

# Representation of Social Dynamics in the Travel Photography Works of Ranar Pradipto

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the digitalization motifs at the Tuha Indrapuri Mosque as a means of preserving traditional Acehese visual arts. This mosque stands as a historical landmark that exemplifies the amalgamation of Hindu, Islamic, and local wisdom through its decorative motifs, which possess both aesthetic and religious significance. However, numerous of these motifs have suffered damage and are at risk of being lost due to a lack of comprehensive documentation. This study employed a descriptive qualitative methodology through literature review, observation, interviews, documentation, and visual digitization utilizing graphics software, resulting in two-dimensional and three-dimensional decorative motif designs. The research findings reveal that the decorative motifs at the Tuha Indrapuri Mosque comprise floral and geometric shapes that embody the aesthetic, symbolic, and spiritual values of the Acehese people. Digitization serves as a strategic step to document and preserve traditional decorative motifs, ensuring their relevance in contemporary artistic developments. Practically, the outcomes of this digitization can be utilized as design assets for the creative industry, authentic references for future physical building restorations, and digital educational media that facilitate the younger generation's access and learning about Acehese cultural heritage visually.

## KEYWORDS

Travel Photography  
Social Dynamics  
Semiotics  
Visual Analysis  
Ranar Pradipto

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## INTRODUCTION

Photography, a visual medium, serves not only as a tool for documentation but also as a form of visual communication capable of representing social reality. Kusuma (2022) elucidates that photography is a process of “painting with light,” wherein light plays a pivotal role in shaping the atmosphere, visual character, and the inherent meaning within a photograph. Through these characteristics, photography possesses the capacity to convey messages and human experiences in a nonverbal manner. In its evolution, photographic practice has transitioned from mere visual recording to a reflective medium capable of interpreting social dynamics within society. Herwanto (2024) asserts that photography can be employed to observe social change, human interactions with the environment, and patterns of life prevalent in everyday activities. Various photographic genres, such as documentary photography and travel photography, provide photographers with a platform to present social life in a more humanistic and contextualized manner. According to Becker (2005), documentary photography functions not only as a visual record of events but also as a contextualized social practice that communicates the intricate relationship between individuals, social settings, and the meanings embedded within everyday life.

The interpretation of photographs is intrinsically linked to theoretical frameworks. Utama Putri and Putri (2023), drawing upon Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, conceptualize photographs as cultural texts imbued with denotative and connotative meanings. Beyond mere visual representation,

photographs convey social values and cultural constructs. This perspective is evident in travel photography practices that transcend documentation of destinations, encompassing the capture of human interaction with living spaces, traditions, and social environments. One Indonesian photographer who consistently delves into human-interest themes within travel photography is Ranar Pradipto. Renowned for positioning humans as the central subjects within diverse social and cultural contexts in Indonesia, his works hold significant importance for study within documentary photography and visual culture research.

Within the realm of Indonesian visual culture, research on human-interest and documentary photography has experienced substantial growth, albeit with a notable emphasis on a limited number of prominent photographers. One of the most influential figures is Don Hasman, widely recognized as a pioneer of Indonesian ethnophotography. His photographic works among communities such as the Baduy exemplify the documentation of customs, rituals, and material culture as a form of visual anthropology. Research on Hasman generally interprets his photographs as ethnographic records that prioritize cultural preservation and informational value over expressive visual framing. Another significant figure is Arbain Rambey, whose photographic practice is closely associated with Indonesian photojournalism (Simanjuntak & Fajarini, 2024). Studies on Rambey typically focus on reportage values, urban life, and the role of photography within journalistic discourse and contemporary events.

In addition to studies on photographers, several semiotic studies in Indonesia have analyzed photographs as cultural representations. For instance, Baetty and Sari (2022) examined human-interest photography through semiotic interpretation, while Susanto (2024) analyzed representations of masculinity in advertising photography. Akbar (2025) also explored documentary photography through an ethno-journalistic perspective. Studies published in *Gorga: Jurnal Seni Rupa* have similarly demonstrated the broad application of Roland Barthes' semiotics in Indonesian visual studies, including the analysis of logos, advertising imagery, and visual communication objects (Gunalan et al., 2022; Ramadhan, 2020; Swandhani et al., 2023). These studies demonstrate that Indonesian photographic research generally tends to position photography either as ethnographic documentation, journalistic testimony, or isolated semiotic analysis.

The travel photography of Ranar Pradipto occupies a unique position that is not fully captured by previous categories, prompting the present research. Unlike Don Hasman's ethnographic approach, which tends to document culture as an object of preservation, Ranar's photography emphasizes the agency of human subjects and their interaction with living spaces. Similarly, unlike Arbain Rambey's journalistic orientation, which primarily focuses on urban events and reportage, Ranar's travel photography explores the geographic and ecological diversity of the Nusantara by highlighting the interplay between humans, traditions, and environments. These concerns with cultural representation and local identity in visual media are also evident in studies of Indonesian tourism and visual communication (Cuaca et al., 2023; Setyanto, 2023). His works consistently emphasize intimacy, cultural continuity, and the ecological relationship between communities and their surroundings. This emphasis on cultural continuity and local identity is also reflected in previous visual culture studies that examine traditional artistic expressions as representations of community values and cultural preservation (Darma et al., 2023; Hendra & Agustin, 2022). The novelty of this research lies in positioning Ranar Pradipto's travel photography as a distinct form of Indonesian human-interest photography that emphasizes social interaction and human-environment interdependence through a consistent visual approach. This perspective also expands previous Indonesian visual studies that primarily focused on symbolic interpretation in static visual objects rather than recurring photographic narratives (Gunalan et al., 2022; Swandhani et al., 2023). Furthermore, it differs from studies of visual storytelling in audio-visual media that emphasize narrative construction and cinematic structure (Wahyuni et al., 2021), as this research specifically focuses on recurring visual patterns within travel photography.

The characteristics of Ranar Pradipto's photography necessitate an analytical approach that examines both visual structure and cultural significance. Consequently, this study adopts Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Barthes' semiotics is deemed highly relevant for this research due to the analysis of photographs as signifying visual texts. Barthes' framework emphasizes denotation,

connotation, and myth, which are the processes through which literal visual elements evolve into symbolic and ideological meanings influenced by culture (Barthes, 1977). This semiotic approach has been extensively applied in Indonesian visual studies to analyze logos, advertising imagery, and visual communication objects (Swandhani et al., 2023; Zakiy, 2020). Other approaches in visual sociology and cultural studies, while significant, tend to focus on distinct analytical dimensions. Becker's visual sociology and Bourdieu's sociology of photography primarily emphasize the social conditions of photographic production, circulation, and utilization, whereas Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory concentrates more on media systems and audience interpretation (Sari et al., 2026). These frameworks are valuable for comprehending institutional and structural aspects of photography, but they are less focused on close visual analysis within the photographic frame itself. Given that this study specifically analyzes visual signs, composition, gesture, ornamentation, and their cultural meanings, Barthes' semiotic approach provides the most suitable analytical foundation. In contrast, Becker's concept of photography as a social practice serves as a complementary perspective to contextualize the findings.

In light of this background, this research seeks to analyze the portrayal of social dynamics within the travel photography works of Ranar Pradipto. The research addresses the following inquiries: how are social dynamics depicted in Ranar Pradipto's photographs, and what visual strategies are employed to underscore the agency of the subjects and their connection to living spaces? This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a visual analysis approach grounded in Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The findings are anticipated to contribute to photographic studies by expanding the comprehension of travel photography as a medium of social representation that chronicles human experiences, interactions, and cultural values within diverse socio-cultural contexts.

## METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a visual analysis approach to examine the meaning and representation of social dynamics in the travel photography works of Ranar Pradipto. Qualitative research emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena through contextual interpretation, where meaning is constructed from visual and experiential data rather than numerical measurement (Kuntoro, 2024).

The research data consist of three photographs by Ranar Pradipto that were purposively selected based on their emphasis on human subjects and clear socio-cultural contexts. Data collection was conducted through documentation study by collecting photographs from the photographer's official sources and was complemented by interviews to understand the context surrounding the production of the works. Data analysis was conducted through visual reading to identify denotative meanings, followed by connotative interpretation using Roland Barthes' semiotic concepts in order to reveal the socio-cultural meanings embedded in the photographs. Data validity was maintained through triangulation between the results of visual analysis, explanations from the photographer obtained through interviews, and the use of theory as an analytical framework. The interpretations were also verified through supervisory consultation to ensure consistency with the context of the creation of the works.

The three photographs were selected through purposive sampling. To avoid ambiguity in the notion of "representative" images, this study defines representative photographs operationally as images that simultaneously fulfill six criteria: (1) geographic diversity across the Indonesian archipelago; (2) cultural diversity across different community contexts; (3) diversity of visual techniques; (4) a strong emphasis on humans as the centre of the visual narrative; (5) the representation of recognizable social interaction; and (6) a visible relationship between humans and their environments. A photograph is considered representative because, together with the other selected photographs, it reflects variations in geography, culture, visual strategy, and human-environment interaction within Ranar Pradipto's photographic practice.

Based on these criteria, the three photographs were deliberately selected. The Asmat Pokman ritual photograph in South Papua represents eastern Indonesia, communal ritual traditions, and ancestral belief systems through a low-angle composition emphasizing collective participation. The

Pacu Jawi photograph in Tanah Datar, West Sumatra, represents agrarian culture, collective labour, and human–animal interaction through a dynamic eye-level action composition. Meanwhile, the Bajau diver photograph in the Banggai Islands, Central Sulawesi, represents maritime culture, ecological adaptation, and inherited local knowledge through an intimate underwater close-up approach. Together, these three photographs represent the eastern, western, and central regions of Indonesia. They also reflect different cultural contexts and photographic techniques while consistently emphasizing human agency and the relationship between humans and their environments, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Operationalisation of the purposive selection criteria across the three photographs

Selection Criterion	Asmat Pokman Ritual (South Papua)	Pacu Jawi (Tanah Datar, West Sumatra)	Bajau Diver (Banggai Islands, Central Sulawesi)
<b>Geographic region</b>	Eastern Indonesia – riverine Papua	Western Indonesia – agrarian highlands of Sumatra	Central Indonesia – maritime archipelago of Sulawesi
<b>Cultural domain</b>	Communal ritual and ancestral belief	Agrarian tradition and collective labour	Maritime livelihood and ecological adaptation
<b>Dominant visual technique</b>	Low-angle framing, centred subject, wide ritual space	Eye-level action shot, symmetrical framing, motion capture	Underwater close-up, surface reflection, centred portrait
<b>Mode of social interaction</b>	Collective participation and leadership within ritual	Human–animal cooperation and communal spectatorship	Individual mastery embedded in inherited communal knowledge
<b>Human–environment relation</b>	Humans, ancestors, and ceremonial ground	Humans, livestock, mud, and rice-field ecology	Humans and the sea as primary living space

To ensure methodological transparency, the analysis follows a systematic three-stage procedure derived from Barthes (1977b), allowing readers to clearly follow each stage of interpretation. The analytical process moves from literal meaning to symbolic meaning and finally to cultural ideology.

1) Denotation – identifying visible elements.

At this stage, the photograph is described based on what is literally visible in the frame, including subjects, objects, gestures, composition, camera angle, lighting, and the arrangement of foreground, middle ground, and background. No interpretation is added at this stage.

2) Connotation – interpreting symbolic and emotional meaning.

The visible elements are then interpreted through their cultural and emotional associations. This stage examines how posture, ornament, framing, setting, and visual composition signify values such as identity, authority, intimacy, solidarity, or belonging.

3) Myth – identifying cultural ideology.

Finally, the connotative meanings are connected to broader cultural values and collective belief systems represented through the image, including ideas related to tradition, labour, gender, identity, and the relationship between humans and nature.

This analytical framework, presented in Table 2, was applied consistently to each photograph. The analysis was also supported by an additional dimension, namely the context of production and reception, based on interviews with the photographer. This dimension was included to situate the visual interpretation within the context in which the photographs were produced and understood.

**Table 2.** Analytical framework for the semiotic reading of each photograph

Stage	Analytical Question	Object of Reading
<b>1. Denotation</b>	What is literally visible in the frame?	Subjects, objects, gestures, composition, camera angle, lighting, and spatial layering (foreground, middle ground, background).
<b>2. Connotation</b>	What symbolic, emotional, and social meanings are represented?	Cultural associations of clothing, ornament, posture, and setting, including the effect of framing choices on the perception of the subject.

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<b>3. Myth</b>	What cultural values or collective ideologies are reinforced through the image?	Shared cultural narratives concerning identity, tradition, labour, gender, and the human–nature relationship.
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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion aim to address the research problem concerning how social dynamics are represented in the travel photography works of Ranar Pradipto. Referring to the ideas of (Barthes, 1977a), photographs are not only understood as visual representations, but also as systems of signs that contain denotative, connotative, and cultural myth meanings. The analysis is conducted on three photographs classified based on similarities in themes of visual representation that emerge from the relationships between humans, the physical environment, and cultural practices. These classifications include communal ritual activities, agrarian traditions emphasizing collective labor, and the lives of maritime communities that depend on the marine environment. This grouping is used to facilitate visual reading in revealing the interconnection between humans, living spaces, and social values represented through travel photography.

### 1. Asmat Pokman Ritual, South Papua Penyelam Bajau, Banggai Kepulauan



**Figure 1.** *Asmat Pokman Ritual, South Papua*  
Source: Instagram Ranar Pradipto (@ranarpradiptoindonesia\_)

#### a. Visual Description (Denotation)

Referring to Barthes (1977a), the denotative stage understands a photograph as what is literally visible without added values or interpretation. In this photograph, a group of men can be seen standing and moving in an open space, wearing traditional attributes such as feathered headdresses, necklaces, body coverings, and face and body paint. One man stands at a higher position in the center of the circle, standing on an elongated object resembling a wooden boat, with both hands raised holding a staff-like object decorated with feathers. Other individuals surround him, with their body positions oriented toward the center of the activity. The photographic composition places the main subject at the center of the frame, while other figures occupy the left and right sides as supporting elements. The shooting angle is slightly low, causing the body of the main subject to appear more dominant within the frame. The background shows a blue sky with clouds and a crowd of people behind the main group. Lighting comes from natural sunlight that illuminates the entire scene, producing contrast between skin tones, white body paint, wooden elements, and the color of the sky. The visual space is divided into a foreground consisting of the tip of the wooden object, a middle ground containing the main figure and surrounding individuals, and a background consisting of the crowd and sky.

#### b. Connotation + Myth (Semiotic Reading & Socio-Cultural Meaning)

Referring to the ideas of (Barthes, 1977a) photographic meaning does not stop at the level of denotation but moves into the realm of connotation, namely symbolic meanings shaped by culture, experience, and social values. White body paint and traditional ornaments can be connoted as symbols of cultural identity and connection to ancestral values. The paint does not function merely

as an aesthetic element, but as a ritual sign reflecting togetherness and communal bonds. The low-angle perspective strengthens the impression of authority and dignity, which connotatively can be associated with an important role within the cultural structure or as a symbol of leadership in ritual and celebratory contexts. The visual composition that presents a crowd not only shows activity and spatial dynamics, but can also be read as a symbol of solidarity, togetherness, and the continuity of tradition within the community. The color contrast visible in the photograph between the subjects' dark skin, white body paint, and the blue sky makes the subjects and the ritual more prominent, helping to emphasize cultural practices and communal identity in progress.

At the mythic level, the photograph constructs a narrative that tradition is an essential part of cultural identity, that ritual functions as a marker of cultural continuity, and that the relationship between humans, ancestors, and nature is maintained through ritual practices (Azzahra et al., 2025). Socially, the photograph illustrates how community members interact and perform their respective roles within the ritual. The presence of a leading figure and other participants indicates a social structure, while collective participation reinforces a strong sense of togetherness and communal solidarity.

### c. Context of Production & Reception

Based on an interview with Ranar Pradipto, this photograph was taken at the *Asmat Pokman* Festival in Asmat, South Papua, a cultural celebration that, according to the photographer, carries strong energy and rich ancestral symbolism. Ranar explained that the Asmat men in the photograph were covered in white body paint and wore feathered headdresses and traditional woven ornaments as markers of tribal identity. The figure positioned at the center of the frame and standing on a wooden boat is represented as the dance leader or ritual figure who guides the collective spirit of the group.

Ranar emphasized that the firm body gestures of the main figure and the choice of a low-angle perspective were consciously applied to highlight the energy, dynamic movement, and heroic impression of the celebration. In the context of (Barthes, 1977a) visual decisions such as camera angle, composition, and emphasis on bodily gestures are not merely technical choices, but constructions of meaning that shape how audiences understand the depicted subject. Thus, the photographer does not merely document an event, but simultaneously constructs a particular representation of strength, leadership, and ritual energy within Asmat culture.

In terms of reception, this photograph has the potential to be read by broader audiences, particularly urban communities and younger generations, as a representation of Asmat culture that remains alive, active, and preserved today. Details of ornaments, body paint, facial expressions, and collective participation present a narrative of local cultural strength and social bonds. As a documentary image, the photograph functions not only as a visual record of a festival, but also as a medium for introducing, archiving, and communicating the continuity of Asmat cultural practices to a wider public.

## 2. Representation of Agrarian Traditions and Collective Labor

*Pacu Jawi*, Tanah Datar, West Sumatra



**Figure 2.** *Pacu Jawi*, Tanah Datar, West Sumatra

Source: Instagram Ranar Pradipto (@ranarpradiptoindonesia)

### a. Visual Description (Denotation)

The photograph depicts two cows running along a muddy rice field track, with a jockey standing behind them while holding the control rope. The jockey's body appears covered in mud, and his position is centered between the two cows. In terms of composition, the two cows occupy the front part of the frame (foreground), the jockey is positioned in the middle ground, while the rice field area and spectators in the distance form the background, providing a sense of spatial depth. The parallel position of the two cows creates a visual symmetry, with the jockey as the focal point. The photograph is taken at eye level with a relatively close distance, allowing details of facial expression, mud, and bodily movement to be clearly visible. Natural lighting reveals the texture of the mud and the surface of the animals' bodies, while the slightly blurred background helps emphasize the main subject in the center of the frame.

### b. Connotation + Myth (Semiotic Reading & Socio-Cultural Meaning)

Referring to the ideas of (Barthes, 1977a), the reading of a photograph moves from denotative meaning toward connotation shaped by culture, social experience, and collective values, reaching the layer of cultural myth that frames visual interpretation. Connotatively, this photograph represents the relationship between humans and nature within the agrarian life of the Minangkabau community. The mud attached to the jockey's body not only indicates the condition of the arena, but also becomes a symbol of the community's closeness to the land as a source of life. The raced cows are not merely understood as livestock, but as markers of pride, status, and the social value of their owners. The upright posture of the jockey presents a heroic image that signifies courage, adrenaline, agility, and the human ability to control the forces of nature and animals. Within Barthes' framework, these visual signs penetrate the layer of cultural myth that affirms hard work, resilience, and closeness to the land as social identities continuously passed down.

The visual dynamics formed by the movement of the cows, the jockey's body position, and the direction of motion lines symbolically reflect social dynamics: individual courage, collective labor, and traditions that shape Minangkabau communal identity. *Pacu Jawi* functions not only as popular entertainment, but also as a space of honor, a celebration of harvest, and a symbol of the interconnectedness between the human body, nature, and tradition unified within cultural practice.

### c. Context of Production & Photo Reception

According to Ranar Pradipto, this photograph was taken during the *Pacu Jawi* tradition in Tanah Datar, West Sumatra. The figure of the jockey, covered in mud and standing between two fast moving cows, captures the speed, tension, and risks of the race, while the splashing mud adds visual dramatization. The selection of angle, focus, and timing deliberately highlights the visual dynamics of the cows' forward motion and the jockey, bodily energy, and directional movement lines, which simultaneously emphasize social dynamics namely individual courage, human-animal cooperation, and human-nature interaction within the Minangkabau tradition.

For audiences, particularly urban communities and younger generations, this photograph allows them to experience the sensation of competition and tension while simultaneously understanding social values: hard work, courage, and collective traditions that constitute communal identity. Thus, the *Pacu Jawi* photograph not only emphasizes dramatic visual aspects, but also serves as a bridge between tradition and modern viewers, presenting the values, identity, and pride of the Minangkabau community as a living cultural heritage.

## 3. Representation of Ecological Adaptation in Maritime Communities

Bajau Diver, Banggai Islands



**Figure 3.** Bajau Diver, Banggai Islands

Source: Instagram Ranar Pradipto (@ranarpradiptoindonesia\_)

#### **a. Visual Description (Denotation)**

The photograph depicts a man positioned beneath the surface of clear water. The subject wears traditional wooden diving goggles, while the camera is placed very close to his face, making the details of his eye expression, skin texture, and the shape of the goggles appear clear and dominant. At the upper part of the frame, the water surface reflects the subject's face, creating a doubled visual image. In his hand, a simple fish-hunting tool resembling a spear can be seen.

The photo composition uses center composition, with the subject's face positioned precisely in the middle of the frame as the main focal point. The framing is tight, with a close-up, eye-level underwater angle. Lighting comes from natural sunlight penetrating the water surface, producing soft light. The color tone is dominated by vibrant blue-green water hues, while the greenish wooden color of the goggles serves as a contrasting visual accent. The clarity of the water creates a clear spatial depth, with the subject's face as the foreground, the hunting tool as the middle ground, and underwater vegetation as the background, clearly emphasizing the sea as the subject's primary living space.

#### **b. Connotation + Myth (Semiotic Reading & Socio-Cultural Meaning)**

Referring to the concepts of connotation and myth proposed by (Barthes, 1977a), a photograph does not merely present visual reality but constructs cultural meanings related to values, identity, and social practices. At the connotative level, this photograph does not simply record a diving activity, but represents the intimate relationship between humans and the sea in the life of the Bajau people. The traditional diving goggles function as a symbol of local knowledge passed down through generations, signifying the ecological adaptation of maritime communities to aquatic environments. The reflection of the subject's face on the water surface creates a sense of duality, as if the subject exists between two worlds, the underwater world and the surface world reinforcing the meaning that Bajau life cannot be separated from the sea as a social, economic, and cultural space.

The proximity of the camera to the subject's face strengthens a humanistic narrative in which the Bajau community is not presented as an object of visual exoticism, but as living cultural subjects who possess agency and maintain a deep relationship with their environment. The calm and focused gaze reflects skill, resilience, and confidence developed from an early age through lived experience at sea. Within Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, these visual signs move toward the level of

cultural myth concerning a harmonious human–nature relationship, where the sea is not understood as a space to be conquered, but as an integral part of identity and livelihood continuity.

Furthermore, the subject’s athletic body, serious expression, and the presence of a fish-hunting tool construct a myth of traditional working masculinity. In maritime societies, the ability to dive and hunt is not merely a technical skill, but also a symbol of men’s social roles as food providers and guardians of family continuity. Thus, this photograph presents a narrative of authenticity, resilience, and the sustainability of traditional knowledge amid the currents of modernization.

### **c. Context of Production & Reception**

Based on an interview with Ranar Pradipto, this photograph was taken in the Banggai Islands, Luwuk, Central Sulawesi, featuring an individual from the Bajau ethnic group, a maritime community known as the “Sea Nomads” due to their close relationship with the sea. Ranar explained that the purpose of this photographic work was to capture the essence of Bajau life, particularly their intimate relationship with the sea as their primary living space. The choice of an underwater perspective allows the subject to be presented within his most natural environment, while the facial reflection on the water surface provides an engaging visual quality without departing from the documentary domain. Natural lighting was intentionally maintained to preserve the atmosphere and visual clarity. He also emphasized the importance of eye expression behind the traditional wooden goggles as a representation of visual sharpness and adaptive ability developed by the Bajau community from a young age through diving practices.

In terms of reception, this photograph has the potential to be interpreted by a broad audience, particularly urban communities and younger generations, as a reminder that traditional maritime lifestyles are not merely viewed as aesthetically appealing, but represent lived realities that currently face challenges from modernization and ecological change. Therefore, this photograph functions not only as visual documentation, but also as a medium for appreciation and archival preservation of Bajau cultural knowledge and the identity of Indonesia’s coastal communities.

## **4. Visual Patterns and Human Agency in Ranar Pradipto’s Travel Photography**

Read individually, the three photographs document very different worlds: a Papuan ritual, a Sumatran race, and a Sulawesi dive. Read together, however, they reveal a consistent visual grammar that constitutes Ranar Pradipto’s signature as a travel photographer and that allows the analysis to move from three discrete readings to a single overarching argument. Across all three images the same compositional and ideological strategies recur, and it is in their convergence that Ranar’s distinctive contribution becomes visible.

The most pronounced pattern is the centralisation of the human subject. In each photograph the principal figure occupies the optical centre of the frame: the ritual leader on the boat, the jockey between the cattle, and the diver’s face within the water. This recurring centre composition is not a neutral habit but a strategy for strengthening subject agency, asserting that the human being is the organising principle of the image rather than an incidental presence within a scenic landscape. Composition here performs an argument: the person is the subject of the photograph, not its decoration.

A second pattern is the deliberate manipulation of angle and proximity to dignify the subject. Ranar employs low-angle framing in the Asmat ritual to lend the leader monumentality and extreme proximity in the Bajau portrait to render interiority and gaze; in both cases the technique elevates rather than distances the subject, refusing the surveying viewpoint that often characterises exoticising imagery, while the Pacu Jawi photograph achieves a comparable effect through eye-level intimacy with the action. The cumulative result is a body of work organised around closeness and respect rather than spectacle.

A third pattern is the consistent embedding of the human subject within an ecological and social relationship. None of the three figures is isolated: each is shown in active relation to a living space, namely ancestral ground, cultivated land, and the sea, and to a community, whether the surrounding ritual participants, the spectating crowd, or the inherited knowledge that the lone diver carries. Ranar’s travel photography thus consistently frames identity as relational, constituted

through interaction between people and between people and their environment, which is the visual articulation of the “social dynamics” that this research set out to identify (Izzara & Nelmira, 2021).

Taken together, these patterns support a single overarching claim: Ranar Pradipto practises a human-centred, non-exoticising travel photography in which composition is mobilised to confer agency, intimacy to confer dignity, and environmental context to articulate cultural continuity. Where ethnography catalogues and photojournalism reports, Ranar’s images propose a relationship, between viewer and subject and between subject and world. This integrated visual strategy, rather than any single photograph, constitutes the study’s principal finding.

These findings can be read back against the theoretical frameworks introduced earlier, and in doing so they both confirm and extend prior scholarship. Becker’s (1995) conception of documentary photography as a contextualised social practice is strongly supported, since Ranar’s images acquire meaning only in relation to the social settings and cultural relations they depict, and the interview data confirm that his compositional decisions are oriented toward communicating those relations rather than merely recording appearances. At the same time the findings extend Becker’s argument from the sociology of the photographic act toward the internal semiotics of the frame, showing how social practice is encoded in specific, repeatable visual choices, namely centring, low angle, and proximity, that can be read systematically.

The analysis also reconnects with Kusuma’s (2022) account of light as a generator of atmosphere and meaning. In each photograph Ranar’s reliance on natural light is not incidental: the contrast of sunlight in the Asmat ritual, the revealing texture of daylight on mud in Pacu Jawi, and the soft refracted light of the Bajau dive all function as connotative agents, confirming Kusuma’s claim while specifying how light contributes to the construction of human dignity and ecological belonging. Finally, the reading aligns with Utama Putri and Putri (2023) in treating the photograph as a cultural text and with Barthes (1977) in demonstrating that the mythic layer, that is, ideologies of tradition, labour, and the human–nature bond, is accessible through disciplined attention to denotation and connotation. Rather than leaving these theories in the introduction, the discussion therefore shows the analysis to be in active dialogue with them: supporting Becker and Kusuma, operationalising Barthes, and contributing a specifically Indonesian, travel-photographic case to a literature that has more often examined static cultural artefacts and single works than the recurring visual grammar of a travel photographer (Mubarat et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of three travel photography works by Ranar Pradipto, this study demonstrates that travel photography serves not only as visual documentation but also as a medium of social representation that captures the interplay between humans, culture, and the environment. Through visual strategies such as centered composition, low-angle framing, and close shooting distance, Ranar consistently positions humans as the primary subjects of the visual narrative. At the denotative level, the photographs depict communal rituals, agrarian traditions, and maritime life practices. At the connotative and mythic levels, the photographs represent spirituality, cultural solidarity, collective labor, ecological adaptation, and the relationship between humans and nature. Consequently, Ranar Pradipto’s travel photography can be comprehended as a visual representation of Indonesian social and cultural life through a human-centered perspective.

Academically, this study contributes to the advancement of travel photography studies by illustrating that travel photography can be interpreted not only through aesthetic perspectives but also through social and cultural representation. However, this research is confined to three selected photographs and exclusively focuses on one photographer employing Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach. Future studies may expand the number of photographs, compare photographers with varying visual characteristics, or integrate semiotic analysis with audience reception studies to provide broader perspectives.

For photography practitioners, this study underscores the significance of cultural ethics in travel photography practices in Indonesia. Photographers should not solely prioritize visual aesthetics but also comprehend the cultural meanings inherent in the communities, traditions, and spaces they photograph. Furthermore, photographers should refrain from exploitative or overly exotic visual

framing and instead present communities with respect, dignity, and cultural sensitivity. Through this approach, travel photography can function not only as visual media but also as a form of cultural appreciation and social communication.

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