

WOMEN'S EXPRESSION IN CONTEMPORARY BATIK FABRIC IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: UNESCO's recognition of Indonesian textiles (batik) as a cultural heritage provides wider opportunities for the batik industry. The fact that needs to be known is that batik craftsmen in Indonesia are dominated by women, but research on batik textiles so far have not explored femininity in Indonesian batik motifs. This study aims to analyze the design of feminine-style batik motifs by Indonesian craftswomen. The data on batik motifs was collected in three cities, namely Pekalongan, Semarang and Solo. The visual analysis was prioritized in this research by tracing batik work documents from the aspect of the motif structure, the source of the idea and the value of feminism. The results showed that making batik fabric was dominated by women. Feminism-style batik motifs in Indonesia are dominated by plant objects (particularly flowers). The elements of red, green, light brown and blue are the most widely used than other colors. The femininity of batik motifs is depicted in an organic look that is presented in various curved lines. Femininity in batik motifs is often found, particularly in contemporary batik, which tries to break away from the rigidity of traditional batik.

Keywords: contemporary batik, femininity, visual craft women expression.

1 INTRODUCTION

Batik has become a clothing trend in Indonesia recently, particularly for women. This is shown by the widespread legitimacy of batik in various districts in Indonesia namely Kudus batik, Semarang batik, Batang batik, Cimahi batik, and even Kalimantan batik which is growing sporadically. Batik is not just a decoration on a piece of cloth, but contains aesthetic symbols [1, 2]. Previously, batik activities were only carried out by courtiers of the palace and then expanded to other areas outside the palace in Indonesia [3, 4]. Many batik fabrics are produced by women both as a main job and as a side job [5, 6]. Batik is growing very rapidly, from traditional to contemporary batik which offers more creative and contemporary motifs [7, 8]. In the midst of these developments, batik craftswomen occupied a vital position as creators, because of their ability to work with the highest efficiency with the lowest wages [9]. However, batik research about batik craftswomen had so far gone unnoticed, whereas batik craftswomen must adapt to the character, needs and desires of consumers so that traditional batik products are always in demand in line with the challenges of socio-cultural change [10, 11]. On the one hand, the aesthetic adaptation of batik craftswomen is a very important issue in the creation of batik. The right aesthetic adaptation will be able to produce artistic batik works as well [1, 12]. On the other hand, femininity usually appears as a pattern that helps form the visuals of batik motifs.

Batik research has actually been carried out by other researchers in the academic and professional realms. One of the historical studies of batik was conducted by Pramono, et al. [11] about the history of Sukapura batik in the study of semiotics and Lokaprasidha, et al. [13] about the history and development of Kampung Batik Kauman Pekalongan. Batik research with a focus on motifs has also been carried out by most researchers in Indonesia [14, 15]. Meanwhile, research on the creation of contemporary batik motifs was carried out by Nurcahyati and Affanti [16]. On the other hand, the previous batik research was also conducted by Sugiarto, et al. [17] particularly about the trend of regional icon motifs.

Unfortunately, these batik studies are still limited to historical issues and aesthetic studies in general; they are not discussing women's expressions in contemporary batik motifs in Indonesia. Two research problems to be solved are „how is the visual form of contemporary batik motifs that are often made by batik craftswomen?“ and “how is the value of femininity represented in the batik motif?“

In this case, this paper is important to convey. We cannot deny that most contemporary Indonesian batik motifs depict visual elements that are close to the world of women, including flower figures, plant figures and the use of colors identical to women. Batik products are also more uniquely created in women's dress products.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study uses a field research approach as part of artistic research, which focused on descriptive explanations of the expressions of craftswomen on batik products as textile heritage in Indonesia [18, 19]. The method was chosen because this study aims to find femininity (women expression) contained in the design of contemporary Indonesian batik motifs, both explicitly and implicitly presented. This research was conducted with a multiple case study design in the three most famous batik industrial areas in Indonesia, namely Pekalongan, Solo and Semarang.

The participants in this study were determined by purposive sampling, so that three batik craftswomen were selected in Kauman Village in Pekalongan, Laweyan Village in Surakarta and the Figa Batik community in Rejomulyo Village in Semarang, which represented many batik industries in Indonesia. Craftswomen are selected based on their experience and style of contemporary motifs [20].

The main data was collected through observations of batik craftswomen in the process of making batik motifs. This study also attempts to collect various information about women's interests and orientations in artistic expression through in-depth interviews [21]. While the visual data, in the form of motifs, was collected through a visual study of the designs of the motifs made. The data analysis uses an interactive analysis model, with the following procedures: data reduction, data presentation and verification [22].

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The development of contemporary batik of Indonesia

As a heritage of traditional textiles in Indonesia, batik has developed from time to time, ranging from classic batik to contemporary batik creations, which increasingly gives crafters the freedom to explore the uniqueness of batik motifs, ideas and techniques [13]. Contemporary batik has been separated from the source of knowledge of traditional techniques that must use a night barrier but with variations in techniques by using canting, stamping, or painting in the process of its creation. In fact, contemporary batik can occupy a position as an artistic work of art [23, 24].

Contemporary batik keywords are "contemporary" or "newness" in the belief of postmodernism [25]. Contemporary indicators are manifested in contemporary concepts discussed [26]. Contemporary batik of Indonesia has been carried out by craftsmen, practitioners and entrepreneurs in the last ten years and has become the beginning of the rise of the national batik industry with various sources of development ideas, the majority of which rely on superior potential and local wisdom [16].

The phenomenon of batik in Indonesia is always interesting to study related to events, classification or categorization and its visualization. Some centers of the development of contemporary batik in Indonesia are in Pekalongan, Surakarta, Semarang, Cirebon and Yogyakarta, as well as the surrounding areas. These cities have always been pioneers in the development of batik in Indonesia. In fact, the batik industries continue to grow at this time to form a special brand for a good image in society [27].

Based on research on the development of batik in Pekalongan, Surakarta and Semarang, contemporary batik developed in the three areas that were developed with an orientation to novelty through four main strategies namely: (a) material processing, (b) motif design, (c) making process techniques and (d) the use in fashion. The novelty is an adjustment to the interests of consumers, particularly to the younger generation.

First, the material used is hot wax and it was scratched with a canting or stamped on the fabric. The batik cloth in traditional batik is generally *mori* fabric [28]. In contemporary batik, fabric materials that can be used include *mori* fabric, cotton fabric and silk fabric. It should be emphasized that textiles are referred to as "batik" when using wax as a barrier or color filter, whether it is applied by writing (called batik), stamped (called batik print making) or screen printing.

Second, contemporary batik that developed in Solo, Semarang and Pekalongan can use three making process techniques. Hand scratches on written batik will produce unique and specific patterns or motifs. The results of this motif pattern will later become the subject to get the main features. The results of batik with the stamp technique will produce motifs that repeat symmetrically. While the results of batik with screen printing techniques can produce repeating or specific patterns.

Contemporary batik is a modification of existing batik motifs, namely a combination of machete and Klithik motifs or an improvisation of the Sekar universe motif [29]. However, contemporary batik is now more flexible to follow the demand of the community [10].

3.2 Batik craftswomen in Indonesia

Based on the 15 participants spread across the Kauman, Laweyan and Rejomulyo batik industries, all of them were batik craftswomen. Two of them were single and 13 were married. The average is that they had been in the profession as batik craftswomen for more than 5 years. In fact, three of them were more than 10 years old. Meanwhile, there were both male and female of batik business owners.

In historical records, batik is included in the work of women. This work was mainly carried out in the areas of Solo and Yogyakarta. The community

who participated in making batik included women, both young and old generations. They worked to earn money or because they were unemployed, to be used by themselves. However, due to changes in the socio-economic structure, batik work was currently only carried out by women who were still interested in making batik for generations for reasons of economic need [30]. Women who work as batik makers do not only string the existing motifs. But also there is an aesthetic expression expressed by craftswomen in a piece of fabric to produce an artistic batik textile work. In this condition, women's beliefs, values and aesthetic tastes are embedded in the batik fabric they make, which are visualized through specific motifs. Thus, it can be emphasized that batik work is a representation of Javanese women.

The aesthetic expression of the batik craftswomen was supported by various batik techniques, namely from writing, stamping or print making techniques. Based on observations of 15 participants, the most widely used technique was writing and printing. Most of the participants' ability to make batik was obtained from generation to generation from their parents. Some of the participants acquired skills from fellow craftswomen and attended training.



Figure 1 Batik women in Kauman Village, Pekalongan region (documentation 2020)

3.3 Flower figure as a visual expression of batik craftswomen: motifs, colors and patterns in contemporary batik

The visual expression of batik craftswomen will not be separated from the guidelines, values, appetites and segmentations. The following picture is used to explain systematically the aesthetic expressions of batik craftswomen in a socio-cultural context, which will have implications for the results of contemporary batik expressions (adapted from Rohidi) [31]. The characteristic of batik as an expression of women is always shown through the depiction of motifs with the subject matter of flowers and plants that are being created to become motifs. Batik motifs are generally formed

through three approaches, namely stylization, deformation and distortion. The 15 participants in this study used stylization as an approach in formulating motifs. However, some of them admitted that the motifs they created were duplicating the existing ones. The first step in stylizing was to make a basic shape with simple line elements; this would be the main motif. The second step, the main motif was filled with lines, dots (*cecek*) or simpler shapes to fill the space. This was called *isen-isen*. The third step was to complete with other forms as a complement to the emptiness of space.

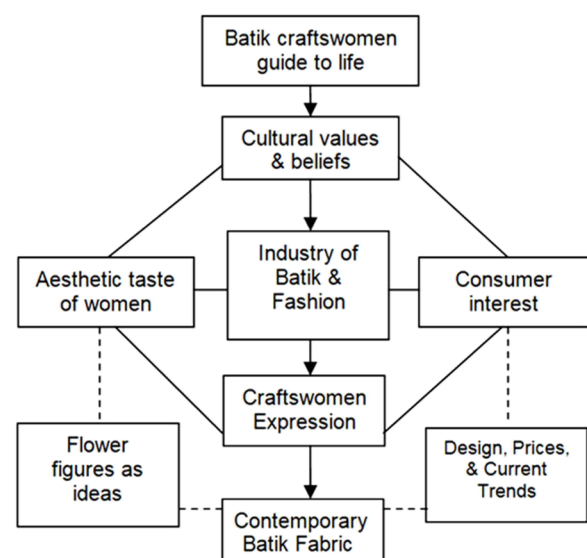




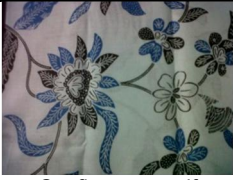









Figure 2 A chart describing the encouragement of aesthetic expression of batik craftswomen

The motifs were then arranged by using a pattern with certain techniques in a geometric fractal [32]. Among the various techniques in compiling patterns which were carried out by batik craftswomen were the full-repeat, half-drop, quarter-drop, diamond-repeat, parallel repetition and opposite repetition techniques. Through these techniques, plant figures as a source of ideas were described as main motifs, *isen-isen* and complements.

The changes and diversity in the use of batik fabric by Indonesian women are influenced by changes and developments in the role of Indonesian women themselves, starting from only doing domestic activities, but also attending school and working in the community [33]. In the development of contemporary fashion, the fashion trend factor is also an indicator of the development of batik fabric production and use, so it results adaptive and flexible batik clothing according to its era [34]. The author presents six motifs out of the fifteen motifs collected. Table 1 shows examples of plants and flowers as visual expressions and characteristics of women. This batik was developed creatively but still came from old motifs.

Table 1 Expression of women in batik fabric

Batik fabric	Main motif	Pattern	Dominant color	Women image
 Buketan motif		full repeat	light blue, dark blue, pink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a 'batik bouquet', which has been created into a variety of new motifs. This motif is widely created in Pekalongan area. The flower arrangement symbolizes the firm and loving personality of women.
 Blooming flower motif		diamond-repeat	pink, blue, light green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This batik fabric was made by a batik craftswoman in Laweyan Surakarta. This batik has the main motif of flowers in bloom with the dominance of pink on the background and light blue on the flower subject matter. This motif has the meaning of "radiance" and elegance. Based on the pattern and color, this batik is identical to the character of women.
 Sunflowers motif		diamond-repeat	blue, white, black	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This batik fabric is made by a batik craftswoman in Pekalongan area. This batik has the main motif of sunflowers which are in bloom with the dominance of white on the background and blue on the sunflower petals. This motif has the meaning of one's spirit of life that must be owned by Javanese women.
 Shoe flower pattern		full-repeat	light blue, dark blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This batik fabric is made by craftswomen in Semarang, namely the Batik Figa community. This batik has the main motif of hibiscus flowers with the dominant colors blue and purple as the background. In the perspective of Javanese women, this motif has the meaning of purity, beauty, and elegance. This flower is also popular in Sundanese and Malay culture.
 Charcoal flower motif		half-drop	purple, red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This batik fabric is mostly made by batik craftswomen in Rejomulyo, Semarang. This batik is an icon of the Semarang city. Its character is Semarang batik, because at the end of the 15th century a type of tamarind or tamarind tree grew which was typical in Semarang. Tamarind has a philosophical meaning in Javanese culture. It symbolizes spirit and welfare.
 Tulip flower pattern		parallel repeat	yellow, blue, green, red, pink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This batik fabric is made by craftswomen in Surakarta. This batik has the main motif of a blooming Kanthil flower with a dominant colors are red and blue on the floral pattern and yellow on the background. In women's lives, this flower has the meaning of closeness and peace.

(Images source: documentation in 2021)

Flowers and plants are symbols of women or representations of women [35]. This belief is actually most visible in painting. Flowers are also used to symbolize women with tenderness of heart, even with great sexual desire [36]. But the symbolism of flowers in western aesthetics, especially in painting, is different from Javanese aesthetics in Indonesia, which is oriented to God's blessing [37, 38]. The symbolism of flowers as a visual expression has many meanings, not even about associations with women and sexuality. Indeed, flowers have always represented female sexuality throughout history and in almost every region of the world. This is also believed in the field of painting as well as batik textiles. Batik activities can be called as

a representation of Javanese women, even though they are included in informal work that is mostly done at home with salaries that are not higher than the average salary of men [39]. Philosophically, Javanese women think of themselves as individuals who are skilled in doing many things, ranging from jobs that are done while sitting to jobs that require more energy [40]. The values of independence and discipline are inherent in Javanese women's behavior patterns, so they do not depend on men or husbands for economic needs [41]. In addition, because most Indonesians keep using batik, batik still exists today, this is inseparable from the role of women as craftswomen. However, it is proven that the current trend is changing from traditional

to contemporary batik patterns. The transformation of batik mostly comes with various design changes [42]. In addition, changes occur in terms of techniques, dyes and equipment [10].

4 CONCLUSION

Batik craftswomen expressed themselves aesthetically. In making batik they used the depiction of motifs with floral ideas. Contemporarily, the resulting motifs had been creatively explored to diversify batik products, but still referred to the old forms that already exist. The visual expression of batik craftswomen were most visible in two ways, namely the selection of flowers as the main motif and the selection of pink, blue and green colors which were more dominant than other colors in fabric coloring. While the technique of batik still maintained the writing technique in addition to the development of stamp and screen printing techniques. Symbolically, this visual expression was also accompanied by a philosophical belief in the role and position of women in Javanese culture, namely as human beings who are independent and full of love in the family. Symbolically, flowers have a certain meaning (it is identical to the nature of femininity) which is widely applied in women's cultural rites in Java.

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