
The Representation of Batik in Batik Fractal's Fashion Catalogue

Ditya Eka Jeulita

Dewi Meyrasyawati

English Department, Universitas Airlangga

Abstract

The development of batik as fashion is indeed undeniable. Until now, there have been numerous fashions performed in both live fashion shows and printed designs. One of the products of batik printed designs is Batik Fractal. Batik Fractal is the product of batik's invention in contemporary era. This journal aims to reveal the meanings of batik in Batik Fractal's Summer Spring catalogue and how batik is represented in this catalogue. This analysis uses qualitative method supported by Roland Barthes' semiotics and Stuart Hall's representation as part of Circuit of Culture theory to reveal the meanings and the representation of batik in the catalogue. The writer finds that batik is indeed the reflection and trace of history in Indonesia passing through an evolution from the phase of traditional, modern, until the current contemporary batik represented by Batik Fractal. Recently, with the innovation of Batik Fractal, batik has become more International than just strictly Indonesian. In the case of Batik Fractal, batik is no longer combined with designs from all part of Javanese regions but it is also mixed with western fashion sense and style.

Keywords: batik, catalogue, fashion, fractal, representation

Introduction

Batik Fractal is a groundbreaking way of producing batik that is led by Nancy and two of her friends in a company named Pikel Indonesia (cited in <http://female.kompas.com/read/2012/05/04/18090318> on 2 April 2013). If artisans of batik originally design their motifs based on their memory of the socio-historical backgrounds in which they live, Nancy and their friends proposed a new way of designing batik which is by computerizing the designs with the help of applied science. Nancy, in her interview with *Female Kompas* (Kompas online 2012) online newspaper stated that fractal is a branch of mathematic applied science that focuses on repetitions, dimensions, and fractions. They analyzed that batik surprisingly has the potential to be designed by classical geometry. "Basically, people now can easily design batik and their own customized patterns with one click on the computer." states Nancy to *Kompas* in her interview.

Batik Fractal has invited so many appreciations as well as critiques due to the fact that not only they offer new way of designing batik, they also offer new faces of batik with its modern complexity that are strongly identical with science and technology. The products that are sold are not only designs but also clothing. The clothing is renewed every few months with different designs depending on the themes. So far, there have only been 2 themes that are out and uploaded on their official website. The clothing line is advertised on a fashion catalogue that is available to download for customers.

Not only do they offer new ways of producing batik, the fashion that they also offer is unique in many ways. For instance, unlike any other batik in general, such as batik from Danar Hadi that mixed their batik with sarong or kain, the version of batik that Batik Fractal offers is interesting as they mix their products with jeans, trousers or dress. While it is true that their new J-Batik software promises that help batik to exist in the modern world, there are several problems that should not be taken for granted just because they claim to propose a new way of offering batik to the world.

The writer argues that there are meanings that are shared through the shifting of batik fashion style offered by Batik Fractal. The existence of a whole new way of producing and offering batik inspires the writer to analyze the meanings of batik in Batik Fractal fashion catalogue and the representation of batik

in this catalogue. Furthermore, in order to be able to analyze the representation of batik in Batik Fractal deeply, particularly related to its result, Semiotics is used to specify data analysis of this research.

There have been numerous amount of studies that are related to the discussion of this study. The first study is from undergraduate student of FIB UNAIR (Faculty of Humanities of Airlangga University), "Consumption of Batik Products (A Case of Airlangga University Students)" by Eriesta Lila Permata (2011).). This study applies qualitative research method. This study finds that there are two modes of batik consumption namely the contexts of space and the context of time (Permata 2011, p.93). The similarity between this study and Permata's is that the object of the researches is batik and the theory used in both studies is Circuit of Culture. However, if Permata focuses on consumption of batik, this study focuses on the representation of batik.

Puspita Sari Sukardani, a post-graduate student of FISIP UNAIR, writes a thesis titled "Visualisasi Ikon Kota Surabaya Pada Batik Tulis Surabaya (Analisis Tekstual Batik Tulis Surabaya)". This study finds that there are so many characteristics of Surabaya's icon that are represented in Batik Tulis Surabaya (Sukardani 2010, p 110). The similarity between this study and Sukardani's study is that the object of both researches is batik. This study and Sukardani's study also portray representation of culture in batik. However, the visualizations of batik in both studies come out different.

This study aims to benefit the readers in understanding the representation of batik in this era. Despite the fact that the existence of *Batik Fractal* has been given so many worldwide appreciations, this study aims to give a critical analysis on the shifting of meaning that is depicted in *Batik Fractal*. It is hoped that the readers, most notably Indonesian readers, will understand batik as an art work with so many aesthetic values that represent variations of histories and cultural backgrounds.

Research Method

This research conducts a qualitative method of textual based study. Furthermore, to analyze the representation of batik that is brought by fractal batik, this research will need a deep understanding of signs and symbols that are depicted in photographs on fractal batik's official website fashion catalogue as the samples of this research. In order to be able to analyze fractal batik deeply, semiotics is used to sharpen data analysis of this research. The famous work titled *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes introduces the concept of signs and symbols.

The approach used in this research is the three orders of representation and meaning productions; *denotation, connotation and myth*. The catalogue consists of 3 sections, the first part is, for sure, the front page, the second part is promotion pages, and the last part is order form. The writer focuses on 3 pages and each page represents each sections. The reason why only 3 pages are chosen is because the writer needs to avoid repetition of analysis due to the fact that pages of promotions basically have similarities of data.

The focus of the analysis is the 3 pages that are chosen. Each page has several photographs of fractal batik worn by a model, and along with those, there are texts that explain the designs. The writer does not cover other photographs and texts in other pages or other parts of the website. The pages are analyzed based on Roland Barthes theory of *Signifier and Signified*. Through this theoretical lens, the representation of batik in fractal batik's fashion is expected to be revealed.

Discussion



Figure 1: Front Page (Cover) of Batik Fractal's Fashion Catalogue

As seen above, the depicted linguistic message is the label of the product itself which is Batik Fractal Indonesia that is positioned in the top right corner of the fashion catalogue. The word 'Indonesia', according to the writer, brings different message than any other Batik products in Indonesia. There are only a few local products that would suggest the word 'Indonesia' as their label; because Indonesian people have already known batik is from Indonesia

Therefore, the message that is brought by any other batik products usually deal with locality, for instance, Danar Hadi, one of the most famous batik labels in Indonesia, promotes batik that is originally from Solo. Mirota which is also one of the most famous batik labels in Indonesia, promotes batik that come from Jogjakarta. However, it is very interesting to find that Batik Fractal promotes batik with the word 'Indonesia' in their fashion catalogue.

At non coded iconic level, there is a young female model who poses in five different styles juxtaposed in a white background. This young female model wears different outfits in every pose. These pictures are also taken separately but then fused together to make one complete photo. Also, there are four lines depicted in the front cover, the colors of the lines are green and oranges, the color of the texts is also orange. All these explanations show that there is a mixture of culture between Indonesia in this case is shown by batik and western culture by fashion style combination.

At coded iconic level, there are many connotations found in this page. The first pose connotes Indonesian urban young and elegant girl. The dress connotes western influence and the color connotes elegance. The absence of batik pattern in this picture also contributes the connotation of western influence. Meanwhile, the summer hat and shoes connote sportiness of young teenager. Batik pattern on the dress connotes Indonesia, the color of the dress which is combination of red and purple connotes happiness and royalty. Veronica L. Zammitto in her journal titled Expression of Colours states that the color of red implies happiness; meanwhile violet or purple implies high range and royalty (Zammitto 2005, p. 5). Sunglasses and flat shoes connote sportiness. Meanwhile necklace and bangle connote elegance.

At mythic level, we understand that all of these signs activating as *Batik Fractal* in their fashion catalogue's front cover produces the idea of global world. First, as seen from their tagline, their products are more emphasized as being Indonesian products. Unlike the usual conventional batik labels' such as Danar Hadi whose tagline is emphasized on Solo; the region in which their batik comes from, it is clear that Batik Fractal offers the idea that is more global than any other batik labels would offer.

Second, the theme that is chosen by Batik Fractal is also a global theme. Unlike any other batik labels in Indonesia whose theme are mostly derived from religious holidays, Batik Fractal offers climate theme based on western weather change. . This proves that western influence plays significant role in defining what kind of products they offer to customers



Figure 2: Promotion Page of Batik Fractal's Fashion Catalogue

As seen above, it is now clear that main language of promotion page is English, whereas Indonesian is only used as the titles. This shows that Batik Fractal intends to attract customers who are able to understand English. However, it is also interesting to notice the repetition of “Handmade with Stamp Technique” that keeps appearing in every section of this page. As we know, stamp technique is one of traditional ways of producing batik other than the essential canting hand-drawn method (Elliot 2004, p.53). Thus, the repetition of the “Handmade with Stamp Technique” line brings meaning which is to emphasize that despite the fact that western influence is dominant; there is still traditional and conventional side in their products.

As mentioned above, there are three sections in this page. In the first section called *Jingga*, three pictures are depicted. The first picture denotes young aged Indonesian model that poses and looks directly at camera. This young aged Indonesian female model wears sleeveless top with orange batik pattern on it and combined with blue jeans short pants. The second section, there are two pictures but the one of them is only zoomed out version. In this section called *Lili Jambu*, the same young aged Indonesian model is captured with a purple short dress with a hint of batik pattern in the bottom part of the dress.

In this page, the writer finds the same connotations with the front page, Blue jeans, Polaroid camera and iPod shuffle are found to connote modernity and western influence, meanwhile batik pattern connotes Indonesian heritage. Mask and glasses connote edginess and quirkiness. The poses made by the model also connote quirkiness and edginess. Model's physical appearance connotation has been explained in previous analysis on front cover.

Myth that shows up in promotion page of Batik Fractal's Fashion catalogue is not different with myth in front cover. However, in this page, dominance of English is very much emphasized. Almost all descriptions in this page are in English except for titles that are in Indonesian. However, the repetition of “Handmade with Stamp Technique” gives meaning that inform their customers although western influence is apparent and significant, it does not mean that the sense of Indonesia is forgotten. The poses shown in this page and the pervious page are also intriguing as they are different from the poses on other batik catalogues. Batik Fractal's fashion catalogue offers sense of quirkiness that is usually identical with *Vogue*. *Vogue* is considered as the most famous fashion magazine that was founded in 1892 by Arthur Baldwin Turnure in New York (cited in <http://dctdesigns.com/2011/06/23/vogue%E2%80%99s-influence-on-fashion-illustration/> on December 23 2013). *Vogue*'s idea of high fashion equals edginess, and here, in the case of Batik Fractal's fashion catalogue, the writer finds adaptation of poses from *Vogue* on this catalogue, particularly, on this page.



Figure 3 & 4: The Adaptation of Vogue's Model Pose

As listed above, the differences between poses and expressions depicted in Batik Fractal's fashion catalogue with Danar Hadi's fashion catalogue is obvious. Batik Fractal adapts *Vogue* in guiding the model to pose and set her expression. In her the myth that Batik Fractal offers is that despite the fact that batik is still attached and identical with traditional or ancient artwork, batik can now be a part of high fashion by adapting *Vogue* fashion sense of edginess and quirkiness.



Figure 5: Batik Fractal's Order Form

The first linguistic message found in this page is “*Form Pemesanan – Nama – Alamat – Kota – NO HP –Ceceran – UK Baju – Jumlah Orderan – Nama Pemilik Rekening*”. The fact that Indonesian is dominant in order form implies that their target of consumers is still Indonesian. This message is also emphasized in the next linguistic message “08562469863”, instead of using +62, Indonesian international mobile phone code, Batik Fractal chooses local mobile phone code in their order form. However, “08562469863 – LINE ID: Batik Fractal – batikfractal.com” also give other meaning. This linguistic message sends meaning to people that in the case of Batik Fractal, technology plays significant role as transaction can only occur online. This also means that the only intended customers are not only Indonesians, but also Indonesians who are able to speak or understand English and familiar with technology.

Since this page uses the same picture as the previous page, the analysis of its denotation is not very much different. The model wears a short dark red short dress, with a hint of grey and pattern in the upper part of the dress and a pair of beige shoes. This time her accessorizes are not only bracelets but also an orange mask. She poses while bending her legs over. Next to her, there are three pictures on WhatsApp, LINE, and Gmail. Mask and glasses connote edginess and quirkiness. The poses made by the model also connote quirkiness and edginess. Model's physical appearance connotation has been explained in previous analysis on front cover. Symbols of WhatsApp, LINE, and Gmail connote technology.

As mentioned roughly above, Myth that is sent by Batik Fractal is that their intended customers are Indonesians who are able to speak or at least understand English and have access of technology either it is phone or internet because transaction between buyer and seller can only occur online. The fact that Batik Fractal chooses online retailing as their marketing method also contributes myth. It is technology of information, computer, and communication that first create the concept of online retailing that provides customers the ability to purchase any products online without having to go to physical shop (Adiwijaya et al 2010 p. 9). Therefore, the decision made my Batik Fractal to use online retailing as their marketing method contributes myth which is to construct that batik can also follow global trends not only in terms of designs, model, but also marketing method.

The Fashion of Batik Now and Then

As explained above, Batik Fractal's representation of batik is very new. The combination of Western-style and Indonesian style is very much apparent. This intrigues question whether or not Batik Fractal can be considered as batik. The development of batik fashion in Indonesia has been really rapid and undeniable. Until well into the twentieth century, batik was used almost exclusively for clothing and for ceremonial occasions (Elliot 2004, p. 32). Elliot states that in batik's first development as fashion, class distinctions were made by the type cloth worn and its pattern. At that time, some designs were only allowed to be worn by members or royal family or the elites.

Ancient batik used to be restricted and was always dependent on class distinction. In other words, batik was the symbols for Aristocrats and member of royalties in Indonesia during ancient times. In 18th century, sultans of Yogyakarta and Surakarta decreed that certain patters were forbidden to commoners.

Even within the royal family, some batik patters were reserved for the crown prince, while others could be worn only by his less royal cousins (Elliot 2004, p. 68).

However, as the time went by, and with the proclamation of Indonesian Independence in the 19th century, batik of Java evolved into the symbol of nation hood. At this time, designs were no longer restricted and class system was destructed. Combinations of designs from one region to another were embraced. Central Javanese patterns from Surakarta and Yogyakarta were combined with north coast colors and techniques (Elliot 2004, p. 186). This was the start of modern batik and modern batik has become a viable art since then. Batik evolved to be the symbol and reflection of one nation; something bigger than just a single region.

It is very interesting to find out that in the case of Batik Fractal, batik symbolizes more than just a nation which is the global world. As explained in the findings, the depiction of batik in Batik Fractal's fashion catalogue brings combinations of Western and Indonesian senses. Starting from theme, designs, clothing style, poses, until method of marketing. With the findings, it is found that Batik Fractal reflects and symbolizes the rise of contemporary globalization in Indonesia. Globalization is all about growing mobility across frontiers – mobility of goods, and commodities, mobility of information and communications, mobility of people (du Gay et al 1997, p.14). In the case of Batik Fractal, it is found that batik is now infused with Western cultural values such as fashion sense and style. Globalization causes the mobility of Western fashion sense and style grows rapidly in the products of Batik Fractal. Therefore, the writer finds how batik in Indonesia evolves from traditional to the contemporary one as described in the following figure.



Figure 4.14: Writer's Findings on Batik's Evolution

The writer found that batik has underwent three evolutions starting from ancient, modern, and contemporary and in each evolution batik underwent designs and technique change, it is no longer hobbled by geographic distance or rigid custom, instead it is now encouraged by the development of Java's modern artist (Elliot 2004, p. 187). Modern batik was marked by the movement namely Batik Indonesia that invented the combination of batik from each region such as Cirebon, Yogyakarta, and even Bali (Elliot 2004, p. 186). But, the evolution does not just stop right here, the writer found that contemporary batik is marked with the invention of Batik Fractal. In the case of Batik Fractal, batik has become less and less rigid. In fact, batik that has always been identical with Indonesian heritage is mixed with the culture of Western.

Batik Fractal as the product of contemporary batik reflects our contemporary world where hybridity that is a mixture of other things is embraced. du Gay explains that globalization gives a sense that cultural encounters across frontiers can create and new and productive cultural fusion and hybridity (du Gay et al 1997, p. 38). In the case of Batik Fractal, batik is created with new mixture of different culture not only from Indonesia but also the Western side of the world. Many people tend to have misconception about globalization as they think of globalization in terms of homogenization, or in other words, Westernization. Globalization is new forms of universal culture, and new kinds of particularism and Batik Fractal symbolizes the arrival of globalization in Indonesia analyzing by the mixture of language used in the catalogue they offer, adaptation of vogue pose, and marketing method.

The Future of Batik in the Realm of Globalization: From *Kain Panjang* to Jeans

When batik first became costume, batik demanded no zippers, button or pins (Elliot 2004, p. 32). Therefore, there were only several types of batik that could be worn at that time such as sarong, dodot, kain panjang, batik pagi sore, selendang, iket kepala, and kemben. Men and women also had different way of wearing these types. For instance, kain panjang or "long cloth" is usually wrapped left over right

sometimes with narrow pleats in the front; men usually wear kain with broader front pleats, wrapping it loosely over left (Elliot 2004, p. 34).

In the late 1960s, there were already many changes in batik during this period. Designs of kain panjang began to experience innovations with different designs that broke the traditions at that time. Iwan Tirta, a modern batik designer, started combining figures of lions and dragons, while at first, lions and dragons were only used for men's clothing (Elliot 2004, p. 191). Modern batik was marked by these kinds of innovations of kain panjang and women were not only attached to delicate designs anymore.

In the six decades since 1945, batik has become more Indonesian than strictly Javanese. During these periods of change, to recognize locale characteristics in one design of batik was already impossible because combinations of each region were embraced. What interesting about these modern trends and designer is that their distinctive styles are adapted from all parts of Java, especially the north coast (Elliot 2004, p. 193).

Now that we come to the 21st century, with the innovation of Batik Fractal, batik has become more International than just strictly Indonesian. In the case of Batik Fractal, batik is no longer combined with designs from all part of Javanese regions. The designs are combined with Western fashion sense and style. For women, kain panjang is no longer used as it has already evolved in form of short dress and short pants. Batik is now spread throughout countries around the world, attracting a greater audience than ever before. However with this big change of evolution, batik that has long been known for its representation of Java and Indonesia is now struggling for its own identity.

Conclusion

The evolution does not merely stop there, as technology began to develop, batik continues to undergo evolution and Batik Fractal is the product of its latest evolution as contemporary batik. It is now crystal clear that batik is indeed the reflection and trace of history in Indonesia from the ancient time until the current contemporary time. The representation Batik Fractal's fashion catalogue is the proof of how significant can the flow of globalization affect Indonesia. What needs to be taken as consideration is that in every evolution, batik underwent significant changes that caused it to lose its own elements. It is an irony that contemporary batik does not really represent Indonesia anymore, but rather global world, the hybrid or mixture of Indonesian and Western culture.

Works Cited

- Adiwiwijaya, M. & Djati, S. P., 2010. ANALYSIS OF GLOBALIZATION TRENDS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE REFLEXIVE SOCIETY AND ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RETAIL INDUSTRY. Surabaya: Petra University.
- Edy, L. W. S., 2008. Contemporary Pants of Indonesian Urban Female Teenager: Fashion and Identity from Cultural Studies Approach. Surabaya: Universitas Airlangga.
- Elliott, I. M., 2004. BATIK; Fabled Cloth of Java, Connecticut: Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd.
- Fractal, B., 2013. Batik Fractal. [Online] Available at: <http://batikfractal.com/> [Accessed 6 June 2013].
- Gay, P. d., 1997. Production of Culture/Cultures Production. London: Sage Publications.
- Gay, P. d. et al., 1997. The Story of the Sony Walkman. London: Sage Publications.
- Grzywacz, Anna. 2013. Constructing National Identity in Indonesia - Experience for Europe. Mozaik vol 13 no 1, pp. 30-37.
- Permata, E. L., 2011. Consumption of Batik Products; A Case of Airlangga University Students. Surabaya: Universitas Airlangga.
- Ryani, A., 2012. Female Kompas. [Online] Available at: <http://female.kompas.com/read/2012/05/04/18090318> [Accessed 2 April 2013].
- Sukardani, P. S., 2010. Visualisasi Ikon Kota Surabaya Pada Batik Tulis Surabaya. Surabaya: Universitas Airlangga.
- Thomas, D. C., 2011. DCT Designs. [Online] Available at: <http://dctdesigns.com/2011/06/23/vogue%E2%80%99s-influence-on-fashion-illustration/> [Accessed 23 December 2013].
- Zammito, V. L., 2005. The Expression of Colors, New York: s.n.