and menial jobs. The priyayi are also believed to be noble people, as a consequence the group leader or king usually comes from the priyayi (Suratno, 2006).

The Dutch East Indies photographic archive in the form of portrait photos and activity photos straightforwardly provides evidence of this. In these archival photos, usually the indigenous elite or priyayi wear luxurious clothes, sit in chairs or stand, while when there are lower class people or the underprivileged in the same frame, the clothes used are simpler, the position in the photo is usually on the edge or sit on the floor. Photos like this, for example, can be seen in Kinsbergen's portraits of regents and palace families (Boer; Asser, 2005). In other photos, for example, it can be seen how Woodbury makes luxury studio sets for photo shoots of the Sultan, Queen, and the royal family, while photos of ordinary people are made with plain setting (Wachlin, 1994). Susanto also explained how the difference between priyayi and wong cilik shooting, both from the photographer's working method, and from the use of the photos. In a priyayi photo shoot, the subject of the photo is the client, so that the photo shoot for the benefit of the priyayi is usually through an idea approved by the subject. In the wong cilik photo shoot, the subject is a model, the photo idea is entirely in the photographer's power (Susanto; Piliang; Sabana, 2019). Priyayi photos are usually produced as luxury items that are displayed at home and belong to the subject who is a client. Photographs of the lower class or wong cilik are usually produced and then traded by photographers or printers, for example in the form of postcards or books (Sunjayadi, 2008). From the

explanation above, it can be seen how the binary opposition of priyayi – wong cilik was also constructed in photographic works in that era.

In the postcolonial era, the social and political structure in Java changed. There are more opportunities for the poor to work hard and improve their standard of living so that they become the modern version of the priyayi group. This modern version of the priyayi may be slightly different from the classic priyayi who also bears the title of nobility in his name and is recognized as a descendant of a respected aristocrat in addition to having a well-established economic level of course. Although it is possible for the underprivileged to reach the position of modern priyayi, of course it is difficult because of the minimal initial capital. In addition, association and lifestyle are also fields that new priyayi candidates must penetrate. This is how modern Java stretches, which is more flexible than the previous era. The use of studio photographic works as a tools for family or personal photograph for wong cilik nowadays to make visualization of their image as priyayi. It is common in Java, that wealthier wong cilik often use photo studio services to take photos of themselves in a luxurious way (Wasino; Hartatik; Shintasiwi, 2021).

Even so, the distinctions, class codes, are still attached to Javanese society. Priyayi are still attached to well-established economic conditions, positions in government, luxurious lifestyles, luxurious foods, gedong houses, etc., while the wong cilik are still attached to poor economic conditions, menial jobs, fields, or jobs that are not obviously, poor lifestyles, huts, slums, etc. Even the labels of priyayi and wong cilik are still attached to the Javanese community. Modernism for Javanese society is a new transformation of Javanese feudalism. The domination of power is no longer based on God's revelation but based on the economic level. However, the spirit of colonial era feudalism is still ingrained, meaning that the royal family and government officials are still important and respectable positions in Javanese society apart from the conglomerates.

Priyayi hegemony in Javanese society always finds a way to launch its ideology as the number one, respected, intellectual, noble people. However, in social life, the wong cilik always find a way to narrate their anti-establishment ideology in interesting, sometimes witty, sometimes dramatic ways, so as to attract the attention of the general public. Various kinds of works of art that revolve around the narration of the daily life of the wong cilik continue to be echoed. In campursari music, for example, narrations of lower class daily life, anti-party narratives, continue to be echoed as something commonplace and not something despicable (Setiawan; Tallapessy; Subaharianto, 2020).

The work entitled "Harta Tahta Siapa" tries to build a portrait of the identity of the lower class using the visual code for the portrait of the King of Java. The first step is to describe the visual code in the portrait photo archive of the King of Java. Furthermore, the visual code is reused in building portraits of lower-class people. The use of a double

code strategy which is a combination of the visual portrait code of the king and the code of the lower class is carried out to deconstruct the binary opposition of priyayi – wong cilik.

The work “Harta Tahta Siapa” does not want to take sides but tries to dilute the dichotomy of priyayi - wong cilik. As the relationship between photography and fine arts began to melt in the postmodern era, “Harta Tahta Who” intends to voice an ideology of anti-binary opposition. This idea is actually based on the ancient Javanese philosophy of life which is different from the modern-minded western society.

In his book, Ong Hok Ham states that the king in Javanese culture is chosen based on God’s revelation (Ham, 2018). That is, at a time when the reign of a dynasty has ended, it will soon be replaced by a new dynasty which is very likely to have no relationship with the previous dynasty. At the time of the change, the priyayi and the wong cilik exchanged positions. In Javanese proverbs, it is also mentioned a lot to stay mingled and become society in general without distinguishing who is higher in position, and to always live a simple life. For example the proverb “dhuwur wekasane, endhek wiwitani” which means “highness at the end, lowness at the beginning” or “sugih without bandha, digdaya without aji” which means “rich without having possessions, magic without having magic” others “ana dina ana upa” which means “there is a day when there is rice” (Achmad, 2017). These three proverbs teach Javanese to always live simply. That is, social class is only a role in society, but in fact every individual must break away from this dichotomy.

## **2. AESTHETIC OF DECONSTRUCTION IN PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS**

The term deconstruction was first introduced by Derrida as a critique of the principle of binary opposition developed by Saussure (Piliang, 2019). In binary opposition there are always two things side by side where one is superior to the other, just like the priyayi – the cilik. Derrida’s deconstruction gave birth to the term *différance*, namely that a thing exists because there is an opposite, and between that thing and its opposition are interrelated and form a unity. This principle is in line with Sumardjo’s thoughts on pre-modern Indonesian society, including Javanese society which adheres to a dualistic-antagonistic notion which states that reality always consists of complementary pairs of oppositional twins (Sumardjo, 2014).

**Figure 1** - Some photos from Jimbo's work, "Indonesian Heroes"



**Font:** Author.<sup>5</sup>

The work "Harta Tahta Siapa" adopts Derrida's thought of deconstruction as the basic principle of his work, namely placing the priyayi - wong cilik not as a pair of binary oppositions but as each other. The strategy of deconstruction in works of art in general is the destruction of the general convention code structure into a new, contextual or subjective code. In the medium of photography, deconstruction is usually done with several alternative strategies, such as pastiche, parody and kitsch. Pastiche is an aesthetic idiom which means to borrow, in this context borrowing existing visual codes to bring up new ideas in the form of reconstruction, sympathy, or appreciation of previous works. Parody also borrows code from the past, but has a different purpose, usually in the form of criticism, satire, or criticism of previous works. Kitsch means cheap or low taste, which is the anti-high taste. Kitsch has the spirit of mass reproduction, adaptation, and simulation of high taste (Syafriil, 2012).

Photography as a medium that is considered to rely more on technology and can be reproduced is considered a medium of low taste, cheapness, kitsch. In the postmodern era, photography has become one of the favorite medium of choice for artists. The visual style of photography is also adapted by painting in the postmodern era. Many

<sup>5</sup> Accessed from <https://indoartnow.com/artists/jim-allen-abel> at 27 Mei 2021.

photographic works use the pastiche strategy of previous paintings and photographic works. One of the photographic works built using the pastiche strategy is the series “Indonesian Heroes” by Jim Allen Abel or Jimbo (picture 1). In this work Jimbo questions the faces of national heroes in the form of illustrations used in various elementary school textbooks and on posters of national heroes for teaching basic education in Indonesia. On the one hand, Jimbo’s work reconstructs the visual signs contained in the posters as a form of appreciation, but also as a step to question the truth, whether so far the public has really known the true faces of these national heroes, or the posters. only simulation is used. In the work “Indonesia Heroes” Jimbo becomes a model in his work. So although it is heavier on pastiche, Jimbo’s work also contains parodies.

**Figure 2** - “Untitled #446”, 2008, One of Cindy Sherman’s works



**Font:** Author.<sup>6</sup>

Cindy Sherman’s strategy of working like this has actually been done first. Sherman made a series of portraits of famous people both fictional and real by parodying them using his own face. The element of parody in Sherman’s work is much thicker than that of Jimbo’s. Sherman is very good at sorting out important visual codes to describe a character, not forgetting to include parody codes that criticize and often mock visually the characters he plays in his work. Sherman is actually playing double coding in his

<sup>6</sup> Accessed from <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1154> at 27 Mei 2021.



works. Sherman combines two usually contradictory code systems in his works. One visual code marks the chosen character, the other usually uses visual markers of clowns or faces in comedy stages.

**Figure 3** - “Jesus is My Homeboy”, David LaChapelle’s work which is a pastiche from Da Vinci’s The Last Supper



**Font:** Author<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to the works of Jimbo and Sherman, there are many other photographic works that re-visualize previous works, for example from famous paintings with new ideas which therefore will always cross two or more code systems, one painting code system is imitated, the other is an idea about the problem. -problems raised in the work. One of the most deconstructed paintings in photography is Leonardo Da Vinci’s The Last Supper.

### 3. VISUAL CODE ANALYSIS IN PORTRAIT PHOTOS OF THE KING OF JAVA

The digital archive of Dutch East Indies photography contains various photos that have been captured by many photographers operating in the Dutch East Indies from the beginning of the photography era until the independence of Indonesia. The photos are collected and archived by KITLV. Because the sources are very diverse, the completeness of the data also varies, especially regarding the origin of making the photos, it is not

<sup>7</sup> Accessed from [https://artgalleryofballarat.com.au/gallery\\_exhibitions/bifb17/](https://artgalleryofballarat.com.au/gallery_exhibitions/bifb17/) at 27 Mei 2021

necessarily the archivist who knows the purpose and technique of shooting in the field. Many of these photo archives can also be accessed online through the website <http://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl> with a CC BY 4.0 file access license, which means that downloaders are allowed to share these photos in various mediums and formats, and may even adapt, transform, and make it the basic material for the creation of other works for any purpose even commercial by notifying the reference from which the material was downloaded (CreativeCommons, nd).

**Figure 4** - Photos of the King containing the Javanese King code system



**Font:** Author.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Accessed from [digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl](http://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl) at 5 maret 2021.



**Figure 5** - Portrait photograph of Sultan Hamengkoe Bowono VIII



**Font:** Author<sup>9</sup>.

From the various photos available, there are a number of portrait photos, namely human photos that are deliberately made to display figures, characters, and personalities. In the collection of portrait photos there are photos of the King of Java, namely the King of the Kasunanan and the Sultanate. There are also several kinds of photos of this King with poses that can be grouped into several types, namely the pose of the King as a leader in Europe in general, the photo of the King as a war general, but the most interesting is the photo of the King which shows the figure of Javanese leadership. The king in the Javanese leadership philosophy is as a representative of God on earth who is obliged to maintain the safety of nature and all its contents as well as the nation and state (Achmad, 2018).

Of all the photos of the King, the photos in Figure 4 are the photos that were chosen because of their set which depicts the King on the throne, thus showing the codes of

<sup>9</sup> Accessed from [digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl](https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl) at 5 maret 2021.

his King, which in Javanese leadership philosophy is God's representative on earth, leader for all nature and the creatures in it. The photo in Figure 5 is taken as a reference because the composition is most suitable to show the figure of the King of Java. Below is a description of the markers in the photo:

1. Throne with footrest: seat of the King, a sign that the subject is King. Seats without backrests so you have to sit up straight. There is a foot mount so that the subject's feet do not directly touch the ground/earth. A throne with a design like this symbolizes the shelter of a holy person, with a higher degree than other humans on earth.
2. *Cepuri* (betel box) on the left of the subject and *kecohan* (place of spitting) on the right of the subject: identical with the preferences/habits of the King (and also the Javanese people). The *cepuri* and trickery used have a visual form that looks luxurious in the photo, depicting the welfare of the King, as well as the welfare of the country.
3. The king sits on the throne: The king as the subject of the photo sits on the throne which is the place where God's representative on earth takes shelter. The position of the feet (as well as other body parts) not touching the ground/earth depicts the King as a holy being, a messenger of God.
4. Sitting Upright Gesture: Sitting Gesture with the back straight, looking straight ahead, hands by the side, elbows bent, arms resting on the thighs, fingers meeting in the middle (parallel to the waist), legs wide apart. This position illustrates the attitude of the King, open to overshadowing the aspirations of the people, strong and firm in facing problems, but also authoritative, courageous, alert, to fight threats.
5. Expression of the King: A flat facial expression as a symbol of authority, firmness, and commitment in leading the country.
6. King's clothes: The clothes used are the oversized clothes of the palace. This outfit is usually used on official palace events. In more detail about clothing should be discussed in a separate sub-chapter, however briefly clothing as an extension of the body, on the ears there are ear decorations so that at a glance the ears are sharper in this case as a symbol of angels, in this sense the King is depicted as an angel or god who incarnates to earth. The king also used a head covering, as a sign of a holy, honorable person. The clothes used are *beskap* which is an adaptation of European suits. *Beskap* described the King as a respected person, on a par with European nobility. The star used is a symbol of the leader of the country in the sultanate / sultanate area. The *parang batik* cloth used has the meaning of never giving up, also has the meaning

of always improving oneself, also fighting for the welfare of the people, embracing all levels of society regardless of social status.

7. Photo composition, placing the King sitting on the throne in the middle of the frame, with cepuri and kecohon on his left and right: Visually placing the subject as the center of attention, a symbol that the King is the center of the universe, the center of the country, the highest leader, a role model for the community.

The seven aspects above briefly summarize the role of the Javanese King according to the Javanese leadership philosophy, as well as build the image of the Javanese King who understands and practices Astabrata, namely the eight behaviors, or eight actions that a leader must have (Suratno, 2006).

#### **4. WORKING PROCESS**

As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, “Harta Tahta Siapa” departs from the idea of anti binary options for the priyayi – wong cilik. This work sees the dichotomy of priyayi - wong cilik as an inseparable unit, who need each other, both of which must exist and be balanced, this is in accordance with the mind of the ancient Javanese society as expressed by Sumardjo in Aesthetic Paradox (Sumardjo, 2014). Interestingly, this paradoxical expression was also put forward by the postmodern philosopher Derrida’s deconstruction. According to Derrida, such a dichotomy of priyayi – wong cilik is more accurately seen as a *différance*, namely that these two things are related to each other, and one exists because of the other (Piliang, 2019). The dichotomy of priyayi - wong cilik is more appropriate to be called harmony than contestation. Therefore, the concept that is conveyed in this work is a holistic view of Javanese society, where the upper class and the lower class are not in opposition, but are in a harmonious relationship, both of which are needed to maintain the balance of the Javanese social structure.

Rather than depicting the harmony between the priyayi and wong cilik classes, this work employs a deconstructive approach by blending their visual signifiers. The art project “Harta Tahta Siapa” utilizes a pastiche strategy with some parodic elements, aiming to portray the wong cilik subjects by applying the visual codes derived from archival photographs of Javanese kings discussed in the preceding section. The strategy of crossing code or intertext, which is crossing two or more code systems, is carried out to produce a double code of priyayi – wong cilik. The wong cilik markers from the selected subjects were deliberately rearranged using the visual composition of the colonial era portrait of the Javanese King. The creation of the work is done first by composing the basic composition, namely taking the composition of the portrait

of Sultan HBVIII as shown in Figure 5. The composition that is built in general, places the subject in the middle of the frame, sitting on his 'throne', complete with leg stands. Then, flanking the subject on either side are objects that function as symbolic regalia, taken from and representing the individual's everyday life and activities. These objects, positioned in a manner similar to the kecoh and cepuri displayed in the reference photograph, serve to characterize the subject as a prosperous and esteemed figure, akin to the depiction of the Javanese King. The subject's pose follows the King's pose. The background is chosen based on the location of the subject, also to be a marker of the identity of the subject, besides of course the properties used.

Technical shooting is done using a full frame digital camera, with a focal length close to the normal view of the human eye (+-50mm). The position of the camera is almost always parallel to the photographer's stomach. This is done to get the shooting angle close to the reference photo (figure 5). In shooting, natural lighting is used mixed with artificial lighting using a flash from the top right of the photographer. The use of a flash that is brighter than ambient light is done to give an accent, make it clear that the photo made is not natural, and also becomes a marker for studio photos, so that the photos made are absurdly like photos in a studio.





**Figure 6 - Harta Thata Siapa #1**



**Figure 10 - Harta Thata Siapa #5**



**Figure 7 - Harta Thata Siapa #2**



**Figure 11 - Harta Thata Siapa #6**



**Figure 8 - Harta Thata Siapa #3**



**Figure 12 - Harta Thata Siapa #7**



**Figure 9 - Harta Thata Siapa #4**



**Figure 12 - Harta Thata Siapa #8**



In the process, the artist who uses the camera with the team goes around and chooses a subject at random, asking for the subject's willingness to be photographed on request. The shooting process was carried out in three cities, Bandung, Surakarta, and Jogjakarta. The choice of the city of Bandung to represent people who are not in the palace area, the city of Surakarta to represent the 'citizens' of the Surakarta Sultanate, while the city of Yogyakarta represents the 'citizens' of the Yogyakarta Sultanate. The artist and team came to the location, then observed the activities of the prospective subject. After that, get acquainted and explain the purpose of the team's arrival. In addition, the team also discussed with subjects who were willing to be photographed regarding the legitimacy of the palace in the current era. After the discussion session, the team began to arrange the shooting location, choose the properties to be used in the photo shoot, and choose an interesting and appropriate setting. After that, the shooting process was carried out. From the entire shooting process, 18 subjects were willing to be photographed. From the 18 photos produced, 8 photos were finally selected based on their visual resemblance to the reference photo and parody aspects of the work made (figure 6 – figure 13).

## 5. WORK REVIEWS

The work "Harta Tahta Siapa" (figure 6 – picture 13) is a portrait series of lower class people built using a visual code system for portraits of the King of Java. This work, which consists of 8 photos, is a parody of pastiche from the portrait photo of Hamengkoe Boewono VIII (picture 5). In the original work, Hamengkoe Boewono is in the center of the frame, sitting upright on his throne facing the camera, wearing oversized clothes from the Yogyakarta Palace. On the left and right there are cepuri (betel box) and kecohon (a place to spit when chewing) which is a Javanese habit. The shape of the cepuri and kecohon were chosen to be very luxurious to represent palace life, representing the life of the upper class, priyayi, who were luxurious. All of these things, the throne, clothes, property, as well as the photo background were deliberately chosen to build the image of the King, the leader of the Javanese people. In addition to representing the image of the Kingdom, the image of the King also represents the image of the upper class/priyayi

society which contrasts with the lower class/wong little society.

In the wong cilik portrait series entitled “Harta Tahta Siapa”, the chosen subject is placed in their habitat, in their ‘Kingdom’, in their area of operation, in their workplace. The properties used are also related to their daily lives, which automatically represent their identity stereotypes, as well as the clothes/costumes used. However, the poses chosen, the layout, the framing used uses a similar arrangement to the portrait photo of the King of Java. This is done to put ordinary people in the position of important people, respected people, the center of attention, leaders, duty bearers, extremes, messengers of God.

The portrait of the fruit merchant in Figure 11. “Harta Tahta Siapa #6” reveals a subject who is disconnected from the traditional Javanese kingdom and its sociopolitical dynamics. Hailing from Bandung, a city distant from the royal center, the merchant appears unaware of the intricacies of the kingdom’s operation and the historical significance of the priyayi-wong cilik dichotomy. His perspective suggests a rejection of the notion that social status is predetermined by divine decree through family lineage. Instead, he believes that one’s ability to attain nobility is contingent on individual effort and luck, rather than birthright. This challenges the traditional belief system that rigidly defines social hierarchies within Javanese society.

The photograph features the fruit merchant’s own belongings as props, with his fruit stall car serving as the backdrop. The moment captured depicts a routine transaction in his stall, with a Doraemon-costumed busker passing by and vehicles in the distance, creating an everyday scene in a Bandung residential area. To contrast with the Sultan’s portrait, the subject is positioned as the central figure, seated on a throne constructed from wooden fruit crates. The foot mount is also made from the same material, while the carpet is a tarpaulin he uses to cover his products. The cepuri and kecohon are replaced by a fruit scale and a stall sign displaying the prices of his popular mango fruit. The subject’s attire, consisting of a casual shirt, jeans, and sneakers, with a hat instead of the King’s kuluk, and a fruit sack instead of batik, further emphasizes the contrast with the King’s regalia. Despite following the King’s pose, the subject’s awkwardness reflects his unfamiliarity with such a role, highlighting the dissonance between his ordinary life and the elevated status portrayed in the photograph.

Here there is a process of deconstruction of the established codes of the priyayi - wong cilik. On the one hand, the parody of the King’s portrait using the subject of the lower class of society may be an insult on the part of the circle, because it seems to ‘equalize’ the position of the King and the lower class. On the other hand, the arrangement of portrait photos of lower class people using the style of photo arrangement of the King is an effort to glorify the position of the lower class. The audience’s mixed feelings between funny, sad, shallow, cheap, unnatural, are things that are deliberately raised in this work.

Awkward poses are deliberately displayed as they are as an expression that posing is not a form of accidental body gestures and expressions, but comes from the identity of the subject. Ertem said, poses are directed, done with intention, but what is emitted when the shooting process occurs is a paradox between the subject who wants to display a certain image (in this case the King of Java) and his hidden identity. This happens because when the shutter-release button is pressed for a fraction of a second, a void occurs which causes the subject's true self to stick out (Ertem, 2006). As a result, in this photo shoot, the King pose that was forced on a subject who had never had the slightest thought of becoming a King or leader became difficult and awkward.

The artist's approach involves photographing subjects in Bandung who lack familiarity with the history and traditions of the Javanese kingdom, and contrasting them with subjects in Solo and Yogyakarta, where the kingdom was centered. This strategy aims to reveal the continued existence of the binary opposition between the priyayi (aristocratic class) and the wong cilik (common people) in both the past and present. By capturing the subjects' gestures and expressions, the artist hopes to gain insights into their perspectives on this socioeconomic divide, providing a more nuanced understanding of the current state of this dynamic. Interestingly, the artist found that even among subjects in Solo and Yogyakarta, some of whom were aware of the history and traditions, all the subjects shared a similar indifference or rejection towards the notion of nobility, suggesting a shift in societal attitudes towards the historical class hierarchy.

For instance, in Figure 13. *Harta Tahta Siapa #8* which was taken at the southern entrance of the Yogyakarta Kraton (palace), the subject is a peddler who operates daily in that area and interacts with both local residents and tourists. However, the peddler views the Kraton merely as a tourist attraction, without a deeper understanding of its political and social significance in the local community. He also lacks knowledge and interest in the history of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, both past and present. This perspective is shared by most members of the society. While there are some who are aware of the history and maintain their status as wong cilik (commoners), they now represent a minority, primarily consisting of the older generation.

The findings of this study suggest that the contemporary social landscape in Java is undergoing a gradual transformation, where the traditional hierarchical structure is being challenged and questioned by individuals who do not ascribe to the conventional notions of nobility and social status. This shift can be attributed to various factors, including increased social mobility, exposure to diverse worldviews, and a reexamination of the legitimacy of the priyayi-wong cilik dichotomy (Blake, 2013; Wasino; Hartatik; Shintasiwi, 2021).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The work “Harta Tahta Siapa” is a work of visual art that uses the medium of photography. This work is a parody of pastiche from the photo archive of the Dutch East Indies, namely the photo of Sultan Hamengkoe Boewono VIII. The photo of the Sultan was chosen because it is considered the most representative of the photo that displays the image of the Javanese kings. In the end, this work, which was made with the intention of dissolving the dichotomy of the binary opposition of priyayi – wong cilik, had to give in to the situation, that to this day social class distinctions still exist. This can be seen from the photo, that even though it is in its habitat, and conditioned like an important person who is the center of attention, the subject of the chosen photo is still awkward. This is because in his life he has never felt the same as those who are more wealthy. That is, always feel left out, ‘second-class’ in the social field of society.

Another thing that can be concluded is that the issue of leadership is more than just the nobility or the upper class/community, but there is a leadership spirit that must be possessed. This is reflected in Raja’s photos, and this personality radiance cannot be manipulated in portraits of lower-class people even though the visual arrangement has followed the photo of Raja. In other works, it can be tried to photograph the lower class people in a room with the actual arrangement of the King’s throne, with luxurious goods and clothes that are also luxurious. With such an arrangement, will the King’s personality be radiated from the portrait staged like that, or will the result be even more awkward because the subject is alienated from his natural habitat.

Based on the research and the process of creating this photography project, the artist has found that the post-colonial societal dynamics in Indonesia, particularly in the regions of Solo and Yogyakarta where the study was conducted, have evolved beyond the traditional binary opposition of priyayi (aristocratic class) and wong cilik (common people). This dichotomy is now largely a historical construct, documented in literary sources, rather than a prevailing social reality. While the Javanese kingdom and its associated traditions continue to exist, they have been transformed and integrated into contemporary societal structures in a more nuanced manner. The descendants of the royal lineages maintain their cultural practices, but the significance of the historical class hierarchy has diminished in the broader social landscape.

## REFERENCES

- ACHMAD, Sri Wintala. Asal-usul & sejarah orang jawa. Yogyakarta: Araska, 2017.
- ACHMAD, Sri Wintala. Falsafah kepemimpinan jawa: Dari Sultan Agung Hingga Hamengkubuwana IX. Yogyakarta: Araska, 2018.
- BLAKE, Megan. Rice talks: food and community in a Vietnamese town. *Social & Cultral Geography*, London, v. 15, n. 4, p. 472-473, 2013.
- BOER, Gerda Theuns-de; ASSER, Saskia. Isidore van Kinsbergen : (1821-1905) fotopionier en theatermaker in Nederlands- Indie, photo pioneer and Theatre Maker in the Dutch East Indies. Amsterdam: KITLV Press, 2005.
- ERTEM, Fulya. Undoing recognition : a critical approach to pose in photography. 2006. Thesis (Doctor of Philosophy in Art, Design and Architechture) – The Institute of Fine Arts, Bilkent Üniversitesi, Ankara, Turquia, 2006.
- HAM, Ong Hok. Wahyu yang hilang negeri yang guncang. Jakarta: KPG, 2018.
- PILIANG, Yasraf Amir. Semiotika dan hipersemiotika: kode, gaya, dan matinya makna. Edited by Alfatri Adlin and Taufiqurrahman. Yogyakarta: Cantrik Pusaka, 2019.
- SETIAWAN, Ikwan; TALLAPESSY, Albert; SUBAHARIANTO, Andang. Poskolonialitas Jawa dalam Campursari: Dari Era Orde Baru hingga Reformasi. *Jurnal Panggung*, Bandung Indonésia, v. 30, n. 2, p. 251–76, 2020.
- SUMARDJO, Jakob. Estetika paradoks. Bandung: Penerbit Kelir, 2014.
- SUNJAYADI, Achmad. Mengabadikan estetika : fotografi Dalam Promosi Pariwisata Kolonial Di Hindia-Belanda. *Wacana*, Depok, Indonesia, v. 10, n. 2, p. 300–315. 2008.
- SURATNO, Pardi. Sang Pemimpin Menurut Astabrata, Wulang Reh, Tripama, Dasa Darma Raja. Yogyakarta: Penerbit ADIWACANA, 2006.
- SUSANTO, Eko, Budhi; PILIANG, Yasraf, Amir; SABANA, Setiawan. Relasi Kekuasaan Antara Fotografer Dan Subject Matter Pada Arsip Foto Portrait Orang Indonesia Era Kolonial. *Seminar Nasional Seni Dan Desain 2019*, 2019.
- SYAFRIL, Syafril. Idiom-idiom Estetik Pastiche, Parodi, Kitsch, Camp, dan Skizofrenia dalam Karya Teater Postmodern Indonesia Jalan Lurus. *Komposisi: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Seni*, Padang, Indonesia, v. 9, n. 2, p. 132-142, 2012.