

A Reconstruction of Indonesian National Identity by Yogyakarta's Batik in the Reformasi Period¹

Pembangunan Identiti Nasional Melalui Batik Yogyakarta di Zaman Reformasi

CHANAKAMOL KONGYOK

ABSTRACT

This article aims to show the relationship between the Batik of Yogyakarta and the development of Indonesian National Identity in the period of reform. The research is developed from the perspectives of political history, art and culture. From the perspective of political history, Yogyakarta was regarded as an important city in which it was once the capital city of Indonesia and was the state where the proclamation of independence was made. This city has been designated as the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Additionally, the city of Yogyakarta is seen as the cradle of Indonesian culture and the Javanese in particular. One aspect of which significant local culture belongs to this region is known as "batik." Yogyakarta's batik is more than just a valued way of dressing; it's also a reflection of Indonesian society and national identity.

Keywords: Reconstruction; national identity; Indonesia; Yogyakarta's batik; Reformasi period

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan hubungan antara Batik Yogyakarta dan perkembangan identiti nasional Indonesia sewaktu zaman reformasi yang dikupas daripada perspektif sejarah politik, dan seni dan budaya. Daripada perspektif sejarah politik, Yogyakarta adalah kota penting di negara Indonesia yang dahulunya turut merupakan ibu negara Indonesia dan merupakan tempat di mana kemerdekaan diisytiharkan. Kota ini telah ditetapkan sebagai Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta hingga kini. Berdasarkan perspektif seni dan budaya, kota Yogyakarta merupakan kota yang masih mempertahankan budaya tradisional Jawa. Salah satu aspek penting daripada cabang budaya ini adalah "batik." Daripada perspektif budaya Jawa, batik Yogyakarta lebih daripada sekadar cara berpakaian yang berharga. Ia juga mencerminkan masyarakat Indonesia. Selain itu, orang Jawa, yang merupakan penduduk utama negara itu, telah menekankan keunggulan Jawa melalui seni dan budaya. Orang Jawa lantas menularkan batik Yogyakarta sebagai sebahagian daripada identiti nasional Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Rekonstruksi; identiti nasional; Indonesia; batik Yogyakarta; zaman reformasi

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia that has the fourth largest population in the world. The country consists of 17,500 islands, and has more than 700 languages; however, the characteristics of ethnicity have not been officially established in the country. For example, ethnicities are not listed on personal identity cards. The differences among ethnicities have been disregarded by the government as much as possible, in order to support the development of a sense of unity in the nation (Johan Meuleman 2006). Culture is therefore a core element of the collective identity of Indonesians, acting in a way that interweaves the disparate peoples into a single nationality. The phenomenon of bringing people together with a common identity under the banner of the aspect

of culture known as "batik" is a phenomenon that has clearly arisen in Indonesia, as can be seen from social conditions that changed when the nation-state rose in influence, together with the establishment of state cultural policies of reform known as *Reformasi*. These changes have caused the Indonesians to experience continual movements of change in the culture of batik.

The period of national governance in the age of reform, was a time in which democracy was being called for, even though, at the same time, it was also a period in which greater emphasis was placed on culture than had been the case in earlier periods. An important example of this support of culture occurred in 2003 when President Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of President Sukarno and the first woman to serve as President of Indonesia,

joined the second ASEAN summit meeting (Bali Concord II) on the island of Bali in Indonesia. This meeting gave rise to three important associations: the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The leaders of ASEAN issued a public statement agreeing with the principle of joining together in the ASEAN Economic Community, or AEC, by the year 2020. This would be a kind of common market in which the ASEAN countries would come together to form a single market and a single production base by allowing the free movement of goods, services, investments, and skilled labor among these nations. In addition, they designated 12 important industrial sectors that would take part in this ASEAN common market. One of those was the industry of textiles and clothing (Department of Trade Negotiations in Ministry of Commerce 2014: 16-20; Economic and Social Commission for ASIA and the Pacific 2014: 16).

The following period saw the rise of President Susilo Bambang Yudhyono, who in 2004 became the first Indonesian president to be directly elected by the populace, after political reforms and a constitutional amendment. Even though, at first, he did not receive much acceptance from the people, he was gradually able to improve the administration of the country. He was also able to deal with various problems, for example by successfully negotiating peace with Aceh, and by dealing with various disputes among the various tribes and peoples. He also revived the economy, achieving a rapid rate of growth and established such cultural strength that today Indonesia an attractive country for investors. The speeding up of development and the addressing of various problems resulted in the re-election, in 2009, of President Yudhyono for a second term (Anthony Reid 2011: 37-39). In the same year, President Yudhyono began promoting batik on the international stage, and succeeded in having it declared part of the Indonesian national heritage, as recognized by UNESCO. This represented another step in the constitution of the national identity of Indonesia. It was hoped that not only would batik constitute part of the identity of the nation, but that these efforts would lead to the official registry of this aspect of Indonesian heritage, raising its significance as part of Indonesian culture in the eyes of the world (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre 2009; Soewarsono 2011: 157).

In addition, in 2014, the Indonesian government promoted Yogyakarta batik both within the country

and overseas, as the national handicrafts society of Indonesia offered Yogyakarta batik to represent Indonesian handicrafts in the Asia-Pacific region section of a global handicrafts competition held in Beijing, China. In this competition, the distinctive characteristics of Yogyakarta batik, in terms of its history, the process of its creation, the artistry involved, and artisans who made the textiles were highlighted. Clearly, many factors have played a role in making this handicraft so valuable for Indonesia's society and economy. For this reason, Yogyakarta was proclaimed to be the World Batik City by the Asia Pacific Region of the World Crafts Council (WCC) (Setiawan Deni 2015: 55-57). Moreover, this writer's interviews with Indonesians in Yogyakarta on the use of batik in creating Indonesian national identity revealed that one of the most important points, from their perspective was that "Indonesia is full of people of many different nationalities and ethnic groups, having different cultures. Sharing a particular culture as a way of showing Indonesian nationhood or citizenship is something that is important not only to the state but also to the Indonesian people. The people are also prepared to work together for the country to have unity. The promotion of the culture of batik that is happening today is like the opening of an additional channel of work for the people" (Eddy Setiabudi, Hani Winotosastro, Pak Prayoga interviewed on 30 September 2017). Therefore, it might be said that the creation of the Indonesian state through the creation of an identity for the nation did not just arise from the state or just from the people, but from both groups playing parts in this together.

Thus it can be seen that the story of the textile called "batik" cannot be told just by considering the cloth itself. Rather, an understanding of the culture of Yogyakarta batik should be told through historical records concerning Indonesian culture, through photographs, through records available in museums, and through people's memories, in addition to the continual creation of new customs and activities concerning batik. These activities contribute to the creation of meanings for batik, and help it to retain and enhance its importance in society, proceeding in cooperation with the support of cultural policies by the authorities known as "the state" (the central power) and "the sultan" (the local power), together with the people in Yogyakarta as they demonstrate the culture of batik in various ways. As Benedict Anderson (2009: 13) has suggested, the nation is imagined as a community. People of the same

community will imagine together the things that deal with the community or the nation. Meanwhile, Michael Herzfeld (2005: 38), expanding on this point, said that the nation is not merely imagined together, but is also practiced together on the level of cultural activities.

This writer has therefore considered two main elements that are displayed in the culture of Yogyakarta's batik. The first is the collective social memory about the batik of the palace. The second is the collective social memory of batik's role in uplifting or drawing attention to the culture of Java. Both of these factors are connected with Javanese social structure, customs, and manners in that they join together the forces of the administrative center with the palace of Yogyakarta, where the sultan reigns supreme at the peak of the structure.

According to the traditional belief of the people of Java, the sultan was the representative of the devadas, and was responsible for protecting his domain and caring for the welfare of the people. The transmission of the sultan's power occurred through blood descent, therefore causing the power of the sultans to originate at the same place, to have stability, and to be carried out justly (Benedict Anderson 1990: 24-27). This style of power falls in line with the thinking that the power of Javanese custom, as well as the former cultural practices and beliefs, were important factors that connected with the manner in which the sultan used his power. The people of Yogyakarta therefore believed that the raja was the representative of God as Lord of the world of people. The raja needed to live among and serve those people who are loyal to him (Adrian Vickers 2005: 154). People therefore were connected and were absorbed in the former religion and customs, and this caused them to show the majesty of their sultan through the ceremonies of the palace, spreading into all aspects of life of the local people (Chaiwat Larnchim 2016: 4-5).

In addition, the people of Java were still considered the largest and most important ethnic group of Indonesia, comprising two-thirds of the population. When compared to members of other ethnic groups, this state of being Javanese not only had social and political importance, but it was also related to particular characteristics of Indonesian culture, because the Javanese were aware of their own traditional culture and took great pride in it (D.G.E. Hall 1979: 700). Therefore, when the state's policy of strengthening culture in order to build the identity of the nation moved forward in tandem with

the increased exhibition of culture by the people, Yogyakarta batik became an identifying distinctive symbol of Indonesia.

METHODS

The focus area in this study is Yogyakarta city, which is located in central Java, Indonesia. The researcher divided the contributors into two groups: knowledgeable individuals in the urban context and those in rural communities. Both of these are critical to the Indonesian national identity through the different Yogyakarta batiks. The researcher made use of an interdisciplinary research methodology that incorporated historical research, social science research and anthropological research. This integration of a wide range of disciplines was meant to provide a broader and clearer perspective on the issues surrounding education.

The purpose of historical research is to study the facts of the past, leading to an understanding of the relationships between persons, events, and the places associated with those subjects and events. In addition, historical research can assist in understanding the origins of the events that have occurred. Historical research also helps lay a foundation for understanding both current and future phenomena.

In the area of social science research, the researcher applied qualitative research methods as the primary research tool. The researcher presents perspectives drawn from the study rather than the researcher's own point of view. Qualitative research methods focus on social phenomena in order to better understand social conditions and social change. In sum, this is a piece of research in anthropology.

The primary research methodology is ethnographical, because ethnographic research is the process of observing behaviors and ways of life. In particular, study of particular social groups or particular cultures can describe the details of their behavior, beliefs, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and values. In short, ethnography depicts the people's way of life. The researcher has integrated all three approaches – historical, qualitative, and ethnographic -- in this study, in order to take a clearer look at the phenomenon studied. Of course, researchers, as they carry out human studies, must respect the dignity of the people researched.

In sum, the researcher has applied anthropological analytical methods for conducting data analysis. The researcher believes that individual actions and social phenomena do not occur separately. Of course, direct relationship exists; rather, there is an indirect one with society providing the context. Therefore, the interpretation or understanding of a person's actions and social phenomena is profound and complex. Researchers need to understand the context first, as contextual studies lead to better understanding of cultural phenomena.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BATIK AND THE CREATION OF INDONESIAN IDENTITY

From the beginning of the colonial period in Southeast Asia, as colonial administration expanded, the countries of Southeast Asia experienced great changes, including changes from traditional styles of administration to colonial styles, the creation of bureaucracies as a means of dealing with resources, the entry of Western forms of knowledge, and new forms of education, all in response to important economic changes. Ever since the end of the colonial period, the study of the creation of national identity or nation-building in the Southeast Asian region has received great comment. In the case of Indonesia, a land full of hundreds of islands with diverse peoples, languages, and cultures, the creation of Indonesian identity has taken on many forms.

The first of these forms was that the government tried to popularize mottos celebrating the diversity of the people as a source of unity. This came in the form of the Indonesian motto, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," which means "unity in the midst of diversity." This motto was used throughout Indonesian society both formally and informally. It was also used in combination with the national emblem of Indonesia, the Garuda. The Garuda carries Brahma, the protector of the world. This shows the persistence of Hindu beliefs in Indonesia. In addition, the selection of Indonesian as the national language, as was specified in the Indonesian constitution of 1945, is perhaps the clearest instance of the construction of "Indonesianness", because, before that, the societies in the areas of the Indonesian islands each had their own local languages. But when Indonesian was established as the official language of the country, this helped develop a sense of unity among those who spoke, read, and wrote Indonesian as the common language. In addition,

use of the Indonesian language caused people to love their nation through the use of their language (Suwattana Maneecharuen 2015: 1965; Anthony Reid 2011: 161-162).

Indonesia was not just constructing a symbolic national identity through the establishment of these symbols of the nation, through the laying down of the foundations of national administration, and through the establishment of its own national language. Indonesia was also constructing national identity through cultural displays, such as the attempt to establish an Indonesian nation through the emphasis on a culture of batik as a key component of the national culture. Tedi Sutardi (2007: 20-22) has said that culture that is designated as a national culture must be able to reach all people in the nation, regardless of which group or ethnicity or social class they are from. National culture is called upon to bring together all aspects of the nation. National culture does not exist to stamp out existing diversity; rather, it works to help create a feeling of commonality in society.

As for the creation of Indonesian national identity by means of showing Indonesian cultural characteristics, in this particular case we are interested in batik fabrics. Batik fabrics have expanded throughout every part of Indonesia. There are many Indonesian groups producing batik throughout 18 states, and the culture of dressing in batik in the daily lives of Indonesians, by using the styles of batik specific to local areas, can be found in more than 23 states. Thus we can see that batik is part of the culture in most of Indonesian society. In addition, Indonesian batik is a traditional handicraft that is done by hand in all of parts of the process. This widespread production and use of Indonesian batik is one of the reasons why it was specifically chosen as part of the national culture. In addition, the batik of Indonesia has characteristics different from that of other countries, and this is yet another reason why batik has been identified with the culture of Indonesia (Tirta 1996: 89).

Aditya Nur Patria (2010) performed a study of Indonesian batik and its status as part of the Indonesian national culture, and of the creation of Indonesian national identity. This author spoke of these matters in two particular ways. The first was that batik, in its status as part of the culture and identity of Indonesia, has received official support as part of Indonesia's cultural heritage by having it officially declared part of Indonesia's Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2009.

This was in recognition of Indonesian batik's long cultural history and the influence it has had on the local cultures that should also be preserved. The government has established that Indonesians should wear batik every Friday, and it has also designated 2 October as the National Batik Day, in recognition of the day when Indonesian batik was officially listed by UNESCO as part of the world cultural heritage. At that time UNESCO said the following about Indonesian batik: "It may be said that Indonesian batik is part of the symbolism of Indonesian culture, through the techniques and creativity of the various steps used by hand in the weaving of the cotton cloth and silk cloth, and the areas that are outlined through the use of beeswax to prevent the dying of certain colors in certain areas. In addition, batik can be considered part of the lives of Indonesians throughout their lives, from the use of batik cloths to carry children, and its use as a crib in which children can sleep, to its use as a sarong skirt by women, and its use as shirts by men, and its use in burials."

The second area highlighted by Aditya Nur Patria was that batik helped create a strong identity for the people of Indonesia. It is a phenomenon that has occurred especially since the year 2000, when the Malaysian government campaigned to have the Malaysian people wear clothes created from batik as a way of showing that batik was part of the Malaysian national culture. This campaign created dissatisfaction among Indonesians, who claimed that Malaysia was trying to steal the national treasure of Indonesia. The Indonesian government therefore began an effort to call for the United Nations, or UNESCO, to designate Indonesian batik as a key element of the world's cultural heritage created by the Indonesians, both in terms of its techniques, the tools and instruments used, the colors used in the dyeing, and the patterns that appear on the cloth. Malaysia's attempt to claim Indonesia's batik as part of the heritage of Malaysia became a point of unity among Indonesians. Even though Indonesia had many different ethnic groups, they were united in wanting to preserve their common culture. In 2009 batik was officially recognized as a part of Indonesia's cultural heritage by being included in the official registry maintained by UNESCO. In all of this it should be recognized that in disputes arose from the drawing of boundaries between nations and the building of new consciousness born from the overlapping geographical and cultural histories that have caused frequent conflicts from the birth of these two nation-states, including conflicting land claims,

and conflicting claims over cultural heritage. Even today, conflicts between Indonesia and Malaysia, including cultural conflicts, continually occur and re-occur between the two countries.

Therefore, it seems important that some of the reasons that have caused batik to be made part of Indonesian national culture be discussed. First of all, the characteristics of batik enabled it to be used to build unity among Indonesians, as can be seen from the attempts to defend against batik being claimed as part of the culture of Malaysia. Second, batik has spread throughout 18 of Indonesia's states. Due to Indonesia's being comprised of a variety of cultures, the joining together of the Indonesian people from Sabang in the far west to Merauke in the far east on the island of New Guinea (Irian Jaya), has been built on their collective use of the culture of batik throughout the vast area of Indonesia, relying on it as one means of creating a collective culture for Indonesians. In addition, Indonesian batik comprises many individualistic kinds of symbolism invested with many different ways of thinking and living. These are two important reasons why batik has become part of Indonesia's official culture.

BATIK INDONESIA AND BATIK YOGYAKARTA IN THE REFORMASI PERIOD

The *reformasi* period (1998-present) has been an era in which there has been a movement to promote democracy. At the same time, cultural significance is more pronounced than in the past. This was the case in the conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia on the issue of Batik culture ownership in 2000. This conflict led to a social movement in Indonesia aimed at recognizing and emphasizing identity. Conflicts of this type might be called movements of cultural politics. In accordance with the words of Jordan and Weedon (1995: 19), who said that "culture is the key to political struggles for change, through its connections with political power," these characteristics show that politics and culture cannot be separated from each other, and that the heart of the Indonesian political struggle was culture. The political changes of the *Reformasi* period moved Indonesian people to demand democracy. In addition, people in the society are actively creating a national identity through the culture of batik. The ownership of batik culture is referenced in multiple ways, such as academic seminars, local batik learning activities, production of various

batik forms, and increasing instances of Indonesian people wearing batik. In addition, the government has helped to push policies and support many activities related to batik.

The Indonesian batik culture campaign was carried on for many years, until, in 2009, Indonesian Batik successfully stepped into the international stage with the announcement that Indonesian Batik had successfully been registered with UNESCO as an official part of the World Cultural Heritage. At that time UNESCO said the following about Indonesian batik:

“It may be said that Indonesian batik is part of the symbolism of Indonesian culture, through the techniques and creativity of the various steps used by hand in the weaving of the cotton cloth and silk cloth, and the areas that are outlined through the use of beeswax to prevent the dyeing of certain colors in certain areas. In addition, batik can be considered part of the lives of Indonesians throughout their lives, from the use of batik cloths to carry children, and its use as a crib in which children can sleep, to its use as a sarong skirt by women, and its use as shirts by men, and its use in burials.”

In order to acknowledge the long history of Indonesian batik and its impact on local culture, the Indonesian government therefore declared that Indonesian people should wear batik every Friday. It also identified October 2 as the National Batik Day. This action is part of the creation of another level of national identity in Indonesia that not only aims to create identity within the nation, but also brings batik into the national identity as part of the formal registration of cultural ownership in a way that makes it visible to the world society. This success is considered an important part of the social history of Indonesia. Batik has become a sign of unity among Indonesian people, which is a nation full of diversity of ethnicities, languages, and cultures.

In the years since 2009, batik culture promotion in Indonesia has been carried out continuously. This is especially true on the island of Java, which is considered the site of Indonesia's original batik production. The government in the *Reformasi* period made the batik culture an important tool in creating and promoting national identity. Yogyakarta batik came to be seen in Indonesian society as the primary representative of-Javanese batik and as a part of the traditional Batik of Indonesia. The Indonesian government promoted Yogyakarta batik both within the country and overseas, with the national handicrafts society of Indonesia putting Yogyakarta batik forward to represent Indonesian handicrafts in the Asia-Pacific section of a global handicrafts

competition held at Beijing, China in 2014. In this competition the Yogyakarta batik succeeded in taking 6th place out of 40 countries because Yogyakarta batik had distinctive characteristics in terms of its history, the process of its creation, the artistry involved, and artisans who made the textiles, making this handicraft valuable for Indonesia's society and economy. For this reason, Yogyakarta was proclaimed to be the World Batik City by the Asia Pacific Region of the World Crafts Council (WCC) (Setiawan Deni 2015: 55-57).

The social movements that happened in Yogyakarta and in the promotion of Yogyakarta batik took on the characteristics of “new social movements,” meaning that their political goals were very different from the kinds of movements that sought simply to compete for state power or to bring down a particular government. Instead, they were multidimensional social and political movements (Buechler 1995: 451-452). In other words, they were social movements that aimed to exalt and honor the identity and special characteristics of the local region. In this case, there were calls for power for the sultan, who was at the center of the hearts and minds of the people of Yogyakarta due to their foundational beliefs of the society, where the sultan was like a kind of deity who cared for and protected the people's lives. At the same time, the sultan and the royal court of Yogyakarta were expected to conduct themselves strictly in accordance with Javanese cultural and ceremonial duties.

YOGYAKARTA BATIK AND THE CREATION CULTURE

Yogyakarta holds great historical importance in the creation of Indonesia, because it was designated the capital during campaign for independence from the Dutch during the years 1945-1948. Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX, the ruler of Yogyakarta at that time, supported the birth of the Republic of Indonesia and accepted that the realm of Yogyakarta was part of Indonesia. Susuhunan, of the realm of Surakarta, did the same, causing both states of the Kingdom of Java to be established as special polities within Indonesia. However, because Susuhunan's opponents within Surakarta engaged in an uprising that caused him to lose power in 1946, Surakarta came to be combined with the administrative territory of Central Java, and was no longer considered a special administrative district.

Susuhunan therefore had only an administrative function. Then, in 1949, the Indonesian government moved the capital back to Jakarta, where it had formerly been, but allowed Yogyakarta to remain a local administrative center because of the Sultan's important role in the movement for independence. The sultan of Yogyakarta therefore has played the roles of both a local ruler and also of a special government administrator of Yogyakarta up until the present day (Sri Soedewi Samsi 2011: 11).

In addition, as can be seen from the two large religious centers which reflect on the prosperity of these religions in the past, namely the Borobudur and the Candi Prambanan, Yogyakarta had, in the past, been a Buddhist and Hindu cultural center for hundreds of years. Even today, when most Indonesians are Muslims, the people of Yogyakarta still hold to their distinctive religious style. The religious beliefs of former ages are still embedded in their ways of life, their customs, and their culture, and the influence of Hinduism has been especially evident in artworks of various kinds. This shows that Hindu artistic styles have sunk their roots deep into the local artistic styles to the point that it is impossible to distinguish them from the other parts of the lifestyles of the people. The thing that is most evident is that the decorative designs, the archways in the door openings, and stone carvings on the Prambanan, have all been used as models for the patterns found in batik, to such an extent that they have basically become the distinctive decorative designs of the batiks of Yogyakarta, which are embedded in various ways of thinking into the lives of the local people. As for the colors that are commonly used in these designs, they include dark blue, brown, and white. All of these have to do with meanings pertaining to the Hindu religion. In particular, all three colors are representatives of the devadas in Hinduism, particularly Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (Inger Mccabe Elliott 1984: 24-25). Nevertheless, even though today there are technologies for printing patterns through modern machines, in the making of batik cloth in Yogyakarta, people still use manual methods for all stages of creating the cloth, a process known as "Batik Tulis" -- batik that is created as a piece of art on cloth, having spiritual and economic value greater than the other kinds of batik.

In all this it can be seen that Yogyakarta has played important roles from the perspective of history and politics, and also from the perspective of art and culture, with the result that the batik of

Yogyakarta is referred to as the "traditional culture of Java," not only by the people of Yogyakarta themselves, but also by the various other peoples of Indonesia. In addition, Yogyakarta batik has been one of the cultural elements used to build the identity of the Indonesian people, due to this history of Yogyakarta, and also due to the circumstances of the people who live the Javanese culture. This has all been supported and bolstered by efforts which have been made to reflect the symbolic meanings of these things through art and culture, and through ceremonials, in addition to cultural movements of various kinds. Therefore, the construction of Indonesian national culture through Yogyakarta batik was not primarily the result of the official declaration of government policies, or through other sources of power, but rather, it arose through the manifestation of the strong culture of batik of the people of Yogyakarta, who at the center of critical cultural movements within society. This can be seen in the work of Simone Sandholz (2017: 180-182), who studied cultural identity and heritage amid the changes in various major cities in Asia and Latin America. One of those cities was Yogyakarta, in Indonesia. Simone's study found that most of the people of Yogyakarta attributed the greatest importance to the culture of batik.

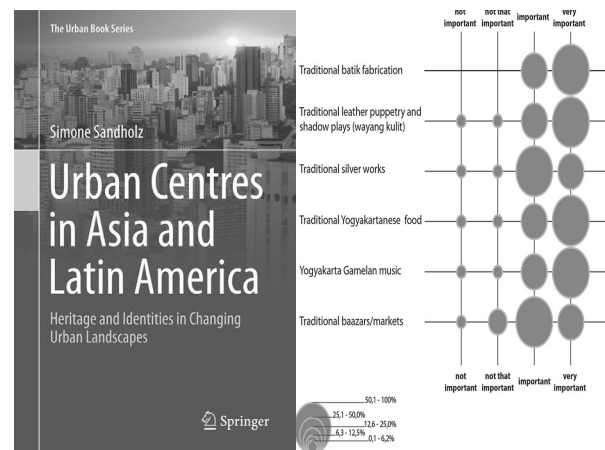


FIGURE 1. Answers to the question: Which intangible things or activities do you consider as typical for Yogyakarta area, how important is it to preserve them?

Source: Simone Sandholz 2017

HOW THE CULTURE OF BATIK SHOWS ITSELF

THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE BATIK OF THE YOGYAKARTA ROYAL COURT

“Keraton” is a word in the Indonesian language that refers to the royal court where the sultan and his retinue reside. In addition, it is used to refer to the batiks that originated in the royal court fabrics, which at the time were produced by the women of the court (Himpunan Pencinta Kain Batik & Tenun 1990: 31-32). At first, Javanese batik was made for use of the elites in the Keratons of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, and the creation and production of these patterns in the two royal courts was done for use only in rituals in the royal courts. The use of batik was controlled by the rules and regulations of the courts because the patterns of the batiks indicated the status and position of the people wearing them. In addition, each of the batik patterns had a different meaning; even the mere colors of the batiks distinguished between the two kingdoms. For example, the batiks of Yogyakarta tended to use white, dark blue, and brown, using bright white as a background that contrasted sharply with the dark blue and the brown. Meanwhile, the batiks of Surakarta, or Solo, used a cream-colored white much like the color of ivory as a background, and used yellow and bright brown in the foreground decorations, where they blended into the tones of the colors. The batiks of the courts had special qualities resulting from the methods of their production that caused them to be known as “Batik Tulis,” or batik with the traditional decorations known as “Batik Klasik.” The meanings of these decorations and patterns tended to refer to power, greatness, and success. For example, the Semen patterns had characteristics similar to the Garuda spreading its wings -- a symbol that showed power and greatness. Meanwhile, the Truntum patterns were symbols of love, of success, and of happiness and the achievement of one’s desires. These patterns were typically worn at important events in one’s life. As for the Parang Barong pattern, it became known as the “forbidden batik” because it was reserved for members of the royalty (Batik Terlarang) (A.N. Suyanto 2002: 44-45; Ani Bambang Yudhyono 2010: 53-55; Yulianto Qin 2015: 62-64).

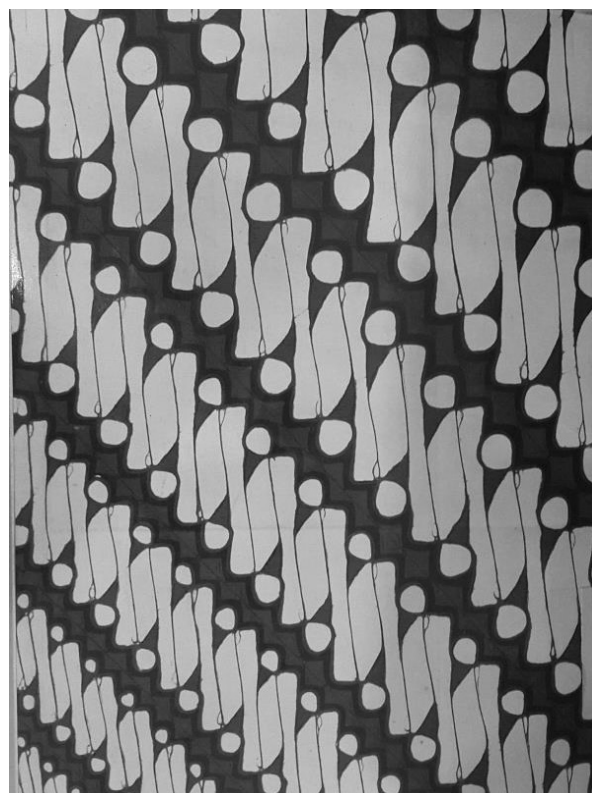


FIGURE 2. Batik “Parang Barong”

Source: Himpunan Pencinta Kain Batik & Tenun 1990

The word “Parang” was a Javanese word that referred to batik patterns that had characteristics like diagonal or slanting waves (Robson and Wibisono 2002: 543), and the word “Barong” was a Javanese word that referred to the majestic characteristics of the king (Robson and Wibisono 2002: 76). Thus, the words “Parang Barong” came to be used as the name of a particular pattern of batik; specifically, a kind of batik that was reserved for the dress of the Sultan and the royal family, and in the past the average person was not allowed to wear this kind of batik pattern at all (Sylvia Fraser-Lu 1986: 58-59; Keller 2002: 44-45). The meanings given to these “forbidden batik” patterns shows the way that social relationships were used or created. Clothing was used to force people to remain within the social positions created by the ruling classes. At the same time, the reservation of this batik for the sultan and the royal house captured and used meanings for the purpose of building and sustaining power of particular groups in particular areas. It seems clear that the sultan of Yogyakarta does not simply hold legitimate power for ruling or administering the special administrative district of Yogyakarta; he is also the center of cultural power in the central part

of the island of Java. This is in accordance with the opinion of John Pemberton (1994: 8), who wrote that many scholars have viewed central Java as the center of power both in terms of the structure of the administrative elites, the complexities of the Javanese language, and structures of ceremonial and its connections with cosmology. Furthermore, it has a traditional culture that ties the people together.

The people of Yogyakarta are aware of the historical origins of the batik of the royal court, and the connection it has had specifically with the court of Yogyakarta, the sultan, and the ruling classes since the 13th century CE. The collective social memory concerning the batik of the royal court is particularly connected with reverence for the majesty of the sultan of Yogyakarta known as Sultan Hamengku Bowono IX, who played an important role in the movement calling for independence in the year 1945 and who played a leading role in many changes in Yogyakarta. During the movement to make Yogyakarta a special administrative area, this sultan said, "The realm of Yogyakarta is not an absolute monarchy, as the government has said. And I wish to declare that, for the most part, I am willing to do whatever is in accordance with the will of the people of Yogyakarta" (Ardian 2011: 384). One of things this sultan did for the people was to pass on the method of making traditional batiks from the royal courts to the common people, meaning that even people outside the royal court would be able to make and wear batiks decorated in the same way as the batiks of the royal court. Nevertheless, the batiks of Yogyakarta continue to reflect the social status of the elites all the way up until today (Pak Prayoga, interviewed on 10 October 2017). For this reason, the use of batiks indicate that the people of Yogyakarta accept and respect the sultan both in his status as a political leader and in his status as a cultural leader.

COLLECTIVE SOCIAL MEMORIES SEEKING TO EXALT THE CULTURE OF JAVA

Another factor that led to the cultural expression of batik by the Yogyakarta people was the collective social memory concerning the greatness of Javanese culture. This was shown recently in the protests of December 2010, when the government wanted to reduce the power and political role of the sultan, an action that would have effects on his cultural role as well. Most of the people of Yogyakarta

did not accept this, and it eventually led to protest marches. The national government, which was led by President Yudhoyono, wanted to change the system of administration to a governor and assistant governor for both of the special administrative districts of Yogyakarta where sultans had always been in charge without use of elections. It justified the proposed change by saying that the existing system was too much like an absolute monarchy, rather than being like the democratic system that the Republic of Indonesia was now using (Heru 2004; Adhi 2010; Ardian, 2011). Even though it appeared that the wave of democracy that was blossoming in the reform period was creating good results for the social and political development of Indonesia during the period of the new reform administration, there were some areas where the wave of democracy was creating challenges for older patterns of social and political life. In the present case, the special administrative area of Yogyakarta, which was located in the farthest south portion of central Java, was an area that had social and political forms that were different from other parts of Indonesia.

The aforementioned protest movements of the people of Yogyakarta brought about a social movement known as "Kirab Budaya." This movement emphasized, in various ways, the importance of the culture of Yogyakarta for the nation of Indonesia, in order to show that Yogyakarta had characteristics that were distinctive from other areas, and that the government should continue to give it special rights. The movement also called for the sultan to continue to be the governor of the province. The interesting thing about this movement was not the political movements that took place or the sources of the ethnic disputes that were occurring here and in other parts of Indonesia, but rather the efforts to create and demonstrate a political subjectivity which dealt not just with citizenship in the nation, but also had to do at the same time with the subjectivity or citizenship status of the sultan. The people of Yogyakarta, therefore, engaged simultaneously in two political movements. On the one hand, they were calling for the government to accept laws that came from the desires of the people of Yogyakarta. At the same time, they were seeking to fortify the historical and cultural role of the sultan as the supporter and upholder of the arts, customs, culture, and traditional values of Java and in his status as the ruler of the city and the governor of the province (Tassana Nualsomsri 2016: 194-195).

The social movements that happened in Yogyakarta took on the characteristics of “new social movements,” whose political goals were very different from the kinds of movements that sought simply to compete for state power or to bring down a particular government. Instead, they were multidimensional social and political movements (Buechler 1995: 451-452). Another way of putting it is that they were social movements that aimed to exalt and honor the identity and special characteristics of the local region. In this respect, they might be called movements of cultural politics. In this case, the calls for power for the person who was at the center of the hearts and minds of the people of Yogyakarta came from their foundational beliefs in a society where the sultan was like a kind of deity that cared for and protected their lives. At the same time, the sultan and the royal court were expected to conduct themselves in strictly in accordance with Javanese cultural and ceremonial duties.

CONCLUSION

Amidst the political, economic, social, and cultural changes of the Indonesian *Reformasi* period, there not only arose people calling for more democracy, but also people who continued to call for national identity that emphasized the culture known as “batik.” In addition, the government began to support this cultural campaign. The conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia over the cultural ownership of batik in the year 2000 led to social and political movements (Buechler 1995: 451-452). Another way of putting it is that they were social movements that aimed to exalt and honor the identity and special characteristics of the local region; they might be called movements of cultural politics, and showed that politics and culture could not be separated from each other, and that the heart of the political struggle was culture, in accordance with the words of Jordan and Weedon (1995: 19), who said that, “Culture is the key to political struggles for change, through its connections with political power.”

The success that was achieved in having Indonesian batik registered in the World Cultural Heritage in 2009 was an historic cultural and social event for Indonesia. The Indonesian people, amidst their diversity of ethnicities, languages, and cultures, were able to demonstrate the unity of Indonesians through the culture of batik. And the batik of

Yogyakarta was certainly given this important role because it was the batik that had preserved the traditional patterns and that represented social and cultural concepts that played such an important role in the lives of Indonesians. In addition, the history of Yogyakarta joined the dimension of politics with the dimensions of art and culture, and the collective social memories of the people of Yogyakarta were deeply embedded in the batik of the palace and the culture of Java. All of this contributed to the batik of Yogyakarta becoming part of the national identity of Indonesia today.

NOTES

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INTERVIEWEES

- Eddy Setiabudi, interviewed on 30 September 2017
 Hani Winotosastro, interviewed on 30 September 2017
 Pak Prayoga, interviewed on 30 September 2017

Chanakamol Kongyok (Ph.D)
 Center of Excellence in Women and Social Security
 Walailak University, Thailand
 222 M.10, Thaiburi, Thasala, Nakhon Sri Thammarat 80160
 E-mail: kamonwan.ko@gmail.com

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