

Symbolic and Socio-cultural Meaning Tanimbar Woven Fabric

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Abstract— Indonesia has been known to have diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, belief, linguistic, customs, and local wisdom with a wealth of values and meanings in each region. The Tanimbar area of West Southeast Maluku regency, Maluku Province also has local wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation i.e. Ikat Weaving Fabrics, better known as "Tanimbar Fabrics." This study aims to discover the symbolic and social meaning behind Ikat Tanimbar Weaving Fabrics. The method used is descriptive qualitative with ethnography approach and sociology method with social fact paradigm approach. The results of this study illustrate that Tanimbar fabrics are usually inherited through the life skills or skills of a mother to her daughter by looking at her mother's way of weaving every day, which is done manually (traditionally). This weaving work has become a culture and has certain meanings in the life of the Tanimbar community. The manifestation of these meanings is seen in the social structure of the Tanimbar society that positions women to high social status. Also, Tanimbar fabrics are not only used as clothing and activities on certain custom occasions but also as a customary item for newlyweds, as well as goods or objects of honor or reward for the family (kin) if they die.

Keywords—Tanimbar, Ikat Weaving Fabrics, Tanimbar Fabrics, West Southeast Maluku.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is famous for its natural and cultural riches. Various islands, large and small, decorate the territory of Indonesia into a source of wealth. In terms of cultural richness, Indonesia is one of the world's largest woven-producing countries, especially in terms of its ornamental diversity.[1] Maluku contributes considerably to Indonesia in this cultural diversity.

The Tanimbar islands are one of the southernmost islands located in Maluku. This area is a land bridge connecting between Kei-Aru and Papua Islands and from Babar-Sermata Islands to Timor and Nusa Tenggara. Bordered directly to Australia, the Tanimbar Islands are also the outermost boundary of the archipelago. This region is also known for its rich variety of cultural heritage, as found in the academic work and various collections of Tanimbar cultural objects in various world museums.[2]

The term for the Tanimbar Islands itself refers to an island cluster located to the south of the Banda Islands. The geography of this archipelago borders the Kei Islands to the east and Babar Islands to the west. Banda Sea is a border in the

north while the Arafura Sea and Australia are boundary in the south. The Tanimbar Islands cluster is formed by more than 174 islands that make up an area of 53.251 km². The largest island in the Tanimbar Islands is Yamdena. Some of the other main islands are Selaru, Fordata, Wuliaru and Sera. The northernmost island is Molu Island and the southernmost island is Selaru. Selaru Island is one of the ninety six outer islands in Indonesia.[2], [3]

Society, in essence, besides having awareness of religiosity, also has a historical awareness which is a powerful encouragement in the effort to understand and interpret social phenomena to the ontological basis of human and/or society's presence. It is a process of understanding as well as explaining, by as much as possible presenting not only the understanding of a person or a group of people but also "things" that include words, stories, traditional expressions, as well as the values contained in human works and creation.[4]

Weaving is one of several types of textile products that get a positive response in the society. Indonesian woven fabrics have experienced a long history along with the development of society's perception in a region. In the past, the position of woven fabric in the society is as customary clothing such as wedding ceremonies, customary equipment, the ceremony towards the birth of the firstborn, and so on.[5], [6]

In Indonesia there are many areas producing woven fabric such as Banda Aceh, Medan, Pekanbaru, Padang, Palembang, Bandar Lampung, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Denpasar, Pontianak, Samarinda, Palangkaraya, Banjarmasin, Manado, Donggala, Palu, Ujung Pandang, Dili, Kupang, Halmahera Island, Maluku, Ambon and Tanimbar Islands. The type of woven fabric produced from these areas is different from the variety of motifs, colors, materials, manufacturing techniques, and tools used. The Tanimbar Islands society in Maluku also has a variety of inventive works embodied in home appliance ornaments and clothing materials made from woven fabric crafts. The weaving activities of the Tanimbar society have long been the main activity of a mother (woman). In fact this weaving activity is a genuine Tanimbar activity especially for women.[7]

The traditional woven fabric or better known as Fabric Tanimbar has become one of the local wisdom that has certain values and meanings, both symbolically and socially for the Tanimbar society. The manifestations of these meanings are seen in the social structure of the Tanimbar society which positions women in high social status. Therefore the dowry for

Tanimbar women is often considered very "expensive". Other manifestations can also be seen in the quarrel between men, and when a woman comes to intervene, the quarrel is immediately stopped, and there is also peace. Because of the high appreciation for women, Tanimbar makes women identic with peace (peacemaker) and cold (cooler). In addition, Tanimbar Fabric are not only used as a daily fashion and clothing on traditional occasions, but also as one of the customary objects for the marriage of newlyweds. Moreover, Tanimbar woven fabric is also used as goods or objects of awarding or honoring the families/relatives who pass away.

The way of weaving the Tanimbar Fabric is inherited through the life skills or skills of a mother to her daughter from how the child sees the way her mother weaves every day which is done manually (traditionally). This weaving work has been internalized in the life of the Tanimbar society in general and has been integrated into the culture inherent in the life of a typical Tanimbar mother or woman. Due to such condition, Tanimbar women are often identified with the Tanimbar Fabric itself.

However, the weaving activities as the original traditions of the Tanimbar society, in recent decades, seem to start to fade in certain places (certain villages) due to the development of society, especially the rapid advancement of education and technology, particularly in the field of textile technology, so most Tanimbar people, especially mothers/women, tend to leave the tradition of weaving, because the tradition is considered "ancient". Another reason besides the process of manufacture that takes a long time and a lot of energy, this activity is also seen as inefficient (economical). The tendency then resulted in decreasing skill and interest in weaving among mothers/women. In fact, based on outside developments (both domestic and foreign) recently, the attention and interest to local wisdom in Indonesia areas including Tanimbar Woven Fabric started to be re-considered.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive qualitative method with combination of ethnographic approach emphasizing on the meaning or interpretative aspect [8], and sociology method with social fact paradigm approach. [9] Primary data or information was obtained from informants or women who are still skillful and and who still weave the Tanimbar woven fabric. The secondary data were obtained from various documents, either from books and writings in the form of previous research journal articles, related to the Tanimbar islands and the social process in Tanimbar.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Weaving Process and Materials and Tools Used

Making Tanimbar Woven Fabrics among the Tanimbar communities of West Southeast Maluku Regency (MTB) is generally relatively the same in all regions, only the motives and meanings are slightly different. According to the informant (weavers), weaving the Tanimbar Fabric begins by preparing

the materials and tools. The main materials consist of factory-made white yarns purchased from local stores and dyes.

In the past, the Tanimbar used the main materials out of cotton and bark as a dye. The cotton is turned into a yarn then soaked with bark according to the chosen color. The bark is cooked with water until it boils; the yarn is dyed for a few minutes then removed, after that it is dried and used for weaving. Before the above process, weavers have drawn patterns (motifs) which are then tied to the threads to be woven.

Nowadays, most Tanimbar society rarely uses cotton material and tends to use factory-made yarn bought at local stores in their village or in District or Regency. The manufacturing process is no different from the yarn of the cotton. The difference is for factory-made yarn, the weavers do not bother to spin and coloring, because when they buy it in the store, the color of the yarn is selected according to the motives and tastes.

The tools used for weaving, among others: *Yambian* (all looms in Eastern Yamdena language), *Ngengetain* (flower binder), *Kobil* (a small round stone/gravel used for rolling yarn), *Tatadas* (a long log tool placed at the very top of the loom frame), *Lilil* (a tool of long logs placed at the center of the loom frame, which functions to adjust the distance of the upper and lower yarn so that weavers can weave carefully), *Pet* (made of thin wood used as a hammer/yarn-tidying tool), *Tatabab* or *Ulkatim* (wood located at the bottom of the loom to hold all threads and loom frames to stay tight), *Utveu* (a tool located at the back to hold all the looms), *Warlol* and *Lilingen* (long logs lying in the middle of the looms).

To begin weaving, all materials and tools are prepared well ahead of time. After that the yarn is arranged and tied on top of *Ngengetain* (flower binder), then the flowers are tied according to the pattern/image/motif on the white yarn as desired. After the flowers are tied, they are dipped into *wanteks* (dye - bought from the store) for a few minutes and then boiled with a certain temperature on a pot or a cauldron (special place made of iron or copper). Next, the yarn is dried by hanging it on hanging rope to dry. After the yarns are dry, they are lifted, opened and arranged in place/loom to be woven. Eventually, the weavers begin weaving until it becomes a fabric which is popularly called as Tanimbar Fabric; in East Yamdena language it is called **Tais** and in Fordata language it is called **Bakhan**. One fabric (Tais/Bakhan), if there is no other work, can be completed within two or three days, but if there are other works coming, it can be completed within one week or six to seven days.

Currently Tanimbar society still retains the customary tradition by wearing a woven cloth to pay for the dowry (*mahar*) as one of the dowries of Duan's family (the man party who is obliged to pay for the dowry) to the Lolat party (the woman party who is entitled to receive the dowry). In addition, the provision of woven fabric to relatives who died is still done, where the family of the woman (Lolat) must provide *Tais Barit*, which is used to wrap the corpse and the family of man (Duan) gives some money and *Sopi* (Tuak = traditional

alcohol drinks which are cooked/squeezed from young coconut juice, or palm tree).

The inheritance of knowledge and skills of weaving from a mother to a daughter is now rarely done, except in some villages in a certain region in the West Southeast Maluku Regency. This is because of the influence of education where most girls are given wide opportunities to go to higher level of education, demanding that they get out of their villages to study. In addition, formal process of inheritance and institutionalization from the local government is almost not done.

B. Types of Woven Fabrics and The Motif, Function and Meaning

The physical product of a cultural form is one example of objects that we can encounter in our daily life, such as traditional houses, carvings, sculptures, woven crafts, woven fabrics and so on. When viewed carefully, the physical products of the culture have a special pattern that characterizes the culture attached to the product. Tanimbar Fabrics is one of the physical products of the social culture in the Tanimbar archipelago, West Southeast Maluku Regency. Tanimbar woven fabric when viewed carefully, has a pattern on the fabric formed from the repetition of an abstract form [10]

Tanimbar woven fabric has various types with their names and meanings. Although it has a somewhat different name as Tanimbar people have several sub-tribes with their respective languages, but in Tanimbar, West Southeast Maluku Regency (MTB) there are only two dominant language clusters, which are East Yamdena (people living in the eastern seaboard Yamdenaisland), and the language of Seira-Larat-Fordata, that popularly called Fordata language. Seira, Larat, and Fordata are three different islands with different geographic and administrative areas.

Seira Island is geographically located in the southern part of Yamdena island adjacent to the capital of MTB Regency, namely Saumlaki Town. Fordata Island, which uses the name Yaru as the name of the District, Yaru District, was formerly part of North Tanimbar District with the center of the district was in Larat City. Larat Island uses the name of North Tanimbar as district, i.e., North Tanimbar District (the name before it is divided into several villages into new districts). Therefore, it is found that some areas have somewhat different types, motifs and meanings.

Several types of Tanimbar Woven Fabrics in the Northern part of East Yamdena are: (1) Tais Matin, a woven fabric that has human skeleton patterns symbolizing the deceased; (2) Tais Lelesor, a woven fabric with the pattern of eye of *kalawai* or a spear to jab fish; (3) Tais Marin, a fish-patterned woven fabric as a symbol of Tanimbar's marine wealth; (4) Tais Susui, a woven fabric roof and house tower pattern as a symbol of protection or shelter; (5) Tais Kawatin, a woven fabric in *Tongke* flower (mangrove) pattern which symbolizes the amount of mangrove forest on the coast of Tanimbar Island; (6) Tais Kakandin, a woven fabric with flower and animals pattern as a symbol of the natural wealth and natural fertility of Tanimbar Island; (7) Tais Barit.

C. Symbolic and Socio-Culture Meaning of Tanimbar Fabrics

Tanimbar Fabric is inherited through the life skills or skills of a mother to her daughter from how the child sees the way her mother weaves every day which is done manually (traditionally). This weaving work has been internalized in the life of the Tanimbar society in general and has been integrated into the culture inherent in the life of a typical Tanimbar mother or woman. Due to such condition, Tanimbar women are often identified with the Tanimbar Fabric itself. Tanimbar Fabric also has certain social and cultural meanings.

The manifestations of these meanings are seen in the social structure of the Tanimbar society which positions women in high social status. Therefore the dowry for Tanimbar women is often considered very "expensive". Other manifestations can also be seen in the quarrel between men, and when a woman comes to intervene, the quarrel is immediately stopped, and there is also peace. Because of the high appreciation for women, Tanimbar makes women identical with "king" or "queen" peace (peacemaker) and cold (cooler). In addition, Tanimbar Fabric are not only used as a daily fashion and clothing on traditional occasions, but also as one of the customary objects for the marriage of newlyweds. Moreover, Tanimbar woven fabric is also used as goods or objects of awarding or honoring the families/relatives who pass away.

In certain areas, in the past, woven Fabrics or Tanimbar Fabrics, with their types and motifs, are specialized in certain people and may be used on customary occasions or events at a particular moment. For example Tais Susui, Tais Marin, and Tais Lelesor symbolize the class/people of the noble or Mela, in addition to the Fabric/Tais these other woven fabrics can be worn by everyone who is not from among nobles. On certain customary occasions when customary dances are performed, for example the "Tnabar Ilaa" dance (Fordata language = Great Dance or Dance of the Nobles), then based on the type and motif of the fabric and the position/place in the dance configuration, status or social class of a person can be known, which is commonly referred to in the local term as "Mata Rumah" (clan group or *Soa*) of a person in the village.

Sometimes fashion and jewelry worn by women or men are different between "Mata Rumah" of a certain social class (nobility) and a class that is not noble. Meanings on motifs, types, and clothing show a certain symbolic meaning for the life of local people and Tanimbar in general. In certain regions or peninsula, the fabric is interpreted differently, as in the peninsula of the northern part of Eastern Yamdena, Tais Susui, Tais Marin, and Tais Lelsor are called Tais Government (Kubani), which symbolizes the formal clothing of government (officials of the village, district, or regency or higher in government).

Tais Matin (in Indonesian = *Mata*), is a woven fabric with a human eye-like motif whose function is specially designed to wrap the dead, usually given by close relatives of the deceased. Tais Farindin (in Indonesian = *dingin / mendinginkan*) is usually used to pay for the dowry for the woman family (Lolat). Tais Kawatin (in Indonesian = *kain bodoh*) is the ordinary fabrics used daily and also can be used

as souvenirs. The types and motifs of Tanimbar Fabrics also refer to certain symbols, which are inspired from the natural environment and the richness of the sea and the Tanimbar island. In certain areas such as Selaru island and Fordata Island each of the fabrics has certain meaning and philosophy.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Cultural wealth is a necessity that must be preserved so as to enrich the values of social life, either at the regional, national, or international level. The richness of the values contained in the Tanimbar woven fabric is thus very important to be preserved so that the upcoming young people are not deprived of their sacred cultural roots, which teach them to behave well in society and nation life.

The richness of socio-cultural values contained in Tanimbar's woven fabric can also give meaning to the regional and national governments to love their people more and treat them according to their cultural values, so they will be apart from the arrogant impression and attitudes of exploitation of local culture.

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