

# Representations of Diponegoro after Arbitrary Interpretations

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**Abstract:** This research is to investigate how Prince Diponegoro - one of the National Heroes in the Republic of Indonesia - is presented in visual works either in two or three-dimensional media. Of the various vernacular expressions scattered in many places in Yogyakarta, it can be said that Diponegoro - the eldest son of Sultan Hamengkubuwono III of the Yogyakarta Sultanate - was presented in various expressions, which seemed to be based on arbitrary interpretations and arbitrary conception. . This research was conducted by first observing Diponegoro's drawings from a number of works - paintings, sculptures, and reliefs - then observing again using visual data and historical texts from official sources that can be accessed by the public. Each selected artwork is considered a sign; its signifier is analyzed, interpreted, and assessed to answer research questions. In general, there are many interpretations of Diponegoro, causing many perceptions, about Diponegoro. Based on the findings obtained, it can be said that the representation of Diponegoro in various visual works have developed in such an arbitrage, even from what is symptomatic can be said to have shown the symptoms of anarchism.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Prince Diponegoro, the first son of Sultan Hamengkubuwono (HB) III of the Yogyakarta Sultanate, is one of the Indonesia's national heroes. He lead the Java War – a fierce and bloody battle - against Dutch Colonialism in 1825, until 1830. Diponegoro is very popular in various communities in Yogyakarta and its surroundings, but the opposite happens in the Palace of Yogyakarta Kasunan itself. The history of Diponegoro related to the War of Java, and what causes the war is still a 'mystery' until now. Diponegoro actually had culturally defected from the Sultanate in the 1810s, when the Sultanate was legally and militarily under control of the British government in Java, represented by Lieutenant-Governor Stamford Raffles of the Dutch East Indies (1911-1816) (Wikipedia: Stamford Raffles); the court was internally governed by an Advisory Board consisting of 4 people. (Roni Sodewo, 2016). The ruler at the time was Sultan HB IV, who was too young to rule the Sultanate. He was crowned as Sulatan Hamengkubuwono IV when he was 9 years old in 2010 when he was 9 years old, replacing the deceased Sultan HB III (Diponegoro

and the new sultan's father). (Roni Sodewo, 2016: 22-23).

Diponegoro then lead the Java War as a protest against the interference from the Dutch towards the sultanate's internal affairs, such as influencing the appointment of the next sultan, HB V, who was 2 years old when he was crowned sultan in 1820. (Sodewo, 2016). The valiant prince, known as the leader of the Java people against Dutch colonialism, has been the subject of many art forms, especially after his capture in Magelang on March 30, 1830, that marked the end of the War of Java. Diponegoro was then brought by the Dutch Colonial Government to be exiled to Manado, North Sulawesi, through Batavia (now Jakarta); and then moved to Makassar, South Sulawesi. Di masa 3 tahun pengasingannya di Manado Diponegoro menulis sebuah babad (chronicle), consisting of 30 chapters, which is now called *Babad Diponegoro* (Chronicle of Diponegoro). (Peter Carey, 2008, via Sodewo, 2016)

The second incongruity is the fact that although Diponegoro is welkonown for his his heroism against imperialism, yet even in a museum that was built in 1968 as a tribute for the great prince, namely “*Museum Pangeran Diponegoro Sasana Wiratama*”, there is no single statue of this legendary figure.

There are only statues of two great generals instead who fought for the Independence of the Republic of Indonesia, they are the Great General Sudirman on the western side and Lieutenant General Oerip Soemohardjo located in the eastern side of the main gate of the complex.

On the other hand, images that are assumed to be, stated, and accepted as Prince Diponegoro emerge in many visual works that are spread throughout Yogyakarta and its surroundings. These works, which were made to bring specific purposes, are in the form of statues, paintings, reliefs, drawings, and wayang (shadow puppets); made by professional sculptors, vernacular artists, even by ordinary people living in kampongs.



Figure 1. Relief of Diponegoro, at Sleman, Yogyakarta.

Monumental statues of Diponegoro outside the cities around Yogyakarta, for government institutions, were made by professional sculptors, including: Saptoto, Eddie Sunarso, Dunadi, Purjito, Sukasman, Yusman, Soewardi; Made Karta, the sculptor who made the Diponegoro statue at University of Diponegoro Campus, Semarang. The above mentioned sculptors received art education at the academy / school of art, which is now part of the ISI Yogyakarta.

In fact, those monuments that are scattered all over the place differ from one among the other. Each work is made from the free interpretation of its maker. Some of them are objectively below the objective standard for a monumental statue. Some others looks funny, or were poorly made. (Figure 1)

Presumably, the visual data and the history from many sources that can be legally accessed and are from the time of the Dutch Colonial era are not considered important as well as relevant. What is more important is always the ideological aspect, where Diponegoro's character carries or has either an

explicit or implicit signifier of his heroism or his religiosity or both.

The research problems are: 1) What kind of characteristics can be found in the representation of Diponegoro in the works that are being researched?; and 2) To what extent are the differences among the characteristics of the works that can be found in many places in Yogyakarta and the works with Diponegoro as their subject material from the Dutch Colonial era?

This research is conducted using Art Criticism and Semiotic methods. Every art object observed is treated as signs. The signs here are realized as three interrelated aspects, namely 'sign', 'signifier', and 'signified'. (Arthur Asa Berger, 1984) The signifier is described and analyzed objectively beforehand; then it is interpreted and evaluated by comparing it with the signifiers from drawings and paintings with the subject matter of Prince Diponegoro from the Dutch Colonial era.

## 2 PRINCE DIPONEGORO IN ART FORM

### 2.1 Diponegoro in Dutch Paintings

The first art work with Diponegoro as its subject matter, considered as the initiator for other works, is a drawing made by A.J. Bik. There, Diponegoro is illustrated wearing white turban, fully clothed with eight buttons on his chest right under his neck. His *sarong* is slung over his left shoulder towards the right waist. The Prince's shiny *keris* (traditional dagger) is tucked in between his belt and his clothes, with the tip its handle facing to the right. His eyes glare at the audience; he looks serious. His ears are hidden underneath his turban. He has no moustache or beard. From this illustration a lithograph was made by C.C.A. Lost in 1835. Consequently, the use of dark-light contrast on Diponegoro's figure seemed sharper, his *keris* looked shiny, and the image of the Prince became more volumetric.

The illustration by A.J. Bik and the lithograph made five years later means that Diponegoro's existence is valued; he is considered as an important figure. Even after his capture and is locked up in Fort Rotterdam, Makassar, he was visited by high-profile guests, including the 16-year-old Dutch Prince Henry in 1837 (Wikipedia: Diponegoro). In correlation with this, the history recording of Diponegoro's capture was very important, even made Lieutenant General De Kock—the commander of the assault—got

recognition in the record as shown in the following painting.

*The Submission of Prince Diponegoro to General de Kock*, by Nicolaas Pieneman, made around 1830 – 1835, shows Diponegoro submitting to the Dutch authority. Diponegoro's face was painted in detail, although it is not clear whether it was made based on realistic occurrence or fictional, because he was not shown as an ordinary Javanese from Yogyakarta with long and thick eyelashes. Fully dressed wearing a greed turban, Diponegoro's hands are stretch out in a way showing as if he was in a submissive state. It is shown that Diponegoro does not bring his *keris*. His chin is raised a little, indexically telling that he is looking towards his followers, the indigenous people, in front of him (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

Diponegoro is presented with submissive gestures, contrast to how Lieutenant General De Kock that looks more relaxed, and is shown to point towards a carriage to his right. De Kock he orders a soldier carrying a sword to take Diponegoro to Batavia. The guards do not appear to be on standby, while Diponegoro's followers looked sad because they have lost their role model, and are in the state of shock.

## 2.2 Diponegoro in the Eyes of Raden Saleh

Raden Saleh, a painter from Terboyo, Central Java (1811-1880) who had been living in Europe for more than two decades, saw Prince Diponegoro differently to Pieneman. Saleh painted Diponegoro distinctively. In *The Arrest of Diponegoro*, Saleh depicts Diponegoro with his chin slightly raised and his eyes staring directly to his front left into the eyes of De Kock who doesn't dare look back at Diponegoro. Diponegoro's left hand is in a tight fist stretched upwards a little; his right hand open, stretches downward, in a gesture that can be seen as if he are trying to calm down a kneeling woman who is in awe of the situation. The woman seems to know Diponegoro quite well, because it can be seen that she is touching the Prince's thigh. No swords are drawn, no guards were on standby. Figuratively speaking, this was not an armed confrontation, but a war of strategy which, according to Raden Saleh, harms Diponegoro.

Werner Kruss in his article "Raden Saleh's Interpretation of the Arrest of Diponegoro: An Example of Indonesian Proto-nationalist Modernism", states that Raden Saleh through his paintings contests the Dutch's "Visual version" hegemony about the key event in the capture of

Diponegoro and painted it using the Javanese idiom which he lived up to (Kraus, 2005).

## 2.3 The Images of Diponegoro after the Independence of Indonesia

In the realm of national heroism for a nation that just declared its independence (August 17, 1945), Prince Diponegoro has been included as a national hero. His name was used by the Third Division of the People's Army of Indonesia in Central Java (Division III/Diponegoro) on June 3, 1947; then it has been used to name The Military Territorial Command IV/Diponegoro on July 20, 1950 that covers the provinces of Central Java and Special Province of Yogyakarta (wikivisually.com). This means that Diponegoro has been popular throughout the country ever since the Republic of Indonesia received its full sovereignty; Diponegoro continues to be one of the subjects of heroism presented in various art media.

Basuki Abdullah (born in Surakarta, 1915-1993), one of Indonesia's elite painters, was an active painter and once took the role as an art teacher during the period of Japanese occupation (before the Republic of Indonesia was proclaimed), saw Prince Diponegoro as an important figure. Abdullah, who took art education and lived in the Netherlands and other parts of Europe for several years, expressed his nationalism through his painting entitled *Diponegoro Leading the Battle*, made around 1940 – 1960 and has the dimension of 150cm x 120cm. This painter who once became the official painter for the Kingdom of Thailand and afterwards as the official painter for the Presidential Palace of the Republic of Indonesia, presented Prince Diponegoro as a leader in a battle. Diponegoro is depicted as having his right arm stretched forward with his forefinger pointing to a distant place, and he wears white clothes with white turban (Printed in *Lukisan dan Patung Koleksi Sukarno, Jilid I*). The prince carried his *keris* that was tucked in between his clothes and his belly cloth. His left hand firmly hold his horse's rein. His horse is a special one, with black fur except for the tips of its legs that are colored white. Diponegoro's horse has become a legend until this day, its name is Kyai Gentayu. "Kyai" is a term for honorable people, usually used for religious leaders. The use of the word 'kyai' in front of the names of sacred objects, horse drawn carriages for kings, and also for horses is also a tradition common for the Yogyakarta and Surakarta Sultanates.

### 3 IMAGES OF DIPONEGORO IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY OF YOGYAKARTA

In the city of Yogyakarta there is a strategic yet metrically short street which stretches from the Magelang Street crossroad to the east and ends at the *Tugu Pal Putih* monument; the name of this street is Diponegoro Street. The same street name also exists in the Sleman and Bantul districts.

Not far from Diponegoro Street, around 2 km to the west, there is a museum named Museum Monumen Pangeran Diponegoro Sasana Wiratama; located at Tegalrejo area where the Prince was raised by his grandfather's family. However, the exhibits there are peculiar. Despite its name, there is no actual statue of the great prince. Instead there are two realistic statues—the head and torso—of the Great General Sudirman and Lietenant General Oerip Soemohardjo of the Indonesian National Army (TNI). The relief about Diponegoro's heroism looks so naive and sober, that seems to be made carelessly even in the place where Diponegoro, the nation's great national hero, once lived.

Nevertheless Diponegoro still proved to be seen as an important hero in Yogyakarta and its surrounding area, as well as in other cities whether they are in Central Java or in East Java. For example, in Semarang the name 'Diponegoro' is used to name a famous state university in Semarang - the capital of Central Java - namely Diponegoro University. For example, in Semarang the name 'Diponegoro' is used to name a public university in Semarang - the capital of Central Java - namely Diponegoro University. There are more than 20 monuments of Prince Diponegoro spread throughout the City of Yogyakarta and its 4 Districts, and other cities around Yogyakarta. These monuments are in the form of statues and reliefs; made as commissioned works, or by the local communities as an expression of admiration towards the great prince who fought for justice and religion. Therefore, in Yogyakarta, there are a lot of statues and reliefs of Diponegoro that are made near or on the entrance gate of kampongs, or become landmarks/site marks of many strategic places.

A professional photographer named Arif Sukardono documented these monuments, either in the form of statues or reliefs, of Prince Diponegoro in almost everywhere within the City of Yogyakarta and its Districts. All those monuments depict Diponegoro who is wearing a turban just like A.J. Bik's depiction,

as a symbolic attribute for Diponegoro's religion and heroism.

#### 3.1 Diponegoro in Shadow Puppets

Prince Diponegoro also appears in shadow puppet performance arts in Yogyakarta. In 2016 a new genre of shadow puppet arisen and is called Wayang Diponegoro. This puppet was innovated by Roni Sodewo. Sodewo himself is the seventh descendant of Prince Diponegoro. The ideas used to write the script was based upon "Babad Diponegoro" (The Chronicles of Diponegoro). Wayang Diponegoro holds a number of historic stories rooted from the "traces of English colonialism in Java."

From August 2016 to the end of August 2017, Wayang Diponegoro had been performed six times. This wayang told historical stories of Java in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Prince Diponegoro's point of view that are different from mainstream stories of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. In the performance, Prince Diponegoro's character is displayed in full, and not just showing his greatness and heroism, but also his human weakness. Through this performance, the everlasting heroic spirit of Prince Diponegoro is presented, and has continued to inspire many people to create as well as to interpret today's life (*Kompas*, Thursday, August 31, 2017; Sodewo, 2016).

A set of Wayang Diponegoro characters from Roni Sodewo's collection was exhibited in "Pameran Sastra Rupa: Gambar Babad Diponegoro" (Visual Litarary Exhibition: Visuality of Babad Diponegoro), in Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta, 1-24 February 2019. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Wayang Diponegoro, collection of Roni Sodewo. Exhibited at Jogja Gallery, 2019.

In connection with the Diponegoro Puppet, it should be noted that there was once a thick paperboard (puppet) maker, named Lejar Subroto

(1937 – 2017). One of his works documented by Arif Sukardono is the puppet figure of Prince Diponegoro, who is turbaned and robed in white, wears a slippers, has an orange belly, and a keris is tucked between his belly and his robe in the abdomen.

## 3.2 Diponegoro in Fine Arts Today

### 3.2.1 Paintings by Heri Dono

Prince Diponegoro's figure as a national hero and as subject in art is continuously reinterpreted. In 2017 (more than 150 years after Diponegoro's death) Heri Dono, one of the leading artists in Indonesia, who since the end of 1980s have participated in a number of prestigious art exhibitions worldwide, has made a painting with the dimension of 200cm x 150cm, entitled *Pangeran Diponegoro Is In Front of the Colonial Hotel*. The layouts and some other components of this painting are taken out from Raden Saleh's *The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro*, 1858. The building, the two mountains on the left hand side of the painting, and the type of trees presented in there are more or less the same. The only difference are the figures. Lieutenant-General de Kock is replaced by a big and tall man that interpretably resembles the 6<sup>th</sup> president of Indonesia: Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Other characters presented in that painting were King Salman from Saudi Arabia, Habib Rizieq Shihab—a controversial man, Basuki Thahaja Purnama (Ahok), Megawati Soekarnoputri—the 5<sup>th</sup> president of Indonesia, Wiranto—a former general of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), several other former state officials, and other politicians or celebrities that often appeared on the silver screen. There is also the image of Prince Diponegoro as painted by Raden Saleh, and is even a character that iconographically be seen as Raden Saleh himself.

Heri Dono modified Saleh's paintings by replacing previously existing figures with famous figures, as well as ordinary people for his paintings. Short said he made a parody through his painting. The most significant is the fact that Heri Dono painted himself in his work. At the far left on the roof of the building is painted the image of Heri Dono, he seemed to be running away, or is away from the commotion caused by many political figures whose social-political views crossed each other. Dono uses Raden Saleh's painting as a 'text' which is freely reinterpreted, then placed in the present context, to offer new perceptions and meanings. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Heri Dono, *Diponegoro is in Front of Colonial Hotel*, 2017, Oil Painting on Canvas, 200 cm x 150 cm.

### 3.2.2 Paintings by F. Sigit Santoso

The similar free interpretation as a creative concept was conducted by an artist famous for his realistic paintings, his name is F. Sigit Santoso. Santoso's work entitled *Abdulrohim Jokowiwobo Namaku* was exhibited in "Pameran Sastra Rupa: Gambar Babad Diponegoro", at Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. F. Sigit Santoso, *Abdulrohim Jokowiwobo Namaku*, 185 x 115 cm, Oil Painting on Canvas

During the exhibition (that was held from February 1, 2019 to February 24, 2019) showed paintings, a set of Wayang Diponegoro, and an installation of objects associated with Prince Diponegoro. This exhibition was held based upon the history of life journey written by Prince Diponegoro himself during his exile in Manado, North Sulawesi and Makassar, South Sulawesi.

In his painting, Santoso depicts a young man wearing a headband based upon the description from Babad Diponegoro (The Chronicles of Diponegoro), in order to represent Diponegoro in his twenties. His right hand is stretched pointing upwards. His left hand is holding his *keris* that is tucked in his rolled up *sarong* wrapped around his belly. The figure that is intended to be Prince Diponegoro wears a turban, just like A.J. Bik's depiction. He is wearing a faded moss green *surjan* (a traditional clothe from Yogyakarta). He also wears a faded maroon *sarong*.

What is significant in this painting is the facial expression of the young figure that is the subject of the painting. That face of the figure looks like the face of President Joko Widodo. The similarity between the face of 'Prince Diponegoro' on and the face of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) is very easy to recognize, because Jokowi's face has been exposed in newspapers, television, and social media in particular in relation to the 2019 Indonesian General Election, which will take place on 17 April 2019. Moreover, Santoso also creatively played the names of the two candidates who were contesting the 2019 national elections, namely Joko Widodo (No 1) and Prabowo (No. 2), which he picked as he pleased, and combined them into a new name, 'Jokowibowo'.

Image 'Prince Diponegoro', in his 20s, with Jokowi's face when he was young, in Santoso's work, shows that the interpretation and reinterpretation of the character and 'mystery' of Diponegoro's history of the War of Java have continued, and appeared in various artistic and non-artistic expressions.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Since his death in 1855 until today Prince Diponegoro's character is still circulating and inspiring many people in Yogyakarta. There are many artists from several branches of art who have created art works based on the media involved, including fine arts, dance, opera, theater, radio drama, and monuments; meaning that Diponegoro has become one of the significant subjects presented in various art media.

Monuments that were made by either professional or vernacular artists are spread everywhere; their visual display can vary, meaning that these art objects were made based upon the artists' free interpretation. Looks like the image reference from the Dutch colonial era is no longer considered relevant. What is more important is that within the work, there are hints that are signifying the 'heroism' as well as the religiosity of Prince Diponegoro.

The fact that the role and image of Prince Diponegoro did not appear in the Kraton of Yogyakarta, and that no statue of Diponegoro in a museum built to commemorate Diponegoro's heroism can be interpreted that the internal problem within the Yogyakarta Sultanate in accordance to the history of the Java War, led by Prince Diponegoro, is not yet finished and is still considered as controversial.

Whereas various statues, reliefs, paintings, and other art expressions that were created and continue to be created in many places in Yogyakarta and in the surrounding areas signify that the character and heroism of Diponegoro have continued to revive amongst many communities. The mystery that surrounds the history of Pangeran Diponegoro's journey actually more stimulates and inspires creative people to explore art through various media.

Diponegoro's character used in the new genre of shadow puppet performance telling the stories from *Babad Diponegoro* (the Chronicles of Diponegoro), has its own agenda and interest, and can never be separated from the socio-cultural dynamics in Yogyakarta.

In Fine Arts, it seems that the free interpretations and the re-interpretations of Prince Diponegoro in correlation to the history of the War of Java (1825 – 1830), has developed openly and freely.

Of what was phenomenal about the representations of Diponegoro, it can be said that the various interpretations are so free and far from the visual data and official historical records of the Prince, even somewhat anarchic. It is as if everyone can interpret and represent Diponegoro in any possible way, as long as it displays the signs of heroism and religiosity that are accepted by the power-holding communities.

It can be said that the interpretation and re-interpretations, especially which are related to art creativity, can be carried out in many ways, whether it is retrospective, productive, prospective, or even deconstructive. Each choice can create different kinds of significance based on the paradigm used.

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