



Typography and Diversity

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Vernacular Typography on the Batik Label as a Representation of Typeface Diversity

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Abstract:

Indonesian Batik is the pride of Indonesian *wastra* (traditional cloth). With the recognition of batik by UNESCO in 2009 as one of the intangible heritage, Indonesian Batik entered the world as a work of art with unsurpassed value. Indonesian Batik are wrapped and labeled with a tag displaying graphic works accompanied by the text with unique font. The font used for the text in each region has their respective differences. This paper focused on analysing vernacular typography within the four labels each from Yogyakarta and Solo. The result shows that the font used are mostly a combination of serifs and sans serifs written manually in capital with bold and contrasting strokes affected by Victorian, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and Plakatstijl style. These are the testament on how vernacular typography can survive within the society despite the birth of many new and sleek fonts brought by the technological advancement.

Keywords: *Vernacular Typography, Label, Batik, Graphic Style, Visual Culture*

1. Introduction

Since Guttenberg created and found movable type and printed machine in 1400-1468 the growth of typeface has advanced remarkably. The growth of typeface form all over the

world has changed, from manually applied and designed to a digital one. This remarks as a great achievement in the field of typography. In addition to that, movable type and printed machine gave change on the field of graphics design as well, especially in Indonesia. At that moment, Indonesia didn't have many options of typeface selection to be used in printed machine (Bajraghosa, 2014, hal. 28). The arrival of European nations, especially The Netherland (Holland), changed the face of Indonesian typeface, given rise to the Indonesian vernacular typography. At first, Roman Script was introduced and Roman script with Portuguese language was found in *Padrão* (monument) in Indonesia. This happened when Henrique Leme was conducted to a place on the right bank of Ciliwung River, near the river mouth known as Calapa which later called Sunda Kalapa (Ikram, et al., 2015, hal. 61-62). After that, Roman Script with various language was found an seen on cannon, monument and paper document.

The introduction of Roman Script has also change vernacular typography used in many industries in Indonesia, especially Batik industry. Batik label (also known as batik etiquette) appears as a representation of batik manufacturers, batik manufacture owners or batik creators. The name of batik creators or batik manufacturers usually appears at the end of the fabrics so that it can be seen by the people. But the first and the foremost means of brand identity was still found in the existence batik label as it was used to present the nature and the quality of the fabrics (Bajraghosa, 2014, hal. 21). Here, batik label served its function in marketing, as the quality of batik could be seen and shown through its intricate design. It informs the consumer about the manufacturers and the fabric's quality so they can decide whether they want to buy that particular batik or choose another one instead.

2. Vernacular Typography

Vernacular is the everyday language through which a group, community or region communicates. It is a recurrent aspect within graphic design as designers draw on the vernacular by incorporating 'found' items, such as street signs and borrowing low-culture forms of communication, such as slang (Ambrose & Harris, 2009, hal. 69). Vernacular typography is shown as a representation of emotional and expression which is growing in the society. Vernacular typography (some also refer it as ethnic alphabets) found on various writings, pictures, and signs in the local environment could become a cultural asset of a country. Although most of these ethnic alphabets are often ignored because of their 'old' and traditional look, they create a uniqueness which more or less will become

local genius in Indonesia (Haswanto, 2013, hal. 159). Vernacular typography creates a typeface that took an inspiration from the society's daily activities. This typeface reflects the expression of traditions, familiar and distinctive cause in the society since typeface creation process started from the local values (Murtono, 2014, p. 115).

3. Batik Label As Logo.

Batik label contains graphics, text and the image or a photograph of the batik creator or the owner. At first batik brand identity was communicated by the use of Indonesian word 'tjap' or 'cap'. This basically means 'brand' and stamped in the batik so that the name of the batik label usually begins with the word 'cap', e.g 'Cap Dokar' (see figure 1) and 'Cap Jujur' (see figure 2). Batik label present at the time contains illustration emboldened by outline style and color block with gradation or halftone. The name of the batik label was selected from Indonesian word representing daily activities or something familiar to the society at that time. This is in line with what Carter said (Bajraghosa, 2014, hal. 23) that a good logo needs to have:

- a. Originality, could be determine
- b. Legibility, easy to read and easy to recognize
- c. Simplicity
- d. Easy to remember

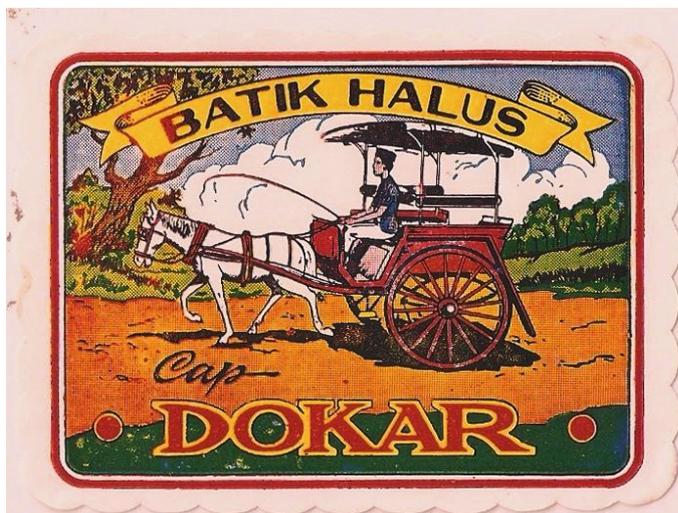


Figure 1. Batik Label Cap Dokar

Figure 1 shows an illustration of 'dokar' (traditional horse carriage) and a depiction of Indonesian rural greenery environment dyed with half tone color. The text 'BATIK

HALUS' was placed on the ribbon at the top using sans serif typeface while the text 'cap' was placed at the bottom using script typeface accompanied by the text 'dokar' with serif typeface. While the dokar and batik doesn't have any relationship whatsoever, the batik label has a unique feels to it, constructing its own identity. The typeface used in this batik label identity was handwritten and created as a master typeface unique for this particular brand, creating a vernacular feels on the usually common serif typeface. All the elements interacting with each other are recognizable by Indonesian people, especially those living in Java rural area, thus it served its function as a good logo as it is easy to remember.



Figure 2. Batik Label Cap Jujur

Figure 2 shows an illustration of truck loaded with groceries and the depiction of Indonesian rural mountainous environment dyed with half tone color. The text 'JUJUR' in sans serif is seen on the truck's body. *Jujur* is an Indonesian words which means honesty. The text 'BATIK•TRADISIONIL' was placed on the ribbon at the top using decorative typeface while the text type 'cap' was placed at the bottom using light sans serif typeface accompanied by the text 'JUJUR' using serif typeface with ball at the end of terminal. The text 's.a.a' was placed under the text 'JUJUR' using sans serif typeface with teardrops/lacrimal at the end of terminal. Truck was used in Indonesian rural mountainous area to load and transport daily needs such as groceries, agricultures, livestock and materials. A text with particular typeface usually applied on the truck's body to differentiate one truck with another. Just like the figure 1, the typeface used in the figure 2 batik label identity was handwritten and created as a master typeface unique for this particular brand and all the elements interacting with each other are recognizable thus making it easy to remember.

4. Vernacular Typography On Label Batik

4.1. Batik Label Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta, otherwise known as Jogja, is a city in the middle of Java island. According to Kurniadi (Bajraghosa, 2014, hal. 17), the batik culture and its industry started when the batik, which is the outfit only the gentries of *Keraton* (Yogyakarta Sultanate) can use, was brought out of the palace and gradually used by ordinary people. The people then begin to leave the traditional weaving as everyday clothing in preferring the batik. This marks the rise of batik industry and the batik culture was developed in Yogyakarta. The batik industry started in Prawirotaman and Tirtodipuran area and then spread across the region in the form of batik home industry. This makes the owner of the batik industry very diverse, ranging from hightborns, merchants and entrepreneurs to the Chinese descents. The growing of the batik industry sees the batik label as an important item needed to give sign for each individual product. This triggered the batik label requirements in the batik industry.



Figure 3. Batik Label Yogyakarta Cap Betara Surya

The batik label shown in figure 3 contains the image of Batara Surya illustration from the Javanese *Wayang* surrounded by paddy leaves icon. The text 'Tjap' was placed at the top using manual script typeface accompanied by the text 'Betara Surja' using grotesque sans serif typeface written in a lineal outline. The text 'Batik Tenun' using transitional serif typeface was placed at the center clamping the central illustration emboldened with shadow. The text 'Jogjakarta' was placed at the bottom using old style serif typeface.



Figure 4. Batik Label Yogyakarta Batik Jogja Asli

The batik label shown in figure 4 contains the illustration of a batik worker painting the fabrics and all text type used a sans serif typeface. The text 'BATIK JOGJA ASLI' was placed in curve at the top using grotesque typeface with light style and bevel effect applied. At the center of the label, the text 'BATIK JOGJA' was made using typeface grotesque typeface with condensed style. The text 'WANTEK KUWAT' and '80 JOGJA' was placed at the bottom using the same typeface with that being used to write 'BATIK JOGJA ASLI'. 'WANTEK KUWAT' literally means strong and not easy-to-fade colors.



Figure 5. Batik Label Yogyakarta Batik Serimpi

The batik label shown in figure 5 contains the illustration of woman dancing a traditional Javanese dance called *Serimpi*. Thus, the batik label was named BATIK SERIMPI. The text 'BATIK SERIMPI' and 'MANIS' were placed at the top using sans serif typeface with a strong stroke at one side and thin stroke on the other side with outline style. The text 'KUAT' and 'WANTEK' were placed in curve on the left and right side of the label using the same typeface as BATIK SERIMPI. Likewise, using the same typeface, the text type 'DJOKJA ASLI' was put on the ribbon at the bottom and the text 'HALUS' was placed underneath. This label only use one typeface.



Figure 6. Batik Label Yogyakarta Tjap PRIJAJI

The batik label shown in figure 6 contains the illustration of a kingly or princely figure clad in Javanese nobility garb. The text 'BATIK TJAP PRIJAJI' was placed in curve at the top using serif typeface between little brackets with strong stroke and hairline outline on the typeface. *Prijaji* means nobility. The text 'SOGA GENES DJOKJA ASLI' was placed at the bottom using sans serif typeface with outline.

The four batik labels from Yogyakarta shown in the figure 3, 4, 5, and 6 use various typefaces. Among the four, the serif and sans serif variation are dominantly found within. One of the many reasons why these typefaces variation were mostly used in batik label was the quality of readability. This quality ensures the costumer to recognize their product easily through their batik label.

Besides the reason concerning the principle of typography, the local philoshophy and local value also plays a role in determining the typeface used in these batik labels. For

example, in figure 6 depicting a kingly figure, the Yogyakarta people highly refer their nobility as great, powerful, and wise person. Thus, the typeface used was emphasized with strong stroke and outline variation to properly depict the royalty. This creates a situation in which the customer will feel like they wear a fabric that is worn by the nobility when they purchase this batik brand. Another example is the typeface used in figure 5. *Serimpi* dance is a sacred traditional dance performed in the ascension of the new king by four female dancers. It depicts the life philosophy of Yogyakarta people in their war to fight the bad with goodness. This was expressed through the dance movement which shows elegant yet bold and strong moves. Thus, the sans serif typeface was used to emphasize the dance movement and the depiction of the two warring side with the use of the typeface variations with strong stroke at one side and thin stroke at the other side.

4.2. Batik Label Solo/ Surakarta

Solo, also known as Surakarta, is one of the city located in the middle of Java. Just like, Yogyakarta, Solo still has its kingdom highly regarded by the people in the region nowadays. Solo, along with Yogyakarta, were deemed as the city of Javanese Culture because the culture still exist and permeates in every aspect of everyday life in these cities. Solo in particular is the central of batik in Java (Hermanu, 2014, hal. 89). Here, the batik home industry started in Laweyan dan Kauman region before they were spread across the region.



Figure 7. Batik Label Solo Putri Duyung

The label shown in figure 7 is very interesting since the name of the brand and the illustration used within the label don't seem to match with each other. The brand is PUTRI DUYUNG (which means mermaid) but in the illustration showed the photograph of a girl which was the daughter of the brand owner rather than a mermaid. The text 'PUTRI

DUYUNG' was placed on the ribbon at the top using old style sans serif. The text 'BATIK SOLO' at the center was written using lineal serif while the text 'DAFTAR' located beneath it use the lineal sans serif.



Figure 8. Batik Label Solo Bintang Mas

The batik label shown in figure 8 contains illustration of stars above the mountains. The text 'BATIK SOLO ASLI' (real batik Solo) was placed in curve at the top using old style serif with a little heavy stroke. The text 'SOGA GENES' at the center use sans serif with rounded style in the end of terminal while the text 'BINTANG MAS' use the same typeface as 'BATIK SOLO ASLI'. *Bintang mas* means golden star so the owner want to present the batik in having a high quality fabrics.



Figure 9. Batik Label Solo Tiga Canting

The batik label shown in figure 9 contains the illustration of two kind of typefaces. The text 'Tiga Canting' was written using script typeface with shadow, matching the style of a handwritten or lettering style. The illustration shows three *Cantings*. Canting is a pen-like tool to write/paint the batik motifs on the cloth. The text 'BATIK TRADISIONAL' and 'SOLO INDONESIA' use sans serif typeface. Moreover, the 'BATIK TRADISIONAL' text use sans serif typeface with thin stroke and extended style.

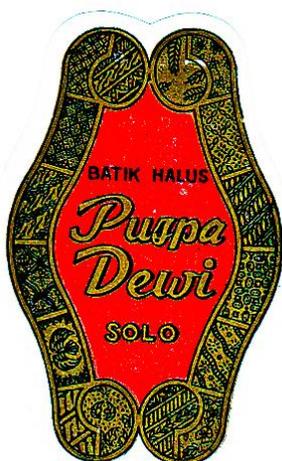


Figure 10. Batik Label Solo Puspa Dewi

The batik label shown in figure 10 contains illustration of two kind of typefaces. The text 'BATIK HALUS' at the top and 'SOLO' at the bottom were written with the same sans serif typeface, with the text 'SOLO' in particular is using a sans serif with outline style. The text 'PUSPA DEWI' at the center was written using script typeface with handwritten style and emboldened with outline style.

The four batik labels from Solo shown in the figure 7, 8, 9, and 10 have different variation of typefaces than those found in the batik label from Yogyakarta. The script typeface in particular has been found dominantly in batik labels from Solo aside of the serif and sans serif typefaces. The script typeface was mostly used because of the quality in its visibility and clarity since it elevates the feeling of elegant and fluidity. Especially when it was used in contrast of the sans serif typeface with bold or thin extended stroke. The local philosophy and local value of Surakartan people also influence the variations used in the batik label. For example, figure 9 shows three *cantings*, a tool used by the people, representing their fluid daily life. Thus, it emphasizes the use of script typeface to give

the sense of fluidity. This creates a more grounded brand reflecting the urban culture in Surakarta.

5. Conclusion

The batik label Solo and Yogyakarta applied many variations of typefaces. Manual technique and letter press technique was used to make these labels. The typefaces used on the label give the impression of old style, traditional look or vintage. These typefaces can be used as an addition to the already existing variations of typeface, particularly on the typefaces used for old style, traditional look or vintage theme. Vernacular variations on the typeface found in batik label in Indonesia are affected from Victorian style, Art Nouveau style, Art Deco style, and Plakatstijl style influenced by the Netherland and assimilated into the local Indonesian culture to generate a new style of vernacular typography.

Batik label Solo and Yogyakarta have a contrasting difference between the two showing the typeface diversity applied on these labels. Batik label Yogyakarta uses a more formal and rigid typeface giving a classical feeling while batik label Surakarta uses a more fluid and elegant typeface giving a more casual feeling. The typeface used also shows the contrasting local values and philosophy found in Solo and Yogyakarta. Surakartan people are more grass rooted and more fluid in contrast to the Yogyakarta people. Yogyakarta pride themselves with their aristocratic high *keraton* culture in contrast to the Surakartan nobility which is more grass rooted and their *keraton* is more open-to-public and not as rigid as that in Yogyakarta. These values expressed through the use of typeface found in batik label and the design shown within the illustration on the label. Batik label Yogyakarta for example refer to the symbol of high culture like the god (*betara dewa*), the high culture (*Serimpi dance*), and their nobility (the *prijaji*). Meanwhile, batik label Solo refers to the symbol of everyday daily life such as the family daughter, the *canting*, and the environment landscape.

These batik labels are not showing just one particular known style but a mix of different styles assimilated with local values and philosophy. In fact, Indonesian batik labels are a visual identity of great masterpiece, although the batik was produced not by a commercial company but by the batik home industry. This paper can shed lights on how vernacular

typography can give a sense, impression and addition to the diversity of the typeface based on the local culture. Continued research are needed to further analyze other vernacular typography, especially Indonesian vernacular typography, besides those found on label batik in Solo and Yogyakarta. This will advance the study of typography and enrich the typeface diversity to represent particular values that is hard to express through the more known mainstream typefaces.

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