

# Symbolic meanings in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta: a transformation study

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**Abstract-** Yogyakarta is one of provinces in Indonesia with special district status. The city planning use concept *catur gatra tunggal* (four element in unity) that covers palace, square, mosque, and market. As one of the top artifacts of Javanese culture, Keraton Yogyakarta which was established by Prince Mangkubumi in 1756 has experienced a transformation of function and appearance. To comprehend the embodied messages, it is substantial to interpret the meaning of the symbols existing in Keraton Yogyakarta. This study reviews the transformation of meaning taking place at Keraton Yogyakarta. This study applies the method of observation, examination, assessment to the object of study, interview with informants, and study of Javanese manuscripts: *Serat Salokapatra*. The result of this study indicates that there are some significant transformations of meaning in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta between the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755-1939) and the reign of HB IX - HB X (1940 - 2018).

**Index Terms-** symbolic meaning, transformation study, Keraton Yogyakarta

## I. INTRODUCTION

The history of the establishment of Keraton Yogyakarta was initiated with the signing of Giyanti Treaty or *Palihan Nagari* (the history of state division) held on Thursday *Kliwon*, 29 Rabiul Akhir 1680 of Javanese Calendar or 13 February 1755 AD in the village of Giyanti. It was stated in Giyanti Treaty that the Kingdom of Mataram would be divided into two regions, Kabanaran Sultanate with Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat as the capital and Surakarta Sultanate with Surakarta as the capital (Sabdacarakatama, 2008).

Kabanaran Sultanate was ruled by Prince Mangkubumi who was appointed by his proponents to be the Sultan of Yogyakarta with the title *Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono I, Senopati ing alaga, Abdurrahman Sajidin Panata Gama Kalifatullah*. The meaning of the title is that the Sultan domiciled as the supreme war commander whose duty was to spread Islamic teachings in his kingdom. In addition to that, the Sultan also served as a representative of God on earth carrying out the main mission of *memayu hayuning bawana* (prospering world life) (Haryanto 2013, Hendro 2001, Sabdacarakatama 2008).

Keraton Yogyakarta founded by Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono I in 1756 owns a traditional Javanese architectural style. It can be clearly observed from the application of roof shapes (*limasan, tajug, and joglo*) on the buildings in the palace complex. However, during the reign of Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono VIII (1921-1939), a significant renovation toward the architectural formation of Keraton Yogyakarta was carried out (Prijetomo, 2004). Some of the renovated buildings include *Tratag Pagelaran, Tratag Sithinggil, and Regol Danapratapa* (Bangunjiwa, 2015).

Along with the Dutch colonialization in Indonesia came the influence of Dutch colonial architectural style called *Indiche Empire Style* (Hadinoto, 1996). The Empire style is a style of neoclassical architecture that struck Europe at that time. In relation to the acculturation of Javanese traditional architecture, it is commonly referred to as the European style, yet it is more to the European Neoclassical style (Prijetomo, 2004). The characteristics of this style are: it is symmetrical, it owns thick walls, its ceilings are high, and it applies Greek columns (*Doric, Ionic, Corinthian*) (Hadinoto, 1996). The European Neoclassical style is also applied to Keraton Yogyakarta's renovation by HB VIII.

Transformations of Keraton Yogyakarta also occurred in the post-independence period of Republic of Indonesia (during the reign of HB IX) in 1956 by building *Sasono Hinggil Dwi Abad* to replace the South *Bangsas Sithinggil*. In addition to that, during the reign of HB X in 1992, a new building was erected in *Kedhaton* courtyard. This new building is HB IX Museum, which was built to commemorate HB IX himself who was appointed as a national hero.

These transformations brought about the changes in symbolic meaning of Keraton Yogyakarta. In connection with the meaning of symbols, the transformations can basically be classified into two, namely: the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755 - 1939) and the reign of HB IX-HB X (1940-2018).

## II. METHOD OF STUDY

This study focuses on the reading of symbolic meanings in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta which is an artifact of Javanese culture. Culture itself according to Geertz is a system of meaning and symbol of the actualization and expression in a

particular community. Symbols can be objects, events, speeches, or written forms that are given meaning by humans (Geertz, 1992). The reading of meanings on Keraton Yogyakarta is executed by directly observing the building, interviewing informants who understand the history of the palace, and reviewing historical manuscripts, among others, *Serat Salokapatra*. *Serat Salokapatra* contains the myths of plants and buildings inside the palace complex of Keraton Yogyakarta implemented in the form of *tembang macapat* (Sunjata, 1995).

To obtain validity of data in this study, the researcher applies triangulation method. Validity test through triangulation is executed because testing the validity of information in qualitative research can not be performed with statistical test tools (Moleong, 2015). The validity of data is guaranteed by comparing data obtained from a particular source or method with data obtained from other sources or methods. In this study, the validity of data is obtained by comparing visual observation result of Keraton Yogyakarta with information from interview results as well as related history documents.

### III. PERIODIZATION OF KERATON YOGYAKARTA'S ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The reading of symbolic meanings on Keraton Yogyakarta is exercised by periodizing based on certain time periods. This periodization is executed because of the symbolic meaning characters that will shift along with the shift of time. Hence, contextualization is required in reading the symbolic meanings.

From the review of architectural transformations occurred in Keraton Yogyakarta, the time periods can be sorted into two.

#### A. Based on expression:

- a. The period of 1756-1934, it started from the establishment of the palace to right before the renovation. The dominant appearance or expression of this period was a Javanese architectural building with the roof shape of *Limasan* and *Joglo*.
- b. The period of 1935-2018, it started from the period after the massive renovation undertaken by HB VIII to the present (2018). In this time period, the dominant appearance or expression has been the emergence of a mixture between Dutch colonial architectural style and Javanese traditional architecture.

#### B. Based on function:

- a. The period of 1756-1968, started from the establishment of the palace which was utilized as the king's palace and central government. During this period, the palace was very private and protective.
- b. The period of 1969-2018, since the Palace was opened to the public as a tourism object of Javanese culture. Some buildings are utilized for art performances, Javanese culture and Javanese history's museum.

Periodization based on appearance and function occurs due to internal and external factors. The main internal factor is the concept of Keraton's architectural philosophy by HB I; *manunggaling kawulo lan gusti* and *sangkan paraning dumadi*. Architecturally, during the reign of HB I-HB VII, Keraton Yogyakarta did not undergo many changes. Major transformations in the appearance took place when HB VIII renovated (1921-1934) some of the main buildings of the palace

by incorporating European Neoclassical elements, while significant function transformations occurred after Keraton Yogyakarta joined the Unitary State of Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and the palace is opened to the public. Thus, the following discussions would be divided into 2 studies; the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755-1939) and the reign of HB IX-HB X (1940-2018). Various political, art, cultural and architectural policies adopted by the Sultan also influence the transformations of the palace's architecture. These policies are as follows: (table 1)

Table 1. Political and Architectural Policies of Yogyakarta Sultanate

Reign	Political Policies	Architectural Policies
HB I (1755-1792)	- Principle of <i>sabda pendita ratu tan kena wola-wali</i> , faithful to the promise. - Succeeded in merging the interests of the palace and the interests of Dutch colonial - "The palace is devoted to its people"	- Designing and building Keraton Yogyakarta. On 7 October 1756, it began to be resided. ( <i>dwi naga rasa tunggal/1682 Jawa</i> ) - The building of <i>Tugu Golong Gilig</i> , in 1759.
HB II (1792-1812)	- Opposing Daendels & Raffles. - The palace was divided into 2: <i>Kasultanan</i> Yogyakarta and <i>Kadipaten</i> Pakualam	- The building of <i>Gedhong (Gedhong Kuning)</i> as the residence of King until HB IX.
HB III (1812-1814)	- Dutch government prohibited the Palace to interact with other kingdoms	
HB IV (1814-1823, reigned at the age of 10)	- The relationship between HB IV and Dutch government was good, yet the relationship between HB IV and the people was vice versa - A revolt from the people occurred. - HB IV was known as figurehead of Dutch colonial/government.	
HB V (1823-1855, reigned at the age of 3)	- Accompanied by Trusteeship Council. - Diponegoro War occurred in 1825-1830, Prince Diponegoro was assisted by Kiai Mojo and Sentot Prawirodirdjo to fight Dutch colonial. - HB V had a good relationship with the Dutch government, with passive war politics.	- The building of <i>Gedong Purwarema</i> , utilized as private office of HB IX.

HB VI (1855-1877)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reign in an unstable political condition</li> <li>- The policy was passive war politics</li> <li>- Good relationship with other Kingdoms, including Brunei Kingdom</li> <li>- VOC limited social and political activities, yet grant freedom for art and cultural activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in 1867, there was an earthquake which demolished Tamansari, <i>Tugu Golong Gilig</i>, Masjid Gedhe, and Loji Kecil (Gedung Agung)</li> </ul>
HB VII (1877-1920)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The King complied to the rules made by Dutch Government.</li> <li>- The Sultan earned income from outside Yogyakarta.</li> <li>- the Sultan still spoke up for the people</li> <li>- promoting economic welfare</li> <li>- Peaceful succession, <i>Lengser Keprabon</i>, the King passed on the throne to his son.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The building of <i>Tugu Pal Putih</i>, in 1889 by Dutch government.</li> </ul>
HB VIII (1921-1939)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The changes of regulation in the palace must be with the approval from Dutch government</li> <li>- Confronting Dutch government with systematic and modern strategies.</li> <li>- Sending his sons to continue their study abroad.</li> <li>- passing down the <i>angger angering negari</i>; the teachings of <i>asta brata</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renovating <i>Tratag Rambat (Pagelaran)</i>, <i>Tratag Sutihinggil</i>, <i>Regol Danapratapa</i>, <i>Gedhong Jene</i>, by inserting European classical style (a mixture of Javanese architecture and Europe/<i>Indiche Empire Style</i>)</li> </ul>
HB IX (1940-1988)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- known as a democratic nobleman, confronting the colonial with systematic and modern strategies.</li> <li>- simplifying Keraton ceremony, civil service post was opened to the public.</li> <li>- HB IX and Paku Alam VIII joined NKRI, with Yogyakarta Decree, 5 September 1945.</li> <li>- becoming the second Vice President of Republic of Indonesia (1973-1978)</li> <li>- becoming the first Governor of Special Region of Yogyakarta (1945-1988).</li> <li>- The throne is for the people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the building of <i>Sasono Hinggil Dwi Abad</i> meeting hall in 1955 to commemorate 200 years of Keraton Yogyakarta and to replace <i>Bangsai Siti Hinggil</i>.</li> </ul>
HB X (1989-2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- during <i>Pisowanan Agung</i> at the north square, HB X and Paku Alam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the building of HB IX Museum in <i>Kedaton Courtyard</i></li> </ul>

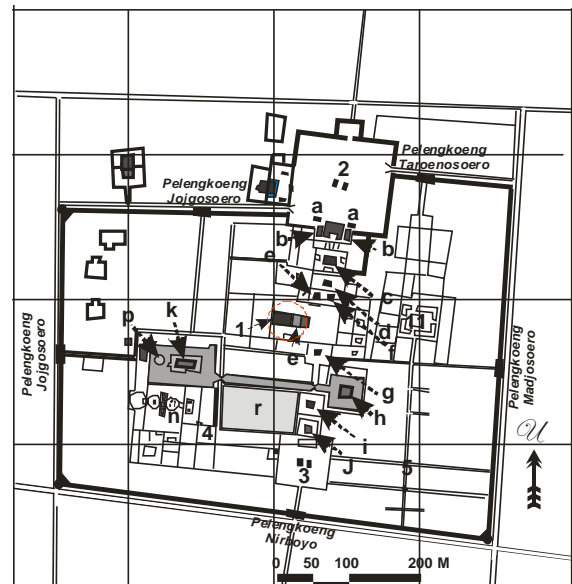
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VIII invite all people to support Reformation Movement on 20 May 1998</li> <li>- at the moment, his toughest duty is to keep the palace's tradition inand to preserve the image that Keraton is owned by the people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in 1992, to commemorate HB X as a national hero.</li> <li>- the building of "Art Building" at cultural heritage area of Benteng Vredeburg</li> </ul>
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(source: from various sources)

From table 1, it can be reviewed that there are some transformations in the function of Keraton Yogyakarta. In the reign of HB I-HB VIII, the Palace was more functioning as a royal institution while in the reign of HB IX-HB X, once opened to the public, the palace serves as a cultural institution.

#### IV. THE REIGN OF HB I–HB VIII (1755–1939)

The colonial atmosphere that accompanied the construction of Keraton Yogyakarta and the HB I background of a military strategist, made it possible for the design of the palace to function not only as a center of government but also as a center of defense. This can be identified from the construction of the fort with a height of 3.5 M and a thickness of 5 M, surrounding the palace with 5 gates whose upper part is curved, commonly known as *Pelengkung*. These 5 *Pelengkung* can be found in: the south, called *Pelengkung Nirbaya (Gading)*, the west, called *Pelengkung Jagabaya (Tamansari)*, the north (there are 2), called *Pelengkung Jagasoera (Ngasem)* and *Pelengkung Tarunasura (Wijilan)*, and the east, called *Pelengkung Madyasura* (figure 1).



Legenda:

1. Bangsal Probeyekso, *tratag* dan Bangsal *Kencana*
2. Alun-alun Lor (utara)
3. Alun-alun Kidul (selatan)
4. Taman Sari
5. Permukiman Prajurit
- a. Pemandangan
- b. Bangsal pengapit dan *Pagelaran*

- c. *Sithinggil*
- d. *Bangsals Keben/ Kemandungan Lor*
- e. *Tratag dan Bangsal Kencana*
- f. *Bangsals Trajumas*
- g. *Bangsals Kemagangan*
- h. *Panggung Segaran*
- i. *Kemandungan Kidul*
- j. *Sithinggil Kidul*
- k. *Gedhong Kenongo /mPanggung*
- n. *Sumur Gemuling*
- r. *Taman Margosatwo*

Figure 1. Complex of Keraton Yogyakarta inside of the fort at 1800 (source: Sumalyo, 2011)

During the reign of HB II, *Pelengkung Madyasura* (*Pelengkung* is kind of region gate) was destroyed by British troops and the gate then being closed until the present. Defense elements can also be observed from the thickness of the fortress that can be utilized for riding patrols and train. Each *Regol* (*Regol* is kind of gate) was equipped with bastion, which functioned as a cannon as well as a guard post (Sumalyo, 2011).

In addition to defense considerations, the palace is also designed as a medium to talk about the nature of human life's journey. It is represented in the layouts of buildings on the north-south axis. The layouts are as follows (being described in sequence from south to north): in the most southern part is South Sea, *Panggung Krapyak*, South Square, Keraton Complex, North Square, *Golong Gilig* Monument, and Mount Merapi. Mount Merapi is symbolized as *lingga* and the southern sea as *yoni*, the fusion between *lingga* and *yoni* embodies fertility symbol.

As a whole, the palace complex, in the form of buildings and trees, holds symbolic meanings as follows: (Haryanto, 2013)

- a) *Panggung Krapyak*, as a symbol of holy spirit's place of origin, *sangkan paraning*, a prospective baby. From the view of cosmology, psychology, philosophy, and symbolism of Javanese culture, *Krapyak* is a picture of the place where a person was born.
- b) *Alun-alun Selatan* (South Square), containing sand owning fragmentary nature, a symbol of a child who still put his own interests above the interests of others.
- c) A pair of banyan trees called "Wok". "Wok" derives from the word "brewok" or beard that symbolizes a child who gets older and becomes a teenager.
- d) Trees of *Pakel* and *Kweni*, symbols of teenagers who have reached their maturity and are brave (*wani*) to express their feelings to the opposite sex.
- e) *Gayam* tree, a symbol of peacefulness and tranquility (*ayem*) to describe a pair of young adults who are in love.
- f) South *Bangsals Sithinggil*, where the seeds of a male and a female meet. It is represented by the encounter of *Palem Cempora* flowers (white, male) with red *Soka* flowers (female).
- g) *Pamengkang* Road, a symbol of the path for the birth of a baby.
- h) *Kemandungan*, a symbol of a baby in the womb that is about to be born.
- i) *Kemagangan*, a symbol of a child who is ready to be mature.
- j) *Bangsals Kencana*, represents the light of nobleness and livelihood, like the sun that shines on the earth.
- k) *Bangsals Srimanganti*, represents a place for guests to await the arrival of the king (where the Sultan welcomes important guests).

- l) *Bangsals Trajumas*, represents a place for courtiers to weigh the good, the right, and the wrong (where the palace officials welcome the important guests)
- m) *Bangsals Ponconiti*, *ponco* = five, *niti* = to check, so the meaning is to investigate five issues. It is a place where the Sultan adjudicates people who violate the rules.
- n) *Bangsals Mangunturtangkal*, which means a high place to face the Lord in a moment of silence (*anangkil*).
- o) *Alun-alun Utara* (North Square), *alun* = waves. It pictures the life of human being in the world who will encounter the wave of life, either happy or sad moment, as well as prosperous or miserable life.
- p) *Margamulya* Street, symbolizes that human life should always go through the path of nobility, return to where he comes from, to the Lord.
- q) *Malioboro* Street, *mali* = guardian, *oboro* = the teachings, so it means that people are asked to implement the guardian's teachings to eliminate all temptations in life.
- r) *Margatama* Street, implies a holy path for human being who will face God the Almighty.
- s) *Golong Gilig* Monument, represents the culmination point when human being face the Creator when he passes away.

The arrangement of the building mass, building shape, building ornamentation, selection and arrangement of trees within the complex of Keraton Yogyakarta considers not only the functional elements but also old Javanese advice; *sangkan paraning dumadi* that was held in a structured manner (figure 2). The nature of this old Javanese advice is also confirmed in the content of *Tembang Macapat* and Javanese manuscript (Haryanto, 2013)

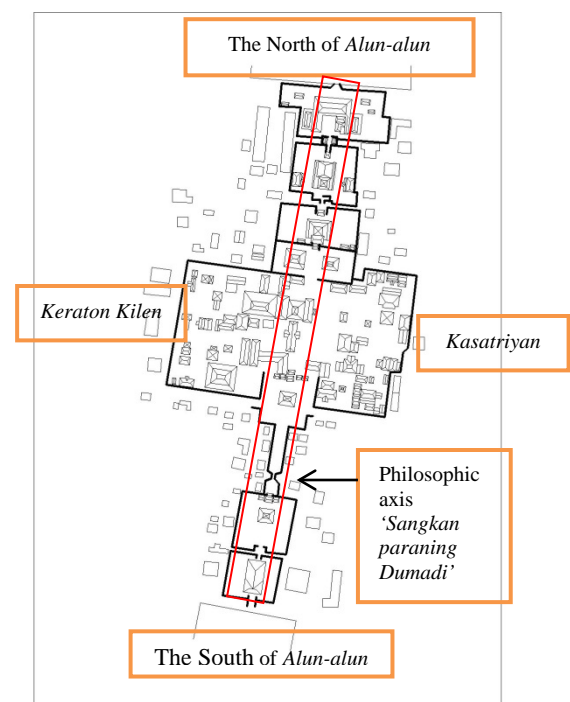


Figure 2. Philosophic axis 'Sangkan Paraning Paraning Dumadi' at Keraton Yogyakarta (source: google earth processed by author, 2017)





Figure 3. The North of *Trtatag Sithihinggil* view from *Pagelaran*, formally atmosphere of the courtiers, sacred and protective meaning, 1886, the reign of HB VII. (source: Keraton's documentation)



Figure 4. *Trtatag Rambat*, the atmosphere of sacred trial process, 1886, the reign of HB VII (source: Sumalyanto, 2011)



Figure 5. The South of *Bangsal Sithihinggil*, funeral procession of HB VIII, 1939, the roof is *Joglo Lawakan* without ornament, sacred atmosphere (source: Keraton's documentation)

During the reign of HB I-HB VIII, the buildings within the palace complex were utilized for the purpose of government activities (figure 3, 4, 5), for Sultan's coronation ceremony and for Sultan's meditation (at *Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil*, the atmosphere is very sacred). Because they embraced activities that were transcendental, the spaces in the palace carried a sacred meaning. Hierarchically, the spaces are: *Bangsal Proboyekso*, *Bangsal Kencono*, *Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil*, *Bangsal Witono*, *Bangsal Ponconiti*, *Bangsal Pangrawit*, *Bangsal Sri Manganti* and *Bangsal Trajumas*.

## V. THE REIGN OF HB IX–HB X (1940–2018)

The biggest transformation during the reign of HB IX took place when Indonesia became an independent republic and Yogyakarta Sultanate joined the NKRI. During this period, the palace gradually opened itself to the public. From time to time, there has been more and more visitors who visited the palace. In its development, tourist access to the palace is divided into two, each with a different entrance ticket. This is in line with the consideration of the vastness of Keraton Yogyakarta complex. The first zone is the northernmost of Keraton complex, *Pagelaran* complex and North *Sithihinggil* complex. The second zone is from North *Kemandungan* complex or *Keben* courtyard to *Kedhaton* complex. In the southern part of *Kedhaton*, there are still courtyards of *Kemagangan*, *Kemanggungan*, and South *Sithihinggil* which are opened to the public without tickets.

*Trtatag Pagelaran* was named *Trtatag Rambat* at the time of HB I-HB VII. Besides *Pagelaran* complex, *Sithihinggil* Complex is also included in the first zone. The buildings within this complex are *Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil* located "inside" *Trtatag Sithihinggil* and *Bangsal Witono* located in the south of *Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil*.



Figure 6. The North of *Trtatag Sithihinggil* view from *Pagelaran*. The atmosphere is relax and the tourists are looking at the artifacts and history of Keraton Yogyakarta, 2017.



Figure 7. The atmosphere of *Trtatag pagelaran* is relaxing and the tourists are enjoying Keraton's exhibits. Keraton is a gallery of Javanese art and culture, 2017.

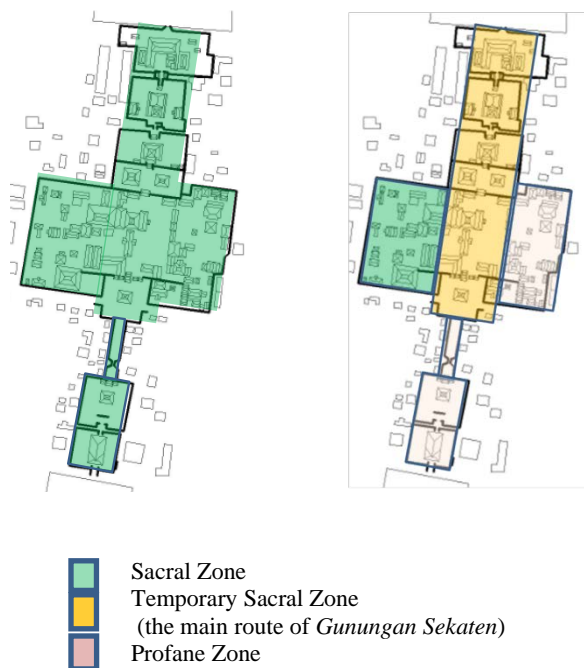


Figure 8. The Zonning change at the reign of HB I - VIII and HB IX - X

From the result of field observation, it can be concluded that the renovation exercised by HB VIII did not change the architecture of *Bangsas Manguntur Tangkil* and *Bangsas Witono*, as well as *Bangsas Pengrawit* which is "inside" *Tratag Pagelaran*. This is because of the traces of spiritual activity that the Sultan performed in those *Bangsas* (wards).

The sacredness of north *Sitihinggil* is illustrated in the fragment of *serat salokapatra*: "*sitihinggil* is a place where the king resides, consequently, not everyone can enter the place. If people wish to come to *sitihinggil*, they must own the same character as the character meaning of *Gayam* tree, which is the character of religious leader" (Sunjata, 1995). It implies that to enter *sitihinggil*, there are some terms and conditions to be applied.

Since it is opened to the tourists, *Pagelaran* complex and *Sitihinggil* complex are functioned to display historical objects of the palace. Thus, the atmosphere is no longer sacred. Keraton now acts as an art gallery of Javanese culture (figure 6 and 7). The sacred atmosphere presents in *Sitihinggil* and *Pagelaran* complex when *Garebeg* ceremony takes place (*Maulud*, *Syawal* and *Besar*). These places are the main route of *Gunungan Sekaten* from the Keraton to *Gedhe* Mosque. The procession path of *Gunungan Sekaten*, which is profane in daily basis, becomes sacred. The sacredness is temporary (figure 8).

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In general, there are significant transformations in the meaning of symbols in the architecture of Keraton Yogyakarta

between the reign of HB I-HB VIII (1755-1939) and the reign of HB IX-HB X (1940-2018). The transformations are as follows:

a) The imaginary axis, from a philosophical symbol, transforms into a performative symbol.

The philosophical axis of North-South as a symbol of *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi* (from which the human comes from and to which the human destination are) turns into a performative axis, tourist gallery; from South Square to North Square is a Javanese art and cultural gallery, from North Square to *Pal Putih* Monument is a typical Yogyakarta shopping and culinary gallery.

b) The architecture of the palace, from modesty symbol to grandeur symbol.

c) *Golong Gilig* Monument, from the philosophical symbol of *Manunggaling Kawulo lan Gusti*, transforms into *Pal Putih* Monument, the symbol of tourist existence (via selfie and wefie).

d) The fortress, from protective and defensive symbols, transforms into a boundary symbol of Keraton's tourist zone.

e) *Regol*, from a symbol of human life's journey, transforms into a transition symbol of Keraton's gallery zone.

f) Typical ornaments in palace buildings with flora-fauna patterns, calligraphy and *sengkalan*, as symbols of king's existence, transforms into visual aesthetic symbols.

g) Plants in the palace complex, as a symbol of a series of moral messages, transforms into complementary shade of the building.

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