



Stambul Comedy Exploration in Early 20th-Century Semarang: Meaningful Teaching about Colonialism

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the results of exploring stambul comedy as part of Indies art in early 20th-century Semarang as an effort to implement meaningful learning about colonialism for students. This research was conducted using a qualitative framework with a case study approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document studies. The data analysis for this research referred to Yin's two patterns: pattern matching and explanation building. The results showed that the narrative of Stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang is relevant for developing students' knowledge about colonialism in a more contextual manner. Findings indicate that students' initial understanding of colonialism was still not contextual and tended to be theoretical, with colonialism merely understood as a process of occupation and domination by one nation over another. After exploring material on the development of Indies art through contextual teaching and learning, students were able to think critically and collaboratively. A constructivist process could trigger acceptance and rejection of colonialism: discovering, elaborating, and determining the meaning of learning. Moreover, students' new knowledge could be factually constructed, influenced by factors such as reading preferences, collaborative abilities, and critical examination of texts provided by the teacher and further explored by the students.

Keywords: aestheticism; Stambul comedy; Indies art; exploration; meaningful teaching; colonialism

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INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the rapid flow of information that is developing today, the collective knowledge of a society is very easily changed. This is due to information that develops through digital media being popular, very quickly accessible to readers, and having practical understanding that has an impact (Sarkawi, 2016; Straubhaar et al., 2015; Yoga, 2019). In a survey on the understanding of colonialism, concerning

results showed that a significant portion of young Indonesians aged 15 to 20 view colonialism merely as a process of occupation, without any understanding of the impact and how colonialism destroyed the cultural foundations of local communities (Amin, 2022; Colombijn, 2011; Day, 2022).

De Zwart et al. (2022) explain that understanding the negative impacts of colonial rule needs to be maintained as society's collective memory. Colonialism has had impacts such as environmental

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damage, human trafficking, slavery, and control over resources that have disrupted the cultural order of society (Bijl, 2012; Bosma, 2020; Winn, 2010). Therefore, colonialism needs to be systematically taught in schools through relevant subjects such as history, culture, and the arts. Regarding how colonialism should be taught, Chalmers (2019) argues that through the arts and culture developed in colonial societies, colonialism can be taught as an interesting idea discussed interestingly through the learning process.

Garba (2012) reinforces the above view that colonialism should not only be understood as a theory or concept but also its practices in the past, which have brought many negative impacts, need to be known by the present generation. The influence of colonialism in culture and social systems is a topic that is rarely discussed, even though colonial culture itself, as a product of ideological practice, has forced colonial societies to practice and internalize new knowledge that is entirely different from old knowledge. Such culture can be found in colonial-era Indonesia and is widely known as *Indische* or *Indies* culture, which gave rise to new traditions and arts in the colony (Soekiman, 2000).

Indies culture is a culture formed through the fusion of Dutch and Indonesian cultures, especially Javanese culture. The formation of *Indies* culture was a result of Dutch colonization in Indonesia (1800-1945). *Indies* culture influenced Indonesia's historical, political, economic, and social aspects (Gultom, 2020). This culture not only included appearance or clothing but also influenced architecture and the traditions of colonial society, including food, party habits, orchestras, and the popularity of theater performances as a natural process of "Dutchification" (Bastian, 2018).

Semarang, as one of the colonial cities, also experienced the development of *Indies* arts, and this city became identified as a tourist destination for the colonial nation due to its *Indies*-style architecture and comfortable living atmosphere. From

architecture, one can identify the cultural style that developed during a particular period (Budiman et al., 2020). *Indies* architecture is the result of a long process of acculturation. Acculturation is defined as cultural change that occurs through continuous and intensive encounters or mutual influences between two different cultural groups (Soekiman & Purwanto, 2018; Yuliati, 2019). In cultural encounters, there is an exchange of cultural traits that blend the two cultures, or it could also be traits from another group, often implying the influence of one culture over another (unilateral), for example, the influence of modern culture on a culture that had fallen behind. In the research results of Wijayanto et al. (2024), cultural change in a society always has a motive. It does not happen without a cause. In the context of colonialism, this change was driven more by Dutch cultural hegemony over native Javanese culture.

Remnants of *Indies*-style city can still be found today in Kota Lama or the old city area of Semarang. A significant amount of *Indies'* cultural and artistic potential can be taught to students to better understand the meaning of colonization that once occurred in Indonesia; today, colonialism is understood to have had positive impacts on past societies (Amin, 2022). *Stambul* comedy, spelled *Komedie Stamboel* during the Dutch colonial era, became an *Indies* culture that developed during the colonial era. *Stambul* comedy is a form of traveling theater performance known as *Istanbul*-style theater, which at that time emerged to fulfill the entertainment needs of the people in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Through the introduction and exploration of these *Indies'* cultural remnants, it is possible for social interaction and academic meaning-making processes about colonialism and its impacts on society to occur.

Chalmers (2019) argues that the meaning-making process of cultural remnants is effective for developing knowledge about colonialism. Rahman et al. (2018), in their research on colonial culture in India, show that widespread forgetfulness in so-

ciety is due to a lack of contextual teaching about colonial culture and its remnants, resulting in the current society acquiring popular knowledge that instead highlights the positive sides of colonization. Similarly, Rovito and Giles (2016) in their research clarify that colonization cannot be simply forgotten; it is actually the most effective medium to reflect on the process of identity formation through socialization. These two studies show the importance of studying the colonial history of a nation to maintain identity, patriotic attitudes, and progressive and anti-colonial cultural understanding.

This research aims to study stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang as a source of learning activities to strengthen meaningful learning about colonialism. The significant contribution of this research is that the subject of history is currently identified with political and power discourses, while cultural discourse is still often neglected, so this research attempts to offer new ideas in the study of history education that can utilize cultural discourse and artistic results in its teaching practices. The integration process between cultural and artistic subjects into subjects like history to develop humanistic thought is very important to research, emphasizing the inclusive side of cultural and artistic subjects themselves.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative method with a case study approach (Yin, 2018). A case study is a form of research that seeks to deeply analyze a case that occurs due to human engineering. The case study in this research aims to present an in-depth analysis of the meaningful teaching about colonialism through the exploration activity of stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang. This research requires the researcher to be fully involved in the processes in the field. How students construct knowledge about colonialism and how they understand the development of Indies arts and their impacts

on indigenous societies becomes a premise that is critically discussed. Additionally, this research is conducted with a case study scenario arranged and shown in a lesson plan implemented by the teachers to carry out meaningful learning. This research involves 30 research participants from students with diverse backgrounds in Semarang.

The research data comes from verbal information, documents, and students' exploration activities. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document studies. Interviews were conducted before students received material about Indies culture and its artistic results. Some students provided information about their perceptions of colonialism, colonization, and its impact on the development of Indies arts. After that, students carried out learning according to the scenario discussed between the researcher and the teachers. Activities that occurred were observed, namely when students observed, discussed, and presented the results of their discussions about Indies arts they learned directly. After that, portfolio-based evaluation documents were analyzed and became a reference for deciding whether or not students had good explanatory abilities about the development of culture and stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang.

The validity of the research data was examined using confirmation techniques with the participants. Almost all participants confirmed the information obtained objectively, acknowledging it as a process worthy of analysis in a report. This statement is important, considering the mutual understanding between the researcher and research participants is fundamental to producing a credible report. This confirmation process runs alongside post-learning interviews.

The analysis of this research data refers to Yin (2018), where two stages of case study data analysis are used in this research, namely pattern matching and explanation. Pattern matching is comparing the existing patterns in empirical data; if

both patterns match, then the results can strengthen internal validity and be confirmed for presentation in the report. Explanation is the process of explaining the research findings as they are, as found in the field; the researcher only provides information according to what he observed. In the explanation process, the researcher then presents research facts, makes theoretical statements, analyzes, and concludes the research results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indies Art, Stambul Comedy, and Content Domination Culture

To broadly recognize the artworks of a nation, it is somewhat easier if one first knows, understands, and comprehends the meaning of the word "*stijl*" or style. The term *stijl* comes from the Latin word *stilus*, which means a scratcher or stylus; it can also mean the way of scratching or writing. In Dutch, it is *schrijfrant stijl*, and in Javanese, it is *cengkok* or way. Another opinion suggests that *stijl* comes from the Greek word *stili silo*, which means pillar, and in English, it is known as "style" (Cohen, 2016; Coté, 2017; Yapp, 2018).

Henk Baren states that the word *stijl* has four meanings: first, "*objectieve stijl*," which is the style of the object or thing itself; second, "*subjectieve stijl*" or "*persoonlijke stijl*," which is the style possessed by the artist, writer, sculptor, painter, or architect that characterizes their work; third, "*stijl massa*" or "*nationale stijl*," which is a style that becomes a characteristic or mark (trait) of a nation, such as the Western European, Eastern, Japanese, Indonesian styles, and others; and fourth, "*technische stijl*," which is a special style related to the materials or techniques used, for example, wood or iron to build a structure (Corrigan et al., 2015; Sutriyanto, 2010).

By recognizing and understanding these four types of styles, it will be easier to comprehend the research on artworks in architecture or various other branches of art, such as visual arts, literature, performing arts, music, and others.

The ability and skill in the arts among the Javanese people were already very high before the Europeans arrived in Nusantara or the archipelago, both in performing arts and visual arts. Unfortunately, written works related to Javanese art are very scarce. Hence, when Europeans took an interest in studying them, they faced difficulties, as written explanations did not accompany Javanese artworks from various fields. It was not until 1921 that books on indigenous music and musical instruments were published, including works by J.S. Brandt Buys and Mr. J. Kunst. In 1925, the Java Institute, in its congress in Semarang, discussed writings for music and dance and music education (Buys, 2019; Kunst, 2013).

In early 18th-century Semarang, Javanese handicrafts were already very developed when Europeans arrived. Indigenous nobility had highly skilled artisans who lived in certain villages and worked for generations. Examples of these villages' names can still be traced from the toponyms in the former port city, such as Sayangan, Gisikdrono, Candisari, Pandean, Papandayan, and others. These artists and artisans had regular incomes and were paid by their masters, so their work had to be refined, beautiful, and meticulous, or *ngrawit* as the locals call it.

As a Muslim city, the crafts that were popular trade commodities and highly favored by the colonial Semarang society included prayer rugs and *kopiah* or caps produced in Bawean. Artisans made body jewelry, such as bracelets, necklaces, and earrings, from Gresik, East Java. Semarang batik was also quite famous, with high-quality silk batik featuring beautiful bird images as ornaments for colonial officials (Natalia & Riyandari, 2016; Patria, 2016; Yuliati & Susilowati, 2022).

Augustijn Henrik, a *Kapitein der Papangers*, was a wealthy landowner in 19th-century Semarang history. He was of European-Javanese descent. His life represents the Indies lifestyle, as shown in his daily life in his household. His slaves (both male and female) had specific du-

ties, such as being musicians. From among them, what F. de Haan referred to as *slaven concerten* or a slave orchestra was formed. Having a slave orchestra indicated a luxurious lifestyle with a certain status among the landowners of that era (Susanto, 2007). In Henrik's secret will, as the owner of Semarang's *landhuis*, recorded in 1831, it was noted that among his 130 slaves, there were 30 described by van de Wall as skilled and versatile musicians (*de onderscheidene bekwane muzikanten*). Additionally, there were four *ronggeng* dancers, two *gambang* players, and two mask dancers. Even the Chinese trained their slaves to be performers in Chinese theater troupes that were flourishing at that time. Usually, slaves who were adept at acting, dancing, and singing were highly valued.

Among all the entertainment provided, the most popular was *Komedie Stamboel*. Stambul comedy was a form of traveling theater performance, styled after Istanbul, created to entertain the people of the Dutch East Indies. This traveling theater resembled European circus performances. Stambul comedy era 1891–1903, was born in Surabaya in 1891, touring the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and Malaya by train and ship. It began to flourish in Semarang in 1895 and became a popular form of entertainment among colonial society.

The term "*stambul* or *stamboel*" is believed to be derived from the word "Istanbul," and indeed, in its early days, stories from the Middle East, such as One Thousand and One Nights, were their leading performances. Nearly 90 percent of the stories performed in their first ten months were dramatic adaptations of the European-translated versions of One Thousand and One Nights. The atmosphere and props—lighting, emotional acting, curtained stage, accompanying orchestra, division of the stage into scenes and acts, costumes, makeup, and plot—resembled late 19th-century European theater dramaturgy and technology. Another significant influence was the Parsi theater or *wayang Parsi* from Bombay, which toured Indone-

sia extensively since 1883 (or even earlier). By the first decade of the 20th century, stambul comedy had a diverse repertoire, including Indian, Persian, and Middle Eastern romances, One Thousand and One Nights stories, popular European literature and folklore (Dr. Faust, Snow White), as well as stories like Nyai Dasima, the 1899–1900 Lombok War, which was banned from being performed, and Shakespearean adaptations.

The typical stambul comedy troupe had around fifty members or more. Stambul became a popular term in the colonial regions with Malay culture. Cities like Semarang, Deli, Malacca, Singapore, Batavia, Makassar, and Surabaya were the metropolises of that era that featured performances similar to those in Cairo, Istanbul, Paris, or London. This is where the term "*stambul*" originated. The sizable troupe usually comprised more than half indigenous people, with the Chinese as financiers and the remainder being Arab descendants. During performances, the roles were divided among indigenous people, such as the comic *jongos* or servants, and Arabs, such as the serious masters, illustrating a skewed social role division by ethnicity. This disparity contributed to the comedy's appeal.

The traveling stambul comedy performances attracted profit-seekers, singers, artists, dancers, and ordinary people who formed troupes known locally as "*tobong*." Although experiencing ups and downs, the legacy of *tobong* arts, despite recent significant declines, still characterizes Indonesian popular arts. Traveling performance arts or *tobong* are not unique to Indonesia. Traveling performances were common in many parts of the world, especially in Europe. However, Indonesian traveling performance arts' diverse cultural elements—language, accompanying music, storytelling, movement arts, body language, and dramaturgy—are distinct and unparalleled elsewhere.

Milone noted that the Indies style in Semarang had already incorporated elements of local art along with Chinese art

elements, which can also be observed in several forms of Semarang folk music to this day. The harmonious blend of these external elements is well represented in the music of *gambang* Semarang (Andita, 2018). The combination of musical rhythms with dance movements in the theater gave birth to the Indies characteristic known as stambul comedy (Cohen, 2006a, 2006c). Meanwhile, in the form of *keroncong* orchestra music, stambul songs emerged. Stambul songs originated from songs specifically created to accompany the sentimental parts of stambul comedy scenes (Figure 1). The songs had to be sung in a more delicate, soft, and emotional manner (Destiana, 2012). Later on, Stambul songs were performed outside stambul comedy music stage events.



Figure 1. The Stamboel women's orchestra from "Komedi Vereeniging De Eendracht Indo" (Source: KITLV)

Marie Oord was a renowned female orchestra conductor in early 20th-century Java, and the photo was taken while she was performing in Semarang at the Societeit de Harmonie (Figure 2). She was quite popular among colonial nobles. Marie's name was always mentioned at every important event or gathering of colonial officials; it was considered incomplete if stambul did not feature Marie. The people next to Marie were indigenous workers who worked for her; they were a group that toured Java to present the best performances for colonial masters (Cohen, 2006b; Lechner, 2021). Stambul comedy was quite popular in Se-

marang in the early 20th century, regularly performed at the Societeit de Harmonie. The Societeit building was used as a place for Europeans in the Dutch East Indies to enjoy themselves (Rietbergen, 2017). The building was equipped with reading rooms, a performance stage, music stages, and a spacious dance floor. Additionally, the place also provided alcoholic beverages, among other things. The architecture of the building featured a spacious marble room with beautiful pillars, crystal chandeliers, wall mirrors, and bronze statues.



Figure 2. Sociëteit de Harmonie, Bodjongweg Semarang 1935, now Paragon Mall Building on Pemuda Street, Semarang (Source: KITLV)

Stambul comedy was initially thought to be an imported product from Turkey, as commonly mentioned. However, this performance was actually the work of the indigenous people themselves. The costumes, songs, and all the accessories were managed by the natives (Boonstra, 2017). The attire also included the red fez, which was often worn by stambul actors. The songs and their accompaniment were Malay songs. Many songs from Semarang had a Malay literary tone and were very popular and widely known among the people of Semarang. The development of this tradition took place in the area that now has become the old town, which was the colonial center in Central Java.

What is interesting and can be a significant lesson regarding the development of stambul comedy in Semarang is the stark division of roles between Europeans and

Javanese, with the indigenous people consistently in lower positions, serving and dedicating themselves to Europeans. As noted by Henrik, Javanese people in Indies tradition were like slaves providing menial services for Europeans, entertaining them, and serving them as if they were kings. Moreover, the places used for artistic performances, artistic attributes, and beautiful decorations used by Europeans were actually made by the indigenous people. This implies that Javanese art had already developed significantly before the Europeans came, but colonialism marginalized this thriving tradition through discriminatory politics and social function division based on ethnicity and religion. This condition is evident in every form of Indies art and cultural product in Semarang.

The slavery and marginalization of the already developed art became a focus that cannot be ignored, also becoming a contradictory discourse with the current understanding of colonialism. The value of the story of the development of stambul comedy in Semarang lies in several points: first, the previously developed Javanese art was eroded, leading to the detrimental impact of cultural expansion, domination, and colonial political hegemony on local traditions and culture; second, humanism did not grow within the colonial society due to cultural hegemony, with the indigenous people only being positioned as servants, entertainers, and slaves; third, the social identity of the community was dissolved, forcing the Javanese to embrace a new identity as part of Indies, although at the lowest level; and fourth, the influence of colonialism in the field of culture cannot be seen as positive, as it caused inhumane impacts. Therefore, for readers and researchers of colonial art development, it is important to convey the above conditions to students so that the new generation does not misunderstand the concept and practice of colonialism in Indonesia.

Art Content Learning Patterns in Teaching History

According to Goldberg (2021), there

are three ways to integrate art into learning: first, learning about art; second, learning with art; and third, learning through art. Learning with art occurs when art is introduced to students as a way to study certain subject matter. The development of Indies art and stambul comedy in Semarang in the early 20th century becomes content that can be used for teaching about the development of art as a reflection of the spirit of the times. Understanding the significant influence of colonialism on art is the main focus, that colonialism negatively impacted the existence of local arts and culture in the archipelago that had already developed earlier.

Art in history learning is integrated as a phenomenon reflecting human development in a certain era. As a material, art becomes a source of information, ideas, discourse, and broader clues to introduce students to the core issues (Saraniero et al., 2014). By training students' imagination through artworks related to core issues, students can make new connections and overcome previous limitations. Being creative is not only applicable to artists. Creativity is important for all fields of knowledge (Winner, 2022). More importantly, the development of art in a society is not only related to creative work but also provides knowledge that there are changes and dynamics in that society influenced by the political hegemony of a strong group over a weaker group (Cunneen, 2017).

In this context, learning about Indies art cannot stop at theoretical processes alone; practical ideas are needed to guide students to gradually understand how art can symbolize the condition of an oppressed society. For example, Rohidi (2000), in his research "Art Expression of the Poor: Symbolic Adaptation to Poverty," deconstructed the understanding of art in society, which was synonymous with aesthetics and focused on beauty at that time. It turns out that within Indonesian society, art aesthetics have diverse meanings. In poor communities, the suffering and life challenges they face are sources of art creation that are not always tied to aesthetics.

This condition shows that art is a dynamic source of knowledge, which can be studied and discussed critically to understand the characteristics of a society.

The development of Indies art as content in history learning can be done with scenarios developed based on Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) (Sears, 2002), a form of learning that emphasizes the involvement of students as a whole. Not only the material studied but also connecting it with real-life situations for their lives, both in family and community environments, with the aim of finding the meaning of the material for their lives.

The CTL learning model with a constructivist approach emphasizes the use of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), knowledge transfer, connecting acquired knowledge with faced reality, collecting, analyzing, hypothesizing, and producing new things from existing data, as well as an assessment system focusing on authentic assessment obtained from various sources and implemented integrated with

the learning process (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). With a constructivist approach, CTL underpins the preparation of learning scenarios on the material of Stambul comedy in Semarang in the early 20th century to create meaningful learning about colonialism. The application of this learning model is projected to foster an understanding of the colonial society's life in the Dutch East Indies viewed from the art practices reflecting discrimination and slavery of the indigenous people.

In an effort to create meaningful learning about colonialism through the exploration of Istanbul comedy in Semarang in the early 20th century, CTL is systematically applied based on a learning plan (see Table 1).

This lesson plan is designed as a guide for meaningful learning about colonialism through the exploration of Stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang. The lesson plan aims to create more productive learning that can strengthen students' conceptual understanding. Stu-

Table 1. Lesson Plan of Meaningful Teaching about Colonialism

<i>Learning Objectives</i>	Developing knowledge about the Stambul comedy in Semarang in the early 20th century and the discourse behind its development Guiding students to understand the discourse and issues in colonialism and helping them find ways to comprehend Developing knowledge about colonialism	
<i>Approach</i>	Constructivism	
<i>Strategy</i>	Contextual Teaching and Learning	
<i>Learning Section</i>	<i>Time (Minutes)</i>	<i>Activities</i>
1	5	The teacher explains the learning objectives
2	15	The teacher explains the stages of learning
3	20	The teacher divides the students into five groups, each consisting of 5 students. The teacher provides texts about the legacy of colonialism that exists today and the development of Stambul comedy in Semarang in the early 20th century. Students are asked to identify the negative impacts of colonialism on early 20th-century art.
4	35	The teacher instructs the students to collaborate in compiling knowledge from books and relevant sources. Students present the answers they have compiled Inter-group responses
5	15	Appreciation, reflection, and conclusion drawing

dents are expected to discover knowledge independently. Students are expected to learn through a constructivist philosophical foundation by “experiencing” rather than “memorizing.” According to Sears (2002), implementing contextual learning can create meaningful learning conditions if it meets the prerequisites: first, the material taught is in-depth, phenomenological, and contextual to the realities faced by students; second, students can develop their own knowledge through the process of discovery, elaboration, and reflection; and third, a classroom atmosphere that appreciates every achievement.

The exploration of Indies art development in the early 20th century can create meaningful learning by applying a constructivist approach, considering the connection between old knowledge (students’ initial understanding of early colonialism) and new information (material explored and discussed independently) and the reflection on the knowledge organized and discussed by students. This will direct learning towards a predetermined goal, where students can understand the meaning of colonialism based on the experiences undergone by the Indonesian nation, specifically, the negative impacts of colonialism in the form of discrimination, slavery, and marginalization of indigenous culture.

Students’ Initial Knowledge of Arts and Colonialism

Before meaningful learning about colonialism can begin, an analysis was first conducted on students’ initial knowledge about the relationship between art and colonialism. Generally, the relationship between art and colonialism is not understood paradigmatically; students only understand art and colonialism as concepts. They do not historically understand art within the context of Dutch colonization in Indonesia. Three key findings on students’ initial knowledge are: first, art is seen as a human expression with aesthetic value; second, colonialism is seen as a process of domination and occupation; and third,

art and colonialism are not seen as related, with art developing independently from the colonization process.

This understanding is evidenced by three statements from personal interviews on February 1, 2023 (Student Statement 1 to Statement 3).

Student Statement 1: “Art, in my opinion, usually relates to something beautiful, which can be music, paintings, dance, sculpture, and other works created as a hobby.”

Student Statement 2: “In my opinion, colonialism is an effort by one nation to dominate and occupy the land of another nation, where they occupy an area to rule and govern it like a country.”

Student Statement 3: “In my opinion, art and colonialism have no relation whatsoever; art develops based on creation and usually focuses on aesthetics, whereas colonialism does not influence the development of art.”

Students’ understanding shows a superficial, ahistorical thinking process. They have never received material on the history of art and its relationship with colonialism. Thus, their knowledge is based on “guesses” that are not conceptually sound. They are not only unaware of the history of art during colonialism but also lack a thorough understanding of the importance of studying history.

To address this, a process is needed to construct better conceptual knowledge. Conceptual thinking enables students to recognize the connections between facts, concepts, and information, creating a foundational knowledge base (Ültanir, 2012). The knowledge that lacks a conceptual foundation often results from rote learning, where history is mainly taught as a process of memorizing names, dates, years, and events generally, without providing knowledge on concepts and how to formulate knowledge based on concepts and facts (Birgili, 2015; Ülger, 2016). Therefore, meaningful learning is necessary to develop these thinking skills. A constructivist approach offers opportunities for students to develop their potential to ask

questions, seek answers, collaborate, and formulate ideas about what they have learned. In meaningful learning practice, constructivism encourages students to formulate their own knowledge autonomously, viewing historical information not as a doctrine but as an academic discourse that can be studied, discussed, and evaluated together.

Student Acceptance and Rejection of Colonialism after Studying Indies Art Materials

During the implementation of meaningful learning about colonialism, students demonstrated curiosity and generated questions to be answered. Material on the development of Indies art and culture in early 20th-century Semarang helped students understand the explanation better because the material was quite contextual. Additionally, the teacher explained that knowledge of colonialism has shifted over time. Modern colonialism is often understood theoretically and generally as a process of domination and occupation, while the actual practice of colonialism, which is a crucial source for learning, is rarely used and often overlooked as a primary source in constructing knowledge.

Indies art was explained theoretically and factually based on the experiences of the Indonesian nation, especially as they occurred in Semarang, with gathered facts. Students also received relevant pictures of Indies art to help develop their illustration and imagination (Leopold & Mayer, 2015). Through imagination, students sharpen their creativity and cognitive abilities. Imagination plays a significant role in psychological and emotional development (Charlton, 2018), helping them understand the world. Indies art became new information accepted by students, as evidenced by the statement (Student Statement 4 to Statement 6).

Student Statement 4: "I just heard about Indies art; it was never taught before. I just found out that Semarang was a place where a mix of Dutch and Javanese culture developed."

Indies art, such as Stambul, strongly sparked students' curiosity. The teacher explained that the art developed as a part of Dutch colonialization and cultural politics in the archipelago. It was no secret that the Dutch aimed to "Dutchify" the indigenous population, including altering cultural forms, leading to the birth of mixed arts like Stambul.

Student Statement 5: "Colonial relics do not reflect the positive side of the Dutch government. Initially, I thought the Dutch had a positive impact, giving us historical objects with beautiful appearances. But behind that, there was the struggle of local people who became slaves, coolies, and servants, which is very degrading to our society."

This statement is a concrete form of rejection of colonialism. After the teacher explained the dark side of colonialism in the form of cultural expansion, students began to realize that the Dutch did not have good intentions. Unlike the "glory" slogan of their maritime era, which symbolized prosperity for the Dutch, the period brought worse conditions for the indigenous population.

Student Statement 6: "If colonialism had not come, perhaps indigenous art would have remained preserved. The influence of colonialism in the field of art has marginalized the already developed local art."

The awareness of cultural marginalization due to colonialism serves as a bridge to relate past situations to the present (Hogan, 2011). Today, Indonesians generally lack interest in their local art or feel inferior about consuming and practicing it. To some extent, Indies art represents an attempt to erase cultural identity (Houben, 2008). Cultural identity is a symbol of a nation's existence (Setyawan & Dopo, 2020). What grew in Java was considered old-fashioned, uninteresting, and even worthless, causing people to lack self-esteem. Local art symbolizes the indigenous population's progress. Colonial cultural politics led Javanese society to forget their cultural identity. Students perceived this

phenomenon as a rejection based on academic concepts, leading to objective knowledge that aligns with the Indonesian nation's experience. This highlights the importance of specific knowledge that can guide learning into a meaningful dialogue.

Henrik's secret testament about slaves working for him to sustain his life in terms of art and entertainment made students understand that colonialism not only marginalized culture but also involved slavery based on racial discrimination (the colonial government divided society into three categories: European, Foreign Eastern, and Indigenous) (Ross, 2012). These categories placed the indigenous population at the lowest social stratum, positioning them as slaves. In this context, becoming a slave serving white masters.

Student Statement 7: "The roles divided in colonial society harmed indigenous people. This was shown by the slaves Henrik owned. This not only degrades dignity but also humanity. I think colonialism should be rejected to avoid such conditions in the future."

Understanding the condition of the indigenous population during the colonial period fostered a supportive viewpoint, aligned with past experiences. This serves as an essential knowledge source. Such a thinking construct can be deemed critical and in-depth regarding the material, information, and facts students read. Understanding such reading material determines the rejection of colonialism.

The beauty or aesthetics of art born from colonialism is a fact. However, its formation process positioned the indigenous population unfairly. Students then took a stance. Art and other cultural products of that era only made the indigenous population appear "uncivilized" and morally "humiliated." This includes not only the role of servants and slaves but also their bodies not being seen as part of civilization and development. Such dehumanization was understood by students, with human exploitation evoking empathy for past events. Upon further examination, empathy in understanding Indies art de-

velopment and colonial cultural products is an attitude that needs to be cultivated in students. Learning should not only be a lecture or information transfer but also a process of knowledge and attitude construction (Holmes, 2013). Through analyzing readings on the impact of colonialism in art and its sociological context, students' dominant attitude was rejection based on an academic concept.

Student Statement 8: "So our ancestors were just slaves and servants. This is very insulting to our society's honor. Even in beautiful art, if there's human exploitation, it should be rejected. Beautiful buildings built through slavery would lose their beauty. It's part of past sins and mistakes, very inhumane, I think."

Dehumanization as a behavior or process that degrades human dignity can be found in historical events, including in the history of the development of Indies art. The position of the native population as workers, servants, helpers, or slaves providing services without receiving appropriate recognition has stirred discontent among students. This emerges as a reaction to the discourse analysis behind the development of art, implying that aesthetics in art cannot be viewed as a singular entity. Instead, how aesthetics are perceived and created also becomes an important object of study in the historical examination of art for students.

Although rejection was prominent and dominant in the class, some students still maintained their opinion to accept some impacts of colonialism. This view is dominated by observations of colonial remnants in Semarang, such as the Societeit de Harmonie and other buildings showcasing colonial architecture as products of culture. Additionally, they argue that without Dutch colonization, the native population would not have been introduced to foreign arts such as Stambul, *kroncong* orchestras, and the unique blend of Dutch and Indonesian architecture.

Student Statement 9: "Colonialism, to some extent, has brought changes to the colonial societies. These external changes

are a phenomenon that has also occurred in other nations. Some former colonies have now become developed countries, like America. I think we need to appreciate some of the Dutch colonial legacies, although we don't have to appreciate everything, such as the process of slavery, for example."

This perspective represents the view of students who feel that colonialism has had a positive impact on the colonized nations. The example provided is quite concrete, namely the experience of the American nation. However, this acceptance must still be regarded as a form of tolerance in learning. Learning sources and reading preferences determine the formation of students' knowledge.

Student Statement 10: "Indies art has become a part of culture in Indonesia, a historical relic that symbolizes Dutch colonialism. We can accept it as both an idea and a fact. We can learn about colonialism through this art, so it must still be appreciated in the academic realm."

The above opinion is quite academic in viewing the development of Indies art and its benefits in learning activities. It serves as an information source about the colonization and slavery process in the Dutch East Indies. This is an important statement that shows academic ability and awareness of the role of facts in the learning process of history. Facts are the basis for developing students' knowledge. Indies art is a fact, as is the sociological situation surrounding it. Therefore, as a series of facts, everything is important in learning. This statement marks the ideal acceptance of the results of exploring Stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang.

Students' rejection and acceptance of colonialism and its impact on the development of art in the Dutch East Indies, including Stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang, have a strong basis of thought. This basis is born from a constructivist process: discovering, elaborating, and determining the meaning of learning (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). The factors determining students' rejection or acceptance

include reading preferences, collaborative ability, and criticism. These three factors have proven to determine students' attitudes and knowledge. The learning process, conducted systematically with contextual teaching and learning, bridges students' existence to a position where they understand and can derive meaning from what they have learned.

Development of Knowledge about Colonialism and Student Reflection

Colonialism is still understood as a process of domination and occupation of one nation by another. However, the meaning of colonialism, as experienced by Indonesia, has not been deeply comprehended, particularly in terms of deriving meaning from past phases. Chalmers (2019) in his research states that colonialism is always identified with cultural expansion and the formation of a new culture that reflects the identity of the colonized society. This is similar to what happened in Indonesia. He further mentions that education about the development of art during the colonial period can be a source for understanding the roots of racism in a former colony. Understanding the development of Stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang has fostered students' understanding of the roots of racism, discrimination, slavery, and the marginalization of local culture. The history of art development during the colonial era, packaged with contextual teaching and learning, has proven to train students to interpret colonialism more deeply. The meaning derived from learning about colonialism includes the understanding that art does not always grow and develop purely as an aesthetic, but other aspects, such as discrimination and slavery, also support the development of such art.

Fischer-Tiné and Mann (2004), Kantawala (2012), and Lentis (2017) describe experiences in British India, where colonial-era art education became a process of forming an Indian identity mixed with English identity, indicating an effort to create a new identity in the colony. They

created artistic products such as orchestras and performances that appeared to involve a blend of cultures, allowing colonial culture to grow gradually. After gaining independence, Indonesia lacked an art education model that freed the society from such colonial views. Some people even experienced historical amnesia, perceiving colonialism as a harmless process. This study's findings have shown that the development of art during the colonial period can generate knowledge that fosters anti-colonial sentiment. This is key to a counter-colonialism process that needs to be continuously discussed in former colonies like Indonesia, India, South Africa, Egypt, and other previously colonized countries.

The history of Stambul comedy's development in early 20th-century Semarang is quite relevant to form an anti-colonial stance. It has been proven that narratives delivered by teachers through formulated learning scenarios have generated various perspectives on rejecting colonialism, while a small minority still accept some impacts of colonialism for academic reasons. Both attitudes are maintained as a collective commitment in democratic education, namely tolerance in protecting freedom of opinion and the views of others (Sant, 2019). The new knowledge produced is based on factors such as reading preferences, collaborative ability, and critical examination of texts provided by teachers and further explored by students.

This exploration emphasizes not only the discovery of information but also the autonomous process of exploring the found information (Sears, 2002). It is then elaborated with findings from group peers. Based on past experiences, such a scientific process becomes essential to continue using and developing in history education involving the material on the development of art during the colonial era. Learning with such a constructivist paradigm has triggered students to seek and discover new insights, autonomously decide attitudes, and construct their own knowledge related to a discussion text proposed by the teacher. This learning approach has

provided a learning experience that allows students to derive meaning from the stages they have gone through, including the most contextual meaning of Indonesia's colonial experience.

In the end, exploring stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang becomes relevant for teaching a more contextual and in-depth understanding of colonialism, reflected in students' attitudes and views. Learning that relies on discourse-rich texts has trained students' critical thinking, collaborative abilities, and independent learning in reflecting on a past event. Regarding Indies art, the dominant attitude among students is an awareness that art development is not always synonymous with aesthetics; many aspects surround it. In the colonial development context, negative nuances more dominantly surrounded the development of Stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang, successfully constructed into new attitudes and knowledge about colonialism in students.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focuses on analyzing the process of exploring Stambul comedy in early 20th-century Semarang by students as an integral part of history education with the development of art during the colonial period as the object of study. The issue of students' knowledge about colonialism, which has not developed and tends to shift towards neutrality, necessitates an emphasis on colonialism education to create new knowledge about colonialism that contextually opposes past colonial practices. The development of Indies art during the colonial period is quite relevant for initiating discussions about the contextual meaning of colonialism. The practices of slavery, racism, discrimination, and marginalization of the local culture surrounding the seemingly beautiful development of Indies art have strongly driven students to formulate their attitudes and knowledge about colonialism autonomously. Students' initial knowledge about colonialism

showed poor results; they understood colonialism definitively as a process of occupation and domination, but the negative impacts of colonialism were not profoundly known. The exploration of narratives about Indies art in the early 20th century with contextual teaching and learning has proven effective in training students to formulate their new attitudes and knowledge about colonialism. Students' acceptance and rejection of colonialism were influenced by the constructivist approach, which systematically enabled them to effectively discover, elaborate, and determine the meaning of learning. New knowledge about the influence of colonialism on the development of Indies art was influenced by reading preferences, collaborative abilities, and critical examination of texts provided by teachers and further explored by students, both individually and in groups. Ultimately, students' knowledge about colonialism can become more contextual and in-depth when they can derive the meaning of learning through scientific stages. Changes in attitudes and knowledge occur when students consciously receive the appropriate texts and methods in learning activities. Utilizing the history of art development during the colonial period positively impacts students; the material is deemed important and predominantly acceptable for developing new knowledge and objective attitudes resulting from the autonomous process.

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