

Alas and *Gunung*: Their Representation in the Javanese Traditional Batik

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Abstract

Alas-alasan is one of the traditional Javanese batik motifs. Motifs that represent the phenomena of *alas* (forest) and *gunung* (mount) are not only belonging to the royal palace batik vocabulary, but also to the one found outside the palace. For the Javanese, *alas* and *gunung* are two important sites. In the Javanese political phenomena, *alas* is where the forerunner of establishment Javanese palace. At the same time, it is believed that *gunung* is the center of cosmic balance, as the nail of the world. That is why *alas* becomes an inspiration of aesthetic creation whose expression can be found in a variety of artifacts by using a variety of media. In addition to representing the *alas*, *Alas-alasan* motifs are also understood as representation of *gunung* in which various types of animals are depicted in it. This is understandable, because the *alas* is mostly located in *gunung* and hill areas as habitat for various wildlife. Among various existing types of ornamental motifs, representation of *alas* in the traditional Javanese batik motif known as *Alas-alasan* shows different depiction techniques. In addition, among *Alas-alasan* motif in the traditional Javanese batik at different regions, there is a different delineation as well.

Keyword: *Alas*, *gunung*, *Alas-alasan*, motif, batik, Java

1. Introduction

Basically the practice of artistic creations that made by almost artists always related to the environment in which they were located. The environment includes the physical environment, social, and cultural. Thoughts, ideas, and fantasies of an artist are the result of his struggle with the physical environment, social, and cultural. In traditional societies such as Java in the past, the artist is an individual that closely linked with its environment and become an integral part of where he or she live. So, what artists thought, conceived, and imagined can be seen as a portrait of what is society's thought, conceived, and imagined. And vice versa.

In the practice of artistic creations, artists' thoughts, ideas, and imagination influenced by a variety of environmental phenomena that exist, whether they are physical, social, and cultural. For the Javanese, the forest and the mountain are two important sites. In Javanese political phenomenon, the forests is a forerunner of the founding of the palace of Java. While the mountain is believed to be a centre of cosmic balance, as the nail of the world. That is, the forest and the mountain are important concepts in Javanese society.

The centrality of the concept seeping into artistic creations and symbolic practices of traditional Javanese art. One of them can be found in the world of batik is expressed through *Alas-alasan* motif. This article discusses the relationship between the physical environment (forest and mountains) in the artistic practice of traditional art, the art of batik. In particular, the discussion focused on the Motif *Alas-alasan* motif in traditional Javanese batik.

Alas-alasan motif is one of the traditional Javanese batik. Motifs that represent the phenomenon of forest and mountain were not just a palace batik motif vocabulary, but also familiar found in batik outside the palace.

Javanese people who live in the natural hilly environment on one side and jungle on the other hand gave birth to certain conceptions of *gunung* and *alas*. That is why *gunung* and *alas* have a special place in Javanese philosophy of life. It is also then forms the basic values of faith. The reality of *gunung*, *alas*, and large trees become inevitable as the basis for the Javanese belief. *Gunung*, *alas*, and large trees are considered to have great powers or supernatural powers. This view influences and shapes the attitudes to always live in harmony with this environment. This has the implications the birth of a form of worshiping. Various types of rituals related to the nature are always done periodically and or incidentally in order to gain harmonious conditions.

Natural forces that gave birth to the practice of ritual and ceremonial practices were also affecting symbolic creations in the field of arts. In the world of art, belief in the reality of nature, such as *gunung* and forest has given rise to numerous works of art that are unique and characteristic in the Javanese community. One of these is

the motif of *Alas-alasan* in traditional Javanese batik. *Alas-alasan* motif is the product of interpretation, which is based on a particular view of *alas* (forest) and *gunung*. The public view of the Javanese on *alas* and *gunung* in relation to *Alas-alasan* motif is the main reason of the discussion presented in this paper.

2. Literature Review

Artistic creations and symbolic practices in the traditional Javanese art are not just a perceptual issue alone, but they have relationship with magic, spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions. Art activities and products are manifestation of aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical sensitivity. In this instance, it is a view that puts the processes and works of art not only as an aesthetic destination (art for the art's sake) but also for social, cultural, and even political sake. That is why Felicia Hughes-Freeland warns us that to understand the use of art concepts in Java, one needs to understand how the Javanese concepts about aesthetics passion are situated (Hughes-Freeland, 1997).

In ornamental art, objects beautify activity is driven by the need for art, information, wealth, and religion. Various case studies indicated that humans are accustomed to have a representation; an ability to form or to create a contour to resemble a thing with something else. In fact, just to resemble a thing is enough to show a real relationship. The ability to make something that has a resemblance occupies a very important place, which is sympathetic magic. Natural object resembling other object is often pursued through sculptures, carvings, or paintings that have similarities with the imagined one. Thus, representation, aesthetic, spiritual, and religion have a profound and direct influence on the art (Haddon, 1902).

The aforementioned artistic representation, according to Richard Eldridge, is a human activity that grows when the interests of truth, communication, and representation are felt to be more important. Representation grows from interaction with other objects and or with our environment. As representation, thoughts and beliefs are not only as the result of sensory-motoric processes, but rather to express the point of view and the nature of the interest in something and its aspects. Representations in the forms of verbal, visual or anything else are products of human activity in response to the object or subject-matter of the representation (Eldridge, 2003).

Based on these thoughts, to understand the diverse representation of *alas* and *gunung* in the traditional Javanese art, an approach that can reveal it is then required. Anthropology of art initiated by Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins is an approach that puts the art in the context of society that creates it. In this perspective, the art must be understood in relation to the place where the art is produced by a society. As a consequence thereof, the art can be interpreted further in relation to some more general propositions about the human condition or in accordance with comparative models of human society. The art, however, must be positioned in the context of ethnography (Morphy and Perkins, 2006).

Through the anthropology of art, the way to understand the process of creativity and the creative act committed by a society is possible. Anthropology of art can provide insight to the system of cognition, i.e. how they conceptualize the components of daily life and how to construct the representations of their world. This is because the art is often used in the creation of context, i.e. the framework within which the action of ritual occurs and the accompanying regalia for political performance (Morphy and Perkins, 2006).

Decorative art on textiles is an important part of cultural heritage, for which variety of characteristics influences, traditions, and ideas are embedded in it (Lekka and Dascalopoulos, 2008). In line with that view, then the existence of *Alas-alasan* batik motifs Surakarta royal palace cannot be separated from the context of how creative ideas come from and the context in which the motif is used. In a symbolic creation, the birth of a work of art created by artists, both individually and collectively, is based on a particular view or specific understanding of reality or phenomenon that inspired him/her (Pihlström, 2002).

In accordance with the conception that art is part of the world view of society, the existence of *Alas-alasan* motifs should have something closely related to the views and interpretations of reality or phenomenon that inspired him/her (Kempers, 1959). A view which, in the decorative arts, cannot ignore the close connection with religious and magical beliefs that develops within a society (Coomaraswamy, 1939).

Berg suggested the need to consider three things if we want to examine how fantasy and speculation that inspire Javanese on the causes of natural events. First, it is related to the notion of a force covered by a mystic because it has a strong property, i.e. the power of magic or *sekti*. Second, it is related to responses that everything that is existed has inseparable link one to another. The third is magic (Berg, 1974).

Randall White stated that the material forms of representation indicated its origin (White, 1992). The phenomenon of art is almost never separated from the influence of natural environment. Existing and developing

arts products in a community in various parts of the world show this phenomenon. The natural environment is not only form a conception of its own, but also influences and shapes human conception on all aspects of their life. Beautiful land with a wild and pleasant climate in many respects offers advantages for its residents, including art (van Dyke, 1887).

3. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative exploratory study. A research is characterized by the nature of the information and data that are the words. But in this study contained herein, the information and data that is visual, in this case in the form of drawings or photographs. Visual character has become very important, since the object of research is the study of *Alas-alasan* motif, in which a complete picture of it can not negate its visual aspect.

Location of the research conducted sporadically in a few places, namely Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Lasem, and other related areas. Surakarta and Yogyakarta are the cultural center of Java. The choice of location was based on the consideration that these areas are the manufacturer, the producer, and the users of the Javanese batik *Alas-alasan* motif. Batik producers from other areas used to obtain the wealth of visual motifs, such as Banyumas, Bantul, and Lasem. However, research specifically conducted in Surakarta, as in the tradition of the coronation of the king and/or his coronation anniversary using the *Alas-alasan* motif. Related to the last issue will be discussed specifically in different occasions.

Data collection pursued through the study of literature and documentation. Literature here includes two things, namely the written materials and visual materials. Written materials are the ideas that have been published both in journals and books, as well as written material in the form of paper. The visual include visual images and photos, either existing in various publications as well as pictures taken by the researcher. Furthermore, the data were analyzed with the written and visual exploratory approach. This approach emphasizes the excavation of the object or subject of study. In this study, exploratory approach was used to identify the central idea of *alas* and *gunung* and its related with vocabulary diversity of *Alas-alasan* motif.

4. Discussion

4.1. *Alas* in the Javanese Point of View

Alas or forest is a reality that has an important position in the life of the Javanese community. It provides not only physical potential through the existing of natural resources, but also spiritual strength of life. Forest as a whole according to Gray and Frese become an important part of spiritual religious beliefs and ritual of a community (Gray and Frese, 1995).

Alas for the Javanese are believed to have mythical power. In the Javanese cosmology, cosmic centers, i.e. the meeting point between the mortal world with the supernatural nature, plays a central role. *Alas* is one of the places that has mythical power just like tombs of the ancestors, *gunung*, and caves, as well as other 'haunted' places. Such places are not only are used as religious visit places of worship, but also are used as visiting sites to seek knowledge (Java: *ngelmu*) alias supernatural power and political legitimacy (the revelation) (Bruinessen, 1990).

Forest in the traditional conception plays an important role; and on that basis, from the first time the shadow puppet play is consistent to maintain the forest as an arena of fiction that should be explored by the knights or heroes in fighting the enemy, the giant, as well as well as a place of hermits (Holt, 1967). Forest, therefore, is a place where adventure and seclusion (Teeuw, 2005). Babad Wana Marta is a chronicle of the epic Mahabharata episode that recounts the establishment of the kingdom of Amarta (Moedjanto, 1997). *Sétra Gandamayit* is an *alas* described as a scary, wild, foul smelling, and the armature place. It is a place inhabited by the goddess Durga, ghosts, bloodthirsty spirit, ugly and naked creature with a strange look (Brakel, 1997).

Alas also becomes a field of adventure and at the same time becomes meeting place between Dewi Sri and Sedana after their escape from the palace of Mendang Kamulan, which then make the forest as a place of their residence (Wessing, 1990). This residence, based on geographic reconstructions performed by Soekmono, was estimated to be in Grobogan, Central Java (Soekmono, 1967).

In addition to the adventure field and spirit maturation area, forest is also a forerunner of a kingdom. As stated by Robert Wessing, the existence of a state is often preceded by clearing forest area (Wessing, 1990). In the phenomenon of Javanese political power, *alas* Tarik was a forerunner of the kingdom of Majapahit. It was said that Raden Wijaya Jayakatwang proposed to the King to be allowed to create a forest in the area as a place to hunt, which was a hobby of Daha's ruling authority. This proposal was made after Raden Wijaya received an

advice from the Duke Wiraraja as a ruse to eventually be used as a field of resistance to him. The promised forest was actually never made; instead they were cleared to be used as a residence. Through the man power imported from Madura as instructed by Duke Wiraraja, Tarik area was turned into a bustling township. This village was Majapahit. This forest clearing was expected to begin at the end of 1292 AD (Muljana, 2006).

Alas Mentaok, Kota Gede, as the forerunner of the Islamic dynasty of Mataram was a forest grove. A land given as a gift by the Prince Adiwijaya, king of Pajang, to Ki Ageng Pamanahan, Ki Ageng Panjawi, Ki Juru Martani, and Ngabei Loring Pasar for their success in crushing Arya Penangsang of Jipang (Muljana, 2006; Moertono, 1985). This conquest was expected to be between the 1540's to 1550's, whilst the new land was completely occupied in the 1570's (Ricklefs, 2008). *Alas* Wanakarta at Pajang was the forerunner of Kartasura Sultanate palace after Sri Susuhunan Mangkurat II (1677-1703) decided to move from the old palace, Plered, which was damaged by an attack of Trunajaya. The Palace occupied an area of forest was established since 1680 and continued to be used as a center of government until before Paku Buwana II moved into his new palace of Surakarta on 17 February 1746 (Ricklefs, 1998; Sajid, 1984). *Alas* Bringan or Beringan, which was located between the River Code and River Winongo, was the forerunner of the first Kingdom of Yogyakarta during Sultan Hamengku Buwana I. The Palace of Yogyakarta was built in 1755 after the Islamic Mataram Kingdom was separated into Surakarta and Yogyakarta through the intervention of the Dutch colonial (Adrisijanti, 2003; Adishakti, 2004). In the tradition of Yogyakarta, Dlepih Kahyangan is one of the cosmic centers amongs Mount Lawu (Pemberton, 2003), Mount Merapi, and the South Seas (Twikromo, 2006). This area, located in the District of Tirtamaya, Wonogiri, Central Java, in the ancient times was a wonderful place for its panoramic views of green forest and rivers Dlepih or Wiraka. A sacred place, which was basically an *alas* used by Panembahan Senopati, Sultan Agung Hanyangkrakusuma, and Prince Mangkubumi for living as an ascetic (Sumarsih, 1990).

Kraton Surakarta tradition believes that *alas* Krendhawahana is a sacred place, a cosmic center amongs Mount Merapi, Mount Lawu, and the South Seas. This *alas* located in the northern part of Surakarta was used as a ceremonial Maesa Lawung Surakarta Palace. This ritual, also called rajawedha (Sajid, 1984), was rooted in Hinduism-Buddhism tradition and was still held until the Islamic era (Brakel, 1997).

Since the seventeenth to the twentieth century, the forest and people around the forest were serving merchants and officials, Chinese businessmen, the king and the regent, Japanese war planners, and Indonesian foresters (Thompson, 2001). At the time of British colonialism desecration of *alas* occurred. *Alas* was just put as the natural resource containing trade of commodities such as wood, spices, and various types of wildlife. *Alas* became a political commodity as done by Raffles when he shared it as a "gift" to the Javanese elite. Raffles in 1813 ever gave forest in the Bradford District (Tegal residency) to the Duke of Singasari Penathan Raden Judo as a gift and became a heritage after (Lee, <http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/5736/5736.ch03.htm>).

Alas in the view of the Javanese, however, is not only economically understandable; but it has supernatural powers. *Alas* is not only inhabited by earth creatures earthly, but also a supernatural creature. An understanding that has been rooted deep in the past is that when nature seen to have an irrational force that is believed to disrupt the order of integration as a community-based understanding of animism; a notion that believes that everything in nature has a soul that can leave their habitat to wander as it wishes and affect human life (van der Kroef, 1955), a belief that links all things in nature with everything else. A medium of this mystical unity is a power that is alive or *mana*. To guard its continuance, human need to control and influence the mana. External signs, magical rituals, and symbols in the meantime become indispensable (Wagner, 1959).

4.2. *Gunung* in the Javanese Point of View

Gunung occupies a special position in the cosmology of Asia. It is a place that is often associated with the myth of the origin and revered as a place of spirits and ancestors (Kathirithamby-Wells, 1992; van der Kroef, 1951). In Indonesia the belief that the *gunung* as a sacred place is one of the principles that were firmly held by many people including the authority (Protschky, 2007). Because *gunung* is seen as a bridge between the world and nirvana, *gunung* is also linked up with the idea of empire in Southeast Asia. Authority in Indonesia links the power to *gunung*. *Gunung* symbolizes the King role as mediator between heaven and earth (Protschky, 2007).

Gunung for the Javanese community has a very important position. It benefits for the life on one side and can lead to disaster on the other side. Through the potential that exists within it, *gunung* provides a variety of needs that can support human survival. However, volcanic activity can be threatening the life around it. Eruption and bursts of hot clouds from time to time may threaten human life around it. The same thing can occur through heat and cold lava flows along the river or other areas in its path. Although such post-event by most people considered beneficial because of fertility and the availability of new materials (sand and stone), but some of them still feel it as a disadvantage because of the disaster it causes.

Gunung's great physical shape creates tremendous admiration for human. In the prehistoric, large natural objects are perceived to have great strength. Such beliefs are also attached to other natural objects like rocks and large trees, which gave birth to a perception of certain beliefs about it. The worshiping of large objects such as stones (megaliths) and large trees are intended to capture the behavior of living for the dead, warnings, and to secure the spirit of the eternity of life in the afterlife (Holt, 2000; Soekmono, 1981).

Powerful forces generated by volcanoes that cannot be solved by humans pose a particular belief about it. *Gunung* is not only understood as the empirical reality but also the reality of the mystic, the supernatural. Magnitude of the resulting leads human on the notion that the *gunung* has supernatural powers that cannot be overpassed by human. That kind of belief underlies the acceptance that the *gunung* is the place where the ancestors or ancestral spirits dwell. Occupied by the spirits of ancestors, therefore *gunung* is seen as a protector and a place where people ask for help (Triyoga, 1990).

The worshiping of *gunung* is the ancient ritual practice and is often associated with the king personally. The king is understood to be in the axis of the universe (Kerlogue, 2004). King is the one who has a charge of magic that is the strength of community life, where he is the exponent (Berg, 1974).

Worshiping practices that still exists until today is in Bali to Mount Agung and on the Tengger crater of Mount Bromo, East Java. In the XI century, worshiping of *Gunung* Indraparwata was practiced by the King Airlangga as portrayed in the essay of kakawin Arjunawiwaha written by Empu Kanwa. In the XIV century, the form of worship in an attempt to seek protection from the *gunung* made by Empu Tantular was not addressed except to King Hayam Wuruk. Title of the ruling king of the *gunung* to the figure of king was rooted in Hinduism tradition that puts Lord Shiva as its ruler. King is the incarnation of god and therefore it is the master of *gunung* (Lombard, 2005).

Mount Merapi is the concept of an imaginary pair of South Sea. Both are thought of as two countries at the mercy of supernatural supremacy, Kyai Sapujagad and Nyai Roro Kidul, combined with the objective area of Mataram (east-west) by Javanese kings. According to P. M. Laksono, the conception of this time of Mataram was based on the premise that rural state in the south of the island of Java was not familiar with the concept of a north-south pair. Empirically, Mataram did not have the land area in the south and north that have breadth as it extends from east to west (Laksono, 1985).

Gunung also symbolize the role of the king as a mediator between heaven and earth. When the king died, his spirit is often believed to be returning to his ancestors in *gunung* and therefore his tomb becomes a pilgrimage site. Imogiri tomb located in the hills can be seen as an example that represents the *gunung* (Jessup, 1992). Another conception of trust can be found on the *gunung* as a quest for wealth (*pesugihan*). *Gunung* Kawi, East Java is such a place, a ritual performed in all-night shadow puppet as a living sacrifice to the ancestors (Santoso, 2000).

The view described above confirms an important role of *gunung* in the life of the Javanese. It is therefore not surprising that *gunung* inspired the artists of the past to express it in various works of art.

The above description confirms that the conception of natural environment, particularly *gunung* and forest have affected many aspects of the Javanese life. It is not only manifested in ritual and ceremonial behavior, but also in practical arts of life. Practicing of such symbolic creations can be viewed as a form of respect for nature as a source of strength and vitality. Nature through *gunung* and forest not only provide a source of biological biodiversity, but there is a psychical power in it, which are essential to the survival of the Javanese as a whole. Javanese entirety is not only indicated by a wealth in the aspects of material dimension, but also in the immaterial, the supernatural--an invisible of supernatural power.

Harmony and balance of life are not just resting on the harmonious relationship between human, between human and god, but also between human and the natural environment around them. Those principles are used by the Javanese in running and developing their personal and social life. That conception of the harmonious order that is what encourages various artistic expressions.

4.3. *Alas-alasan Motif as Alas and Gunung Representations*

Among various existing types of ornamental motifs, representation of *alas* in the traditional Javanese batik motif known as *Alas-alasan* shows different depiction techniques. In addition, among *Alas-alasan* motif in the traditional Javanese batik at different regions, there is a different delineation as well.



Alas-alasan Motif form Surakarta Palace

(Photography: Agus Heru Setyawan, 2009)

Alas representation on the *Alas-alasan* motif of Surakarta royal palace impresses a spontaneity and simplicity. Line as the main visual element in the depiction of motifs is expressed through a spontaneous single line. Single lines are characteristic of the portrayal of the motif. Likewise, additional elements to beautify motif commonly called stuffing (*isèn*) in the form of *cecek*, *sawut* or the like, are commonly found in the traditional batik, nil of the depiction. *Isèn* is applied to accentuate the element motif, especially for animal figures. *Isèn* applied to the head, body, and tail of the animal appears streaked with a very simple way.

On the aspects of composition, there are two characters stand out from the drawing of *Alas-alasan* motifs of Surakarta royal palace depicting a peacock lane by lane depicting other animals. In the lane of peacock, peacock-shaped figures are drawn from the side facing each other with the peacocks are mediated by other peacock figure depicted from behind. On this lane the peacock element is drawn horizontally repeated from the left to the right or vice versa. On other lanes, the other animal elements are depicted horizontally mediated by a figure of a plant or a tree. On this column a steady repetition of figures of animals is not found, except for plants or trees as a unifying element among the depicted animals.

In composition, the drawing of *Alas-alasan* motif of Surakarta royal palace is achieved through sharing the exact same area between the top and bottom of the fabric. At the center of the distribution system there is an empty field called *blumbangan* or *sidangan* (Jasper, 1916). The edge of *sidangan* is in the form of wavy lines. Side edge of the fabric has a fringe, i.e. the remaining threads that are left loose. Edge ornament is in the form of fringed framing the edge of fabric decoration. *Gurdha* shaped figure is decorated at each end of the cloth. *Gurdha* figures are depicted in the form of two birds facing each other with a bent beak and flapping wings. Tails combined two birds with feathers depicted in the forms of scales. A kind of sticking tendrils is attached to the tail. The background color is dark blue (*bango tulak*) or dark green (*gadhung melati*). Line as a visual element is boasted by the yellow color of gold (*prada*). The middle field was white.

Representation of the *alas* found in the Yogyakarta royal palace batik is also called *Alas-alasan* motifs. These motifs adorn the fabric shaped *dodot*. The structure of the fabric is in rectangular shape. Composition or distribution of the motif elements follows the structure of the fabric. There are fringe at the end of the fabric on the right and left side. On the inside after the fringe, there is a decorative tassel (Java: *ran*) in the forms of *kemada*. Between *kemada* with the fabric bodies there are ornaments in the forms of flame-shaped (*cemukiran/ cemungkiran*). Body of the fabric is decorated with various figures of animals as the main element motifs.



Alas-alasan Motif from Yogyakarta Palace

(Doellah: 2002)

Stylization is a technique used to describe all elements of the animal-shaped motif. In particular, each element of the animal figures is depicted by enclosed by the outer line following the structure in it. Strong stylization techniques seem over the depiction of decorative elements that form the edge of the flames. Composition of animal-shaped elements is symmetrically arranged either horizontally or vertically. Horizontal symmetry divides the same plane between the right and left into halves. Vertical symmetry divides the same plane between the upper and lower sides into halves.

The remaining of the space generated by the system of symmetrical division of the field is decorated with animal figures. Depictions of animal figures are made by a stylization that is surrounded by an outer line. Decorative element composition leads to the center of the fabric. *Dodot* is not like the batik Surakarta palace or temple Mangkunegaran, which has a center area. However, the composition of the motif elements is laid out leading to the center of the fabric. Pattern of concentric arrangement of the elements are evident especially on the edge of the decorative elements in the form of tongues of fire (*cemukiran*) (Susanto, 1980). This decoration is repeated continuously around the edge of the fabric. On the outside, parallel to the ornate decorations are flame-shaped flowers arranged similar to a mutual direction reversed alternately. The edges of the fabric are decorated with *kemada* that are surrounding all of the edges (Susanto, 1980). Background color is black, while the motif element is golden yellow (*prada*).

In the neighborhood of the Pura Mangkunegaran, *alas* representation is also becoming special vocabulary in its traditional batik. Different from the previous two similar motifs, elements of *Alas-alasan* batik motif at Pura Mangkunegaran are depicted in stylistic on a fabric in the form of *dodot*. Another difference appears through the aspects of the composition or distribution of motif elements. Although the structure of the fabric has a rectangular shape, but in principle on the elements do not completely follow the principle of symmetry. Referring to the center plane (*sidangan*), the surface of the fabric is divided into two equal areas, both right and left sides and the top and bottom. However, it is not followed by a system of organizing elements in a symmetrical pattern. Composition or distribution of motif elements occupies a small rectangle. This square field is achieved by dividing the surface of the fabric as much as seventeen columns horizontally and nine columns vertically. Among the square, there is an octagon-shaped in the middle of the fabric (*sidangan*) shaped, wavy, and white in color.



Alas-alasan Motif form Mangkunegaran Palace

(Doellah: 2002)

Placement of the motif elements is random; direction toward each element also looks free. There is no particular pattern to the direction toward each element of motif. However, the crown-shaped ornaments at four corners of the cloth completely overlooks into the center. In addition to the palace batik, *Alas-alasan* motif can also be found in ordinary society. At Lasem batik, decorative motif elements, both animals and plants figures, are illustrated with living stylization. Compositional structure of the motif elements is arranged in a diagonal pattern in four rows. Two rows illustrate the main theme (subject-matter) and two columns describe the decorative edge.



Alas-alasan Motif form Lasem

(Manex N. V. – Oldenzaal, 1955)



Alas-alasan Motif
(Phillips, 1931)

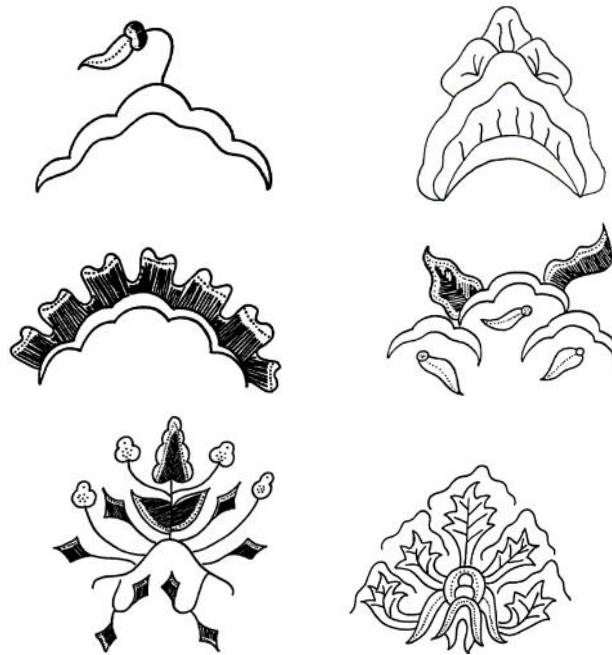


Alas-alasan Motif from Banyumas
(Foto: S. Joko Suryono, 2008)

Important ideas about the *gunung* can also be found in traditional Javanese batik, both of which thrive in the ordinary society as well as in the palace. *Gunung* conception expressed in batik motif is seen through the *Alas-alasan* and *Semèn* motif. Motifs depicting sacred *gunung*-shaped element is represented in the forms of birds and animals, trees, holy places and pond (*blumbangan*) (Maxwell, 1990).

Representation of the *gunung* on batik is illustrated through a form of *mèru* seen from the side. Sometimes it is portrayed through a series of three *gunung* in which the apex is in the middle.

Mount is also a representation of the earth or ground. Meru therefore is equated with the earth, through the growth process or a semi began. On that basis, motif describes *mèru* also often referred to as *semèn*. *Mèru* motifs include various types, both *mèru* combined with herbs, combined with other forms on the top and bottom, combined to form a wave, with leaves arranged in three, with creeping plants, and *mèru* depicted on the top of the plant (Susanto, 1980).



Meru combined with plants (top),
Meru is depicted in waves (middle), and
Meru decorated with leaves on the right side and the left (bottom)
(Susanto, 1980)

Identical to *kayon* on the puppet shadow, the tree is also a representation of *gunung*. Representation that can be found in various forms of motifs categorized as *Semèn*. Some motifs included in this category are the motif of *Semèn Rama*, *Sido-Mulyo*, *Semèn Ragas*, *Semèn Sawat*, *Semèn Teman*, *Semèn Tokol*. At *Semèn Rama* motif, there are several elements that form it, the eagle, life tree, flames, birds, stars, *mèru*, temples, boats (*baita*), crowns or *dampar*, and heirloom or a spear (Susanto, 1980).

The term of *Semèn Rama* comes from the word "semi" meaning "the growth of plant limb," while *rama* is likely to come from the story of Rama in the Ramayana epic. In the epic there is a doctrine or concept of "Hastha Brata", teaching the virtue through eight ways. This virtue was the doctrine taught by Ramawijaya to Wibisana when he was crowned as king of Alengka. The teachings characterize the nature of Rama, namely *endra-brata*, *yama-brata*, *surya-brata*, *sasi-brata*, *bayu-brata*, *dhanaba-brata*, *pasa-brata*, and *agni-brata* (Susanto, 1980).



(Left) Mount Representaion form Yogyakarta (Joop Avé, 1997)
(Right) *Semèn Rama* created by K.P.T Harjonagoro (Doellah, 2004)



Taman Arum Sunyaragi Motif
(Djoemena, 1986)

Depiction of *gunung* and Mahameru in batik motif can be seen such as *Taman Arum Sunyaragi* traditional batik of Cirebon, West Java (van der Hoop, 1949). *Semèn* motifs composed of walls of the tomb Sendangduwur, Paciran, Lamongan, is a representation of the *gunung*. Aesthetic elements of the old walls of the mosque complex in the tomb of Queen Kalinyamat Mantingan, Jepara can also be regarded as a representation of the *gunung*.

Variations on the motif as described above, according to Philip Kitley, come down to satisfaction and enjoyment as a source of creativity (Kitley, 1992). On the other side, the variation should be also viewed as a strong understanding of Javanese to the reality of *gunung* and forest. *Gunung* and forest are part of the roots of the Javanese conception of life. Variety of expression and manifestation of art reality show urgency and centrality of *gunung* and forest in the life of the Javanese; a conception that is not only based on the reality in which *gunung* and forest as a source of potential biological life, but also a belief or faith about it.

5. Conclusion

Various theories of artistic creations in various domains of art, decorative art is no exception (ornaments), indicating that nature is an endless source of ideas that inspire creative and expressive acts as a satisfying sense of beauty. The most ancient civilizations of history show the close relationship between human nature and expressed in a variety of art products. Various types of expression are evidence of the proximity relation between human and nature driven by practical needs, aesthetic, symbolic, magical or ritual. The interaction between human and nature driven by such needs spawns a variety of decorative art creations (Pihlström, 2002). It thus

simultaneously asserts that the unity of the universe and all beings in it that is related to each other is an essential element in the mind of the ancient Javanese (Zoetmulder, 1994).

Human interaction with nature can be performed in various ways, one of them is to imitate what exists in nature. Mimicking or imitation behavior is human nature at birth. Imitation of action can be the starting point of the achievement of knowledge and through the imitation the pleasure of each human being begins. Therefore, the attributes carried by human being as imitative creatures gains its recognition (Rader, 1960).

Natural resources are source of inspiration for artistic creations, including efforts to imitate this nature. Based on that conception, *Alas-alasan* motifs are the product of the interaction between nature and aesthetic requirements. *Alas-alasan* motifs, therefore, is an attempt in imitation, drawing, imaging, or representation of the phenomenon of *alas*. Depiction of the *alas* phenomenon in such a work of art is not only based on admiration for the diversity of the richness of potential in it alone, but also the existence of a certain view of society, including artists, on the reality of *alas*.

Alas is not only beneficial for the physical-natural potential in it, but it is no less important is the position that is sacred because it is believed to have supernatural powers. *Alas* is not only gives us power to live physically, biologically-physically, but also non-physical vitality, soul, and spirit. The above description confirms that *alas* is a very important place for the Javanese (Sumardjo, http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/0703/10/khazanah/lainnya01_10.htm). That is why *alas* becomes an inspiration for Javanese artists of the past and expresses it in various forms of art. Mythology *alas*, with terminology borrowed from Astri Wright, a mecca or spiritual orientation for Javanese artists (Wright, 1991). For an artist, *alas* reality is then isolated metaphysically and integrated into new reality that is represented into a particular abstraction. According to Rand, isolation and integration are core processes that involve artistic formation and creation (Rand, 1975).

Alas is a distinct entity from other places. *Alas* is a special place that needs to be integrated into a new reality. *Alas-alasan* motifs are interpretation of new *alas* reality. That is why *alas* becomes an inspiration of aesthetic creation whose expression can be found in a variety of artifacts by using a variety of media. In addition to representing the *alas*, *Alas-alasan* motifs are also understood as representation of *gunung* in which various types of animals are depicted in it. This is understandable, because the *alas* is mostly located in *gunung* and hill areas as habitat for various wildlife. Raffles specifically defines *Alas-alasan* motifs as depiction of the *gunung* phenomenon with a decorative consists of different types of animals both natural and mystic (Raffles, 1965).

Such portrayals are based on a belief in the *gunung* itself. *Gunung* as stated by Heine-Geldern is the cosmic center. In the tradition of Southeast Asia, Java is no exception; *gunung* has a strong link between country and the universe. Fundamental of Hinduism that influences the arts of Southeast Asia is the cosmological conception of the universe with Mount *Mèru*, where God resides (Kerlogue, 2004; Dowson, 1957). Mount *Mèru* forms the center of the universe, which is surrounded by seven other *gunung* and seven oceans (Heine-Geldern, 1942). Mount *Mèru* has different layers that can be exchanged for symbolic cosmic human, the temple in the center of the universe, mandala, and perennial climbing going through a mystical tantric. *Mèru* is not only understood as a place, "out there" but also "in here" (Mabbett, 1983). *Alas-alasan* motifs and *Semèn* are depiction of a sacred *gunung* with birds and animals, trees, holy places and pond (*blumbangan /sidangan*) as the main decorative elements (Maxwell, 1990).

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