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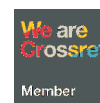
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Article

# The symbolic meaning of the tunis motif of the tanimbar weaving at aesthetic value, applied to clothing in learning fashion design at ciputra university



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## ABSTRACT

Tanimbar weaving, especially the Tunis motif, is one of Indonesia's cultural riches that is rich in historical, philosophical, and aesthetic values. This study explores the symbolic meaning of the Tunis motif in relation to aesthetic values and its application in fashion design at the Fashion Design Department at Ciputra University Surabaya. The Tunis motif, which originates from the Tanimbar Islands, has a deep cultural meaning, representing strength, direction, and protection. This motif is inspired by traditional hunting tools, bows and arrows, which symbolize the readiness and alertness of the Tanimbar people. This study uses Charles Pierce Sander's Triadic Interplay theory, which divides signs into three categories: Representamen (sign), Object (sign reference), and Interpretant (understanding). Through this approach, this study reveals how the Tunis motif functions more than just a decorative element, which acts as a medium for cultural expression and identity. This study applies the Tunis motif in modern fashion design, examining how this motif enhances aesthetic value while preserving cultural heritage. The integration of motifs into contemporary clothing designs not only enriches fashion, but also strengthens the cultural identity of the Tanimbar people. This study highlights the importance of cultural preservation through fashion design innovation and the role of local artisans in the global creative economy. The application of motifs in fashion also supports economic empowerment and sustainability in the creative industry, with potential benefits for the local economy.

## Keywords:

Tanimbar weaving  
Tunis motif  
Fashion design  
Cultural heritage  
Symbolic meaning

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## Introduction

Traditional weaving is one of Indonesia's cultural heritage forms, which not only serves as fabric for clothing needs but also carries deep meaning (Hidayani, 2024). Every region in Indonesia has its own distinct characteristics in terms of cultural values and beauty, one of which is the Tanimbar Ikat Weaving (Batilmurik, 2019). Originating from the Southeast Maluku region, Tanimbar weaving is one of Indonesia's rich textile legacies, steeped in historical, philosophical, and aesthetic values. In the Tanimbar Islands, Maluku, weaving has become a long-standing tradition and a livelihood for the community, especially the women. All women in the Tanimbar Islands are required to possess weaving skills (Sabandar, 2022). For the Tanimbar community, weaving is not only an economic or artistic activity but also an important form of socialization in their daily lives.

Tanimbar weaving patterns are culturally rich, with 47 motifs that have been patented by the government, as stated by the Head of the Cooperatives, SMEs, and Transmigration Office of the

Tanimbar Islands, Ambrosius Sabono: We have 47 motifs that are our pride and wealth in the Tanimbar Islands to make us famous in other regions and internationally (Admin, 2022). Some of the motifs include Motif Lelmuku (Orchid Flower), Motif Sair (Flag), Motif Kembang Enau, Motif Lipan (Millipede), Motif Corn, Motif Tali Tiga, Motif Tunis (Arrow), and Motif Cengkeh. One of the most celebrated motifs of the Tanimbar community is the Tunis motif, which carries a strong symbolic meaning that has been preserved to this day.

The Tunis motif, which depicts the shape of an arrow, is believed to symbolize strength, direction, and protection from ancestors. This design is inspired by the traditional Maluku weapon, the bow and arrow, which not only serves as a hunting tool but also carries deep meanings regarding life, strength, and spirituality in the culture of the Tanimbar people (Kuleng, 2023; Tanjung, 2024). In the context of Charles Peirce's theory of signs and symbols, the Tunis motif is not merely a visual element, but a cultural message that holds significant meaning for the Tanimbar community (Rawung & Mainake, 2020; Rohmaniah, 2021). In fashion design, the Tunis motif is often used for special occasions such as weddings, cultural celebrations, state events, and as souvenirs.

With the passage of time, Tanimbar weaving, particularly the Tunis motif, has undergone adaptation and innovation to maintain its existence. This traditional weaving is now not only used as a cultural fabric but has also evolved in the fashion world (Nuraini & Falah, 2022; Samuel et al., 2022). The Tunis motif, with its beauty and philosophical meaning, is applied in fashion design to enhance aesthetic value and promote cultural preservation that is more dynamic and relevant to modern fashion trends. The intricate and time-consuming process of making Tanimbar weaving makes it a high-value masterpiece, with each piece of weaving crafted with patience and great skill (Soelistyowati & Rahadiyanti, 2025).

The application of the Tunis motif in contemporary fashion reflects an interesting interaction between tradition and modernity. In fashion, this motif becomes an important element that blends local wisdom with the continuously evolving global aesthetic. The transformation of the Tunis motif in fashion not only highlights visual beauty but also conveys a profound symbolic message, increasing appreciation for cultural heritage. The use of this motif in contemporary fashion can enrich fashion designs while also introducing Indonesian cultural values to the international stage. This creates significant opportunities for local artisans to develop a culture-based creative industry.

This study aims to explore the symbolic meaning of the Tunis motif in relation to its aesthetic value and its application in fashion design at Ciputra University, Surabaya. This study provides a deeper understanding of the role of Tanimbar weaving, specifically the Tunis motif, in the fashion and design industry, as well as the importance of cultural preservation through high-value and functional fashion design innovations. The application of the Tunis motif not only enriches fashion designs but also strengthens the cultural identity of the Tanimbar community, while supporting the empowerment of the local economy and the sustainability of a culture-based creative industry.

## Methods

This study uses a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach. According to Sugiyono, descriptive qualitative research is based on the philosophy of postpositivism and is used to investigate natural object conditions, where the researcher acts as the key instrument (Sugiyono, 2022). The research applies Charles Pierce Sander's Triadic Interplay theory, aiming to uncover and understand the symbolic meaning (Soelistyowati, 2022), and its application in fashion design based on design principles and elements following current fashion trends. Data collection is obtained through primary and secondary data.

### Primary Data

In-depth interviews with key informants: Tanimbar weaving artisans, fashion designers, local cultural and customary leaders to gain insights. These interviews explore their experiences and perspectives on interpreting the aesthetic value of the motifs and the symbolic meaning of the motifs in local traditions. Observations involve directly examining the Tanimbar woven fabric, recording

every visual detail, production techniques, and its usage. Documentation consists of photographs and video recordings of the activities.

### Secondary Data

This data is collected from several sources to provide theoretical data or relevant context (Dwija, 2020). The sources include previous research studies, literature reviews in the form of journals, articles, books, magazines, websites, and documents.

## Results and Discussion

The results of data mining from several sources, weaving is not just a skill, but has become an inseparable part of the culture of the Tanimbar people, Maluku, since ancient times. This tradition is passed down from generation to generation, making it more than just handicrafts but also a form of expression, identity, and respect for ancestors. The ability to think in coordination and the skills they have are skills, able to be creative in drawing flat shapes and making precise calculations for weavers (Auliani & Suripah, 2024). In each strand of thread that is assembled with great care, there are stories about life, nature, and social values that are upheld by the Tanimbar people. The distinctive motifs engraved on woven fabrics are not just decorations, but symbols of the journey of history, the relationship between humans and nature, and social status within the community (Titisay et al., 2023). Tanimbar women, with great patience and perseverance, weave using traditional tools using wooden frames of Non-Machine Weaving Tools (ATBM), in order to maintain the authenticity of the techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation. Natural dyes from local plants are used to provide distinctive colors that reflect the natural wealth of Maluku.



**Figure 1** Weaving Activities in the Tanimbar Islands. Source: (Fitriani, 2022).

As discussed earlier, the production of Tanimbar weaving is made from natural materials using traditional looms and features 47 collection motifs, including the Ulerati Motif, Kembang Enau Motif, Cengkeh Motif, Ormanen Kakehan Motif, Lelumuku Motif, Sair (Flag) Motif, Matantur Motif, Eman Matan Lahir Motif, Tunis Motif, and many others (Tanzil et al., 2021).

Weaving is the process of creating fabric by arranging threads horizontally (weft) and vertically (warp) using a loom (Soelistyowati, 2025). The production of ikat weaving involves several stages. The weft thread (horizontal thread) is inserted between the warp threads using a tool called a torak or sekoci. This process is repeated several times to form the pattern and texture of the fabric (Pahlefi, 2021). After the weaving process is completed, the fabric undergoes stages of cutting and finishing.

The Tunis/arrow motif, which remains a classic motif to this day, is a source of pride for the people of the Tanimbar Islands in Maluku. This motif is derived from the shape of the bow and arrow used by the Maluku people for hunting and as a weapon for warfare in the past. The bow and arrow are inseparable and complementary, each serving an important function in producing an effective shot/target. It represents a cooperative synergy aimed at a specific goal. Without the bow, the arrow cannot fly; without the arrow, the bow cannot function as a weapon. Together, they work in harmony to create an accurate and powerful shot to achieve the target.


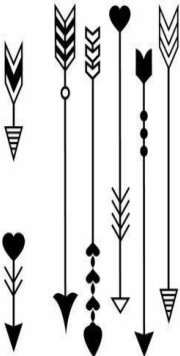
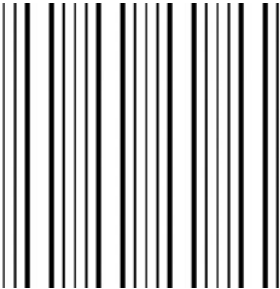
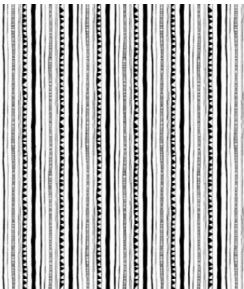




**Figure 2** Cultural Parade of the Maluku Community. Source: (Mc Kab Maluku Tenggara, 2025)

Visual motif analysis of arrow-shaped design flanked by several geometric lines, placed on the sides of the Tunis motif, flanking two sides and creating an aesthetic visual frame. The elements in the design are seen in several motifs combining triangular shapes resembling arrowheads. There is a spear shape with variations in the size of this triangle creating visual dynamics in the placement of vertical geometric line motifs, thick or thin combinations that create a harmonious and balanced arrangement (Soelistyowati, 2025).

**Table 1.** Transformation of Tunis Motifs.

Original Motif	Motif Development
	
	

Source: (Weavers' Collection, 2024)

The Tunisian motif pattern that is arranged regularly and repeatedly creates an interesting and pleasing visual rhythm. The repetition of the motif creates a continuous rhythm, with harmonious colors (Tanzil et al., 2021).



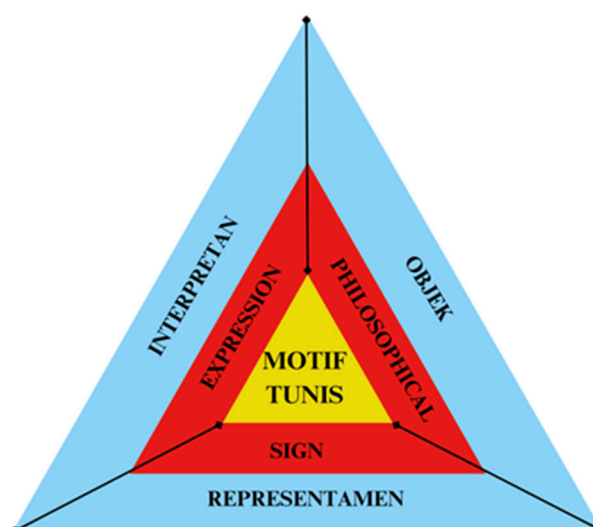
Figure 3 Tunis Motif. Source: (Kuleng, 2023)

The characteristic color choices of this weaving have the exotic natural colors of Maluku. Monochromatic color elements, natural colors are also called "earth tones" or "earth colors. Tanimbar weaving craftsmen make extensive use of nature such as tree colors, such as Tingi (reddish brown), Mahogany (terracotta brown) and Teak (light brown) and Secang Tree (dark brown) (Lor, 2024). Plant colors utilize turmeric plants (yellow), pandan leaves (green) and mangosteen skin (red purple) (Redaksi Kumparan, 2022).



Figure 4 Natural Color of Tanimbar Woven Wood Fiber. Source: Barbalina Elfira Hehanussa Collection, 2024

The analysis of the Tunis motif of Tanimbar ikat weaving is not just a decorative woven fabric but there is a complex sign system, through Charles Pierce Sander's semiotic theory in the journal (Yunus & Muhaemin, 2022), that a concept is used as a means of analyzing a sign that conveys a message of meaning from the results of interpretation. Through the theory of dividing signs into three categories, it can reveal layers of meaning. Analyzing the symbolic meaning of the Tunis motif in Tanimbar weaving according to Charles Pierce Sander's theory divides signs into three main elements. The Triadic Interplay theory in semiotics can be used to analyze the symbolic meaning of the Tunis motif in Tanimbar weaving, namely, 1). Representamen (sign), 2). Object (sign reference), and 3). Interpretant (understanding or meaning).



**Figure 5** Triadic Interplay. Source: Author Document, 2025

**Representamen:** One of the distinctive patterns in the Tanimbar Weaving Tunis Motif is the arrow, which is depicted as a straight line with a pointed triangular tip and repeated geometric vertical lines.

**Sign:** The movement of the sign indicates the dynamism of the arrow in flight, symbolizing direction through the strong, vertical lines. **Object:** The awareness and preparedness symbolized by the Tunis motif, with its arrow shape, reflects the Tanimbar community's vigilance and caution in facing potential threats. **Philosophical:** It mirrors a culture that remains alert and ready to protect itself. The arrow shape, whether singular or double, suggests direction and purpose, signifying readiness to face challenges. **Interpretant:** An exotic aesthetic symbol that reflects local wisdom. The Tunis motif serves as a cultural expression, conveying the values and identity of the Tanimbar people. **Expression:** Interpreting this motif as a symbol of protection may evoke greater confidence in facing challenges. This can be observed in its use in traditional clothing, cultural ceremonies, and artworks. Wearing the Tunis motif radiates confidence and pride, showing appreciation for the beauty and uniqueness of Indonesian culture.

The Tanimbar woven fabric with the Tunis motif is usually worn during important ceremonies such as weddings, traditional rituals, cultural events, and even state events. As seen in the image below, during the 2023 MPR Annual Session, President Joko Widodo wore traditional attire from the Tanimbar Islands, Maluku, featuring the region's iconic ikat woven fabric. The choice of this motif in the attire reflects the president, as the head of state, supporting the elevation of Tanimbar's cultural heritage onto the highest national stage in Indonesia (Zaenuddin, 2023). The leader demonstrates appreciation for preserving Indonesian textile heritage and uses this moment as a promotional opportunity. The selection of this outfit was not made casually when worn by President Joko Widodo, as it considered various aspects, including the implicit meanings behind the Tunis motif. The philosophical value embedded in the motif signifies the purpose of achieving effective shots/targets, providing synergy that aligns with the goal as the head of state. The weaving also reflects the identity of the wearer; in a social context, this motif can symbolize social status and leadership roles.

This study aims to apply the Tunis motif of Tanimbar weaving into fashion, making it suitable for both men's and women's modern clothing designs, without losing its essence as a strong cultural identity. Fashion development, as proposed by Arifah A. Riyanto (2003) in the book *Teori Tata Busana*, states: "Fashion always evolves and develops from year to year. This rotation and development of fashion are influenced by public tastes and the ideas of designers which are reflected in their creations." Based on this foundation, the creation of fashion is influenced by trends that spread to the wider community. However, the emergence of new trends is not spontaneous; it is also shaped by the influence of information technology through the rapidly growing world of social media. The process of trend formation also involves academic testing through field observations and analysis, as well as research on phenomena occurring in society (Santika & Zahra, 2021).





**Figure 6** Tanimbar Woven Cloth with Tunis Motif Worn at State Events. Source: (Zaenuddin, 2023)

Application can be interpreted in various ways, both traditionally and modernly. Several approaches can be designed according to the needs and functions for the wearer. The modern clothing design should still feel light, modest, and flexible, with options such as men's shirts or beskap for formal events, and for women, the design could include a sakcdress, midi/maxi skirts, pants, and outerwear, which can be combined with plain fabrics like linen, rayon, and cotton. Accessories with an ethnic touch can also be added to enhance the appearance, making it more stylish. The goal is to appear fashionable and expressive, suitable for the event and occasion. In general, designers create a moodboard as part of the design planning process to ensure the theme and design harmony. The moodboard concept titled "Harmony in Earthy Hues" conveys a warm, natural, and elegant impression, making it perfect for both casual and semi-formal looks that highlight the beauty of the weaving motifs while harmonizing with a natural color palette. The models in the photos, with natural makeup and wavy hair, wear loose woven fabric garments, paired with wooden and leather accessories.



**Figure 7** Moodboard Concept Ideas. Source: Author Document 2025

An alternative option with a draping technique is ideal for more formal events such as party attire, where a woven draped skirt can be paired with a kebaya top. Structural tailoring can also be used to create formal men's and women's suits, such as office wear, combining blazers with skirts or pants



and formal shirts/blouses. For a modest yet stylish look, a "Modest Officewear" concept can be paired with outerwear such as long blazers, tunics, palazzo pants, and matching hijabs. The Tunis motif can also be mixed and matched with other ethnic motifs in one look, for example, paired with lurik, batik, or other traditional patterns, resulting in a unique and eclectic design. The use of earthy tones or monochromatic colors gives the impression of easy mix-and-match combinations, creating a multilook style. Given the relatively high price of Tanimbar weaving and its lengthy production process, the Tunis motif collection could be developed for a luxury ready-to-wear segment, ethnic casual, or even haute couture. It is ideal for a target market of cultural fashion enthusiasts, ethnic fashion collectors, or fashionistas who prioritize sustainability and value culture in their exclusive fashion choices.

As an appreciation and full support for the government's role in the Tanimbar weaving SMEs, Bank Indonesia has contributed by showcasing officewear designs using Tanimbar ikat weaving, as seen in the photo below. The attire was worn by Bank Indonesia's Ambon-Maluku office staff, with a variety of woven motifs in soft colors, consisting of men's shirt cuts and sack dresses for women. This event is held annually during the Bank Indonesia Annual Meeting at the Ballroom of the Santika Premiere Hotel in Ambon 2024 (Media Center Provinsi Maluku, 2024).



**Figure 8** Bank Indonesia Wearing Tanimbar Woven Clothing. Source: Bank Indonesia Document, Ambon- Maluku 2024, Design By: Soelistyowati, 2024

### Discussion

The Tunis motif, derived from the shape of a bow and arrow, is deeply ingrained in Tanimbar's culture. It symbolizes strength, direction, and protection, reflecting the Tanimbar community's preparedness and alertness in facing challenges. The motif's origin from a weapon used in hunting and warfare highlights its philosophical value, emphasizing the culture's need for both spiritual and physical readiness. In this study, the Triadic Interplay theory of semiotics by Charles Pierce Sander is used to analyze this motif, dividing it into three categories: Representamen (sign), Object (sign reference), and Interpretant (understanding or meaning). This framework reveals that the Tunis motif conveys more than just a decorative pattern—it serves as a cultural message that links Tanimbar weaving to the preservation of its heritage.

Through this lens, the application of the Tunis motif in fashion design can be understood not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a cultural expression. By incorporating such motifs into modern clothing designs, the traditional symbolism of the motif is preserved while also adapting to contemporary needs and trends. The study highlights the successful integration of cultural values into the fashion industry, demonstrating how the Tunis motif can enrich fashion designs while strengthening cultural identity. This dual role supports the empowerment of the local economy and fosters the sustainability of a culture-based creative industry, which is crucial for the development of cultural tourism and local artisans.

The aesthetic value of the motif is evident in its ability to enhance the visual appeal of fashion designs. The rhythmic repetition of geometric lines in the motif, such as the arrow and triangular shapes, creates a pleasing visual dynamic that resonates with modern sensibilities. This motif's earthy tones, such as brown and red hues, derived from natural dyes like mahogany and turmeric, are emblematic of Tanimbar's natural wealth, further reinforcing its connection to the land. These earthy colors are harmonious and versatile, making the Tunis motif applicable to both formal and casual fashion, adding a touch of uniqueness to contemporary clothing.

In applying the Tunis motif to fashion designs, various interpretations arise, from modest office wear for professional settings to ethnic casual wear for everyday use. The inclusion of accessories like ethnic jewelry further enriches the design, making it more expressive and contemporary. Fashion designers have successfully mixed and matched the Tunis motif with other traditional motifs, such as batik and lurik, creating an eclectic and innovative fashion statement. This mixture not only maintains the authenticity of the original designs but also appeals to a broader market, especially among cultural fashion enthusiasts and sustainability-conscious fashionistas.

By integrating the Tunis motif into modern fashion education at Ciputra University, Surabaya, students are not only learning technical fashion skills but also gaining a deeper understanding of cultural preservation. This approach allows students to design with purpose, ensuring that cultural identity and aesthetic value are preserved while meeting the demands of the global fashion industry. The application of such traditional motifs in contemporary designs also positions local artisans as key players in the global fashion scene, providing them with new economic opportunities.

The government's support for SMEs in the Tanimbar weaving sector, as demonstrated by Bank Indonesia's promotion of Tanimbar Ikat Weaving in their annual events, further emphasizes the importance of cultural preservation in modern industry. By showcasing the Tunis motif in official settings, such as the Bank Indonesia Annual Meeting, the government aids in elevating Tanimbar weaving to national prominence, thus supporting both cultural pride and local economic development.

In conclusion, the application of the Tunis motif in fashion design not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of contemporary clothing but also preserves and promotes the cultural identity of the Tanimbar people. Through its integration into fashion education and industry, the motif helps bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, fostering the empowerment of local artisans while contributing to the sustainability of cultural heritage in the creative economy. This study provides a valuable understanding of how cultural symbols, such as the Tunis motif, can be revitalized and applied to modern fashion, enriching both the fashion industry and cultural preservation efforts.

## Conclusion

Research on the symbolic meaning of the Tunis motif from Tanimbar weaving has provided a deeper understanding in learning for the younger generation, especially for students majoring in Fashion Design, Ciputra University, Surabaya, about the aesthetic value and cultural significance in the context of fashion design. This study successfully shows that the Tunis motif, which originally came from traditional hunting tools, functions as a profound cultural symbol as protection, direction, and strength for the Tanimbar community. Its integration into contemporary fashion design reflects an effective blend of tradition and modernity, allowing the preservation of cultural heritage while adapting to current fashion trends.

Through the use of Charles Pierce Sander's semiotic theory, this study highlights how the Tunis motif is not only a decorative element, but also a cultural sign that has many meanings. This understanding is very important in promoting the role of cultural symbols in the fashion industry, where motifs can enrich designs while strengthening the cultural identity of the community. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the economic potential of these cultural expressions, because the application of these motifs in fashion design supports the empowerment of local craftsmen and contributes to the sustainability of the creative economy.

In conclusion, this study underlines the importance of maintaining and promoting traditional cultural elements, such as the Tunis motif, in the global fashion industry. As a suggestion, future research can focus on exploring other traditional motifs and their applications.

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