

BATIK DAMAR KURUNG:

EXPLORATION OF WOMEN PERFORMATIVITY IN JAVA CULTURE

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the performance of women in Java culture that is reflected in the ornamental batik Damar Kurung typical of Gresik. Javanese women have a position as a support pillar of Javanese culture, not only physically but also psychic which includes perception, imagination and interpretation of Javanese cultural values. Damar Kurung is a typical lantern of Gresik that serves as a marker of the coming month of Ramadan. The culture of light is gradually eroded because of its function that is no longer relevant, especially since electric lights dominate human life. Beginning in the 16th century Damar Kurung has become a 'canvas' for the cultural dynamics social and religious life of coastal communities, mainly Gresik. The ornaments that decorate Damar Kurung have been preserved for generations by female artists: Masmundari. When she died at the age of more than 100 years in 2005, Damar Kurung had also slowly faded. This qualitative research describes the performance of Javanese women in Damar Kurung decoration. It takes for approximately 8 months to wrap it all included the observation, design stage and the implementation towards the design results. The data analysis is descriptive, which is useful to describe factual findings of Damar Kurung decorative characteristics along with its historical chronology. The findings of the data are classified in accordance with the findings of the theme of women's existence, to be developed as innovation of new batik ornaments. Thus the development of decorative Damar Kurung into batik motif is regarded to be an efforts to preserve it as a national intangible heritage. It is expecting to inspiring the designers or craftsmen to utilize the heritage to improve the economy of creative industries based on local wisdom.

Keywords: *Batik, Damar Kurung, Woman, Culture, Java.*

INTRODUCTION

Since UNESCO established Batik as the masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity in October 8 years ago, many regions in Indonesia have sought to explore its uniqueness as an inspiration for their own batik motifs signature. As well as Gresik, one of the coastal areas and industrial centers in East Java Province. The socio-economic conditions of a predominantly industrial society, have slowly eroded Gresik's distinctive cultural characteristics along the effort to explore the typical batik motif of Gresik.

In January 2017, Batik *Pamiluto Ceplokan* has been patented as Gresik's typical batik by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Kemenkumham) RI with the given number D002017004963 (ekonomi.kompas.com, February 26 2017). The emergence of this batik motif began with a contest held by the Regional National Craft Council (Dekranasda), followed by more than 1,000 participants, from students to commoner. Maulana Malik Ibrahim's grave gate, the tomb of Sunan Giri, typical snacks of Gresik: *pudak*, Bawean island deer and *bandeng* (milkfish) are the inspiration for batik motifs.



Figure 1. Batik *Bandeng*
(Source: Potograph by author from Poer Collection, Gresik)

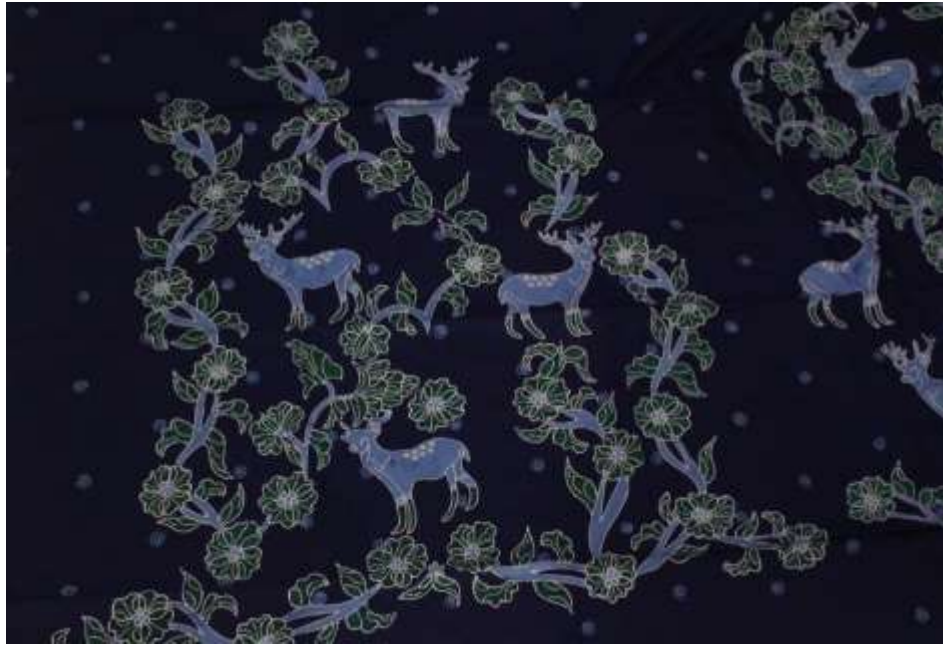


Figure 2. Batik *Rusa Bawean*
(Source: Potograph by author from Arti Gallery, Gresik)

The inspiration for batik motifs are mostly *bandeng*, because Gresik has a tradition since the age of Sunan Giri that remains until now, called *Bandeng* market (<http://www.suaragresik.com>, February 5, 2015). The market is held every two days before Ramadan month. It is a form of religious ritual within the economic life in the society.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

However, Gresik also has other exquisite tradition that quite inspirational to be treated as motif of Gresik's batik, *Damar Kurung*. It is Gresik's traditional lantern that sadly has fade away because of its irrelevance to today's culture. People would ignite this lantern during the fasting month welcoming the Eid Al-Fitr (Danny, 2003). Not only for lighting it is also significant that one must do *tarawih shalat* ritual during fasting within Ramadhan month. There is a special ornamentation on Damar Kurung wrapping paper (Gresik in History Perspective, 2003). It depicts the social-economic situation of the society and it is unique, decorative and naive. This tradition lasted from the 16th century, but when electric lighting technology dominated lives, the Damar Kurung function is slowly shifted.

The ornament has recorded the civilization of the Gresik since the 16th century. Toward its extinction, it was published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia that has set Damar Kurung Gresik as a national non-cultural heritage on October 4th, 2017. This has become a stepping stone to whomever wants for making Damar Kurung more perceptible and appreciated by the wider community, especially the younger generation.

The author has carried out previous research that related to Damar Kurung's ornamentation, entitled "The Role of Damar Kurung Lantern as A Time Signal of Gresik Society" (ITB Journal of Sociotechnology Vol. 17, No. 1 2018) and "Becoming a Javanese Woman Through Damar Kurung "in 2017. This study discusses the identity of Javanese women through Damar Kurung's ornamentation. Where identity is something that cannot be separated from human beings. Because people live in a social dimension that forces them to constantly face and formulate identities that signify their existence. The cultural context in which women are born, live and grow up contributes greatly to them when building their identity in society specifically in Java. Damar Kurung's ornamentation clearly shows how women's performativity and identity are defined by society.

Based on the explanation, the authors considered that Damar Kurung's ornamentation could be an inspirational alternative for Gresik's batik motifs. Thus, with the 'new packaging', the old Damar Kurung's ornamentation can be reintroduced and appreciated by today's community. And of course enrich the ornamentation and batik patterns treasury in Indonesia. In the end, this research is encouraged the development of designs based on local wisdom to support creative industry economy. And bring to reality a cultural conservation that encompasses technology, motif development as well as its cultural backgrounds. Producing batik means celebrating creativity both in terms of engineering, technology, aesthetics and culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Batik as a National Identity

Batik is a form of Indonesian art. The history of batik cannot be separated from the development of ancient kingdoms in Java. The batik production process was initially carried out only in the palace area and was only worn by the king and his nobles. Therefore, batik must be done carefully by *abdi dalem* or servants that live within the palace. Since their family live outside the palace, this brought Batik to spread outside the residence and finally to be known by

the public is the effort of many parties. The first President of the Republic of Indonesia, Soekarno formulated the Trisakti idea which included (1) Sovereignty in politics; (2) Self-reliance in the economy; and (3) Personality in culture. The third point explains that Indonesia must have a strong cultural root as the character foundation in dealing with foreign culture which continues to overwhelm Indonesia. The 2nd President of the Republic of Indonesia: Soeharto also made similar efforts to preserve batik as a national identity commanded all heads of the state attended the Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) in 1994 to wear batik clothing. Leading to the establishment of batik as a world cultural intangible heritage of Indonesia by UNESCO in the leadership period of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, October 2nd, 2009. The seventh President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo also contributed to the preservation and appreciation of batik by setting a batik dress code at the inauguration of the Working Cabinet minister.

With the establishment of batik as a unique Indonesian intangible culture by UNESCO, awareness of this Batik glorious art continues to be fostered from generation to generation therefore Indonesian culture is remain strong even though it is exposed to the outside world. As Kanjeng Susuhan Pakoe Buwono X stated: "*rum kuncaraning the nation dumunung haneng luhuring culture* " which means the core of a nation lies in culture (Wulandari, 2011).

Coastal Batik Ornamental Pattern

Agus Sachari (2010) explains that decorative patterns are arrangement of motifs made repeatedly. Ornamental patterns are generally used for a design that will become a decoration unit, as applied in weaving or batik. Decorative batik patterns consists of two main components; the motif and isen-isen batik. Motif ornament batik is divided again into main and supporting ornaments / additions. The main one determines the overall ornamental pattern and usually has a certain meaning. While the other one, functions as a support for the main ornament. Isen-isen is applied in batik to add beauty, usually in the form of geometric shapes that are very simple and small in size, such as a series of dots, straight lines, dashed lines, or other smaller and simpler forms than the two before (Rasjoyo: 2008: 17). Both supporting ornament and isen-isen have no meaning.

Ornamental batik patterns are classified into two based on their composition; ornamental patterns geometri/non geometric and the frame. The geometric decorative pattern is basically an arrangements of geometric shapes, such as circles, squares, triangles, and parallelograms. This Pattern is divided into several techniques, namely: *tubrukan*, *onde-onde*, *parang*, dan *mubeng*. *Tubrukan* and *onde-onde* are based on square shape, while *parang* uses form parallelogram as a reference. Mostly Batik ornaments are repeated parallel to the right or upwards but *mubeng* pattern applies repetition of ornaments which is counter-clockwise.

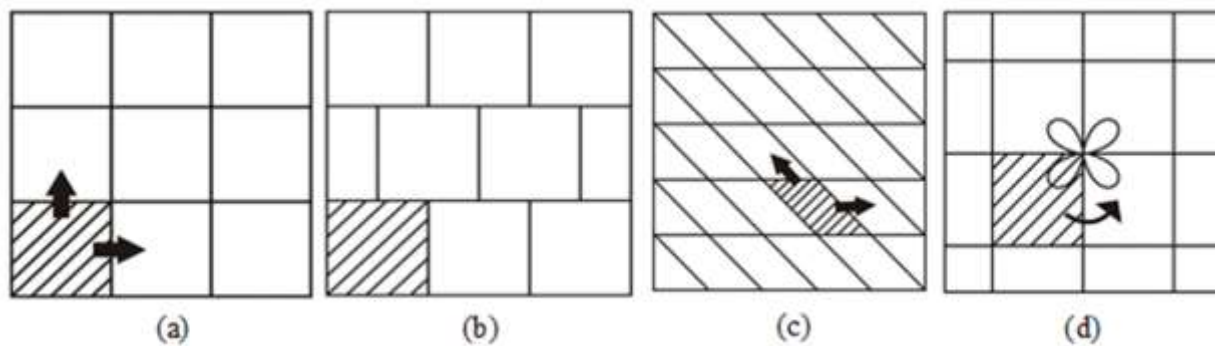


Figure 3. Composition of batik: (a) *Tubrukan*; (b) *Onde-onde*; (c) *Parang*; and (d) *mubeng* (Source: Tjahjani, Indra. 2013)

Meanwhile, non-geometric decorative patterns are arranged freely even though there are repetitions. Classical batik with Dutch and Chinese colonial influences often applied this composition. Contemporary batik has now applied many non-geometric decorative patterns because of aesthetic considerations and the increase of market demands. The frame section of batik is specifically made as a decoration and to separate ornaments one with another.

The coastal area of Java Island is identical to the multi-ethnic socio-cultural conditions. The natives have characteristics that are different from rural society, such as Solo and Jogjakarta. They tend to be more open minded, yet still have a sensitivity in capturing social changes that occur. It is this open attitude that encourages acculturation, which then generates creativity to create more art work, e.g. batik motifs in Pekalongan, Cirebon, Madura, Semarang including Gresik. Craftsmen's creativity continues to grow along with market needs. The hallmark of coastal batik lies in its nature ornaments that depict west culture and has more various style and color due to Chinese and colonial cultural influences. These social, cultural, economic and

geographical backgrounds of the coastal region strongly predispose the formation of coastal batik ornaments.

Batik Heritage in Gresik

Gresik is highly potential to arts and crafts, with the strong characteristic within every products its regions can possibly produce. Woven sarongs are produced in Cerme, Menganti and Kampung Arab Gresik areas. Gold and silver crafts were developed in the Giri and Kebomas. For pottery, udeng (headband) and kopyah are widely developed in Sidomukti Village. Plaited mats of pandan leaves are made on Bawean Island. While batik cloth is produced in the Giri area, but since 1973, this commodity had a hard time, caused by of the emerging of industrialization that quickly dominated most aspects of people's lives. As a result, batik is no longer seen as a promising commodity.

Until last year in January, Batik Pamiluto Ceplokan was patented by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Kemenkumham) RI Number D002017004963 as Gresik's signature batik (ekonom.kompas.com, February 26, 2017). The emergence of this batik motif began with a contest held by the regional National Craft Council (Dekranasda), followed by more than 1,000 participants, from students to the general public. Maulana Malik Ibrahim's grave gate, the tomb of Sunan Giri, *pudak* (Gresik's typical culinary), Bawean island deer and *bandeng* become inspiration for batik motifs. There are other motifs, although not yet patented, namely *loh bandeng* dan *ndulit sisik bandeng* (gresik.com, 25 September 2012). Batik *Loh Bandeng* is the creation of Anang Syamsul Arifin, chairman of the Batik Studio Rumpaka Mulya (Agustina, 2017).

Masmundari: Female Artist Producing Damar Kurung

Sriwati Masmundari or Nyimas Mundari was born in Kroman Village, Gresik regency, East Java on January 4, 1904. In 1980, she was listed as the only maker and preserver of Damar Kurung. According to the interview with the collector: Muzachim (66 years), the oldest Damar Kurung found was the work of Kyai Untung whose dimensions were greater than the work of Masmundari. The ornamentation tends to be similar to puppet illustrations.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4. (a) Damar Kurung by Kyai Untung
(Source: Damar Kurung Institue documentation, 2017)
and (b) Damar Kurung by Masmundari
(Source: Photograph by author)

Damar Kurung is made to be sold once a year, as a token of Ramadan's month, in the house it worked as a lighting as well as decoration on the terrace. Ornaments that adorn its surface become some kind of storytelling media by parents to their children since the ornaments illustrate the dynamic socio-cultural situation of the Gresik people. However, this tradition finally come to an end when the modern lighting emerged. Of course, this followed by the craftsmen that also gave up and switched to other professions. Without leaving the heritage of preservation to the next generation, the only Masmundari, who spent the rest of her life preserving Damar Kurung.

Damar Kurung's ornaments painted by Masmundari is categorized as a naivism style by many art observers (Indrakusuma, 2003). Benedetti, Joan M (2008) defines naivism as an art stream that prioritizes visual elements and qualities, oppose to the standard rules of conventional art. The characteristic is disproportionate figure drawing, not using the concept of perspective,

mostly drawn very simple and has bright colors. Her painting style is influenced by the book of Babad Sindujoyo (Ismoerdijahwati, 2003).

Babad Sindujoyo is an ancient manuscript made in 1850 which tells about the biography of Kyai Sindujoyo santri from Sunan Prapen, the man that found the Kroman area and the mud in Gresik. This ancient manuscript written by Ki Tarub Agung is basically a 5 cm, 200 pages' thick book with a leather cover. This book is very interesting because it is written with Arabic letters with Javanese/*Arabic Pegon* accompanied by colored illustrations. Illustrations in Babad Sindujoyo and the Damar Kurung ornamentation by Masmundari show a similarity, which describes a human figure with a simple stylation technique that appears two dimensional. This drawing techniques are often found in the characters of wayang kulit and temple reliefs. The connection between the two proves that Damar Kurung art has existed for a long time recording the dynamic civilization of Gresik society.



Figure 5. Babad Sindujoyo
(Source: Photograph by author from Oemar Zainuddin's collection)

METHODOLOGY

Method of collecting data

This research is a qualitative research with descriptive methods used for describe Damar Kurung's ornamental variety. This research was carried out for approximately 8 month which includes the research phase, the design stage and the implementation stage of the results design, as follows:

1. Research Phase, including:

- Study of literature
- Review of Damar Kurung's decorative ornaments
- Damar Kurung decorative ornaments classification based on themes
- Review of Gresik's signature batik

2. Design Design Phase, including:

- Exploration of batik ornamentation based on the theme of Damar Kurung ornament
- Sketch of batik pattern designs, motifs and batik ornaments
- Design analysis and aesthetic review
- Design Development and Revision

3. Implementation Phase of Design Results, including:

- Design Development and Revision
- Choose the best design
- Prototype

Data collection methods are taken through:

- a. Literature study to find data and information related to history and Damar Kurung's ornaments.
- b. Interviews with batik artisans in Gresik and Damar Kurung collectors.
- c. Documentation and field observations to obtain factual data about Damar Kurung's ornaments. Field data was obtained from batik UKM observation in Gresik

Data analysis method

The data analysis method used is descriptive, which is useful to describe the factual findings of the characteristics of Damar Kurung's ornaments along with its historical chronology. The findings of the data are classified according to the findings of the theme, to later be developed as innovative new batik. The next stage is to make alternative designs starting from the main pattern, supporting ornament, *isen-isen*, background and the frame. Then the alternative designs were analyzed from various aesthetic points of view. After that, the results were then developed to the best design as a batik motif. Lastly, this final designs are implemented in prototype.

Research Outcomes

The output of this research is the creation of variants of batik ornament originating from local wisdom and Damar Kurung's decorative philosophy. The development of Damar Kurung's ornaments into batik decoration is one of the conservation efforts to preserve it as a national intangible heritage. The output of this research is also expected to contribute to designers and art and craft practitioners so that they are able to utilize local cultural heritage to improve the economy of creative industries based on local wisdom.

ANALYSIS RESULTS

Woman portrayed in Damar Kurung Ornaments

Understanding Java is the same as understanding the complex background of the society, molded by so many cross culture and civilizations many decades ago, appears in both level of the system of thought and behavior. This complexity is the result of a long socio-historical process, and sometimes recorded subliminally as a mental foundation structure by Javanese people themselves.

Geertz (1990) explains that according to the epistemological basis of Javanese culture, human life refers to two things: body and soul. The physical life of Javanese humans is related to all behaviors involving the senses, such as eating, drinking, working, driving, shopping, recreation and so on. Spiritual life includes the 'place' and the most personal behavior. In that 'place', people 'take distance and isolation' from various mundane rituals. The idea of physical life is called material reality, so nonphysical life is called spiritual reality. The philosophy of the Javanese life does not separate the body and soul aspects, in fact both of them interact together to form harmonization.

The concept of Javanese human identity is built comprehensively because it includes aspects moral, religious, psychological, socio-cultural and economic all of which are built to establish the identity of Javanese humans. The combination of these various aspects cannot be separated from the philosophy of life of Javanese culture that is oriented towards the balance of the body and inner aspects. Similarly, the gender relations between men and women maintain mutual harmony between the birth and inner cosmos of Java.

As a female artist, Masmundari gave a distinctive feature to Damar Kurung's ornaments. Most of her work is the result of observations of the socio-cultural development that she drew spontaneously (without making any basic sketch before). She also emphasized the position and role of women through her art. Observing Masmundari's Damar Kurung decorative paintings is an attempt to build identity while identifying the performance of Javanese women. The findings of the Damar Kurung ornamental variety theme that identifies the role of women are as follows:

a) **Women and Economic Activities**



Figure 6. Damar Kurung ornaments theme of women and economic activities
(Source: Photograph by author from Oemar Zainuddin's collection)

Damar Kurung's ornament by Masmundari illustrated a variety of activities carried out by women, one of which is economic activity, both as a seller and buyer position. The commodities that are visible are lanterns, *tuak* (Gresik typical drinks), *bandeng*, food, fruit, and clothing, along with market atmosphere as the background. In the Javanese philosophy, there are expressions: *sepi ing pamrih rame ing gawe* which means ones must put other first before themselves which apply not only to men, but women also refer to that life guide. There is no social convention that women must work with certain positions, have certain competencies, work

at specified times and generate minimal income, yet these Javanese women consciously and voluntarily seek everything to maintain the stability of their households.

Households are always regarded as the central pillar of the Javanese women's world, while work is a form of expansion of household space. Jodelet in Permanadeli (2015) states that households become centers that determine structure view of the social world. Generally, economic activities carried out by Javanese women are informal and not recognized as an economic structure of the production system. The core of informal economic activity is within the household activity, therefore Masmundari painted those kinds of activities such as selling food, *bandeng*, fruit, clothing and making batik, that of course an extension of household activity itself. And it should be noted that now the economy in Indonesia has evolved and developed into a creative industry, thanks to this informal economic activity.

The symbolic meaning of Javanese women who work is a representation of the ability of each Javanese men to respect and maintain the balance of the Javanese cultural cosmos. Women working in social spaces are not for privacy matters alone. Women who are consciously, voluntarily and independently can strive for their economic potential is a manifestation of mental maturity. This is too a sign of their ability to empower themselves and people. Through the working world, women can build social networks (in the concept of Javanese philosophy called: *srawung*) which broadens knowledge as well as social relations. Thus, for Javanese women, work and households are not two worlds that are contrary to each other, over and above women are fully responsible for household economic as well as community resources.

b) Women and Technology

In Javanese philosophy, there is a terminology *ubet*, meaning any work done by women, whereas as an adjective it means: tenacious and keep moving (Soeseno, 1991) as Poensen in Permanadeli (2015: 274) states:

"Women are in charge of maintaining the rice they have planted, they are also the ones harvest, dry and then pound it. Women also cook rice and make spices...They buy household appliances...They buy home appliances...They make batik and sell ready-made batik ".

In practice, *ubet* shows the idea of always moving, active and resilient to earn income. Javanese women are called one if they are active outside the house to *srawung* (socialize) and make income that can support the sustainability of their household. Active women are represented by mastery of technology, both communication and transportation technology, which enables them to expand their range of networking. Masmundari articulated it in the image of women riding bicycles, a wagon or airplane. In the context of the production of Damar Kurung ornaments by Masmundari in the 80s to 90s, Gresik made very rapid progress due to industrialization. Investors are simultaneously investing in Gresik so that impacting the transition of the livelihoods of the majority of Gresik residents. Most fishermen and peasants shifted to factory labor. This massive modernization also has an impact in people's lives with the latest technology. Masmundari described women taking part in that process by mastering technology.



Figure 7. Damar Kurung ornaments theme of women and technology
(Source: Photograph by author from Oemar Zainuddin's collection)

c) **Women and Traditional Ceremonies**

According to Mulder in Permanadeli (2015), the division of symbolic roles between men and women is maintained in daily life: *wong lanang nang ngarep*, *wong wedok nang mburi* (man first, followed by woman). Both dichotomies do not refer to the power relations with each other. Conversely, superiority in the Javanese world is not hegemonic. A paternalistic conception in the family states that Javanese women who have become wives are referred to as *konco wingking* (assistant-friend). These ideas tend to connotated pejoratively, if not examined thoroughly. Being *konco wingking* in the concept of Javanese philosophy does not always mean bad and low. The role of women is similar to the role of *dalang* (puppeteer) in *wayang*

performances. The puppeteer does his work behind the screen and plays various characters and determines the storyline told. Puppet show spectators cannot see who is the mastermind. Masmundari portrayed many traditional ceremonial scenes in Damar Kurung's ornaments. Because in Javanese culture is synonymous with symbolic order. Traditional ceremonies are held routinely as a sign of the stage of human life, such as child birth, circumcision, marriage and death.

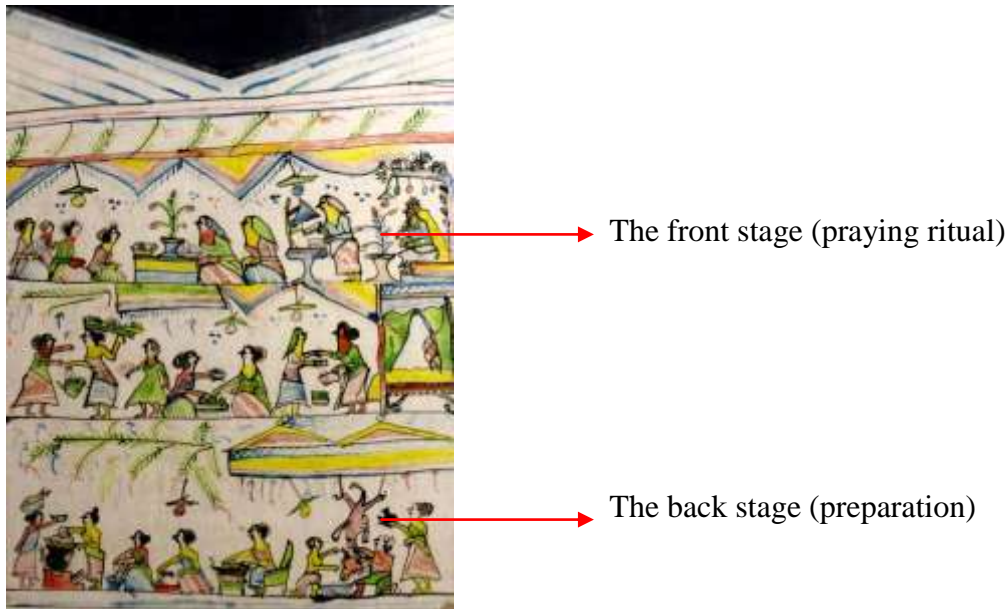


Figure 8. Damar Kurung ornaments theme of women and traditional ceremony
(Source: Photograph by author from Oemar Zainuddin's collection)

Each traditional ceremony is carried out in two stages, namely the back stage (preparation) and the front stage (prayer ritual). The back stage is carried out by women and the front stage is carried out by men. Although carried out by women, the back stage includes rough and heavy work, such as slaughtering a goat, grating coconut, and coking dish over a stove. In general, the back stage is assisted by female relatives (both family and non-family) voluntarily. In Javanese culture the concept of women volunteering for each other is called *mbiyodo* or *rewang*. This backstage has been arranged as a working chain that is carried out by women of any social status, whatever age and education level. Unlike professional work, this activity does not have a clear job description. Every woman involved must be sensitive to the extent of her

ability to be involved. In this process there was exchange of information, to formulate and establish identity as a Javanese woman.

The front stage (prayer ritual) will not happen, if the back stage is not carried out by women. Men will not be able to 'face God' if women do not prepare everything well. The vertical relationship between humans and God in traditional ceremonies is the full responsibility of women.

Batik motifs from Damar Kurung Ornaments

Based on the findings of various themes of Damar Kurung ornaments before, the results of this study are expected to produce designs of new batik motifs and patterns based on local wisdom. As well as producing creative products (craft and fashion) that are useful for the development of creative industries in Gresik. In addition, efforts to develop batik motifs and patterns contain conservation content for art practitioners, designers and educators to utilize the potential of cultural heritage. This can also improve the economy of creative industries based on local wisdom. The following are the designs of batik motifs and patterns based on the findings of the Damar Kurung ornamental variety theme, Women in traditional ceremonies, women and technology, and women and economic activities.

Batik decoration consists of ornaments which are composed in a way to form a patterned-unity design. The Damar Kurung batik pattern uses geometric patterns, such as squares and parallelograms which are the reference patterns. The Damar Kurung batik motif is inspired by the character of Masmundari who always portrays humans without perspective law, simple and two dimensional. Motifs are arranged repeatedly using *tubrukan*, *parang* and *mubeng* techniques. Both the motive and the isen-isen are arranged in a repetitive and diffuse rhythm. So that an impression of order and harmony can be obtained. This Batik also colored with primary color, red, blue and yellow just like Masmundari's. Based on her style, Damar Kurung batik is a new batik creation, without leaving the identity / characteristics of the form referred to.

Table 1. Damar Kurung Motif and Pattern


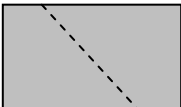

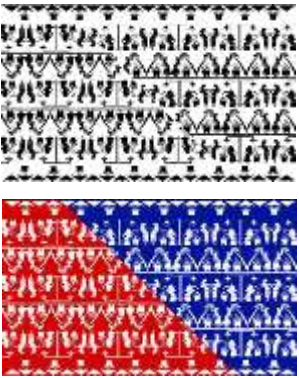

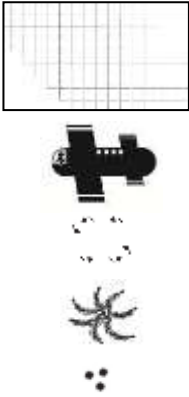
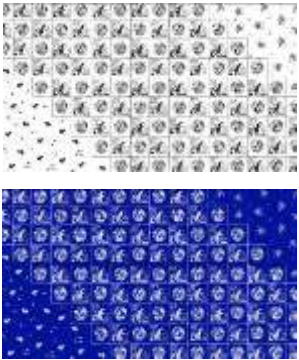



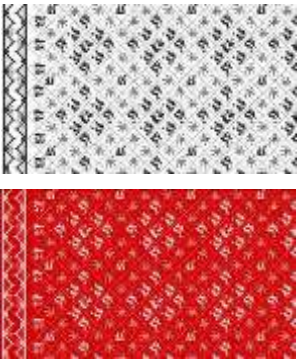
	MAIN MOTIF AND SUPPORTING MOTIF	BACKGROUND	BORDER	ORNAMNETAL
ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES				
WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY			-	
TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES				



Figure 9. Implementation of Damar Kurung motif and pattern documentation
(Source: Photograph by author)

CONCLUSION

Women in Javanese culture play a big role in the private and public world precisely because of their emotional intelligence and the power of their femininity. Being a Javanese woman has a very deep and broad understanding, covering the totality of Javanese basic values philosophy. Being a Javanese woman is not merely material, but a combination of other aspects that focus on socio-cultural aspects. This combination cannot be separated from the orientation of Javanese culture which prioritizes inner and outer harmony. Masmundari was well aware of this philosophy and made her an inspiration in Damar Kurung's ornamentation.

The design of the Damar Kurung batik motifs and patterns is expected to be an extension of Masmundari's efforts to imprint noble values into Javanese women. So that the conservation of Damar Kurung as a national intangible heritage, can be carried just mere lantern artifacts. This batik motif and pattern design is open to the possibility of implementing other creative products.

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