

# Social Movement and *Kebaya* Design Trends in the Borderless World

Tan Paulina Candra Agista  
*Culture and Media Studies*  
 Gadjah Mada University  
 Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
[paulina.candratana@gmail.com](mailto:paulina.candratana@gmail.com)

Faruk  
*Culture and Media Studies*  
 Gadjah Mada University  
 Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
[farukfaruk76@gmail.com](mailto:farukfaruk76@gmail.com)

Suzie Handajani  
*Culture and Media Studies*  
 Gadjah Mada University  
 Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
[suzie\\_handajani@ugm.ac.id](mailto:suzie_handajani@ugm.ac.id)

**Abstract**— *Kebaya* as a form of Indonesian female clothes has experienced big changes in its looks. Contestation has happened between the traditional *kebaya* and the modern one since fashionable *kebaya* was introduced by an Indonesian *kebaya* designer, Anne Avantie. By considering the cultural practices and preferences of the individual and group behavior toward taste, this study intends to investigate some forces that influence the shifting of trends in *kebaya* designs, from the traditional designs to the fashionable *kebaya*. The need of this study stems from the scarcity of research dealing with the contestation in the borderless world, between traditional *kebaya* and fashionable *kebaya*. An analysis of the cultural, social, political and technological influencing the consumption of fashionable *kebaya* is conducted in order to find out what forces influence the shifting trends of *kebaya* designs. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field and taste are used to study and analyze deeply the power relation, contestation taking place in the field of *kebaya* and its effects towards the structure of *kebaya* field. This study applies a qualitative method and a media ethnography approach. The research finding shows that *kebaya* trends have been influenced by the political reform, social and cultural exposure. Interconnectivity in the borderless world and the rapid development of new media technology have important roles in this social movement.

**Keywords**— *kebaya*, shifting trends, interconnectivity, new media

## I. INTRODUCTION

The field of *kebaya* experienced some big structural changes. Before the presence of Anne Avantie, an Indonesian female *kebaya* designer, there was only one field of *kebaya*. The field of traditional *kebaya* used to know three conventional patterns of *kebaya*, namely *kebaya encim*, *kebaya Kartini*, and *kebaya kutubaru*. However, sometimes after the downfall of the New Order regime in 1998 which had held on power for 32 years, the political reform opened the door to freedom in many fields which were formerly closed, including the field of cultural productions such as literature and fashion. This freedom gave a room for Anne Avantie, an Indonesian female designer to revitalize *kebaya* designs. She used that moment to introduced fashionable *kebaya* or hybrid *kebaya*. The fashionable *kebaya* could be called a hybrid *kebaya* as it combine the conventional pattern of

*kebaya* and the other clothe patterns. Since the emergence of fashionable *kebaya*, the field of *kebaya* has segmented into two sub-fields. The high fashion sub-field which only recognizes the traditional *kebaya* and the sub-field of popular or fashionable *kebaya*. Severe contestation happened between the two types of *kebaya*. Before the deconstruction of traditional *kebaya* patterns, the field of *kebaya* was dominated by traditional *kebaya*. During that period the traditional or mainstream *kebaya* designer such as Pradjudi was holding the legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer. However, the traditional *kebaya* domination weakened after Indonesian political direction changed. The emergence of popular or fashionable *kebaya* had shifted the *kebaya* consumers' taste and preference. Although this type of *kebaya* was opposed by the traditional *kebaya* designers.

Referring to the situation in the field of *kebaya*, This study addresses a research questions: What forces influence the *kebaya* consumers' dress decisions? In order to answer the research question this project explore some forces that influence the shifting of *kebaya* consumers' taste and preference.

Before the findings of this study are discussed, a theoretical framework will be outlined to highlight the relevant theories and concept to this study. After that, the research methodological approach will be presented. Finally, the data obtained will be analysed and discussed

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since this research particularly focuses on the shifting of taste and preference as a result of living in a global world, it is necessary to discuss (1) Bourdieu's theory of field to study power relation and domination found in the field of *kebaya*, (2) the concept of globalisation for exploring the boundaries which are dissolving and the interconnectivity which is increasing due to the technology development in the new media.

### A. *The Theory of Field*

A field or social field in Bourdieu's point of view is a social arena where struggles take place [1]. Jenkins in discussing the concept of field defines a field as a network or configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determination they impose upon their occupants, agent or institutions, by their present and potential situation. [2]

A field, therefore, is a system in which social positions can be recognised. As a result, in a field power relation happens. There is domination and subordination or equivalence. Each agent puts some efforts to dominate the field and to get legitimacy. Social movement may happen due to the social aging. Since a field is fluid, it is possible to change and to be changed. The dominant position of an agent may end as his/her power weakens. In the field of *kebaya*, consumers' taste and preference influence the structure of the field.

### B. *Globalisation*

This project uses two concepts of globalisation stated by Tomlinson and Servaes and Lie. According to Tomlinson globalisation refers to the network of interconnections and inter-dependences that characterize modern social life, the idea of increasing 'flow' of goods, information, people and practices across national borders. [3] This definition underlines that globalisation creates a global 'flow' to happen. Since the 'flow' occurs globally, its characteristics is borderless. Meanwhile, Servaes and Lie write globalisation as the widening, deepening, and speeding up of the worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life. [4] The two concepts of globalisation underline the idea of worldwide interconnectivity that allows a borderless world. This borderless world allows inevitable influences in fashion decision since people are more connected in new media era and globalisation era. It means there is interconnection between the local fashion and the non-local fashion. Fashion consumers are open to fashion products that combine *kebaya* patterns and other fashion attire patterns.

## III. METHODOLOGY

In order to gain answers for the research question, this study implements the media ethnography approach. According to Rantanen mediagraphy has a function as a tool to express the role of media and communications in the process of globalisation. [5] Several ways to collect the data were conducted. There were five steps to collect the data.

First was an interview with Anne Avantie, a non-conventional *kebaya* designer. The interview was held on 1 August 2018. Questioned were directed to get some information about *kebaya* trends, her strategy to do contestation, and how Instagram strengthens her domination. Second, some observations about Avantie's activities on her Instagram account and the number of her followers were done from September 2018 to April 2019. Third, study on Avantie's autobiography and biography were done. Fourth,

observation towards Avantie's fashion show. Finally, all the data obtained were written down, studied, analyzed, interpreted, and reported.

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

*Kebaya* as a form of clothes has been conventionalised and complicitous with power, authority, religion, and tradition. The field of *kebaya* before the presence of Anne Avantie or in the era of New Order Regime in Indonesia was dominated by the conventional *kebaya*. This *kebaya* only recognizes three *kebaya* patterns. First, *kebaya* encim which has long sleeves, front opening, a loose body pattern and its length is down to cover the hips or bottoms. Second, *kebaya* Kartini which is similar to *kebaya* encim despite of its front opening that has a folded part. Third, *kebaya* kutubaru which has open and narrow front part and tighter body pattern. Those three models had been accepted widely as the 'genuine' *kebaya* models. There was only the sub-field of high-fashion *kebaya* since this field only recognized the conventional *kebaya*. Contestation happened between *kebaya* and other fashion attire. As conventional *kebaya* did not follow the fashion trends, it then was considered as unfashionable. Therefore, the female younger generation was not interested in wearing this conventional *kebaya*. Triyanto states that *kebaya* was marginalized as Indonesian women preferred wearing modern fashion to *kebaya* when they attended a party. [6]

The downfall of the New Order Regime was followed by the rising of the Reformation Order. The new political direction influenced the field of *kebaya* since the new authority gave more freedom to artists and designers to express their creativity [7]. This moment was used by Anne Avantie to introduce her hybrid *kebaya* designs. Her designs deconstructed the conventional *kebaya*. She combined other clothes models and traditional *kebaya* patterns. Her designs changed dramatically the outlook of *kebaya*. She introduced backless *kebaya*, non-symmetrical sleeves *kebaya*, *kebaya* with different kinds of fabric. Since Avantie's era, the field of *kebaya* had recognized different kinds of models. What Avantie had done answered women's needs and desire on fashion.

The emergence of Avantie had changed the structure of *kebaya* field. As a result, there were two sub-fields; the sub-field of conventional *kebaya* and the sub-field of popular *kebaya* which was close to fashion. Although there was strong objection from the conventional *kebaya* designers, Avantie designs gained more popularity.

The contestation happened severely. The mainstream party used propaganda to say that Avantie's *kebaya* was not *kebaya*. This strategy, in fact was not successful since fashion market ignored it. Fashion market which looked for novelty preferred the fashionable *kebaya* to the old-fashion

one. Many Indonesian artist such as Agnes Mo, Nadine Chandrawinata, Maia Estianty even Malaysian singer, Siti Nurhaliza and Miss Universe worn her designs. Those famous public figures played a big role in directing other female's fashion decision. Bourdieu argues that art is part of the field of power. The things that are valued by the dominant people, will be valued by everyone. [8] It means the subordinators' taste and preference tend to follow the fashion choice of the dominant people. Dominant people have power to direct ordinary people's fashion decision.

The influence of Avantie's *kebaya* designs was getting more powerful since her designs became the stage costume for many artists, for example on Agnes Mo's video clip, *Paralyzed*. The fashionable *kebaya* has been popular not only in domestic market (Indonesia) but also overseas market. Avantie's *kebaya* designer was chosen by Siti Nurhalizah ( a Malaysian singer) for her wedding *kebaya*. Some achievement that conventional *kebaya* never obtained. Avantie had made some breakthrough in the fashion arena.

In the new media era, Instagram has made possible of images and videos fast distribution. It is also easier for everyone to operate any new media such as Instagram. People have can access easily to fashion arena including popular *kebaya*. Instagram speeds up the distribution and influence of fashion trends. Avantie confirmed that Instagram supported her to gain fame. The data from her Instagram account shows that the number of her followers adds around 3,000 to 5,000 thousand each month. the following table shows the result of one year observation towards the number of Avantie's followers. According to Avantie, she did not use any influencer in her Instagram. The number of her followers really showed the people who wanted to know her and her designs and those who enjoyed her designs.

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF AVANTIE'S FOLLOWERS IN INSTAGRAM

Date	Number of Follower (in thousand)
30-06-2018	655
30-07-2018	662
30-08-2018	679
30-09-2018	684
30-10-2018	700
30-11-2018	707
30-12-2018	710
30-01-2019	712
28-02-2019	717
30-03-2019	723
30-04-2019	728
30-05-2019	733
30-06-2019	736

From the interview with Avantie, it can be concluded that Instagram played a major role in building Avantie's legitimacy. In her Instagram she could introduce her *kebaya* designs to people all around the world. Without moving out from their home country, people could see, learn, and enjoy Avantie's designs. Instagram helped Avantie bring her *kebaya* designs travel to other countries. The *kebaya* images she uploaded in her Instagram account spoke dan echoed loudly. As a result, famous people such as Miss Universe 2016, 2017, 2018 knew her *kebaya* designs and they were interested in wearing her designs. They were willing to put on her *kebaya* designs when attending *Putri Indonesia* Contest Night.

For Avantie, distributing *kebaya* images through Instagram had become a strategy to strengthen her domination. Instagram could be accessed by anyone regardless the social, cultural, economical, and political background.

Since Avantie *kebaya* designs had been introduced globally, her designs had become a part of the world fashion. Her legitimacy as a *kebaya* designer was gained through people's recognition of her *kebaya* designs. She gained legitimacy not only from her home country (Indonesia) but also from abroad.

The second role of Instagram was providing Avantie a room to learn, know, and get information about the development of overseas fashion situation and condition rapidly. The information about the current modern fashion trend equiped her for designing *kebaya*. For Avantie, Instagram was a tool for empowering herself and doing commercial strategy. In the age of mechanical reproduction, it was not possible for a designer to get information and to distribute the images of her designs quickly. In that time, a designer relied on a photographer to distribute the images of her designs. It was the photographer who decided which photos could be printed on the magazines or newspaper. In the digital era, Avantie herself could decide and distribute the *kebaya* images.

Before the digital media or the new media era, the photographers were superior and Avantie was the subordinator. She did not have freedom. She had to obey the photographers. In short, the technology advancement of the media had changed the structure of the *kebaya* arena.

## V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data revealed that the changing of political direction, globalisation, and technology advancement had major roles in affecting *kebaya* consumers' taste and preference. Political reformation, interconnectivity, and technology advancement in terms of new media development (in this research is Instagram) are

three forces that made the shifting of *kebaya* consumers' taste and preferences.

The changing of political direction gave freedom to artists, including *kebaya* designers to express their ideas. This freedom allowed Avantie to introduce unlimited *kebaya* patterns. In addition, the use of Instagram by Avantie in distributing images and videos influenced people's decision on *kebaya* designs. Famous people's *kebaya* choices which were uploaded on Instagram had tremendous effects to influence and direct women's fashion decision. This proved that taste and preferences could be directed by dominant power. Fashion is not free from power. In the field of fashion (*kebaya*) the designer who dominates will direct the *kebaya* trends. That designer, then will be the trendsetter and the subordinates will just follow.

This study finds out that Anne Avantie's creativity in designing *kebaya* could not have been actualized if Indonesia political direction had not changed. If there had no freedom to express ideas, there had no fashionable *kebaya*. The was not possible to have a room for negotiating *kebaya* designs. This fact shows that the field of fashion (*kebaya*) is not independent. Other fields such as political field effects the field of fashion (*kebaya*). The political power directs the movement of in the field of fashion (*kebaya*) and the dominant designer directs the other designers and market. Fashion (*kebaya*) can be used as a tool to show power. Anne Avantie with her legitimacy proves that she directs domestic and overseas subordinates' *kebaya* choices. This fact confirms that everyone is not a free subject. There is always power that constructs. In a field there is a dominant agent that structures the weaker and there is subordinates which are structured or dominated. In the field of *kebaya* right now, it is Anne Avantie who is holding the domination. Contestation in a field happens as taste and preference can be directed.

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