

# Jember Fashion Carnaval as a Reaction of Visual Culture to The Principle of Binary Opposition (A Case Study)

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## ABSTRACT

It has been commonly understood that fashion shows are always associated to glamor, luxurious, starred hotels, city centers, elite society, lights, and glittering costumes. It is often not realized that fashion shows have created strong boundaries between the center and the periphery, the elite and the public, the upper and the lower class, glamorous and old-fashioned. Since 2003, Jember Fashion Carnaval has been a peripheral phenomenon against the common convention on fashion. Streets as catwalks have totally changed territorial borders, social hierarchy, and created a favorable fashion carnaval arena. This yearly consistent performance and the reaction to binary opposition in fashion turns out to be able to create positive impacts in various fields of the creative industry, created a social and cultural carnival arena, education, and improve the economy of the people and tourism. The fashion carnaval phenomenon which has grown in the community was a result of dealing with foreign influences to create a new visual culture in Jember.

*Keywords: Jember Fashion Carnaval, Reaction of Binary Opposition, Visual Culture*

## INTRODUCTION

Jember Fashion Carnaval is a fashion carnival event as a product of youth creativity in Jember society who have taken some education and informal training sessions on fashion carnival from the Jember Fashion Carnaval Council/JFCC. The training sessions include costume design, make-up, choreography, leadership, singing, dancing, music, and physical endurance. Participants are obliged to join the whole training sessions for ± 3-12 months until they're able to design and produce their own costumes, decorate the appearance of the costume and put them on their own bodies, win auditions, and join the festival by taking the carnival on to the streets. Some of the results of the education and training are shown on the following photos:



Figure 1. Inspirators must design the costumes, put on make-up, and participate in the festival (Source: Private documentation).

Participants who have passed the audition serve as inspirators in the carnival as participants play the roles of designers and models of their own costumes. Inspirators who win the festival are divided into several subtheme, and they are entitled to awards such as scholarships for Fashion School in Esmod Jakarta, beauty skills by Marta Tilaar and Sari Ayu, and a suite of stage make-up products from Marta Tilaar products. These activities on education, training, and carnival have been carried out regularly every year since 2003 until today. Jember Fashion Carnaval/JFC has been developing significantly over the years. In August 2013, JFC participants have increased to  $\pm 1200$  inspirators and  $\pm 2600$  freelance photographers, both domestic and foreign.

Millions of domestic and foreign appreciators, thousands of security officers, district government officials, the tourism board, civil service police unit (Satpol PP), JFC committee members, and medical staff members have worked together to realize these JFC big events. JFC originated from the idea and dream of a young man from Jember, Dynand Fariz, a painting artist who later turned into a fashion designer. He completed his study on fashion in Esmod France, and he currently works as fashion instructor in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Malang. The owner of 'Rumah Mode Dynand Fariz', a carnival consultant for various carnivals in the country that have been actively held in other cities such as Jakarta with JFFF/Jakarta Food Fashion Festival, Solo with SBC/Solo Batik Carnival, Lumajang with LOS/Lumajang On Shine, Banyuwangi with BEC/Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival, Belitung with BBF /Belitung Beach Festival and others, all of which are inspired by the success stories of JFC.

These results of the education and experience abroad are what encouraged Fariz to mobilize young people in Jember to express their creativity through fashion carnivals. Fariz attempted to combine fashion trends in France and the elegance of carnivals in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil to direct Jember Fashion Carnaval, yet with different unique styles so that the visualization also shows clear differences. Fariz intended to lift his hometown that had no particular specialties to make it famous a place up to the level of other cities in the world through fashion carnivals. He did not build the dream by starting in the center of big cities like Jakarta, at Esmod Fashion School where he teaches, for example; instead, he started in the suburbs of Jember, his own hometown.



Figure 2: The atmosphere during costume making (Source: Private documentation 2013).

Nor did he start from the elite bourgeois groups who are already familiar with and always up-to-date with the trends in world fashion, but from the lower level society who is not touched by the dynamics of fashion. Fariz chose a path that few fashion designers take, those who tend to work for commercial purposes and personal benefits, and he gave free training and encouraged Jember people to express their creations in fashion and fashion carnivals. This was something unfamiliar to his people whose background is mostly plantation, and it was something no other designer done previously. Fariz has done something different, a reaction to the common convention generally held by people in the fashion world. He once said, (Fariz, 2011: 27)

JFC has broken all stigmas where a fashion designer must be a fashion school graduate, a model must possess a perfect body, or a make up artist must be a beauty school graduate.

Fariz is currently an educator in three Indonesian universities, and he still makes time to develop and train the people in Jember so that they possess some creativity in fashion and carnival events. Fariz has other ways to promote the people and the city of Jember, not only through formal education but informal one as well. Through informal education that he initiated, Fariz managed to reach out to more people who are less than privileged to get formal education such as drop-out children, gang members, former convicts, and transvestites, besides school students. For Fariz, fashion carnivals are a medium to promote the people and the city of Jember so that they become known in the international stage, just like his words that inspire us to do more for other people: (Fariz, 2011: 57)

Until God summons us, then what will be left is Jember Fashion Carnival as The World Fashion Carnival.

## METHODOLOGY

### The Principle of Binary Opposition Relations

This research is based on qualitative interpretative methodology that explains that fashion and carnival performance can grow from below current/non elite society. Even it could give more positive effects for growing up social, economic, tourism, creative education and culture life of the society against the general conventional ones. The Principle of Binary Opposition is understood as the management and organization of signs, signages, meanings, and values based on the opposition principle of two elements by appreciating, celebrating, and valuing an element while marginalizing, lowering, and leaving the others (Piliang, 2012: 273). A relation that exists in modern and traditional costumes, for example, the word modern is often attributed to everything that is new, progressive, high standard of achievement, superior, and original. Modern costumes are often attributed to designs that follow the trend through contemporary compositions, techniques, materials, textures, colors, millineries, and accessories.

On the other hand, tradition tends to explain the opposite of things, bring up and value the past, maintain the values of beliefs that have existed for a long time and become local wisdom. It's not about new things, but preserving the superiority of old-time legacy. The people judge modern and new things as better and superior when compared to tradition which is considered old fashioned. These two different principles have become phenomena that characterized the visual culture of Jember's society, who has a cultural background of Indonesian tradition or culture, especially Javanese tradition.

Indonesian tradition culture professes strong harmonious patterns or patterns of marriage. In the field of art harmonious pattern is referred to as Aesthetic Paradox (Sumardjo, 2006: 31). Life is a dualistic of conflict which is inevitable, but not to win one so that the other can live. But let the pair of permanent conflict still live, both should be harmonized so that born a new life, by creating a new entity that contains both. A new life will emerge if there is a paradoxical harmony between them. JFC has tried to create this harmony by doing a reaction to conventional fashion, combining the Western culture and Eastern culture which is rich of its local values.

The people judge modern and new things as better and superior when compared to tradition which is considered old fashioned. The binary opposition that strongly binds the society who tend to Western Culture can be found in a lot of relations such as:

Modern	×	Tradition
Center	×	Periphery
Masculine	×	Feminine
<i>Rational</i>	×	<i>Irrational</i>
<i>Reason</i>	×	<i>Emotional</i>
West	×	East
Intelligent	×	Stupid
<i>High</i>	×	<i>Low</i>
White	×	Black

Elements mentioned first are considered more superior and more excellent than those mentioned later. The relation that strengthens this hierarchy is deeply rooted in everyday practice of the people and is hard to shake, why is why this relation of binary opposition is the essence of modernism. This relation is also found in fashion world and carnival world in general.

It has been a convention in the society that the dynamics of fashion shows is always related to everything glamorous, luxurious, and intended to elite bourgeois society, like that exist in Western culture. Fashion shows are often associated with the image of starred hotels, spacious ballrooms with state-of-the-art design and lighting equipment. It is a space where famous designers meet with up-to-date design creations and use of costume materials. Appreciators who are able to enjoy the shows, follow current trends, and consume the creations of those designers are limited to certain society members, namely those from the upper class. These upper class are more meant as center cities' society with high social degree and middle up economic degree.

These city designers unconsciously get carried away by the world fashion trends and continuously create a circle of endless new designs, only to make them trapped by the tricks of capitalism aimed at obtaining profits. Baudilard argued that the fashion world is a paradigm of code domination, everything we see in fashion is a simple game of signages, fashion does not refer to something real but only create codes which are always reproduced by default (Baudrilard, 1976/1993: 87). Fashion creates what postmodernism calls *pastische*, containing elements borrowing from past culture works and esthetic idioms that had previously existed.

It is different from modern art in general, which is required to build a foundation and criteria from and for itself (Piliang, 2012: 179). *Pastische* in fashion is understood as the efforts to make refinements over the years what has been there before in huge combinations. Fashion continuously repeats existing codes to be reproduced in order to create endless circles of design that tend to be consumed only by those that belong in the elite group. They, too, are trapped in the vortex of having to keep consuming the reproduced fashion created by designers to achieve pride/prestige and strengthen their position in the hierarchy of the society.

Factually, fashion is just belong to Center Area, comes from Center Cities, only provides for elite bourgeois society and it is full of glamorous appearances. In the other case what done by JFC is something against that, so what is the role of JFC in order to colouring fashion conventional? Is JFC as a visual culture reaction to fashion conventional?

## ANALYSIS

### **JFC as the reaction to the principle of binary opposition in fashion**

The phenomenon of Jember Fashion Carnaval in the city of Jember, a city at the edge of the East Island of Java, which is considered to be ignorant of the dynamics and circles of fashion trends in big city centers, not to mention the fashion trends in the world. Fashion with its carnivals which are consistently developing in Jember since 2003 until today is showing signs that tend to be the opposite of fashion and carnivals developing

in city centers or other world cities, and the resulting impacts are apparently different as well.



Figure 3. Costumes in the Rio de Janeiro carnival (Source: [www.brazilcarnival.com/abautus/carnival-history.html](http://www.brazilcarnival.com/abautus/carnival-history.html) diunduh 25 September 2013 with Octopus Defile Costume JFC XII, 2013).

The characters of binary opposition can be seen by making comparisons at the level of the costumes in Rio de Janeiro carnival with those in the Defile Octopus during Jember Fashion Carnaval XII, 2013. This comparison caused by Rio Carnival's fame and greatness has been known by people in the world, to become direct Dynand Fariz for building Jember as a world carnival with different characteristics:

		<b>Rio de Janeiro Costumes</b>	<b>JFC XIII, Defile Octopus Costumes</b>
Head decorations	Shape	Have the shape of a crown, conventional	Octopus Mimemis, nonconventional
	Techniques	Fabrication	Handmade, combine fabrication
	Texture	Glittering, full of light reflections/ glossy	Opaque, combine glittering on beads
	Materials	Jewel Imitation	Sponge and paint combine jewel imitation
	Colors	Silver white of jewel	Dominant Red analogues
Body cover	Materials	Jewel imitation, covering certain body parts	Clothes and accessories covering the whole body
Expressions	Gesture	Hand open	Hand gripping
		Looking up	Looking straight at the target
		Happy	Scary
		Free stare	Predatory stare
	<i>Body language</i>	Showing off the body features	Showing off the attributes
	Sexy	Non sexy/ Well -mannered	

Table 1. Characters of binary opposition in Rio de Janeiro costumes against the costumes in JFC XII that tend to combine (Source: Private documentation).

Local medium, composition and the using of colour that are used on JFC have created an extraordinary art works which are no less interesting with ones in Carnival's Rio and others. Dynand Fariz as the founder and the president of JFC is part of the Jember society who has encouraged young people to be obsessed to be excitedly involved in fashion world and carnivals in order to promote their city. Through well-programmed

education and regular training sessions, through Jember Fashion Carnaval Council/ JFCC, Fariz has managed to make JFC a creative industry, to bring the city of Jember to the world. This is proved by various national and international awards such as those from MURI Museum, Kick Andy Heroes, Metro TV Documentary, JVC photos presented in 'The Picture of the World Reuters'.

The yearly event has been a target for hunting freelance photographers, with  $\pm 2600$  amateur photographs and professional journalists recorded in 2013. This condition proves that binary opposition is apparent on the smooth run of the fashion carnivals in Jember, which moves from the lower to the upper level of the society. At once efforts to carry out mixing here and there in order to achieve harmony. The number of inspirators that tends to increase in 2013 has recorded  $\pm 1200$  inspirators because, since 2013, JFC event is divided into three categories during a three-day event, which include JFC Kids category, JFC Art Ware category, and JFC Grand Carnival on the last day.

In the previous years, JFC only held a one day event, JFC Grand Carnival, which recorded  $\pm 900$  inspirators in 2012. The number of appreciators has also increased to reach millions of domestic and foreign spectators among the massive crowd along the city streets covered by the catwalks without any kind of lighting. This phenomenon signifies that JFC has developed a different visual culture which is different from the one in the city centers. JFC is seen as a visual culture constructed by the people, which develop from grassroot plurality and reflect an expression of plurality (Denissa, 2012: 203).



Figure 4. The fluid atmosphere of the catwalks, Grass Root Plurality, 2011 (Source: JFC Council Documentation).



Figure 5: The atmosphere at Sambodromo Plaza, Rio de Janeiro (Source: [www.carnivalpower.com history\\_of\\_carnival htm](http://www.carnivalpower.com/history_of_carnival.htm) downloaded 11 April 2012).

The characters of binary opposition can be seen by making comparisons at the level of carnival event in Rio de Janeiro with 2011 JFC as follows:

	<b>Event at Sambodromo, Rio de Janeiro</b>	<b>Event at Catwalk in JFC Jember</b>
Area	Sambodromo Plaza	Street Catwalk
Character of the Area	City center	Suburbs/ periphery
Territory of Appreciators- Inspirators	With strict boundaries, hierarchical, conventional	Without strict boundaries, fluid, nonconventional. Combine with strict boundaries only on roadway stage ± 300 m
Characters of the event	Group attraction, performing together	Tend to form lines, although in groups
Social characters	Consumerism, for capitalistic profits, high class societies	Grassroot Plurality, low class, to promote the city of Jember
Time	Night	During the day
Lighting	Artificial lighting Luxurious, high technology, elite	Natural lighing, non-elite
Impressions	Territorials of the appreciators are separated from those of the Inspirators	Without strict boundaries, fluid, nonconventional. Strict boundaries only on roadway stage ± 300 m

Table 2. Characters of binary opposition at the Sambodromo Plaza, Rio de Janeiro compared to those at JFC street catwalks (Source: Private documentation).

Fashion carnival visualization in the peripheral areas is the reaction to fashion convention and carnival convention in city centers. All levels of the society can come flocking in along the streets and become great appreciators or even take part in the interactions with the inspirators

Appreciators can come close to take pictures together, greet each other, or move together with the inspirators while cheering them on. There are no territorial boundaries like most fashion shows normally are, and even big city carnivals have the tendency to impose certain boundaries. No more social hierarchies between the rich and the poor, the elite and the non-elite, educated and non-educated, foreign and native, government officials and peasants.

Jember Fashion Carnaval in the city of Jember, when compared to fashion shows and carnivals in city centers, displays striking differences in that city center fashion shows tend to appeal to consumerism, sexuality, glamor, creating boundaries that define social hierarchy, while JFC events, in many ways, are very relaxed and borderless.



Figure 6. No West East boundary (Source: Documentation of JFC Council).



Figure 7. Elimination of social hierarchy (Source: Documentation of JFC Council).

Everything flows smoothly amidst the joy and appreciative closeness. There is only pride mixed with collective spirits to introduce the city of Jember with its unique fashion carnival creativity to the world. The resulting visualization may look ‘unsophisticated’ with small town atmosphere in the suburbs, but it is able to warm and touch sensitive hearts as it feels so moving.

Each defile performed during a JFC event produces ±40 – 60 different costume creations on average. No costume is alike in the same defile, even in group performances. Things are different in the Brazilian carnival in the city of Rio de Janeiro, where they wear uniform costumes in group performances, utilize luxurious

costume materials, glittering, and really put sexuality forward. JFC costumes utilize local materials which are easy to obtain, cheap, and recycled, which means that the costumes worn in previous years' fashion shows can be worn again by changing the structure, composition, or colors/imitation.



Figure 8. Visualization of Rio de Janeiro carnival, showing off sexuality (Source: Documentation [www.brazilcarnival.com/abautus/carnival-history.html](http://www.brazilcarnival.com/abautus/carnival-history.html) downloaded 25 September 2013).



Figure 9. Visualization of Ranah Minang Defile in Jember Fashion Carnaval JFC VIII in 2009, does not show off sexuality (Source: Documentation JFC Council).



Figure 10. Visualization of the glamorous and sexy carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean (Source: Documentation [www.brazilcarnival.com/aboutus/carnival-history.html](http://www.brazilcarnival.com/aboutus/carnival-history.html) diunduh 25 September 2013).



Figure 11. Visualization of JFC XII carnival in 2013 (Source: Private documentation).

Materials used in JFC costumes are varied and not limited to conventional, common materials in that they may utilize other materials not commonly used in most costumes. These include mattress materials/heart rubber, sponges, frame profiles, wax, plastic, leaves and twigs, bamboo mesh, spray paint, dolls, rope fibers, wires, various kinds of metals, and so on. The costume visualization has fought against common costume visualization and brings enticing charm to the society of all levels, including common people, sociologists, researchers, culturalists, mass media, as well as becoming tourism objects that attract controversies. JFC reaction to the principle of

binary opposition in fashion can be described as follows. (Sign  $\diamond$  means to combine, makes harmony)

Center	<>	Periphery
Glamour	<>	Recycle
Elite	<>	Public
Glittering	<>	Natural/opaque
Capitalist	<>	Socialist
Conventional	$\diamond$	Nonconventional
Sexy	<>	Nonsexy
High Class	<>	Low Class
Territorial	<>	Relaxed/ fluid
Western	<>	Easter

### **The Meaning of Binary Opposition in Jember Fashion Carnaval**

Jember Fashion Carnaval is a postmodern phenomenon due to its characters that react to the principle of binary opposition in that the principle is a modernist criterion for being an established culture. Binary opposition is a conventional point of view of binary space that creates 'binary point of view'. Everything in this world consists of two fields like Center and Periphery, High Class and Low Class, Elite and Peasants, Western and Eastern. Anything outside those fields is considered to deviate, is abnormal, marginal, or low, according to modern/Western views (Piliang, 2012: 275). JFC phenomenon is a reaction that attempts to break down or melt all boundaries of oppositions and differences so becomes a harmony.

It allows a penetration from below, grows and develops from down under to eliminate the boundaries, especially those between Center and Periphery, social hierarchy, High Class and Low Class, glamor and recycle, sexy and nonsexy, and so on. A fashion carnival arena can be an inseparable entity that affects the spirit of Jember youth to keep on being creative and play with continuous signs through their unique fashion carnival. A fashion carnival arena that can assemble thousands of inspirators, appreciators, photography artists, paint artists, researchers, mass media, journalists, culturalists, government officials, and the tourism board to come and form massive crowds along the catwalk streets.

A fashion carnival arena that is unique, relaxed with no boundaries, a situation that possesses the power of a huge promotional space to reach out to the world and bring Jember and its people's creativity for the international world to recognize

### **CONCLUSION**

Jember Fashion Carnaval that has been consistently held for 11 years is a phenomenon about a reaction to conventional fashion and carnivals. A convention that goes in the opposite direction as the binary opposition point of view that causes controversy, but it is warmly welcome by the people in Jember and outside Jember, by fashion artists, photographers, painters, media, researchers, government officials, and the tourism board. Enthusiastic reception of this community due to cultural tradition background of Indonesian society/ Jember's community, particularly, have had paradoxial harmony.

The contradiction is not to win the one and dominate the other but combining them into a harmonious unity.

The binary opposition point of view against the superiority of center areas, as well as elite, glamorous, glittering, sexy, conventional, capitalistic, high class, territorial point of view, which then reacts to bring up the opposite which comprises the periphery, non-elite, nonsexy, nonconventional, social, low class, and relaxed point of view. The reaction not means to eliminate the superior but to prove that something good could come from the opposite point of view and create a harmony. The crowd that create this fluid fashion carnival arena has established an amazing promotional power, both domestic and foreign.

The consistency of JFC development year after year explains phenomenon's fashion reacts the convention, in various fields of social, economic, non-formal education, and field of culture. The change identity of the original town explains the process of Jember's journey to a city of international-scale Fashion Tour and Carnivals leading to steps towards the reality as intended by the pioneers. Other researchers can continue this research by measuring how much of visual impacts are reached by JFC, Jember as a Tobacco City in nostalgia (since the 19th century) be transformed into a World Fashion Tour and Carnival's City through its young people's creativities?

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