



# Journal of Arts & Humanities

Volume 08, Issue 07, 2019: 53-59

Article Received: 05-07-2019

Accepted: 27-07-2019

Available Online: 30-07-2019

ISSN: 2167-9045 (Print), 2167-9053 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18533/journal.v8i7.1694>

## Color of Paradise: An Inspiration of Bird-of-Paradise Feather Colors in the Artworks and Designs in Papua

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### ABSTRACT

Papua as the part of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia has a wealth of cultural colors. Various colors in the rite of death tradition are the manifestations of various ethnic groups in Papua. In addition, Papua has natural wealth in the form of various colors of flora and fauna. It is manifested in the beauty of Bird-of-Paradise color which is very well known as the icon of Papua and the messenger of Moon Goddess. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive method. The qualitative descriptive method is to provide an overview about the doers' condition and their environment based on the facts in the field. The result obtained in socio-cultural aspect is the colors of Bird-of-Paradise feathers can be referred to as a social labeling. It is a kind of "social stamp" addressed by an institution or group of people related to socio-cultural reality. Color is created as a label for socio-cultural reality and forms social semiotics which is the meaning formed in society regarding social reality. Signs in the form of colors are a form of world representation by socially reconstructed humans.

**Keywords:** Colors, Bird-of-Paradise, Arts, Papua.

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### 1. Introduction

Papua is one of the islands located at the eastern part of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Papua has a wealth of diverse customs and culture. It can be seen from traditional ceremonies for people who pass away in each tribe in Papua which have different traditions from one another. Likewise, the natural wealth of Papua is also abundant. The majority of Papuans assume that God, the Creator, grant a small portion of heaven in the Land of Papua.

Papua is divided into 28 districts and 1 city in which Merauke is the largest district or city (56.84%) and Jayapura is the smallest city in Papua (0.1%). In 2010, the population of the Papua Province

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was 2,833,381. The male population of the Papua Province was 1,505,883 and there were 1,327,498 women. Sex The ratio of the population of Papua is 113. While the Total Dependency Ratio in Papua is 56.37 percent, where the Youth Dependency Ratio is 54.87 percent and the Aged Dependency Ratio is equal to 1.50 percent. It means that every 100 population ages (15-64 years) bears around 54-55 children aged 0-14 years and 1-2 elderly people (65 years and over) (BPS, 2011). With an area of Papua Province of around 317,062 km<sup>2</sup> inhabited by 2,833,381 people, the average population density of Papua Province is 9 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

The third sector that still survives and continues to increase its contribution to the economy is the transportation and communication sector. Papua's geographical situation, which is dominated by mountainous regions, requires that most of the regional transportation can only be reached by water. It causes costs for transportation to increase in line with increasing mobility of economic activities between regions. With the increase in transportation costs, transportation and communication sector is also increased. Whereas the sector that contributes to the smallest economy of Papua is the electricity and clean water sector. The small income of this sector is due to the low number of households that enjoy electricity and clean water facilities. In 2010, the number of households using electricity facilities was only 38.83 percent, while the number of households that had access to clean water was only 20.41 percent (BPS, 2010). Overall, the population in the Papua Province can be seen in the following map.

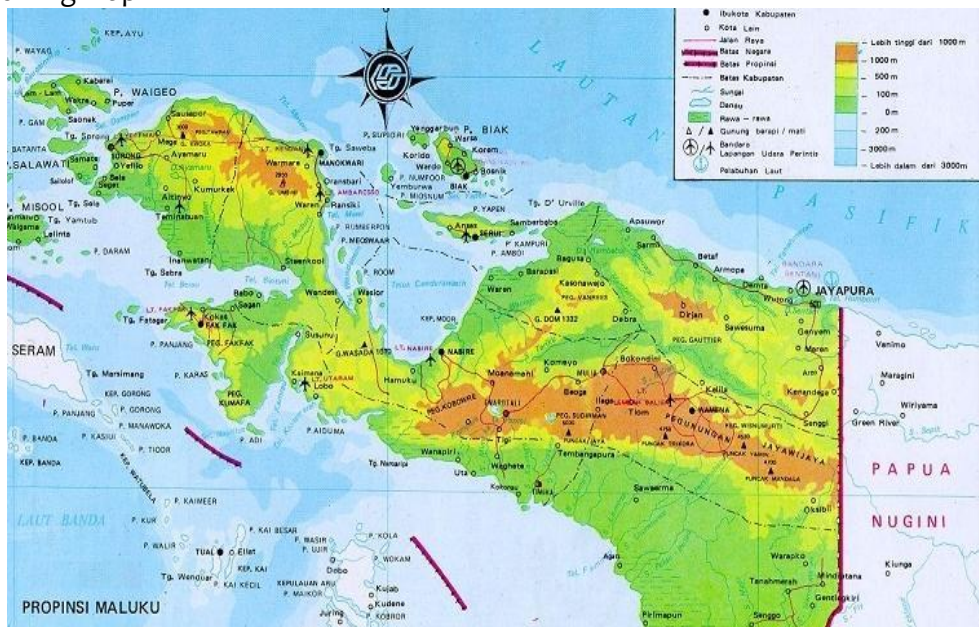


Figure 1. Map of West Papua

Available online at <http://www.harnas.co/2017/10/01/papua-dan-papua-barat-adalah-wilayah-indonesia>.

The Biak-Numfor tribe has 11 ceremonies to honor the dead including ceremonies for the destruction of objects belonging to the deceased, respect for the deceased, myths of Wakui-Wasei, funerals, releasing the dead, washing (Sumardjo, 2014: 154). Whereas, in the Dani tribe, the death ceremony is conducted by burning a corpse. Before the corpse was burned, the bodies of the dead were decorated and seated on the throne (bea). These ceremonies conducted in a field center of the township. Relatives and people who come to mourn will sit around the customs and cry out loud. The bodies of the women are covered with white mud, a sign of mourning with death songs and lamentations. After that, they will conduct a mortuary ceremony and the relatives of the deceased burn pork in holes they dug in the ground and some will be served to the spirits (ame) of those who died. In the afternoon, the cooked meat was eaten together and by dusk, all the jewelry worn on the corpse was taken and the body of the corpse was rubbed with pork oil. Afterwards, the corpse was started which was accompanied by the cry of the people who came to mourn (Yusuf, 2015).

In addition, Papua is also rich in its natural wealth, both flora and fauna. One of the most famous and iconic fauna of Papua is the bird of Paradise. The word "Cenderawasih" means "the

messenger of the Moon Goddess". Bird of Paradise is a family of Paradisaeidae from the Passeriformes order. This bird is commonly found in eastern Indonesia, Torres strait islands, Papua New Guinea, and eastern Australia. There are 35 species of bird-of-Paradise which live in Papua from 43 species that exist today.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The research method used is a qualitative descriptive method to be able to provide a qualitative description of bird of Paradise, society, and matters related to the facts found in the field. Through qualitative descriptive method that is fact-finding, it is expected to provide an interpretation of the object. Nawawi (1991: 73-76, 81) states that qualitative descriptive research is used to find reality related to objects. This research provides an overview based on the facts obtained from the Papua Institute of Indonesian Cultural Arts (ISBI Papua) and several works of art and architecture in Papua. These facts are expected to provide a clear picture of the application of the color of bird-of-Paradise to the artworks in Papua.

## 3. Results and discussion

Colors can be defined physically and also psychologically. Physically, color is the nature of light emitted, while psychologically it is as part of the experience of sight sense (Swasty, 2010: 6). The emitted light has different wavelengths. The wavelength that can be sensed by humans is 380 to 780 nanometers. Out of these wavelengths, there are ultraviolet waves, X rays, gamma rays, and cosmic rays. Psychologically, the appearance of color can be given to hue (hue of color or color), value (lightness or light-dark color, old color), Chroma (pure-dirty color, brilliant-gloomy color, bright- dim color, color intensity) (Sanyoto, 2005: 9-10)

According to Endah (2011: 2) in his book entitled "Burung dari Surga (A Bird from Heaven)", Bird of Paradise has a very bright feather color with a combination of black, reddish brown, orange, yellow, white, blue, green, and purple. Because of its beauty, British people call it "bird of paradise". The characteristics of small bird of Paradise according to Rand and Gilliard and Cooper and Forshaw that adult male bird of Paradise has green shiny black chins, yellow forehead and neck, yellow front back and lighter brown to the back and tail, deep brown wings, thin yellow upper wing cover, metallic green esophagus and front neck, brown lower belly. The ornamental feathers that come out on the upper hip side are golden yellow on the base and bright white at the ends; on the outer edges, there are a few short yellow feathers that have spotted red blood lines. Middle tail feathers are like wire, yellow iris, gray blue beak and legs, the inside of the mouth is pale green. Female bird of Paradise has blackish brown front head, forehead, and side of the head, chin and throat. The nape of the neck, back of the neck and upper back are light yellow gradually creamy and deep brown; the back (deeper than male), chest to lower tail, and thick are deep brown.

Based on the characteristic identification of bird of Paradise that has been described above, it can be concluded that colors such as black, green, brown, yellow, gray, and white are the basic colors of bird of Paradise. These colors have inspired many artists



Figure 2. Bird of Paradise  
source:[http://static.republika.co.id/uploads/images/inpicture\\_slide/burung-cendrawasih-\\_150412195759-336.jpg](http://static.republika.co.id/uploads/images/inpicture_slide/burung-cendrawasih-_150412195759-336.jpg)



and designers to produce artworks and designs. Many artists and designers in Papua take the idea of the color of bird of Paradise feathers to be used in artworks and designs as the basic color or background color of these artworks. It can be described as follows.

Based on the results of the thematic deepening study on architectural design using the concept of "Architectural Symbolism" by applying the distinctive Papuan emblem, the regional philosophy and culture of Papua region, it is found that the colors of bird of Paradise feathers which are red, brown, yellow, green, and white have the following meanings (Lamia & Karongkong, 2006):

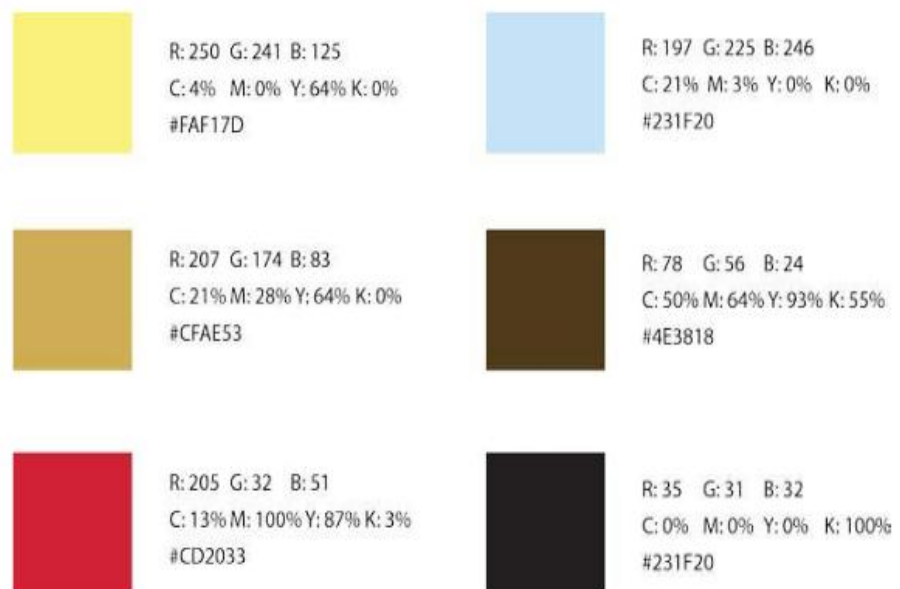
- a. Red: Symbolizes victory.
- b. Brown: Symbolizes peace.
- c. Yellow: Symbolizes cooperation.
- d. Green: Symbolizes hope.
- e. White: Symbolizes simplicity and unity.

Color for Papuans is an important icon for the daily lives of indigenous Papuans besides areca nut. Tribes can be different, but the belief in colors can be the same, especially red and black. These two colors are considered as a symbol of courage and soul determination. Besides, black is considered a symbol of the darkness of Papuans. The other colors which are liked are blue, a symbol of the sea soul; and white, a symbol of holiness. Also, yellow and green colors are popular. The most preferred ones are red and black. These two colors are also chosen by the pride of Papua, Persipura (Papuan Football Club) (Prie, 2012: 3). The conclusions obtained are based on the explanation above, the meaning of red is courage and black is the toughness of the soul. Hence, when combined with the above explanation, the red color is a symbol of victory and courage and black is a symbol of the soul toughness.



Figure 3. Persipura Team Costume Color  
source: Faezya, 2017

In the design of the info graphic video "Noken, Papua Intangible Cultural Heritage" which aims to introduce Noken as a Papuan cultural heritage to the community, the designer prioritizes using yellow and brown tones because these colors are the color of Papuan people (brown) and also is a characteristic of Noken Papua in general (Hidajat & Nathania, 2016). In some parts of the info graphic video, it uses other colors as supporting colors to clarify the information presented. The supporting colors can be seen in the section below.



According to the designer, the use of   
Figure 4. Supporting Colors for Info Graphic Design  
source: Hidaiat & Nathania, 2016

supporting colors for info graphic design is the typical color of Papua and colors in Noken Papua, so that it is considered appropriate and has a relationship with the aesthetic value of the theme chosen. Based on this, the designer sees that the colors used in info graphics to introduce Noken Papua are based on the aesthetic values of the Papuan people and have a close relationship with the lives of the local community.

The inspiration for the colors of bird of Paradise feathers as the base color is also implemented for the basic colors of Papuan batik. Papuan batik is considered having a characteristic that is very different from other regions in Indonesia, where Papuan batik is more "alive" with bright colors (Laksmana, 2010: 21). The unique characteristics of Papuan batik appear on the motives used as illustrations of batik such as images of paradise, tifa, honai houses, fish, and typical geometric patterns of decorative Papuans. The illustrations used are cultural symbols possessed by Papuans. Here is a picture of a very typical Papuan batik.

From November 29 to December 9, 2016, the Indonesian Cultural Arts Institute in Tanah Papua held a workshop for ISBI Papua Land students. The activity, titled Year-End Exhibition and Performance of the Indonesian Institute of Art and Culture (ISBI) in Papua, took place at the Expo Waena Cultural Park, Jayapura City, which is the campus of the ISBI Tanah Papua. The results of the workshop which was realized with performances and art exhibitions featured a collaboration of 50 artists consisting of 25 teaching staff of the Indonesian Art Institute (ISI) Denpasar and 25 artists from Papua and teaching staff at ISBI Tanah Papua (Costa, 2016). The following are the results of the work manifested at a workshop at ISBI Tanah Papua exhibition.



Figure 5. Papuan Batik  
Source: Laksmana, 2010: 22



Figure 6. The Painting works of ISBI students in Tanah Papua  
(Documentation: Wibawa, 2016)

In works of art and design that are realized, whether intentionally or not, the use of the colors of bird of Paradise feathers are still very strong seen in the works made.

In socio-cultural term, the colors of bird of Paradise tend to be referred to as social labels. Social labeling is a kind of "social stamp" addressed by an institution or group of people on socio-cultural realities. Color is created as a label for socio-cultural reality and forms social semiotics which is the meaning formed in society about various socio-cultural realities. Red is the color of blood, but it is often considered "courage". Whereas, for Papuans with different cultural backgrounds, red will mean victory. The meaning of "victory" is a form of social agreement that occurs on the sign. This is reminiscent of the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure in Hoed (2014: 8) which mentions five important things about the sign of language, namely the sign consisting of signifiers (signifiant) and markers (signifie) whose relationship is based on social conventions; 2) Therefore, language is a social symptom that is arbitrary and conventional and consists of social norms that are realized together (langue) and social practice (parole); 3) interpersonal relations are syntagmatic (in-praesentia) and associative (in-absentia); and 4) language can be approached diachronic (development) or synchronous (the system at a certain time); 5) as a social symptom, language consists of two levels, namely the rules of the internal system (langue) and social practice (parole). The meaning of color is formed socially based on what is called the collective consciousness of a society. Collective awareness is the aspect of langue (agreed social rules) and its implementation is a parole aspect. Structurally, this is called associative relations.

Sign is a product of language which is a result of human social interaction. It needs a social agreement in order to represent the world socially reconstructed. The sign in the form of color is a form of representation of the world by humans. As stated by Halliday, social functions are the determinant of a form of language and how it develops (Halliday, 1977; Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1992).



Figure 7. Design works illustration of clothes for ISBI students (Courtesy: Wibawa, 2016)

#### 4. Conclusions

Papua has a wealth of customs and culture. One of them is a traditional ceremony for people who die differently for each tribe. In addition, Papua is also rich in its natural wealth, both flora and fauna. One of the most famous and iconic Papua is bird of Paradise. The word "Cenderawasih" means "the messenger of the Moon Goddess". Based on the characteristics identification of bird of Paradise, it can be concluded that colors such as black, green, brown, yellow, gray, and white are the basic colors of bird of Paradise. These colors have inspired many artists and designers to produce works of art and design. Architecture, fashion, info graphics and works of art have taken much inspiration from the color of the bird's feathers in his works. In socio-cultural term, the colors of bird of Paradise tend to be referred to as social labels. Social labeling is a kind of "social stamp" that is addressed by an institution or group of people to the reality of social culture. Color is created as a label for socio-cultural reality and forms social semiotics which is the meaning formed in society about various socio-cultural realities.

In socio-cultural term, the colors of bird of Paradise tend to be referred to as social labeling. It is a kind of "social stamp" addressed by an institution or group of people on socio-cultural realities. Color is created as a label for socio-cultural reality and forms social semiotics which is the meaning formed in society about social reality. Signs in the form of colors are a form of world representation by socially-reconstructed human.



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