

## The Absence of Madura's Batik in Men's Daily Fashion

Maria Nala Damajanti<sup>1</sup>, Sutinah<sup>2</sup>, Diah Ariani Arimbi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Petra Christian University, Indonesia*

<sup>2,3</sup>*Airlangga University, Indonesia*

<sup>1</sup> mayadki@petra.ac.id

### ABSTRACT

The fashion tradition on the island of Madura is closely tied to the general Javanese dressing culture. Its geographical proximity implies cultural similarities while also showcasing distinctive features that make it unique. Madura is renowned for its hand-drawn batik products. Pamekasan, one of several sub-districts and regencies in Madura, is quite popular for its batik production. The local community has unique customs regarding batik fabric and its usage among both men and women. This research aims to gain an understanding of the cultural background that contributed to the tradition of wearing sarongs in Pamekasan, Madura. The research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method based on an ethnographic approach. It is common for women to wear batik sarongs as part of the traditional dress in Pamekasan, Madura. On the other hand, men wearing sarongs are also common, but they refrain from wearing batik sarongs. They used to wear geometrical patterns as their favorite sarongs. The absence of batik in the daily sarong tradition of Madurese men becomes an interesting issue according to the government policy in developing local batik industries. In fact, until now there is a specific term for men wearing batik sarongs, and it is still considered inappropriate. Batik, as one of the strengths of local culture, has received counterproductive treatment from its community. The concept of Madurese men's clothing is influenced by a more dominant power that governs it. Foreign influences, whether during the colonial era or afterward, have shaped a distinct and locally characteristic perception. By not adopting the habit of wearing batik as part of their attire, Madurese men have created a certain distance from their local cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** *Fashion tradition; batik; men's sarong; Madura*

### INTRODUCTION

The way people dress in Madura is closely intertwined with the historical cultural dressing practices of Javanese society in general. Madura Island is located north of Java, within

the province of East Java, but Madura differs culturally. For example, it has its distinct language separate from other ethnic groups on the island of Java. Madura's dependence on Java has been long-standing, encompassing aspects such as economy and political power. This has resulted in Madura always aligning itself with the ruling powers on the island of Java (Syamsuddin, 2019, pp. 13-14). Between 900 and 1600, Madura came under the influence of Hindu-Javanese culture. From 1500 to 1624, it relied on Islamic kingdoms along the north coast of Java. In 1624, Madura was once again brought under the rule of Sultan Agung from the Mataram kingdom. Historical records indicate that in the 18th century, Madura was under the control of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and later transferred to the Dutch East Indies government after the collapse of the VOC in 1789 (Syamsuddin, p. 12, citing Van Dijk, et.al.1985, pp. 1-6). In terms of Islam, Hefni mentioned in his book *Islam Madura* (2019, pp. 88-89) that Islam became known in Madura during the 15th and 16th centuries, and to this day, Islamic teachings continue to be an integral part of the way of life. However, amidst various influences from local rulers, foreign powers, and Islam, Madura's traditional dress customs demonstrate their unique characteristics, particularly when it comes to men's fashion.

The islands of Java and Madura are renowned for their thriving batik industries, each with its distinct character. Madura batik is categorized as coastal batik. In general, both regions demonstrate similarities in their local fashion traditions, with batik being one of the main elements. Islamic teachings contribute to the formation of the social identity of the community and permeate daily life, shaping their aspirations (Hefni, p. 56, citing Jonathan P. Berkey, 2003). This religion also shapes their attire identity. This can be traced through historical sources such as Raffles' "History of Java" from the 18th century, Muhammad Syamsuddin's "History of Madura" (2019), and Kuntowijoyo's book "Social Change in Agrarian Society Madura 1850-1940" (2017).

Pamekasan Regency is well-known for its production of hand-drawn batik as well as stamped batik or a combination of both techniques. The popularity of Madura batik is due to its distinct characteristics, such as the spontaneous lines (*canting*) and vibrant colors. Another characteristic is that most of its motifs have simple and modern patterns. Popular motifs nowadays depict contemporary objects found in society, such as city icons (an example is the Arek Lancor batik, which depicts a monument in the city), as well as motifs of animals or flowers inspired by nature or imagination. Additionally, several classic motifs bear a

resemblance to classical batik patterns (such as the Solo-Jogja palace batik). However, according to Hakim and Rufaidah (2021), there are distinct beliefs surrounding batik within the community. In the context of modern clothing, it is said that both men and women use batik as a requirement for work, regardless of the type or name of the batik they wear. Therefore, this research aims to get a better understanding of the way Madurese wears batik (fabric) as daily attire. In general, Madura men pay great attention to their dressing style. Their dignity is not only seen in their physical appearance but also in their daily appearance and lifestyle (Rifai et al., 2022). In the context of daily local attire, men generally avoid wearing batik fabric as a sarong, which contrasts with women who wear sarong batik fabric as part of their daily routine attire, as often seen on the outskirts of the city. This condition reveals a question: How do men and women understand batiks usage as daily attire? What is the cultural background that may have occurred? This implies a contra-productive situation. Batik has become a major industry, especially in Pamekasan, and the local community should play an important role in its development.

## **METHOD**

This study is qualitative descriptive research based on ethnographic data. A literature review is supplemented with interviews to confirm the realities encountered during field data collection. The object of study is the culture of dressing in Madura society, with a focus on the case study in the Pamekasan area. The interview involved eight informants who came from Madura, specifically from Bangkalan Regency, Sampang Regency, and some from Pamekasan Regency. Data collection was conducted between the years 2021 and 2023. The data collected is not limited by a specific time frame but rather by the main issue of this study, which is the dynamics of batik usage as part of local attire. Visual objects, such as photos or images, are analyzed using a social approach to understand the meaning of batik and its usage for both men and women in Madura. Analysis was performed with a qualitative approach.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Specifically, Wiyata (2013) notes that the worldview of the Madurese people is strongly tied to the values of Islam, and their adherence to it is reflected in their clothing. Murtopo (2017) in his writing on "Islamic Dress Ethics: A Review of Women's Clothing According to Islamic Regulations" stipulates that clothing should cover the *aurat* (parts of the body that should be covered), should not be tight, and should not be transparent. However, he acknowledges that not all followers adhere to these guidelines. In Madura, the commonly found clothing for women includes *samper* (a long cloth), *kebaya* (a traditional blouse), and *burqo* (headscarf). As for men, the sarong and *songko* (a traditional cap) are symbols of Islamic identity, especially in rural areas. The sarong for men is different from the *samper* for women, although both share a similar cylindrical shape in their external appearance.

On the other hand, Rifai (2007, p. 16) also mentions the depiction of Madurese women wearing a tight *kebaya* (traditional blouse) paired with a short sarong batik, exposing their navels, while Madurese men are depicted wearing black *komprang* (loose) pants with unbuttoned shirt, revealing a large red and white striped undershirt, and a red-patterned batik headscarf. Rifai's depiction resembles several digital references to Madurese men's and women's clothing that are commonly known, as shown below.



Figure 1. Traditional Clothing of East Java, Complete Pictures, and Explanations | Traditional Customs ([adat-tradisional.blogspot.com](http://adat-tradisional.blogspot.com)).

The traditional clothing for Madurese men, called *pesa'an*, consists of a shirt worn with a sarong, while women combine a *kebaya* (traditional blouse) with batik. Batik fabric is highly dominant in women's clothing and minimal in men's attire. Madurese women prioritize batik

as an integral part of their attire. Middle-aged women wearing batik sarongs or *samper* (a long cloth) can be commonly seen in the Pamekasan area, as depicted below.



Figure 2. Photo of mothers wearing batik sarongs at the 17th of August market in Pamekasan City.

Source: Location of the Largest Batik Market in Madura at Pasar Tujuh belas Agustus.

On the other hand, Madurese men are reluctant to wear batik as a sarong, but in their tradition, they are known for wearing geometric sarongs which are believed to be more suitable for men and represent Islam. The geometric-patterned sarong referred to here includes a combination of checkered motifs and the so-called Samarinda sarong (Damajanti, p. 6). A source, Boesiri (June 2, 2022), confirmed the current trend of Madurese men's attire, which is widely worn in various styles and can be seen at the Sandur gathering. Sandur itself is one of the traditional performances in Madura (Ulfa, 2016).



Figure 3. Men wearing geometric sarongs at the Sandur Event.

Sources (left to right): (2733) Sandur - YouTube; (358) Sandur Sapok Angin Kl. Lembung Gunung

Long or short-sleeved shirts worn together with geometric sarongs and a *peci* (traditional cap) as a head covering can be seen in various videos related to the Sandur gathering. Some respected figures who attended were seen wearing open outer garments over a T-shirt, along with loose black pants or geometric sarong bottoms.



Figure 4. Madurese men in the past and present (left to right).

Sources (left to right): Raffles, p. 61; Sandur Bangkalan ©2020 Merdeka.com/YouTube Siti Fardana.

Differences between traditional Madurese men's clothing and contemporary Madurese men's clothing can be observed. The traditional Madurese men's clothing, as seen above, does not include batik elements. The top is made of plain fabric, or a type of striped fabric called *lurik*, while the bottom consists of batik fabric. In the image above, a modern Madurese man is seen giving money to two 'women' wearing brocade *kebaya* and batik sarong.

Based on historical accounts, Madurese clothing in general was similar to that worn by the Javanese, with both men and women wearing batik (Raffles, 2014; Syamsuddin, 2019). However, this has undergone changes in recent times. In addition to the use of *pesa'an* (traditional Madurese men's clothing), Madurese men are more accustomed to wearing sarongs as part of their daily attire, as well as for religious and cultural activities. Based on various interviews with informants, it can be noted that there are at least four categories of clothing for men based on prominent activities: 1) clothing for religious activities, 2) daily clothing including cultural events, 3) work clothing, and 4) wedding attire. Wedding attire generally includes batik as one of its components, but it will not be further discussed in this writing. Work uniforms such as shirts or similar garments are not extensively explored in this context as they belong to modern culture, which tends to diminish personal identity in favor of a collective identity.

*Pesa'an*, as described above, falls under the category of daily clothing and is a combination of wide, dark-colored trousers called *komprang*, paired with an unbuttoned outer garment that reveals a T-shirt worn as an undergarment, often featuring wide red and white stripes. As an accessory, batik fabric is often seen worn as a head covering (*odeng*) and

sometimes tied around the waist. For religious activities, sarongs are an important element of Madurese men's attire.

It is widely known that the sarong is an identity marker for Indonesian Muslims, to the extent that there is a term "*kaum sarungan*" referring to Islamic students who always wear sarongs in almost all their activities. It is also common to wear sarongs in other religious-related activities (Zuhry, 2018, p. 3; interview with Anwar, 2022; interview with AB, 2022; interview with Mundir, 2022). Generally, young children (7-12 years old) in Madura go to Taman Pendidikan Agama (Madrasah Diniyah) or Taman Pendidikan Quran (informal Islam school) in the afternoon beside the elementary school in the morning, to learn Islam such as how to pray, how to read Quran, etc (interview with Anwar, 2022; interview with Henny, 2023). Men students wear sarong. Parents and Ustadz (Islam teachers in those last two informal schools) become their role models, including information on how Muslim men should dress. Thus, the sarong is always worn to demonstrate both religious identity and masculinity for Madurese men. However, interestingly, the sarong, which is an integral part of Madurese men's clothing, does not necessarily include batik as a mandatory tradition. In fact, there is a term "*bentuh*" (a derogatory term for effeminate men) used for men who wear batik as a sarong, even if it is worn by non-Madurese people. An example of such an incident was shared by an informant during an interview with Lintu, a batik enthusiast from Surabaya (interview 2021), and with Nurul (interview 2022), a batik entrepreneur from Madura residing in Pamekasan. During a visit, one of the guests from Surabaya wore a batik as a sarong and instantly he was regarded as "strange" and laughed at. This belief is still held firmly to this day, as reaffirmed by Anwar, a Madurese individual from Bangkalan residing in Surabaya (interview, 2022), and Henny, a Madurese from Katagena Laok, Pamekasan (interview, 2023).

Wearing a sarong, apart from those with batik motifs, is a part of home attire or attire for attending religious activities, which is a habit that cannot be abandoned by Madurese (Damajanti, p. 7; Qosim, 2020). Based on this notion, it can be concluded that there is a belief that geometric-patterned sarongs are associated with masculinity for men, while batik sarongs are associated with femininity for women. Given the fact that men are willing to wear geometric-patterned sarongs but refuse to wear batik sarongs, it suggests that the form of the sarong itself is not the issue or rejected by men, but rather the motifs found in batik that are

considered not representative of masculinity as confirmed by some informants. Batik is understood to have certain meanings that are not suitable for men.

In the tradition of hand-drawn batik, women play an important role as batik is made while performing household chores, while men are responsible for activities outside the home to earn a living (Dwiyanto and Nugrahani, p. 11). The creation of hand-drawn batik requires precision and perseverance, which are believed to be more skills possessed by women. Therefore, this division is also related to the technical mastery of tools, which then becomes a gender issue (p. 12). According to one informant, one of the reasons for rejecting batik sarongs is that they are considered too short for men. Thus, besides the issue of motifs, there is also a concern about the size as the basis for the objection.

Referring to *langue* and *parole*, Roland Barthes divided the phenomenon of clothing into three distinct systems: first, clothes as written about; second, clothes as photographed; third, clothes as worn. "Clothes as written about" refers to clothing found in various media such as magazines, etc. "Clothes as photographed" refers to garments seen in pictures or photographs and the like. "Clothes as worn" refers to the actual garments that are worn (Barthes, 1983; Barthes 1981; Budiman, 2004). This study is based on the third system, which views clothing as fabric shaped into garments that protect a person's body and are bound by collective rules as norms or customs as its *langue*. An individual's decision to choose and wear specific clothing in a particular manner represents their *parole*. The dress code expected to be worn when someone is invited to a specific event becomes a constraint for them.

The customs or traditions that exist in society are considered guidelines believed to be worthy truths to be adhered to. Madurese people, whether residing in Madura or outside of it, are found to still hold onto the customs and beliefs they have been taught without questioning the reasons behind them. Some of the sources who adhere to the tradition of wearing sarongs state that men are indeed supposed to wear sarongs, not only because they are comfortable to wear, but also because it is a habit or even a necessity. This is why when someone is introduced to sarongs during their childhood for religious activities such as prayer, learning the Quran, or others, it becomes accepted as a mandatory attire and is held firmly onto until adulthood. The concept of sarongs and their association with Islamic identity is embraced as part of the *langue*, or collective understanding. However, personal decisions are not separate from one's social and cultural position within society. The construction of society theory by Giddens explains the

interaction of agents concerning social practices that shape the system of social production and reproduction.

Furthermore, Barnard (1996) notes that fashion and clothing construct, signify, and produce gender identities based on Rouse's opinion (1989, p. 108) and that the reflection of identity is influenced by how images of men and women are created and reproduced (pp. 159-160). What clothes one wears or how one wants to be perceived is ultimately a personal decision, at least initially constrained by their own will and preferences. The concept of masculinity in Eastern cultures, such as Indonesia, specifically Madura, is heavily influenced by cultural factors (Rifai et al., 2022). The issues of masculinity and femininity represent a collection of paradigms built upon arbitrary signs (Rouse, p. 163). In this case, how a man dresses according to the beliefs of the local community has also influenced how Madurese men choose their clothing and sarongs. It is closely related to the culture in which they live and were raised. Pribram and Harding mention that emotions play a significant role in the social, political, and epistemological configuration of modernity. One's knowledge production is influenced by the production of emotions and emotional experiences (2004, p. 865). Geometrical sarongs become specific uniforms for students and they use sarongs until they become an adult. Among the choices available to Madurese men, batik sarongs are not typically worn as everyday attire. Therefore, the decision to wear or not to wear batik sarongs is subjective knowledge based on one's understanding and experiences. Thus, a Madurese man's decision in dressing cannot be separated from their *langue* and *parole*.

“Considering the existence of the following bhupa'-bhabhu-ghuru-ratoh (mother, father, kiai (religious leaders), and government), and the strong adherence to Islamic teachings as the norm of Madurese life, it can be understood that the position of local authorities is highly important for Madurese people and is believed to contribute to the description of the Muslim attire style for men. This situation implies that even though Madurese culture intertwined with Javanese culture and other influences in the past, Madurese people have generated their understanding based on their cultural and religious perspectives. As it is known how the four hierarchical authorities manage people's lives, then the situation would always be under control. Obedience to authority is absolute for Madurese. When there are no figures or role models who perform such different things, the situation will remain. The absence of batik in men's daily attire shows power relation status in social structure. From the perspective of social

structure theory leaders and society have the same possibility to play a significant role. Actors perform both autonomous and dependent actions. According to Giddens, without reflective awareness, agents cannot see the consequences that arise from their various actions. In this case, it is important (Giddens, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

The image of men and women is manifested through how they treat batik. The understanding that emerges from various cultural factors also shapes the knowledge of dressing for men and women differently. Disregarding a certain custom can affect the image of the wearer in the eyes of society. Considering that the association between checkered sarongs and ethnic or sexual identity is arbitrary, the power relations mentioned by Foucault contribute to the construction of such paradigms. Concerning the focus of this study on the absence of batik sarongs in the attire of Madurese Muslim men, it becomes evident that power relations in Madura have played a significant role in shaping the local concept of clothing. The concept of Madurese men's clothing is influenced by a more dominant power that governs it. Foreign influences, whether during the colonial era or afterward, have shaped a distinct and locally characteristic perception. This is not the case for most Javanese ethnic groups, especially regarding the use of batik in men's clothing. Men from non-Madurese ethnic groups do not refuse to wear batik as everyday attire. For example, during my visit to a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) owned by a *kiai* in Nganjuk Regency, East Java, in mid-July 2022, I encountered a *kiai* who habitually received guests wearing a batik sarong, which was confirmed by his wife, the *nyai*.

Batik, as one of the strengths of local culture, has received counterproductive treatment from its community. By not adopting the habit of wearing batik as part of their attire, Madurese men have created a certain distance from their local cultural heritage. This may have separated the community from the prosperity that should have been enjoyed, especially considering the current popularity of Pamekasan batik. The absence of batik from men's clothing reinforces the power relations that influence the development of this tradition. Even though the presence and the absence of understanding of batik among men and women in one perspective is a result of collective knowledge, individuals have also a significant responsibility to maintain or change.

Fortunately, as part of the batik industry, women continue to play a dominant role in its preservation to this day. However, there have also been productive efforts to promote batik by the Pamekasan Regency Government, such as through the Official Notice on Wearing Batik during Eid (viva.co.id., May 28, 2019) and collaborations with fashion designer Embran Nawawi in recent years (radarsurabaya.jawapos.com, Tuesday, November 3, 2020). These efforts may need to be further advocated for.

## REFERENCES

Administrator. (2020, November 3).

<https://radarsurabaya.jawapos.com/jatim/77970580/embran-nawawi-kreasikan-batik-pamekasan-next-level>.

Akbar, R. J., & Faishal N. (2019, May 28). VIVA.co.id pada hari Selasa, 06:32 WIB. Judul Artikel: Bupati Pamekasan Terbitkan Surat Edaran Pakai Batik saat Lebaran. <https://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/1152981-bupati-pemekasan-terbitkan-surat-lebaran>.

Barnard, M. (1996). Fashion sebagai Komunikasi. Routledge.

Barthes, R. (1981). Elements of Semiology, New York: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R. (1983). The Fashion System. New York: Hill and Wang.

Budiman, K. (2004). Jejaring tanda-tanda: Strukturalisme dan Semiotik dalam Kritik Kebudayaan. Magelang: Indonesiatara.

Damajanti, M. N. (2022). Budaya Bersarung Masyarakat Kontemporer. Jurnal Biokultur, Volume 11, Number 1, 2022, pp. 1-14.

Dwiyanto, D. & Nugrahani, DS. Perubahan Konsep Gender Dalam Seni Batik Tradisional Pedalaman dan Pesisiran. <https://adoc.pub/perubahan-konsep-gender> (retrieved 2023, Juli 1).

Giddens, A. (2004). The Constitution of Society. Translation, second print.

Hakim, R., & Rufaidah, A. (2021). Eksistensi Batik Tulis Sebagai Identitas Kabupaten Pamekasan (The Existence of Handmade Batik as the Identity of Pamekasan

- Regency). *Jurnal Ekonomi Pembangunan*. Vol. 6 No. 4 December 2021. ISSN: 2503-3093 (online), pp. 35- 43.
- Hefni, M. (2019). *Islam Madura. Sebuah Studi Konstruktivisme Strukturalis tentang Relasi Islam Pesantren dan Islam Kampung di Sumenep Madura*. Malang: Literasi Nusantara.
- Kuntowijoyo. (2017). *Perubahan Sosial Dalam Masyarakat Agraris Madura 1850-1940*. Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD.
- Murtopo, B. A. (2017). *Etika Berpakaian dalam Islam: Tinjauan Busana Wanita Sesuai Ketentuan Islam*, *Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman dan Kemanusiaan*, Vol. 1 No. 2 October 2017.
- Nugrahani, D.S. (1994. September 27). "The Relation between Cultural Context of the Indonesian Cloth Production with Factors Leading to Its Transformation in Those Traditions" Unpublished Essay presented at the routine Seminars of the Anthropology of Art, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Faculty, the Australian National University.
- Pribram, E. D. & Harding, J. (2004). *Losing Our Cool? Following Williams and Grossberg On Emotions*. Faculty Works: Communications. 9.  
[https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/com\\_fac/9](https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/com_fac/9).
- Qosim, A. (2020, May 12). *Islam Pantura: Penikmat Sarung Juga Bisa Cingkrang!*  
[Islami\[dot\]co](https://islami.co).
- Raffles, T.S. (2014). *The History of Java, 1817*. (Translation) Narasi Publisher.
- Rifai, M.A. (2007). *Manusia Madura*. Jogjakarta: Pilar Media.
- Rifai, A., Ahmadi, A., Rengganis, R. (2022). *Laki-laki Madura dalam Kumpulan Esai Madura Niskala Karya Royyan Julian Studi: Maskulinitas (Ahmad Rifai)*, *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education (JIME)* Vol. 8, No. 3, August 2022 p-ISSN: 2442-9511, e-2656-5862. DOI: 10.36312/jime.v8i2.3542/  
<http://ejournal.mandalanursa.org/index.php/JIME> 1894.
- Syamsuddin, M. (2019). *History of Madura. Sejarah, Budaya dan Ajaran Luhur Masyarakat Madura*. Yogyakarta: Araska Publisher.
- Ulfa, A. (2016). *Orientasi Nilai Budaya Seni Pertunjukan Sandur di Kabupaten Pamekasan Madura Jawa Timur*. Sarjana Thesis, Universitas Negeri Jakarta.

Wiyata, A. L. (2013). Mencari Madura. Jakarta: Bidik Phronesis Publishing.

Zuhry, A. D. (2018). Peradaban Sarung, Veni, Vidi, Santri. Jakarta: PT Elex Media  
Komputindo.