

SYMBOLS OF POWER IN TRADITIONAL ARABIC DRESS: A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE

SIMBOL KEKUASAAN PAKAIAN TRADISIONAL ARAB: KAJIAN SEMIOTIKA CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE

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Abstract

This article aims to find out the types of traditional Arab clothing in the Middle East and to find out the influence of symbols of power in traditional clothing in the lives of Arab society itself. Data was taken using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theoretical approach. According to the findings, this research analyses the symbols of power in traditional Arab clothing. The results found that: first, the types of traditional Arab clothing have various variations. Arabs often use kaftans as their traditional clothing. This style of clothing has a loose, long cut and dates back to Ancient Persia; secondly, symbols of power in traditional Arab clothing symbolize status or caste in everyday life. Apart from that, these clothes also symbolize people who have a cultured personality and high dignity. As traditional clothing for Arab women, it has experienced fashion dynamics from time to time. The national clothing symbolizing Arab women presented in the fashion show was able to convey a contemporary impression but did not leave behind a legacy. Thus, traditional Arab clothing also provides a symbol of Arab society itself.

Keywords: Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics, traditional Arabic clothing

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui jenis-jenis pakaian tradisional Arab di Timur Tengah dan mengetahui pengaruh simbol-simbol kekuasaan pada pakaian tradisional dalam kehidupan masyarakat Arab itu sendiri. Data diambil dengan menggunakan pendekatan teoritis semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce. Menurut temuan, penelitian ini menganalisa simbol-simbol kekuasaan pada pakaian tradisional Arab. Hasil menemukan bahwa: pertama, jenis-jenis pakaian tradisional Arab memiliki variasi yang beragam. Orang Arab sering menggunakan kaftan sebagai pakaian tradisional mereka. Gaya pakaian ini memiliki potongan longgar dan panjang dan berasal dari zaman Persia Kuno; kedua, simbol kekuasaan pada pakaian tradisional Arab melambangkan status atau kasta dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Selain itu pakaian tersebut juga dilambangkan sebagai masyarakat yang berkepribadian berbudaya dan memiliki martabat yang tinggi. Sebagai busana tradisional wanita Arab yang mengalami dinamika mode dari masa ke masa. Busana nasional simbol perempuan Arab yang dihadirkan dalam peragaan busana mampu mengungkapkan kesan kontemporer namun

tidak meninggalkan warisan. Dengan demikian, pakaian tradisional Arab juga memberikan suatu perlambangan atas masyarakat Arab itu sendiri.

Kata kunci: Charles Sanders Pierce, pakaian tradisional Arab, semiotika

Introduction

The symbol of power in traditional Arabic clothing symbolizes a cultured personality and is highly dignous. Arabs uphold cultural values, and their country has become an influential country for other countries in various traditions and acculturation (Oktaviani & Hafil, 2022). Arab countries uphold Islamic culture and values. Over time, the use of traditional Arab clothing has been eroded and forgotten by Arab society. Arabic clothing has exhibited various variations in the past. At the time of the Jahiliyah. At that time, Arab clothing was distinguished by caste. Wealthy Arabs wear luxurious clothes imported from abroad (Supawi & Badrun, 2022).

Low-income Arabs, prefer to wear clothes that adequately cover their bodies with old cloth or the like. According to linguists, there are two types of Arabic clothing: cut and uncut. The first type can be exemplified by clothes, dresses, and pants (Asmanijar, J. Waluyo, & Rohmadi, 2021). The symbol of power in traditional Arab clothing has become an identity of Arab society. Traditional Arabic clothing can provide

material culture products, so it can be studied in various disciplines, such as symbolism (Bashirov, 2020). The author uses semiotic studies that discuss symbols of power from the perspective of Charles Sanders Pierce.

Semiotics is a sign that indicates something else. The meanings of signs in people's lives are diverse (Pratiwi & Sholihah, 2020). The scope of the meanings of signs can include various events, objects, and cultures. Basically semiotics is used as an attempt to interpret or feel something strange and something that needs to be questioned when we see or read certain texts or narratives (Darma, Sahri, & Hasibuan, 2022). In this article, the author presents a comparison with the current research. These include signs, objects, and interpretations (Tania, Sakinah, & Rusmana, 2022), symbolic forms present in motifs (Shabiriani, 2022), digital-based modern media such as memes on the Internet (Fista, 2022), meanings and messages contained in samples of three covers of Tempo magazine (Wahyudi, Susanto, & Purnomo, 2022), and the meaning of symbols in the Jheng mantoh tradition (Oktaviani & Hafil, 2022).

Researchers have found similarities and differences between previous studies. Among the similarities is that both use the theory of Charles Sanders Peirce as basic material in the discussion. The difference lies in the object studied, which is related to the symbols of power in traditional Arabic clothing. Previous research has focused on the aspects of icons and index marks. This study focuses on the symbols used in traditional Arabic clothing. Based on the similarities and differences between this study and the latest research, it can be seen that the position of researchers among previous studies is to add references when comparing a study. The purpose of this article is to determine the types of traditional Arab clothing in the Middle East and to understand the influence of symbols of power on traditional Arab dress in the life of Arab society itself. This research is expected to provide readers with broader knowledge about Arab culture, especially from the perspective of traditional clothing.

This research is based on the argumentation or hypothesis that each existing symbol has different meanings, giving birth to various impacts on life. The meaning of any traditional Arabic dress is strongly influenced by the socio-cultural factors of the local people. It is based on

caste differences in each Arab society. Therefore, the more developed a community culture, the more symbols or signs will also develop along with the times.

Method

Qualitative and descriptive research methods were used in this study. Researchers describe the results of this discovery in the form of symbols of traditional Arabic clothing that have the meaning of power that can affect the status of Arab society. The main data source used in this study was traditional Arabic clothing. The secondary data sources in this study are books, journals, and other literature relate to the object and discussion studied. The data collection technique carried out in this study was reading as a whole related to traditional Arabic clothing sourced from various references. After reading the various references, the researcher noted important matters related to traditional Arabic symbols and clothing. The meaning is then assembled into an explanation that is clear and easy to understand by the reader.

The data triangulation technique was used in this study. Researchers analysed all data obtained from various sources in order to provide a clear meaning for each object. The data analysis techniques used in this



Picture 1. Models of simple traditional Arab clothing in 1980-1990



Picture 2. The popular hijab often used by Arab women is called "Shaila."

women in the face of modernization.

Black abaya has meaning in it. Countries on the Arabian Peninsula, such as Saudi Arabia, have regulations that prohibit women. Women are in the spotlight and monitored by security forces. Therefore, choosing black abaya is the right choice to avoid public attention. The loose black model does not show her curves, so it is protected eternally. Black is the upper-level dark colour; usually clothes with this colour are not transparent like other colours. Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet taught that women should not use transparent clothes and clothes that deviate from other religious rules.

Therefore, the use of abayas is a strict

rule for women in Saudi Arabia. The country, known as the birthplace of Islam, is very strict with religious rules and norms. Abaya is a self-identity of the nation's culture contained in clothing. The abaya, one of the garments designated as a national dress for the national population regardless of social status, continues to operate in the power dynamic between citizens and their country (Sodikin & Khoiri, 2023). The use of abayas, as in Saudi Arabia, has become a rule for women. This was reinforced by the issuance of Fatwa number 21352 by the Fatwa Committee of Saudi Arabia regarding standard guidelines for abayas that must be bold, not form curves, and not bear any symbols in figure 2.

Hijab is an object of cultural heritage, elegance, and pride for Arab women. The hijab worn by Arab women has many varieties, one of which is what they call the shaila. Shaila is a thin cloth used to cover a woman's head, but her hair remains visible. This veil model is commonly found in countries where the majority of women wear abayas such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and other Gulf Arab countries. In Western countries, the hijab is a black cloth that covers the whole body, a kind of burqa, while for Arab women, the use of the hijab is adapted to social, political, and religious conditions. Although there are different variations, in general, the abaya has become a cultural identity in the Arabian Peninsula that has been maintained until now (Eiman, Hala, & Rana, 2022).

On the one hand, women in the Arabian Peninsula consistently maintain the

abaya tradition and obediently carry out dress norms, but on the other hand they also have a very high consumption spirit, especially in terms of fashion. When they are at home with their family, both in formal and non-formal family events, they usually take off the abaya and replace it with clothes like women in other countries, such as wearing jeans or other tight clothes, and even luxurious dresses. Judging from the economic level, this area is indeed very tempting for foreign investors. They can meet the needs of their families from primary to tertiary needs, one of which is to wear and collect luxury clothes from well-known brands. Not all women living in the Arabian Peninsula and Middle Eastern countries agree to wear this distinctive clothing every day. They want to wear clothes that are still closed and loose, but shift the position of the abaya to daily clothing.



Figure 3. Yemeni, Omani and Arabian Arab women's traditional dress and sirwal



Picture 4. Contemporary Arabic traditional clothing

Arabs usually appear in their traditional clothes with pride and dignity as nations with cultural personalities. As shown in Figure 3. This clothing is used because it upholds cultural values. Meanwhile, when Arab women leave the house or go to other places that are expected to be seen by men who are not muhrims, they usually wear black abayas, which are very likely to cover their already very modern and fashionable clothes.

Along with this latest development, the abaya model is divided into two: traditional abaya and contemporary abaya. Traditional abaya styles, such as abayas, are often known by many people, and the design is loose, unmodeled, plain, and black. Abayas such as this are not attractive to women in the Middle East today. They tend to be attracted to contemporary abayas that have various models and clothing patterns, even though the fabric is black. Abayas have now evolved designs, colours, beads, and other designs, but the basic colours have not changed. For countries in the Middle East, such as the UAE,

elite women wear premium abayas from global brands, such as Dolce, Gabbana, and Carolina Herrera. The style remains loose and wide sleeved, but different colours tend to be lighter with florals. In Qatar, the abaya is indeed a national dress, but women prefer other clothes for daily wear (Valentina, 2020). As shown in Figure 4.

The South, North, and Southwest regions of Arabia are famous for their strong adherence to local (traditional/regional) dress traditions, especially for men. Men in Najran still wear wizra (futah), a type of sarong cloth that is folded around the waist and then tied with a belt. One of the traditional clothes often worn by Arab women is kaftan. This model of clothing is loose and long, and has existed since ancient Persian times. Historically, Bedouin Arab women (Bedouins) always wore veils because they were nomadic herders whose lifestyles were always on the move in search of water and food sources. For them, veils are very useful in protecting the face from scorching the sun and desert dust. The function of the

veil here is not only to protect the face from desert dust when herding cattle or hunting but also to protect against evil spirits. Arab countries that retain their original traditional clothing tend to be economically richer and more developed. As shown in Figure 6, in northern Saudi Arabia, men wear traditional head coverings, called *mihramah* and *mudhawarah*. The regions of South, North, and Southwest Arabia are known to strongly uphold local (traditional/regional) dress traditions, especially those of men. Men in Najran still wear *wizra* (*futah*), a type of sarong cloth that is folded around the waist

and then tied with a belt.

Arabs like long-sleeved overalls that hang down past the ankles, called *thawb* or *thob*, *qomish* (*gamis*), *gamis*, *kaftan*, or *tunic*. In Iraq and the Biladu of the Levant (Levant), this is called *dhisdashah*. In North African Arab countries, it is known as *jilabiyah*, *jelaba*, or *gandura*. Women are required to wear black *abayas*, headscarves, and headscarves in public, which they say is the closest color to the dictum or directive in Islamic law: modesty. Those who violate this rule will be subject to severe sanctions including whipping (الزبيدي، هيثم، 2023).



Picture 5. Kaftan dresses and sarwals since ancient Persian, Omani and Arabian times



Picture 6. Kaftan dresses and sarwals since ancient Persian, Omani and Arabian times

Symbols of Power in Traditional Arabic Clothing

In the Middle Ages, Arabs still used loose clothing such as gamis. In the future, clothes will undergo modifications and changes according to the times, fashion trends, and influences of other regions (Istiqomah, 2021). Currently, clothes called Abayas are generally only worn by Arab women in some countries in the Arabian Peninsula, such as Saudi Arabia. This is unlike Qatar and the UAE, which do not require women to wear abayas. The policy of abaya as national dress is in line with Leila Bassam's explanation of the emergence of abaya in Arab Land.

Before 1930, Arabs wore clothes similar in style to the abaya, but both men and women could wear these clothes. Some of these clothes are influenced by fashion from outside the Arab region, such as Persia and Rome. In addition to these two regions, this clothing model was also influenced by the Mesopotamia area. The influence of clothing models from other regions has resulted in colored Arabic clothing models. People's clothing on the Arabian Peninsula is synonymous with long and loose models. Especially for women who wear hijabs as a head covering and everything is long, where during Assyria women were required to wear

hijabs. The materials used to prepare hijabs are wool, linen, and cotton. Arab men also wear head coverings, in contrast to women, who are more secretive (Sodikin & Khoiri, 2023).

In the western regions from Egypt to Sudan and the east of Iraq, it can be observed that the cloak has an increasing variety of colors and shapes. Officials centered on hereditary monarchical governments continue to preserve white robes. There are two groups of societies: traditional and modern societies. Traditional lower-class societies in the countryside use colorful and flexible robes called jellabiyah. It is not the actual color of the robe that distinguishes its status. Jellabiyah can be any color, including white, so at first glance it can be mistaken for a khawf gamis worn by officials or businessmen. The distinguishing statuses are the collar, sleeves, and pockets. Khawf has a neck collar and a short collar and pocket that require more attention in maintenance (Supawi & Badrun, 2022).

The distinguishing statuses are the collar, sleeves, and pockets. Khawf has a short neck collar, cuffs, and pockets which require relatively more attention. This clothing makes it easier for them to move more actively, especially hand movements, and helps keep large quantities of small or

large items in their pockets, to help with farming activities or save money or cigarettes. Thus, the values contained in the robes can be translated directly into Arab cultural values.

Protection from dust due to the use of very simple materials, namely long dresses without additional images, decorations, and so on. Without dents, dust can be easily cleaned, clothes become neater, and sand is difficult to stick to. Its wide shape allows the wind to help expel sand if it becomes stuck in clothes. The flexibility of gamis is more limited than tight clothing. Someone in a robe, for example, will have difficulty riding a motorcycle because of the narrow thigh-opening. Many strenuous physical activities are hindered by gaming. This makes gaming very practical for use in activities that do not require complicated movements. It is suitable for employers, administrators, or office workers. This is in contrast to elaborate modern clothing (الزبيدي، هيثم, 2023).

The power of the white robe made officials at the very top, both state and organization, used the white robe in business and daily life and contrasted it with non-Arabs who dressed instead of robes. Even without being required to wear them, gamis are at the top of the Arab fashion scene. Given the importance of the value of white

robes in aspects of life outside the home, life outside the home in its various variations must be carried out with robes (Valentina, 2020)

In general, Arab women still adhere to their traditional clothing styles, which are often used in everyday life. When teaching at formal events, even during non-formal activities such as running or leisurely walking, they still wear abayas complete with headscarves, veils, and even niqabs. Although often wearing modern clothes, abayas are still worn as an outer and removed in private situations, such as events or activities among women or families (mahram) .

As a traditional Arab women's dress that experiences fashion dynamics from time to time, abayas are also often featured in Dubai Fashion Week fashion shows, which are famous for their various models and styles. Abaya modifications can be seen from patterns, sleeve models, and decorations of the materials used to make them. This enables abaya to stand side by side with other fashion products. Designers are also competing to make abayas needed by Arab women. With the latest form of abaya, young Arab women, like teenagers, are educated to protect one of their cultural items. The national fashion symbol of Arab women presented in the fashion show can express a

contemporary impression but does not leave a legacy.

Conclusion

The symbol of power in traditional Arabic clothing symbolizes a cultured personality and is highly dignous. One of the traditional clothes often worn by Arab women is kaftan. This model of clothing is loose and long cut and has existed since ancient Persian times. Traditional Arab clothing can depict the life and caste of Arab society. Arabs usually appear in their traditional clothing with pride and dignity as a nation of personality and culture. This is because they have highly upheld cultural values. In recent years, there have been massive changes in Arab fashion, both men and women. This change has resulted in the fading of Arab traditions in terms of the use of traditional and modern clothing.

This use has been mixed with the development of the Western world, causing significant changes. Because of these problems, the government echoed again regarding the use of Arabic clothing so as not to leave the culture they had instilled in people's lives. This study has advantages in terms of the use of words that are easy for readers to understand. The drawback of this

study is the lack of image references related to traditional Arab clothing, especially for Arab women in each Arab period and region. The authors hope that future research can improve this article, both traditional Arabic clothing in general and the area of use of clothing more specifically.

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