

# Cultural Identity Construction in Betawi Fashion System of *Kerak Telor* Sellers

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to elaborate the construction of Betawi cultural identity through the representation of the fashion system by *Kerak Telor* sellers. Among traditional Betawi *dishes* sellers, the only ones that consistently wear the traditional Betawi outfit are the *Kerak Telor* sellers. The method applied in this paper is phenomenology study, which attempt to describe comprehensively the fashion outfits of *Kerak Telor* sellers in Jakarta, associated with the image of *Kerak Telor* itself as one of the Betawi specialties. The data are collected through literature study, in-depth interview, observation, and documentation. The result of this study shows that fashion outfits, especially worn by the *Kerak Telor* sellers, could become a strategic media to construct cultural identity among Urban people nowadays.

**Keywords:** *Fashion, Kerak Telor sellers, Betawi, Cultural identity, Construction*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Kerak Telor* (spicy ommlete) as street *dishes* has its own status in the society, especially for the Betawi people in Jakarta. *Kerak Telor* was viewed as a *dishes* that has value in its history despite the many opinions that emerged in the Betawi people regarding the origin of this street *dishes*. According to the interview with Yahya Andi Saputra as the head of R&D Lembaga Kebudayaan Betawi, there were two opinions related to the origin of *Kerak Telor*. One of the opinions stated that *Kerak Telor* is *dishes* for the poor, which means a symbol of concern for colonized indigenous people.

Other opinion stated that *Kerak Telor* is a *dishes* for the upper class, as appetizer for the Dutch people who in colonized the Betawi region. The Dutch considered as the upper-class individuals. Nowadays, *Kerak Telor* has been a mandatory street *dishes* commonly associated with the event called *Pekan Raya Jakarta* (Jakarta Fair), an annual celebration of the founding day of Jakarta. *Kerak Telor* was stated as an icon of Betawi *dishes* refers to Governor of DKI Jakarta Regulation No. 11/2017. What distinguishes *Kerak Telor* from any other street dishes in

Jakarta is the presentation, the equipment, and the event in which *Kerak Telor* is served. There is one of several prominent element that is presented by the *Kerak Telor* seller, namely the clothing worned by the seller selling *Kerak Telor* according to Rini and Karlina based on the findings of their research that the people including *Kerak Telor* seller have influenced that tourist significantly bought *Kerak Telor* [1]. The clothing of *Kerak Telor* seller as a part of the Betawi cultural artifact and its relation to *Kerak Telor* as Betawi specialties seem to be able to construct the identity of the Betawi people.

Many experts of social interaction are interested in the way identity is presented through fashion, performance and other non-verbal instruments [2]. Research about local traditional fashion, especially national costume or outfits has been delivered by Chandyevea [3], that "National costume is a traditional national culture both as a sign and as a symbol of artistic and creative expressiveness. Its imagery and stylistic structure have capaciously and vividly including ethnical, ethical, artistic and aesthetical concepts of the nation, its history, mentality, system of values, and the level of its spiritual and material" [3].

The complexity about local fashion fascinates to investigate deeper about the phenomenon of *Kerak*

*Telor* sellers. The fashion outfit worn by the *Kerak Telor* sellers which is used as daily for Betawi people are seemingly different compared to the other Betawi dishes sellers since they consistently wear the Betawi culture outfits. Thus, this paper seeks to examine the cultural identity construction of the Betawi people that is represented by the clothing worn by *Kerak Telor* seller.

**2. METHOD**

In this research, uses a phenomenological study with a qualitative approach, about the fashion system exhibited within the people, especially those worn by *Kerak Telor* sellers. Littlejohn [4] explained that phenomenology study is the approach that assumed that a phenomenon is a dependent reality. The study of phenomenology assumed that people tend to interpret their experiences and try to understand the world with their personal experiences. The study thus focused on the personal conscious experience.

Phenomenology study in this research describes comprehensively the fashion outfits of *Kerak Telor* sellers in Jakarta which related to Betawi cultural identity. *Kerak Telor* as a traditional Betawi dishes is seen as a phenomenon and experience that forms an identity. In examining the cultural heritage of the Betawi people represented by the outfit of *Kerak Telor* sellers, data in this paper were collected through: 1. Literature study, by looking for reading sources and articles that discuss about traditional Betawi clothing and their meanings. 2. In-depth interviews, conducted with *Kerak Telor* sellers and people who are experts in Betawi culture to find out the identity contained in the clothes used by *Kerak Telor* sellers. 3. Observation and documentation, took several places, such as in Monas, Situ Babakan and PRJ. Those locations are the centre for selling *Kerak Telor* in Jakarta.

**3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

*Kerak Telor* (egg crust) is an Indonesian traditional spicy omelette dish from Betawi. It is made from glutinous rice cooked with egg and served with *serundeng* (fried shredded coconut), fried shallots, and dried shrimp as condiments. Due to the well-supplied of the generative natural resources of the local ingredients such as eggs and coconuts which cultivated in the Batavia land, the making of *Kerak Telor* was initiated by the natives as an experimental dishes [5]. In the early 70s, the people of Betawi started to sell *Kerak Telor* in Tugu Monas area. During the time, it began to attract visitors in Jakarta and became one of the favourite dishes among the elites [5]. In relation to daily life, the street sellers of *Kerak Telor* are not commonly found selling the dishes in the streets as much as any other street dishes sellers. However, on special occasions such as PRJ and annual events related to Betawi culture or in cultural tourism spots such as Setu Babakan and Kota Tua, *Kerak Telor* sellers will dominate the street dishes spots. Although most of the sellers are seen as a “seasonal seller” that only sell *Kerak Telor* during certain events, there are many *Kerak Telor* sellers that have permanent stall and sell *Kerak Telor* daily and

can receive orders or invitations to make *Kerak Telor* for special celebrations. Usually, these sellers are the Betawi people compared to the seasonal seller who is usually coming to Jakarta from another region such as Kuningan or Majalengka.

These seasonal sellers usually have their own daily job as construction laborers. These seasonal sellers are considered by many as selling “phony” *Kerak Telor*. However, it is important to unveil that *Kerak Telor* as traditional dishes has its own space in society because it supports livelihoods and social welfare within the people.

*Kerak Telor* sellers tend to be dominated by male wearing a clothing that is seen historically as a characteristics of the Betawi people [6]. Frequently outfits worn by several *Kerak Telor* seller based on observation are *Baju Sadariah*, *Kokoh* shirt, *Sarong* and *Kopiah* as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The outfit worn by *Kerak Telor* sellers

Picture of <i>Kerak Telor</i> sellers	Category of the Vendor and trading venue	Betawi Identity Constructon through Fashion
	Permanent <i>Kerak Telor</i> vendor, A Batavian, selling <i>Kerak Telor</i> in Setu Babakan everyday.	The seller in this category wears Ujug Serong outfit complete with belt, Sarong around the neck, and Kopiah.
	Permanent <i>Kerak Telor</i> vendor, A Batavian, making <i>Kerak Telor</i> daily based on the order placed for special events	The seller in this category wears <i>Baju Sadariah</i> comprised of white <i>Kokoh</i> shirt, paired with Sarong underneath.
	The seasonal <i>Kerak Telor</i> seller, not a Batavian, only sells <i>Kerak Telor</i> during holidays	The seller in this category only wears kopiah and small towel around the neck, imitating the appearance of <i>Baju Sadariah</i> .

The variation in Betawi traditional outfits as seen in figure 1 cannot be separated from the formation of Betawi cultural identity which involved both amalgamation and incorporation of other cultural identities, with Batavia serving as a new symbol for place identity [7]. Because of that, the traditional outfit of Betawi people also comes from the acculturation from one or many other cultures.

One of the clothes that is commonly worn daily for men in Betawi people is a Kopiah (Muslim prayer cap), a “kokoh” shirt with a closed neck influenced by the Malay-Chinese culture that is usually paired with trousers or Batik long pants, and a piece of batik cloth or sarong that is worn around the neck. This set of daily clothing for Betawi men is known as *Baju Sadariah*. Besides *Baju Sadariah*, there are also traditional Betawi clothes for men that are used in formal situations such as *Ujug Serong* clothes or *Baju Demang* that is commonly known as *Baju Abang* since it was associated nowadays with the cultural pageant events called *Abang None Betawi*, and a wedding dress for men that is known as *Dandan Care Haji* that was influenced by the Arabic culture.

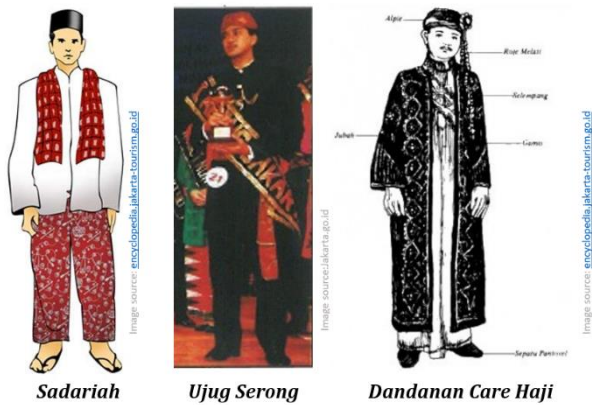


Figure 1 Betawi traditional clothes

Fashion can be considered as a sign that represent the body in cultural context. As Koentjaraningrat stated that fashion is one of the elements of culture [8]. Fashion is more than just a clothing to protect the body, but also as the system of sign integrated with other signs within the society [9].

There are many studies related to clothing and fashion. All of these studies argued that fashion is a media that represent identity. Barker define identity as similarities and differences between one and another which connote through signs such as taste, beliefs, attitude, lifestyle, and political interest [10]. Barnard stated that fashion is strongly related to the identity of the user from social identity, to sexual, class, and gender identity [11]. Hansen, which mapped the study of fashion in three different continents, also reached a similar conclusion [12]. He argued that in Africa and Asia such as India, fashion which culminated in traditional outfit such as *Sari* was used as a symbol to affiliate themselves with local culture and identity in the world of globalization. Another study concluded that fashion can represent social class and status of the user within the society [13, 14]. This shows that cultural identity is a social construction that can be expressed through visual media that is easily identified by others [10].

The existence of *Kerak Telor* sellers cannot be separated from of Betawi culture, the culture that in its continuation, develops naturally as a part of cultural identity within the people. However, in today’s development, there are parts of the culture that are artificially constructed and engineered. This was reflected through the use of Betawi cultural outfit as a fashion worn by *Kerak Telor* sellers.

The result in Table 1 shows that the seasonal sellers tried to construct their identity in order to dissolve themselves into the Betawi culture. This was achieved through imitating the fashion worn by the native sellers. It would need a great effort in creating a make-believe design structurally which tried to represent the Betawi culture. This interesting phenomenon however, appears only among the *Kerak Telor* sellers. It did not occur to other Betawi street *dishes* sellers such as *Kue Ape* sellers, *Kue Rangi* sellers, and *Selendang Mayang* sellers which can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 The outfits of other Betawi street dishes sellers

Picture of Betawi street dishes sellers	Description
	<p>Kue Ape seller with casual outfit without exposing Betawi cultural identity.</p> <p>Kue Ape is one of Betawi traditional pastries with soft texture in the center surrounded by slightly crunchy and crispy crust. The aroma of Pandan leaves contributed to the mild taste of this pastry.</p>
	<p>Kue Rangi seller Wearing casual outfit devoid of Betawi cultural identity</p> <p>Kue Rangi, also known as Sagu Rangi is also one of the Betawi traditional pastries. The main ingredient of Kue Rangi are sago flour mixed with grated Coconut, baked in a special baking sheet.</p>
	<p><i>Selendang Mayang</i> seller</p> <p>Wearing casual outfit devoid of Betawi cultural identity</p> <p><i>Selendang Mayang</i> is a traditional beverage from Betawi people. With the recipe that lasts for generations, its main ingredient is sago, which is easily found. It is a legendary Indonesian dish, The dough is made of rice flour and hunkwe flour (mung bean flour), usually in red, white, and green colored. It is best served cold with ice cubes, coconut gravy, and sugar syrup.</p>

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The exciting color is similar to the colors of Selendang (shawl or stole), therefore it is called Seledang Mayang

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Comparing the results between Table 1 and Table 2, it proofs that cultural identity construction takes part in the form of fashion system among *Kerak Telor* sellers. The seller artificially plotted *Kerak Telor* as a authentic and unique dishes from Betawi by using *Baju Sadariah* and *Ujug Serong* outfit as a medium of communication, thus allocating it as an icon for Betawi dishes. This can also be seen in the seasonal sellers who try to involve themselves by imitating the Betawi cultural outfits. However, the imitation is incomplete as the fashion only try to mimic the form structurally, usually by wearing *Kopiah* and *Sarong* around the neck, without wearing the complete traditional outfit.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The fashion clothing system in *Kerak Telor* sellers is a form of construction of Betawi cultural identity. It engineers artificially the link between the image of *Kerak Telor* as Betawi traditional dishes with the outfits of the sellers and Betawi traditional clothing, which is a form of an acculturation.

Using the Betawi traditional outfit can also be seen as steps form way effort of cultural preservation and, furthermore, the identity of the traditional dishes seller with the special fashion outfits is able to attract people, contributing in the field of tourism. The fashion outfits, especially worn by the *Kerak Telor* sellers, could become a strategic media to construct cultural identity among Urban societies.

By studying the phenomenon of Betawi fashion clothing system from *Kerak Telor* sellers, this paper offers a recommendation for assessing many other Indonesian tradition in the form of assessment to other traditional dishes sellers from many other regions in order to communicate to the people regarding the rich and diverse culture in Indonesia.

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