

Javanese Fashion on the Small Screen: Sustaining Tradition through Costume in *Gadis Kretek Series*

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Abstract. *This study examines how Javanese traditional aesthetics are preserved and recontextualized through costume characters in the Gadis Kretek film series. As visual media increasingly shapes contemporary fashion discourse, film operates as a cultural agent that constructs and communicates meanings of traditional dress within specific socio-cultural contexts. In Gadis Kretek, costume design is not merely decorative but is deeply embedded in the narrative, representing Javanese women's identities within the socio-historical context of kretek culture. The series portrays women across different social positions, from aristocratic figures to female laborers in the kretek industry, where costume becomes a key visual element in expressing class distinction, gender roles, and cultural expectations. This research employs a qualitative approach using visual semiotic analysis, focusing on denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings of costume elements. The analysis explores how visual elements such as kebaya, batik motifs, textile materials, and accessories function as cultural signs that reflect social hierarchy, femininity, labor identity, and historical context. Particular attention is given to how variations in material quality, silhouette, and styling construct contrasting representations of Javanese women. The findings show that costume characters function as cultural signifiers that articulate Javanese femininity, class distinction, and labor identity, while also reinforcing cultural narratives rooted in tradition. At the same time, the use of traditional materials and craftsmanship reflects values aligned with sustainable fashion practices, particularly in terms of cultural preservation, local knowledge transmission, and continuity of artisanal practices. This study highlights how film, through costume design, not only preserves Javanese traditional aesthetics but also actively reinterprets them within contemporary visual culture.*

Keywords: Javanese Traditional Fashion, Sustainable Fashion, Traditional Aesthetics, Costume Characters, Film Series, Semiotics

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana estetika tradisional Jawa dipertahankan dan direkontekstualisasikan melalui kostum karakter dalam serial film Gadis Kretek. Dalam konteks media visual yang semakin memengaruhi diskursus mode kontemporer, film berperan sebagai agen budaya yang membentuk dan mengomunikasikan makna busana tradisional dalam konteks sosial budaya tertentu. Dalam Gadis Kretek, desain kostum tidak hanya bersifat dekoratif, tetapi juga terintegrasi secara mendalam dalam narasi, merepresentasikan identitas perempuan Jawa dalam konteks sosio-historis budaya kretek. Film ini menampilkan perempuan dalam berbagai posisi sosial, mulai dari kelas aristokrat hingga pekerja perempuan di industri kretek, di mana kostum menjadi elemen visual utama dalam merepresentasikan perbedaan kelas, peran gender, dan ekspektasi

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budaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis semiotika visual, dengan mengkaji makna denotatif, konotatif, dan mitologis dari elemen kostum. Analisis ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana elemen visual seperti kebaya, motif batik, material tekstil, dan aksesoris berfungsi sebagai tanda budaya yang merepresentasikan hierarki sosial, femininitas, identitas kerja, dan konteks historis. Perhatian khusus diberikan pada bagaimana perbedaan kualitas material, siluet, dan gaya membentuk representasi yang kontras terhadap perempuan Jawa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kostum dalam film berfungsi sebagai penanda budaya yang mengartikulasikan femininitas Jawa, perbedaan kelas sosial, serta identitas kerja, sekaligus memperkuat narasi budaya yang berakar pada tradisi. Selain itu, penggunaan material tradisional dan praktik kriya mencerminkan nilai-nilai yang selaras dengan prinsip mode berkelanjutan, terutama dalam pelestarian budaya, transmisi pengetahuan lokal, dan keberlanjutan praktik kerajinan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa film, melalui desain kostum, tidak hanya melestarikan estetika tradisional Jawa, tetapi juga secara aktif menginterpretasikannya kembali dalam konteks budaya visual kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Busana Tradisional Jawa, Mode Berkelanjutan, Traditional Aesthetics, Kostum Karakter, Serial Film, Semiotika

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is changing, moving away from fast consumption toward more responsible and sustainable practices. This shift is driven by environmental concerns, greater consumer awareness, and renewed interest in cultural heritage. Slow fashion now challenges fast fashion by prioritizing long-term value, quality, local craftsmanship, and cultural preservation. Heritage fashion, as part of this trend, incorporates traditional forms and techniques into modern design, helping to preserve and keep cultural traditions alive.

Building upon this transformation in fashion values, visual media, particularly films, has become an influential agent in sustaining and promoting these narratives. As Bartlett et al. [1] note, the visual consumption of fashion through digital and cinematic platforms increasingly shapes public perception of trends, often more effectively than conventional fashion shows. Film's capacity for immersive storytelling and its ability to integrate costume design into character, setting, and narrative make it a powerful medium for both preserving and reinterpreting traditional aesthetics. In this way, costumes function as signifiers of identity, social class, and ideology, can become tools for transmitting cultural meaning to a broad audience [2][3].

This interplay between fashion and film is particularly evident in Indonesia, where traditional clothing such as *kebaya* and *jarik* has regained public interest as a means of expressing cultural identity. However, as Nugraha [4] emphasizes, genuine preservation is necessary to ensure these traditions retain their authenticity and meaning. This aligns with the principles of sustainable fashion, which prioritize cultural heritage alongside environmental and social considerations. Through careful costume design, films can not only enhance visual storytelling but also reinforce the significance of traditional dress in the modern era.

A compelling example of this phenomenon is the Indonesian Netflix Series *Gadis Kretek* (2023), which exemplifies this dynamic. Adapted from Ratih Kumala's 2012 novel of the same name and directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfanyah, the five-episode series blends romance, history, and cultural heritage within a dual timeline narrative set in the 1960s and early 2000s [5]. Central to this study is the character Jeng Yah, portrayed by Dian Sastrowardoyo, who consistently wears a *kebaya janggan*. This sartorial choice functions not only as a historically accurate costume but also as a visual symbolic anchor for themes of resilience, femininity, and Javanese identity.

Beyond its narrative and aesthetic strengths, *Gadis Kretek* earned both critical and popular acclaim, winning Best Miniseries at Seoul International Drama Awards 2024 and topping Netflix's Global Top 10 non-English TV shows, including number one in Indonesia

for two weeks [6]. Critics praise its meticulous costume design, cinematography, and cultural depth. Viewers highlight the *kebaya janggan* as an iconic visual element, enhancing cultural resonance. The enthusiastic reception underscores the impact of costume design in invigorating traditional dress and cultural themes within popular media.

This study examines the connection between film, fashion, and cultural preservation through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and the Cultural Sustainability Model by Larissa and Titisari [7]. It examines how the costume design in *Gadis Kretek* helps keep traditional styles relevant. By examining the meanings behind these costumes, the research aims to demonstrate how movies can influence people's perceptions of heritage fashion and promote sustainable cultural practices.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach to analyze how *Gadis Kretek* contributes to the sustainability of traditional aesthetics through costume design. The primary goal is to decode the cultural and ideological meanings embedded in the traditional clothing worn by the characters, particularly through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Larissa & Titisari's Cultural Sustainability Model [7].

The research employs a visual semiotic analysis to explore the multilayered meanings of the costumes in *Gadis Kretek*. As Barthes [3] proposed, semiotics allow for a detailed breakdown of fashion items as signifiers that carry denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. In the context of this study, costume elements such as *kebaya*, batik, and accessories will be treated as visual texts that reflect gender roles, national identity, and social ideologies embedded in Javanese culture.

Data Collection

The primary data for this research is gathered through a systematic visual analysis of selected scenes from the *Gadis Kretek* film series. These scenes were carefully chosen based on their narrative significance and the presence of key costume elements. Focused on the main characters, especially Jeng Yah (Dasiyah), the analysis examines how the design and details of each costume visually communicate character traits, social class, and historical contexts. The visual texts of these costumes serve as symbols that reveal deeper cultural meanings beyond their mere appearance.

To deepen the analysis, a literature review was conducted to support the theoretical framework and contextualize the findings. In addition, cultural sustainability models such as Larissa & Titisari's framework [7], which integrates aspects of traditional aesthetics within sustainable fashion, will be used to evaluate the extent to which traditional clothing practices align with broader sustainable fashion principles.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows a three-step process to interpret the visual costumes through the lens of Barthes' semiotic theory, focusing on the Traditional Aesthetics dimension of Larissa & Titisari's [7] Cultural Sustainability Model.

1. Identification of Visual Signs: Each costume is analyzed for its denotative elements
2. Connotative Analysis: The next step involves interpreting the cultural meaning of the costumes.
3. Mythological Analysis: Finally, the analysis focuses on the mythological significance of the costumes, exploring how they represent cultural values, gender roles, and national identity.

Focusing on Traditional Aesthetics, this study emphasizes how the film acts as a cultural agent, preserving and promoting Javanese traditions through authentic costume design. The use of traditional textiles, motifs, and style contributes to the visual storytelling and the broader movement of sustainable fashion that incorporates local craftsmanship, cultural memory, and historical continuity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film, Costume & Fashion

Culture relies on shared meanings that are communicated through a common language that plays a crucial role in expressing cultural values and transmitting meaning. These meanings influence how individuals behave and interact, forming the norms, rules, and social practices that govern everyday [8]. Corrigan and White [9] further emphasize that film is a work of art, richly layered with cultural practices. Film is a powerful medium that can be used in transmitting different ideologies and preserving cultural values. In the western world, films have been used to strategically position foreign culture and sell it subtly on a global scale to other nations who eventually adopt western cultural values [10]. Films also act as conveyors of history; they allow the audience to experience past events [10]. Film was a new object for human sciences, offering insight specifically because of its status as a collective medium which both reflected and formed collective psychology and social culture [11]. Film continues as an important object of study within communications and cultural analysis [11].

Film functions as a powerful medium not only for storytelling but also for expressing cultural meaning, which justifies its analytical use. The relationship between film and fashion is complex, as they are interconnected but remain distinct. According to Booth Moore, costume design serves the demands of narrative, while fashion design is driven by the creation of desire. Costumes in film play a vital role in shaping and revealing character identity. They support the actor's performance and emphasize that identity is socially constructed and contextual. In this sense, costumes function as tools of social epistemology, offering insight into identity, embodiment, and social norms. Costume films are often criticized for being inauthentic and superficial. Much of the scholarly critique surrounding them reflects a distrust of their underlying agendas, arguing that they tend to uphold bourgeois values and offer a conservative, idealized version of history [12]. The continual evolution of women's clothing expresses female sexuality and identity in ways that can challenge traditional gender roles and symbolic norms based on stability. In contrast, conventional male attire, with its rigid and phallic symbolism, remains static serving as an unyielding counterpoint to the fluidity of female fashion [13].

According to Malcolm Barnard [2], clothing meanings can be understood through two distinct yet complementary levels: denotation and connotation, each functioning independently. These concepts are useful for interpreting meaning not only in garments but also in visual media such as illustrations, film, and photography. If we accept that fashion plays a role in shaping personal image, then these semiotic frameworks apply broadly across both two- and three-dimensional representations [2]. Cinema adopted costume as a compelling visual element to captivate audiences, drawing on the fluid and dynamic aesthetic of Fuller's choreography. In early films, costumes, movements, and time were closely integrated, especially in the serpentine dance, illustrating how cinema could both capture and actively produce visual imagery [1].

Fashion and culture are both social and material practices shaped by ongoing change and continuity. Their interaction reflects everyday and global contradictions. Analyzing them together shows how fashion represents change within continuity, while culture emphasizes continuity within change. Both help us understand how different processes coexist and influence each other [14].

Fashion films are creative audiovisual works that combine fashion, storytelling, and visual aesthetics to create immersive experiences. They emphasize emotion, beauty, and narrative rather than direct product display, often featuring symbolic representations of style and identity. Drawing on mythic structures and familiar archetypes, fashion films communicate cultural values and offer a sensorial form of visual seduction [15]. The moving image provides a powerful way to present fashion by adding a performative and immersive sensory experience. Its widespread presence today suggests that Barthes would likely consider fashion film a key component of *The Fashion System* [1]. Barthes describes myth as having a persuasive and assertive nature, emerging from specific historical conditions and rooted in particular contexts [1].

Fashion, much like *pastiche*, is often seen as a process of borrowing and reworking styles, frequently from the distant past. It is characterized by constant stylistic change and has been criticized for taking elements from history and other cultures without genuine understanding or respect. This careless appropriation reflects the kind of superficiality Jameson associates with postmodernity [2]. One of the ironies of modern national dress is its frequently nostalgic relationship to what has been called rural, peasant, or ethnic attire [14]. Fashion provides a space to reexamine bodily identity and its lived, embodied meaning. However, fashion also imposes aesthetic and moral norms that can obscure or fabricate restrictive and exclusionary identities. Body image within fashion is deeply racialized, often prioritizing white beauty ideals. Understanding the link between fashion and identity becomes clearer when explored through the lens of stylistic expression [16].

Film, costume, and fashion are closely connected in shaping cultural expression. Film conveys shared values and social norms, while costume helps define character identity and reflects social structures. Fashion contributes through changing styles, visual codes, and symbolic meaning, often shaped by history, myth, and narrative. Together, they form a visual language that reflects how people understand identity, culture, and appearance in everyday and mediated life.

Building upon the relationship between film, fashion, and costume, it is essential to contextualize traditional Javanese clothing as a culturally embedded system of meaning. Traditional garments such as kebaya and batik function not only as aesthetic objects but also as cultural signifiers that communicate identity, social values, and historical continuity within Javanese society. In cultural and fashion studies, dress is understood as a form of non-verbal communication through which material, silhouette, and ornamentation encode culturally specific meanings. Recent studies in costume and textile research highlight that traditional dress operates as a repository of collective memory, preserving myths, beliefs, and socio-historical narratives embedded within communities, thereby positioning clothing as a medium through which cultural ideology is visually reproduced [17]. Furthermore, clothing has been identified as a key expression of identity and social meaning, reflecting the dynamic relationship between individuals, culture, and environment [18]. In addition, cross-cultural design studies demonstrate that costume elements, including motifs and visual symbols, function as carriers of culturally embedded meanings that enable audiences to interpret identity and social positioning through appearance [19]. In this sense, traditional Javanese costume can be interpreted not merely as heritage attire, but as a semiotic system that constructs layered meanings, ranging from visible form to cultural symbolism and mythological narratives. Within visual media such as film, these meanings are amplified, allowing costume to function as both a narrative device and a cultural medium that sustains and rearticulates traditional aesthetics in contemporary contexts.

Film & Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion marks a significant shift in the global fashion industry from rapid, disposable consumption toward a more responsible and enduring approach. This

transformation is driven by ecological concerns, rising consumer awareness, and a renewed appreciation for cultural heritage [20]. In this context, *heritage fashion* has emerged as a creative practice that revives traditional values, forms, and techniques within contemporary design. These practices sustain cultural identity [7], preserve artisanal skills and promote economic resilience in local communities [21].

To conceptualize this relationship between tradition and sustainability, this study draws on the Cultural Sustainability Model by Larissa & Titisari [7], which identifies five interrelated dimensions; environmental, social, economic, design (traditional aesthetics), and indigenous. This framework serves as the analytical foundation for understanding how traditional fashion elements, such as the *kebaya janggan* in *Gadis Kretek*, contribute to sustainable fashion practices in contemporary media.

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of fashion. Films can popularize certain styles and renew interest in traditional clothing, fostering sustainable practices that value durability and timeless design [2]. Digital platforms, particularly Instagram, are reshaping consumer interaction with fashion by enabling active trend participation and opening opportunities to promote eco-friendly and tradition-based designs [1].

In cinema, costumes often carry symbolic weight that goes beyond appearance. They can communicate social, cultural, and psychological narratives [3]. Through the lens of semiotics, costumes function as signifiers that carry layered meanings; denotative, connotative, and mythological [3]. Representation of traditional aesthetics in popular works can further strengthen sustainable fashion initiatives [22]. However, Niinimäki [23] cautions against superficial appropriation, urging that designs balance aesthetics with ethical production and ecological care.

Hall's theory of cultural representation emphasizes that visual culture, including costume design in film, shapes public perceptions of identity and heritage [9]. The integration of traditional aesthetics into contemporary media, exemplified by the *kebaya janggan* consistently worn by Jeng Yah in the Netflix series *Gadis Kretek*, demonstrates how fashion can serve as both a cultural repository and a driver of sustainable practices. Guided by Hall's theory of cultural representation, which underscores the role of visual culture in shaping perceptions of identity and heritage and framed by the Cultural Sustainability Model by Larissa & Titisari [7], this approach highlights how thoughtful costume design can preserve cultural identity while fostering environmental responsibility, social empowerment, and aesthetic continuity. Through the combined influence of cinema, digital platforms, and heritage-inspired design, traditional fashion not only maintains its relevance but also inspires a shift toward more conscious and enduring fashion consumption.

DISCUSSION

***Gadis Kretek* (Cigarette Girl)**

Gadis Kretek (Cigarette Girl) [24] is an Indonesian drama series adapted from Ratih Kumala's novel. It was released globally on Netflix on November 2, 2023, following its premiere at Busan International Film Festival in October 2023. Directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfanyah, the series is produced by Base Entertainment and Fourcolours Films, with five episodes running 58-74 minutes. The main cast includes Dian Sastrowardoyo (Dasiyah/Jeng Yah), Ario Bayu (Soeraja), Arya Saloka (Lebas), and Putri Marino (Arum) [24].

Set between the 1960s and early 2000s, the story follows Leba's journey in search of Jeng Yah at the final request of his father, Soeraja. As the narrative unfolds through flashbacks, it reveals their love story, the intrigue of the *kretek* business, and the socio-political dynamics of the era. Notably, a key visual throughout is Jeng Yah's consistent

appearance in the *janggan kebaya*, a type of *kebaya* characterized by a high collar and slanted buttons, which becomes a symbol of steadfast character and strong cultural identity [24].



Figure 1. Thumbnail of *Gadis Kretek* (Cigarette Girl) on Netflix. Source: Netflix.

In the series, the *kebaya* functions as a semiotic device, signifying not only social status but also the expression of Javanese cultural values and the persistence of tradition amid social change. This research interrogates the *kebaya* as both a visual and narrative symbol, arguing that its representation in the series articulates traditional aesthetics while intersecting with contemporary fashion discourses.

Identification of Visual Signs

The following table categorizes the visual appearances of Jeng Yah in *Gadis Kretek*, focusing on *kebaya* type and color, motif, accessories, style, and episode time stamp. This categorization is intended to support a semiotic analysis using Roland Barthes’ three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth.

The purpose is twofold: first, to document costume details with precision for cultural and cinematic interpretation; second, to organize these details in a way that reveals visual patterns, contrasts, and narrative transitions across episodes.

Five key indicators are applied: episode and time stamp, *kebaya* type and color, motif, accessories, and style. Episode and time stamp ensure accurate referencing of each visual moment. *Kebaya* type and color capture silhouette, style, and chromatic changes that often signify shifts in mood, social standing, or thematic emphasis. Motif records decorative patterns with cultural and symbolic resonance. Accessories, such as brooches and earrings, function as signs of status and personal expression. Style refers to the complete visual arrangement of the costume, including coordination with the bottom cloth, which shapes the overall character presentation.

Jeng Yah is selected as the sole focus because her costumes display the most coherent and visually meaningful progression throughout the series. Across episodes, her wardrobe undergoes a deliberate transformation from dark-toned *kebaya janggan* richly adorned with gold accessories, projecting authority and adherence to aristocratic values, to lighter-toned *kebaya* with simpler embellishments, suggesting openness, reconciliation, and inner peace. This consistency in traditional *kebaya* use, combined with clear shifts in color, motif, and styling, makes Jeng Yah’s wardrobe a central semiotic device that embodies her

social status, personal journey, and cultural identity. Concentrating on her appearances reduces analytical distractions and allows for a richer reading of how traditional aesthetics operate as a visual language within the film's narrative.

Table 1 to 5 presents the condensed observation of Jeng Yah's costume elements across *Gadis Kretek* episodes 1–5. The data includes *kebaya* type & color, motif, accessories, hairstyle, and bottom cloth.

Table 1. Identification of *Kebaya* in episode 1. Source: Netflix.

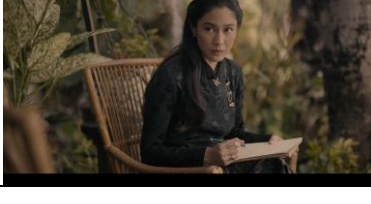
Still	Time Mark	<i>Kebaya</i> Type & Color	Motif	Style & Accessories
	00:06:50	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Large gold brooch on chest, gold stud earrings, tightly styled bun (<i>sanggul tekuk</i>), batik.
	00:09:30	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, small gold stud earrings, tight bun, batik <i>parang</i> .
	00:38:05	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Large brooch, gold stud earrings, half up twist.
	00:41:25	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Large gold brooch, gold earrings, tight bun.
	00:47:08	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Large gold brooch, small gold earrings, half up twist.

Table 2. Identification of *Kebaya* in episode 2. Source: Netflix.

Still	Time Mark	<i>Kebaya</i> Type & Color	Motif	Style & Accessories
	00:08:53	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Large gold brooch, gold earrings, half up twist, batik

	00:13:00	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, braided.
	00:23:00	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Large brooch, gold earrings, tight bun, batik.
	00:24:50	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Brooch, small earrings, half up.
	00:34:22	<i>Janggan</i> -Black	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, small earrings, half up, batik.
	00:47:11	<i>Janggan</i> -Black	Floral & leaf	Large brooch, gold earrings, half up.
	00:47:31	<i>Janggan</i> -Black	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, half up.
	00:50:40	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Silver brooch, silver necklace, silver earrings, tight bun.

Table 3. Identification of *Kebaya* in episode 3. Source: Netflix.

Still	Time Mark	<i>Kebaya</i> Type & Color	Motif	Style & Accessories
	00:05:59	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, half bun, batik.

	00:10:35	<i>Janggan</i> – Black Fabric transparent	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, half up, batik.
	00:20:11	<i>Janggan</i> – Black Fabric lace	Floral & leaf	Large brooch, gold earrings, half up.
	00:37:21	<i>Janggan</i> - Black	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, half up.

Table 4. Identification of *Kebaya* in episode 4. Source: Netflix.

Still	Time Mark	<i>Kebaya</i> Type & Color	Motif	Style & Accessories
	00:53:24	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Leaf	Small gold brooch, gold earrings, tight bun.

Table 5. Identification of *Kebaya* in episode 5. Source: Netflix.

Still	Time Mark	<i>Kebaya</i> Type & Color	Motif	Style & Accessories
	00:16:20	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, simple bun, batik.
	00:18:50	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Plain	Small brooch, simple bun, batik.
	00:19:27	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Simple bun.

	00:24:20	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, sanggul.
	00:24:54	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Simple bun
	00:26:40	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, simple bun.
	00:27:24	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Small brooch, gold earrings, simple bun.
	00:28:45	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Simple bun
	00:34:10	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Small gold brooch, simple bun, batik.
	00:54:48	<i>Janggan</i> - White	Floral & leaf	Gold brooch, gold earrings, simple bun, batik.

Across *Gadis Kretek* Episodes 1–3, Jeng Yah consistently appears in the *janggan kebaya* in deep black tones, adorned with floral and leaf motifs. This combination is accessorized with large gold brooches, gold stud earrings, and a tight *sanggul tekuk* hairstyle, paired with dark batik *jarik* in *parang*, *kawung*, or floral motifs. The *kebaya*, as Trismaya [25] notes, serves as both a national symbol and a medium for expressing personal, gender, class, and cultural identities, making these early appearances a clear projection of authority and social prestige.

In Episode 2, two exceptions appear: a white encim *kebaya* with floral and leaf

embroidery (00:12:29), paired with a smaller brooch, thin dangling earrings, and a loose bun, and a grey *janggan kebaya* (00:50:40) with a neutral-tone brooch, small earrings, and a simple bun. These deviations visually suggest at subtle shifts in demeanor and narrative positioning.

By Episodes 4–5, Jeng Yah transitions into white *janggan kebaya* with variations in motif (floral & leaf, plain, or leaf-only). Accessories are notably more minimal and small brooches or none, and the hairstyle becomes a simple bun. Batik *jarik* in this phase lightens in both tone and motif, often adopting floral or *parang* designs in softer shades. This visual simplification parallels what Condronogoro [26] observes about *kebaya* adaptation, where traditional forms can be reinterpreted in response to evolving personal and cultural contexts.

Kebaya as Cultural Social Sign

Dasiyah consistently wears a black-and-white *kebaya janggan*, adhering to the Javanese court conventions (*pakem*) described by Trismaya [25] and Condronogoro [26]. The long straight cut (*janggan*) signals formality and continuity with tradition, while the black color conveys solemnity and authority and white symbolizes purity and moral integrity. This choice of costume positions Dasiyah not only within the 1960s kretek industry setting but also within the socio-cultural hierarchy of the time, signaling her ethical and social stance. Other female characters, by contrast, wear simpler or single-colored *kebayas*, highlighting Dasiyah’s distinct role and identity.

Eicher [27] explains that clothing communicates behavioral and social meaning within temporal and cultural contexts. In this case, the *kebaya janggan* conveys Dasiyah’s integration into both the historical setting of the 1960s kretek industry and the broader cultural narrative of Javanese womanhood. Nordholt [28] further highlights that garments are extensions of the body and social identity; thus, Dasiyah’s attire becomes a visual manifestation of her personal and social self, mediating the audience’s perception of her role and values.

The *kebaya janggan* is an active element of the film’s *mise en scène*, shaping the narrative visually. For instance, in Episode 2 [00:12:45], Dasiyah enters the kretek factory wearing her black-and-white *kebaya*, setting her apart from other female characters who wear simpler or single-colored *kebayas*. The *kebaya janggan* bridges historical authenticity and modern narrative demands, allowing the audience to engage emotionally with Dasiyah while simultaneously connecting to broader cultural heritage. Trismaya [25] notes that clothing mediates between personal identity and societal norms, a principle clearly reflected in the costume design choices. Condronogoro [26] highlights that the black-and-white *kebaya janggan* embodies both the aesthetic principles of the Kraton (palace) and a coded moral narrative. In *Gadis Kretek*, this dual function enhances the semiotic richness of the film, making Dasiyah’s attire a central narrative device.

Semiotic Analysis

The semiotic analysis will group data by episode, as each episode presents distinct visual signs, such as colors, patterns, accessories, and hairstyles, that together create a mood and reflect a stage in the character's development. Analyzing each episode separately clarifies how meanings shift over time, from a formal and authoritative presence through transitions to a more stable, softer leadership style. This method ensures that the analysis of denotation, connotation, and myth captures the narrative in the costume changes, rather than combining them into one interpretation.

Table 6. Semiotic analysis. Source: Author.

Episode	Denotation (Physical Description)	Connotation (Symbolism / Social Meaning)	Myth (ideological narrative)
1	Long <i>janggan kebaya</i> , black bodice with white trim, fitted cut, high collar; paired with patterned batik skirt	Black = authority, solemnity; White = purity, moral integrity; indicates composure and emerging social leadership	Dasiyah introduced as morally upright, culturally rooted, socially responsible; costume establishes narrative centrality
2	Black-and-white <i>janggan kebaya</i> , side-fastened buttons, embroidered sash; subtle variations in trim and collar across scenes	Differentiates Dasiyah from peers; ceremonial and social significance; emphasizes ethical strength, resilience, and poise	Costume functions as visual motif tracking character development; embodies ideal Javanese womanhood; semiotic bridge between tradition and modern narrative
3	Full-length black <i>janggan</i> , minimal white details; occasionally paired with batik skirt or sash depending on scene	Highlights formal authority and emotional tension; maintains continuity of character identity	Semiotic cues of internal conflict and moral deliberation; Dasiyah embodies cultural maturity and stability; reinforces narrative and ethical ideals
4	Black-and-white <i>janggan</i> with subtle brocade or embroidered motifs; high collar maintained throughout	Signals ceremonial participation and elevated social status; emphasizes grace, discipline, and poise	Costume conveys cultural legitimacy, respect for Kraton (palace) aesthetics, and emotional maturity; reinforces Dasiyah's role as moral and narrative anchor
5	Black <i>janggan</i> , minimal white trim; consistent silhouette and traditional accessories	Represents resolution of character arc; maintains visual and moral consistency; reinforces ethical and social identity	Semiotic closure: Dasiyah embodies ideal feminine virtues, moral integrity, and cultural continuity; costume as narrative device symbolizing the convergence of tradition, identity, and modern storytelling

Semiotic Reading of Traditional Aesthetic Indicators in *Gadis Kretek*

The analysis of Jeng Yah's costumes through Larissa & Titisari's seven traditional aesthetic indicators reveals how the film's wardrobe design functions as a complex visual language, where denotation, connotation, and myth interact to communicate cultural meaning.

1. The use of **natural materials**, In Episode 2, the black-and-white *janggan kebaya* with side-fastened buttons and traditional embroidery conveys the impression of handcrafted attire linked to local materials, visually positioned within a *craft* tradition associated with natural resources. Episode 3 presents a plain black *janggan* with minimal ornamentation, highlighting the fabric's texture and reinforcing associations with natural fibers and simple dyeing practices of traditional textiles, evoking a sense of *ecological authenticity*. In Episode 4, the inclusion of brocade and fine embroidery references *heritage craft* historically rooted in natural dyes and materials, while its placement within the palace strengthens cultural legitimacy and the narrative of continuity. Episode 5 concludes with a consistent black *janggan* silhouette, affirming the continuity of tradition and identity, where the costume functions as a symbol of wholeness and cultural sustainability seen in the black *janggan kebaya* paired with *sogan* batik and gold brooch.
2. **Craftsmanship** emerges in the white *kebaya* with tailored modifications and batik pairing, where precise cutting and embroidery reveal mastery of inherited techniques. This reflects Eicher's [27] assertion that garments produced with artisanal skill embody enduring cultural meaning. In the mythical sense, the *kebaya* becomes a cultural monument and proof of generational knowledge.
3. The indicator of **product attachment** is evident in the repeated visual presence of the black *kebaya* with *sogan* batik and gold brooch. Denotatively, it is the same garment reused across episodes. Connotatively, it signifies emotional and identity attachment.

Mythologically, it transforms into a “second skin” that mirrors Barnard’s [2] argument that clothing can form a lasting communicative bond between person and garment.

4. **Historical value** is reinforced through the white *kebaya* with classic batik in period-specific scenes. Denotatively accurate to the era depicted, it evokes nostalgia and situates the narrative within a historically coherent visual frame. Fletcher’s perspective [20] supports this by noting that historical dress codes in visual narratives preserve cultural memory and bridge temporal gaps between past and present.
5. The **preservation of cultural value** appears in the white brocade *kebaya* with formal accessories, which connotatively conveys propriety, etiquette, and cultural pride. In the mythic sense, it casts the wearer as a custodian of tradition. This is consistent with Bartlett et al.’s [1] argument that traditional fashion in film can act as a cultural ambassador that maintains aesthetic continuity.
6. The use of **local images**, particularly the black *janggan kebaya* with *sogan* batik featuring Yogyakarta court motifs, visually asserts a place-based identity. Connotatively, it positions the wearer as a representative of regional heritage. Niinimäki [29] links this to increased cultural literacy when local motifs are incorporated into fashion. Mythologically, it frames the character as a cultural envoy to both national and international audiences.
7. Finally, **traditional fabric** is celebrated in the white *kebaya* with *jarik* batik. Denotatively, it is instantly recognizable as a heritage textile. Connotatively, it normalizes batik in everyday contexts rather than limiting it to ceremonial wear. Mythologically, batik is treated as a cultural language in which each motif is a symbolic utterance. This resonates with Larissa & Titisari’s emphasis on traditional textiles as both aesthetic and socio-cultural assets, and with Barnard’s framing of fashion as cultural storytelling.

Overall, the semiotic reading reveals that *Gadis Kretek* uses costume not simply as decorative realism but as a layered system of signs. Each garment carries forward the visual codes of traditional aesthetics while embedding them in the evolving narrative arcs of the characters, allowing film to act as both a preservation medium and a space for the rearticulation of cultural myths.

CONCLUSION

A semiotic analysis of the costumes in *Gadis Kretek* reveals that the series consistently employs *traditional aesthetics* to construct character narratives while sustaining the relevance of traditional dress within the global fashion landscape. The *Janggan Kebaya*, *sogan* batik, and intricate craftsmanship function across Barthes’s three levels: as visible forms (denotation), as carriers of socio-cultural meaning (connotation), and as ideological narratives (myth) about authority, femininity, and local identity.

The film’s contribution to sustaining fashion lies in its effective integration of Larissa & Titisari’s seven traditional aesthetic indicators [7] into a popular cultural product without sacrificing authenticity of form or symbolic value. The use of natural materials, craftsmanship, traditional fabrics, and local imagery reinforces cultural sustainability while also aligning with ecological and social dimensions as discussed by Fletcher [20] and Niinimäki [29].

From a critical perspective, however, this representation remains centered on a middle-to-upper-class Javanese aesthetic, narrowing the scope of “local image” and limiting inclusivity toward Indonesia’s broader ethnic diversity. Furthermore, while the costumes successfully promote traditional fashion, the ecological sustainability message is not made explicit within the narrative, resulting in a stronger impact at the symbolic and cultural levels rather than on actual consumer practice.

The implication is that *Gadis Kretek* demonstrates the significant potential of film as a platform for preserving and reinterpreting traditional aesthetics within *sustainable*

fashion. However, to transform symbolic representation into tangible cultural and industrial change, a more inclusive visual strategy and explicit integration of sustainability themes into the narrative would be necessary.

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