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Embracing Contemporary Colors of Endangered Endemic Birds in Lurik Weaving for the Preservation of Indonesian Cultural Heritage

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ABSTRACT

Traditional weaving in Yogyakarta might become an extinction, as many of the young weavers are turning into sand miners or factory laborers due to lack of regeneration. Therefore, Lawe offers a new interpretation of lurik through appropriate stories to attract young people to use it as part of their fashion. This research is concerned on Lawe's efforts in producing modern lurik weaving that has a message for young people and to encourage an understanding of the importance of lurik as a traditional Indonesian woven textile. Using the colors and patterns from their collection, Lawe took this opportunity to tell stories about Indonesia's environment, especially the endangered native birds in Indonesia. The researchers used qualitative research methods and interdisciplinary strategies with Visual Communication Design and Cultural Studies to generate scientific knowledge. The research findings identified that in generating patterns, the composition of lines in lurik weaving is affected by the color ratio of bird feathers. This research contributes to inspiring the creative economy in cultural value and pride in one's work for years to come, and the sustainable preservation of the Indonesian natural environment and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Contemporary Color, Cultural Heritage, Lurik, Weaving

INTRODUCTION

A clothing item is not only a basic necessity, but it also serves as an identity statement. Nowadays, people can express themselves through their clothes by following fashion trends and advancements on the internet, television, and movies. The world of fashion has had an incredible change since 1960. Most Indonesian women wore kebaya on a daily basis then but now it has become a rarity. The modern Indonesian woman, especially urban dwellers in big cities, have various choices of clothing styles and fabrics due to the fast-paced and multitasking global lifestyle. Urban dwellers are always connected to the internet and mobile phones (Hatuka & Toch, 2016). Due to a lack of local knowledge, many Indonesians, especially those living in big cities have difficulties in identifying with global culture. Furthermore, Sedyawati (2014) asserts that national cultures that have high values will be underdeveloped by the global culture, which is appointed as the superpower in the world. Although globalization is unstoppable, its consequences that could lead to the destruction of a cultural identity are unavoidable. According to Mulyantari & Rosilawati (2021), Indonesian traditions tend to disappear with time and become replaced by contemporary culture. Meanwhile, there is potential for cultural heritage to be used for the future. The government has attempted to preserve cultural heritage by enacting the Law on the Promotion of Culture in Law No. 5/2017, which states that culture covers all aspects of human characteristics, taste, reason and creation (Indonesia, 2017). According to this law, Indonesian national culture is the full consequence of intercultural exchanges across Indonesia and constitutes its development. The protection, development, utilisation, and improvement of culture are part of the cultural advancement initiative, which aims to strengthen cultural resilience and the contribution of Indonesian culture to global civilization. Technology, knowledge and traditional arts are all considered objects of cultural advancement. The objectives of enhancing culture include fostering cultural diversity, enhancing national identity, preserving cultural heritage, and improving public welfare. Thus, the focus of national development is on culture.

Unfortunately, this issue also affects some Indonesians. A consortium of Lawe Society weavers has been establishing contemporary lurik since 2004 to preserve Indonesian traditional heritage. *Lurik* is a traditional hand-woven fabric pattern from Java that has been existed since the ninth century. *Lurik* is a type of fabric that is simple in design and production yet has deep symbolic value (Nursari & Nikmah, 2023). Fitria Werdiningsih as Manager of Lawe's Business Unit stated that many young weavers in Yogyakarta have switched professions to become sand miners or factory laborers, both men and women, and they are elderly women who have no regeneration. Traditional weaving will be endangered and become extinct. If not preserved, Indonesia's weaving heritage will disappear. In order to sustain the attention of the younger generation to keep using lurik

fabric as part of their fashion, Lawe seeks to create lurik tenun with new meaning through the right narrative. It will ensure that Indonesian culture continues to have the vibrancy, pride and identity inherent in Indonesian society as it grows over time (Ramadhan, 2017).

This research is concerned on Lawe's efforts in producing modern lurik weaving that has a message for young people and to encourage an understanding of the importance of lurik as a traditional Indonesian woven textile. Using the colors and patterns from their collection, Lawe took this opportunity to tell stories about Indonesia's environment, especially the endangered native birds in Indonesia. In addition, it remains relevant to the current times while educating the public about endangered Indonesian birds. Therefore, it is expected that Indonesian nature and cultural heritage can be preserved. To generate scientific knowledge, the researchers used qualitative research techniques and an interdisciplinary approach with Visual Communication Design and Cultural Studies to examine some important aspects of *Lurik Lawe* inspired by Indonesian nature and the current context in more detail.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative methods combined with a case study approach. The case study approach focuses on a case and its fundamental issues that are described in depth within a typical structure then followed by an interpretation of their respective meanings (Rashid et al., 2019). The unit of analysis is to examine an event, program, activity, or more than one individual. Observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials are some of the many sources of information commonly consulted during the comprehensive data collection process that is part of case study research. Through this data collection, a detailed description about their case emerges (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In order to understand the complexity of the descriptions, a researcher can focus on a few significant issues. One analytical approach is to identify the issues in each case before finding common themes that apply to all cases (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Each case and its fundamental issues are described in-depth within a typical structure before an interpretation of the significance of the case. In the final stage of the interpretation process, as a significant outcome of understanding the issues, the researcher offers a report on the meaning of the case (Rashid et al., 2019). The researcher made observations by visiting the weaving workshop to observe the process of making *Lawe lurik* weaving and interviewing Mrs. Fitria Werdiningsih, as the Manager of the Business Unit. In addition, researchers also searched for literature related to lurik weaving, especially Lawe weaving.

Koentjaraningrat defines culture as a whole system of ideas, actions and human creations for community life made by learning (Sumarto, 2019). Cultural change usually includes five main points, such as changes in the value system;

changes in the meaning system and knowledge system; changes in the behavior system; changes in the interaction system; and institutional changes (Rachman, 2021). Meanwhile, Sumarjo stated that aesthetics is more a matter of beauty, and tries to solve human questions about the meaning of beauty and artistic value (Wahyudi, 2019). The origin of artistic properties can be approached from various aspects. There are six main discussions in the philosophy of art, such as art object, artist, art society, art context, art value and art experience. Creativity is a highly individualized mental activity that is a manifestation of human freedom as an individual, while expression involves feelings and thoughts (Shao et al., 2019). Ornamental variety, as defined by Sunaryo, is interpreted as the attraction and aesthetic value of the product. Ornamental variety is divided into two types of forms, such as geometric (simplification of natural forms) and organic (imagining objects in nature) (Rumambie, 2021). The same thing occurs with Lawe, since they developed *lurik* patterns inspired by nature, especially from endangered Indonesian birds. Pattern is understood as repetition and is closely related to the manufacturing process, which has a geometric basis (Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2017). There is a system within patterns that is formed through design (Dawes & Ostwald, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

People encounter design on a their daily life, both in nature and constructed environments. Artists work with the components of space, line, shape, form, color, value, and texture to create a design. In order to create interesting and aesthetically pleasing art forms, artists use principles such as balance, movement, repetition, emphasis, and contrast (Lalji, 2021). One of the Indonesian traditional crafts that has persisted and developed over the years is *tenun*, which has philosophical principles embedded in Indonesian culture. Weavers can produce nature-inspired motifs using traditional tools, such as non-machine looms (ATBM) (Wiguna & Permana, 2019). *Lurik* as a fabric is made using an ATBM, or a simple loom known as *tenun gedhog*. *Lurik* is a woven fabric with stripe motifs. *Lurik* comes from an old Javanese language called *lorek*, which means lines, dashes, or stripes, which indicates simplicity, and can be seen as a pattern (Musman, 2015). Each *lurik* woven fabric has a certain meaning depending on the design and colors used to make it. Each line on the fabric is a physical “message”, with natural materials and processes, and a non-physical message, with a story that becomes the context for the development of colors on the fabric. A fabric can be called *lurik* if it complies with specifications related to certain materials and also goes through a distinctive process, from dyeing, dipping, printing, staining, bleaching, trimming, washing, and tuning, until it becomes a ready-to-use fabric (FK et al., 2019).

Lurik with its diverse patterns is believed to reflect sacred values that provide luck, advice, guidance, and hope (Suprayitno & Ariesta, 2014). Based on inscriptions from the Hindu Mataram era, *lurik* has symbolic meanings associated with Javanese society and more than a fashion statement for the people of its day as descendants of the Mataram Kings (Nursari & Nikmah, 2023). Traditional clothing such as *beskap* and *kebaya* used to be made from *lurik* weaving for the courtiers of Yogyakarta Palace. *Surjan* is also made from *lurik* woven fabric, as mentioned by Djomena. People wear certain *lurik* for formal activities when they attend different ceremonial occasions. They have unique names and pattern definitions. In addition, pregnant women use *lurik* as a *kemben* (cloth covering a woman's body in Javanese terms) at the *Tingkeban* celebration (seventh month of pregnancy). They believe that it will keep the mother and baby from harm and disease. Besides for ceremonial purposes, *lurik* is also used as a daily sling because of its durable characteristic (Suprayitno & Ariesta, 2014).

Five women Adinindyah, Ita Natalia, Paramita Iswari, Rina Anita, and Westiani Agustin were aware of the potential of *lurik* and also realized that *lurik* weavers faced market challenges and had difficulty in competing with the modern textile industry. Unfortunately, the four founders are no longer active. In Yogyakarta, *Paguyuban Lawe* was established in 2004. They are firmly committed to prevent its demise. Their vision is to be the leader of the sustainable weaving movement that preserves Indonesia's traditional hand-weaving and provides a means of independent living for the craftswomen. Their mission is to be a center of excellence in producing and preserving high quality traditional Indonesian hand-weaving, empowering women and communities to create contemporary products using traditional hand-weaving, both on a retail and corporate basis, to consumers within and outside Indonesia. Therefore, Lawe aims to elevate woven fabrics into more valuable items. Lawe creates a variety of fashion products from a single piece of *lurik* fabric, including apparel, accessories, bags, wallets, pouches, soft toys, and home decor.

In order to attract public attention, Lawe used a variety of innovations, which included various patterns and products with brilliant colors, for a wider market use. Before its modification, *lurik* was usually only available in dark-colored fabrics. Then, Lawe started to develop *lurik* to attract more younger customers. Although the product is innovative, Lawe still maintains the production process using ATBMs continuously. These hand-woven fabrics incorporate traditional stories and knowledge about preserving natural and social values. The uniqueness of the patterns and the subtlety of the manufacturing process increase the selling price of Lawe's *lurik* products. Lawe's *lurik* began to expand beyond the local market and into the global market. Lawe uses this opportunity to portray stories about Indonesia's environment through the colors and patterns of their current *lurik* woven fabric collection. People can learn about Indonesia's natural conditions today. Most people in Yogyakarta, generally from

Javanese ethnicity, are interested in bird-keeping as a hobby. The songbird enthusiast community is closely associated with Javanese ethnicity, especially among men. This perspective developed in the historical context of Javanese history, where bird-keeping activities were only associated with Javanese cultural entities, especially areas with strong royal or *kraton* traditions. However, this perspective has changed as the songbird-keeping community has expanded not only among Javanese but also among other ethnicities that do not have royal traditions, but also in other areas that historically did not have kingdoms or monarchies (Aryanto et al., 2020).

Lawe began design development on *lurik* weaving in late 2016 by developing the value of bird biodiversity and preserving an eco-friendly culture that focuses on patterns and colors. After selecting endangered species of Indonesian birds to implement into the *lurik*, Lawe explores colors that do not belong to the existing collection and compares them with the dominant colors of the birds. Then, Lawe created several *lurik* patterns inspired by the birds' feathers and varied the style of line weights and colors, referring to the principles of design. *Kacamata Sangihe* (*Zosterops nehrkorni*), Javan Kingfisher (*Halcyon cyanoventris*), Rhinoceros Hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*), Javan Sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*) and Violet-necked Lory (*Eos squamata*) are some of the 11 bird motifs whose colors have been used in *lurik* fabrics.



Figure 1. *Lurik* pattern inspired by *Kacamata Sangihe* bird
Source: Google images (2023)



Figure 2. *Lurik* pattern inspired by Javan Kingfisher bird
Source: Google images (2023)



Figure 3. *Lurik* pattern inspired by Rhinoceros Hornbill bird
Source: Google images (2023)



Figure 4. *Lurik* pattern inspired by Javan Sparrow bird
Source: Google images (2023)



Figure 5. *Lurik* pattern inspired by Violet-necked Lory bird
Source: Google images (2023)

Lawe creates patterns by transmitting colors proportionally into the striated weave, imitating the structure of bird feathers. The proportion of the bird's feather tones has an impact on the composition of the line patterns in the *lurik* weave. The alternation of line width and color brightness will create a distinctive visual composition in *lurik*. Color has a direct impact on mood, which affects productivity (Alkathiri & Sari, 2019). Color is also directly related to a person's feelings, and the choice of color in humans can change the body, mind, emotions, and the balance of them (Julianto et al., 2019). Lawe has created these designs to make people more interested in using lurik woven fabric and appreciating it by embracing a narrative that is relevant to the current context. The weaver community became interested in weaving Lawe's *lurik*, besides from the

consumer aspect, within the urban environment. Supported by the organization, Lawe is collaborating with 20 tailors and 50 traditional weavers in Bantul. Different types of *lurik* are now being prepared to compete in the International contemporary fashion market.



Figure 6. Contemporary *kebaya* with bright and colorful *lurik*
Source: Lawe (2021)

Lawe intends to preserve the natural wealth of Indonesia and contribute to the zero-waste mission. The series of soft toys inspired by Indonesian fauna are made using leftover *lurik* weaving materials with the beautiful colors of Indonesian endemic birds. For example, the Javan rhino doll serves as a reminder that this species is one of the most endangered mammals on earth. These fun soft toys will encourage children to learn about endangered animal species. Lawe had spent a year to develop these adorable toys with the assistance of a handful of housewives (Lawe, 2021).



Figure 7. Javan rhino soft toy made from leftover *lurik*
Source: Lawe (2021)

The system is highly humanized in this regard, having implemented a mother-friendly working hours strategy and an empathetic design. They work from home, allowing them to choose when to work as long as predetermined purposes are achieved. Lawe also discusses time-frames and the desired number of stitches with them. Fitria explained that Lawe does not impose on the craftswomen's abilities in empathetic design. They do not need to make themselves feel like they have to produce curved items if they can only sew straight. Fitria stated that the products are modified to match the ability of the craftswomen so that they are not subjected to torture and the results will be quality controlled.



Figure 8. Empowering Women Program of Lawe
Source: Lawe (2021)

Lawe tries to make lurik weaving using natural dyes because it is concerned about the environment and sustainability. More than 20 types of plants are used to make natural colors. The yellow and brown pigments come from Javanese Soga (*Cudrania javanensis* and *Cerriops tagal*), and the blue tint comes from indigo (*Indigofera* sp.). In the end, this color conveys a sense of serenity and tranquility. Unfortunately, when using natural dyes, color constancy is quite difficult to achieve. The drying method and type of fixator also have a different impact on the result. Thus, producing the same color tint is very difficult. Although the process takes longer than usual and the colors are not as stable, and moreover, they are not as vivid as colors made from synthetic materials, the challenge is worth trying, as it is environmentally friendly and protects the earth from pollution.



Figure 9. Lurik bedcover used natural dye
Source: Lawe (2021)

In addition, Lawe aims to promote culture, improve educational standards, and provide women with the resources they need to improve the socio-economic status of their families. Lawe created the Sisterhood program to achieve these goals of preserving traditional weaving and empowering Indonesian women. Lawe embraces women from various regions who have similar concerns and encourage the development of traditional weaving in their respective regions, such as North Sumatra, Riau, South Sumatra, Lampung, Central Java, Bali, West Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara. They also have a social program that focuses on enhancing the potential skills of new members. Lawe disseminates information on color harmony, market trends, weaving quality improvement, and motivational development. Its product ranges are developed based on consumer demand and the skills of the craftsmen. The focus of Lawe is improving the lives of the craftswomen, not just the aesthetic value. As part of its women empowerment program, Lawe offers various trainings, including classes on product development, natural dyes, and company startup. In addition, they provide free training to housewives and students on making products from fabric scraps. In order to achieve their goal of preserving traditional weaving and empowering Indonesian women from different regions, Lawe also created the Sisterhood program. They share the same concern and encourage the development of traditional weaving in their respective regions, such as North Sumatra, Riau, South Sumatra, Lampung, Central Java, Bali, West Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara. The focus of this social program is to enhance the potential skills of new members. Therefore, they disseminate information on color matching, market trends, weaving quality improvement, and motivational development.

CONCLUSION

The research resulted in the development of a strategy for Lawe's *lurik* weaving pattern design that involves ecological and cultural challenges, and contemporary cultivation. Lawe achieved this through the creation of textile designs inspired by the patterns and motifs of Indonesian birds, making *lurik* more vibrant, distinctive, and appropriate for modern society. This contemporary *lurik* is used in clothing and its accessories, such as bags, wallets, shoes, accessories, soft toys and home decor. Supported by the grant they received, Lawe focuses on getting the miners back to work as weavers, providing a new spirit for *lurik*'s craftsmen and consumers. Lawe brings new meaning to *lurik* by developing fabrics inspired by the colors of endangered birds in Indonesia so that *lurik* becomes more alive with the appropriate narrative context, appears varied and is more acceptable to the current community. *Lurik* becomes relevant to the younger generation in the current context. Through this cultural preservation program, Lawe encourages Indonesians to appreciate culture through passion and pride for the nation and the respect for ecology and the environment. This research also

contributes to stimulating the creative economy related to cultural values and generating pride in work in the future. In the current context, *lurik* is relevant to the younger generation who are searching for identity. When someone dresses in a culturally significant way, it defines them. Through the assistance of this cultural preservation program, Lawe expects to inspire Indonesians to value their cultural heritage with national pride, ecological awareness, and environmental sensitivity.

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