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# Semiotic Analysis of the Changes of Ondel-ondel Costume Elements as a Betawi Cultural Negotiation

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## ABSTRACT

Recognized as one of Jakarta's icons, the large pair of puppets known as *ondel-ondel* has undergone significant transformation since its origin centuries ago. Classically built in a fairly simple form, *ondel-ondel* presents itself in various ways at every performance. Now, *ondel-ondel* is increasingly found throughout Jakarta, having gone through numerous changes in its costume elements. Whereas it is usually meant to be shown as a couple, nowadays a single *ondel-ondel* can be found cruising alleys with a mere digital sound system as musical accompaniment. Once respected and feared for its looks, today it is belittled by its own people. Due to this phenomenon, this research aimed to answer the questions of who influenced this ideological change, which ruling elite encouraged their ideology, and what the ideology is. Interviews and direct observations produced stories and photographs, while literature and media studies provided a historical background. Roland Barthes' semiotic connotations with a historical perspective were used to read the hidden concepts behind these signs, which connect the changes of the costume elements through the important events in Betawi society during the period of 1970–2020. The different interests of each party brought more conflict in their relations, which created a dynamic cultural negotiation. Based on the results, the terms for the *ondel-ondel* models were identified, specifically a personification model, Islamic model, and commercial model, each named after the historical events and ideology brought about by Jakarta's ruling elites.

**Keywords:** *ondel-ondel*, semiotic costume elements, cultural negotiation, Betawi; ideology

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## INTRODUCTION

A pair of large puppets known as *ondel-ondel* is an ancient Betawi performing art. *Ondel-ondel* was presumed to have existed in Jakarta under the name *barongan* (group, together, meaning to turn something on together) and used by the Betawi people in 1605 (Purbasari et al., 2019) as a disaster deterrent and protector for the community against a bad omen. *Ondel-ondel* possessed traditional wisdom to uphold a clean, safe, and peaceful life (Rizal, 2019). Following its function, the *barongan* appeared horrific and terrifying with an angry red face, round bulging eyes,

and long fangs. It was large and tall, approximately 80 x 250 x 80 cm, structurally made of rattan or bamboo with a mask from high-quality wood (Purbasari et al., 2016). Besides its quality, easiness to form, and fragrance, this wood was chosen because *barongan* or *ondel-ondel* is a work of art that is honored by the people.

*Barongan* was created in Betawi *Pinggir* or suburbia and also culturally influenced by Chinese and Sundanese (Shahab, 2001) when they were struggling in the agricultural sector and believed that something big

and huge had unlimited power (Sugiyarto, 2010). Betawi *Kota* was influenced by Arab culture (Shahab, 2001). *Barongan* became part of a ritual in the Betawi *Pinggir* community and considered sacred and separated from daily life. Betawi *Pinggir* and *Kota* were differentiated geographically by city limits and dialect (Betawi *Pinggir* ended the word with “a” while Betawi *Kota* used “e”, for example: *ngapa* vs. *ngape*) (Erwantoro, 2014). Before a procession in the village, there was an *ukup* (smoking) ritual using burning incense along with offerings to pave the way for the emergence of magical energy (Saputra, 2009). It means *barongan* was not part of the popular culture for both the Betawi *Pinggir* and Betawi *Kota* communities (Wahidiyat, 2019), because *barongan* was used by Betawi *Pinggir* for sacred rituals only, while *barongan* was forbidden by Betawi *Kota*.

Based on an interview with Saputra, *Barongan*'s simple form was due to the urgency to deal with the malaria epidemic. *Barongan* was used as the embodiment of the ancestral village protector (Supriyanto & Dharsono, 2017).

Since 1605, its performance was considered as somewhat serious and sacred, because of its place in the sacred rituals in the Betawi community such as exorcizing evil spirits, which was believed as the source of outbreaks, earth alms. The *ondel-ondel* parading in the village was a performance awaited by the people because its presence was associated with joyfulness and celebration (Wahidiyat, 2019), which is connected with funds and food. In this case, *ondel-ondel* has become a cultural medium.

Today, *ondel-ondel* are easily found all around Jakarta, especially in suburban areas. Despite the evil looks, they still present a magnificent atmosphere. Unfortunately, their sacredness diminished – asking for money. With its new function as a medium of entertainment and breadwinner, it is as if this large puppet can be treated at will by users as long as it can generate coffers of money (Samhudi, 2020). Many *ondel-ondel* elements are missing like the standard music companion. *Ondel-ondel* walks solo while simultaneously pushing a musical cart.

In the 1970s, *ondel-ondel* was announced as one of the Jakarta icons by Governor Ali Sadikin (Samantha, 2013). *Barongan* underwent distinctive changes, and transformed into *ondel-ondel* today. This marked the beginning of the first model. Jakarta began to shape itself as a city, inviting immigrants from other parts of Indonesia, thus creating a need for identity for the Betawi. Over time, acculturation between immigrants and Betawi residents created a strong bond united by

religion. It marked the birth of the second model. The third model was in line with economic development, as Jakarta fast became a metropolitan city. *Ondel-ondel* is no longer just a part of the culture but has also become an economic asset, such as in tourism.

Barthes's semiotic approach was used to read the changes in *ondel-ondel* costume elements from time to time to interpret the meaning and ideology of the ruling elite. The relationship between the ideology and culture lays in the fact that to interpret a language, people depend on ideology. Culture is about negotiation to generate various speeches through a cultural text and ideology (Sunardi, 2013). A cultural analysis will culminate in an ideology (Barthes, 1983). It shows that a cultural negotiation indeed is an ideology negotiation between the ruling elite and an influential person with close ties to power. The changes of *ondel-ondel* costume elements show the presence of negotiation between the society and the ruling elite, in which the ruling elite spread their ideology. The result of this analysis is the *ondel-ondel* model.

This study explored the continuity and changes in the *ondel-ondel* appearance to know the meanings and concepts or ideologies from each model. It focused on *ondel-ondel* costume elements from 1970-2020. The author interviewed cultural practitioners, *ondel-ondel* artists, and the audiences. Incidents, interests, and ideologies led to what *ondel-ondel* looks like today.

## CONNOTATIVE SEMIOTICS IN ONDEL-ONDEL

Data from 1970 to 2020 was collected through observations, interviews, and literary research. Direct interviews were conducted on three groups: cultural practitioners, *ondel-ondel* makers and performers, and the audiences. With cultural practitioners, discussions were held and attended. Betawi cultural activities were attended, which resulted in storytelling about Betawi culture and *ondel-ondel*. In a meeting with the makers, knowledge was gained about making *ondel-ondel*, and the ritual process for the preparation of the show. Together with the performers, the experience was gained in parading the *ondel-ondel* around the village. Interviews with the audiences received responses about the presence of *ondel-ondel*.

Besides observations and interviews, data was sourced from publications such as journals, books, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, and other records.

*Ondel-ondel* is the result of the mental construction of the Betawi community, influenced by the local

context according to the conditions of the concerned community. A mental construction involves negotiation until the *ondel-ondel* model is established. Negotiation is a dialectical form, and the dialectical process is most rapidly manifested through the development of artistic styles (Hauser, 1982). Hence, *ondel-ondel* development has produced several models. This study used Roland Barthes' semiotic approach (connotative semiotics) that contains a synchronic and diachronic historical perspective, which used to see the continuity and changes of it from time to time. The connotative semiotic approach was used to interpret the meaning of *ondel-ondel* through several subjects, which are denotation; symbolic, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic sign relations; connotations; stolen language; naturalization; myth; and ideology. Stolen language is a process where a certain part from a previous object is taken and then developed into a new object with particular goals.

Referring to the term used in Barthes' book, the term 'model' is used to divide *ondel-ondel* based on the changes and developments of the costume elements. The word 'model' is also related to Roland Barthes' clothing system. This word means something general or an example or type used for imitation or comparison (Flexner & Hauck, 1987). The costume elements on *ondel-ondel* became important as the subject analyzed in the first stage. Costume elements are decorations or accessories in *ondel-ondel* both in shape and color. Color is one of the elements of the costume discussed, for Betawi has a distinctive color combination that is also applied in *ondel-ondel* (Purbasari et al., 2016).

Roland Barthes' semiotic approach was chosen not only because of its appropriateness to explore the various meanings of *ondel-ondel*, but it also contains a historical perspective that is certainly suitable for long-lived *ondel-ondel*. Barthes' semiotic approach views the importance of the analysis of myth and ideology; his theory of myths and/or ideology allows the study of ideology in both diachronic and synchronic (Sunardi, 2013) means. This ideological study contains a historical perspective. To understand the meanings of objects, we need to review their history (Goebel, 2020). In checking their history, we need to have a diachronic and synchronic view of the continuity and changes of the *ondel-ondel* costume elements.

There are two levels in Barthes semiotic approach. The first level is called a signifier: the meaning in the form of a description of what is seen by the eyes, in this case the visual signs of *ondel-ondel* are costume elements, body shapes, cloth decorative motives, and others. In the first level, I documented the costume

elements into a visual table. Second-level semiotics (connotations) is called signified. Other meanings are further interpreted through the following stages: 1) the relationship of symbolic, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic signs; and 2) connotations and the interactions that occur when the visual signs meet the emotions and values of the culture; meaning that comes from experience and is personal. The connotation of *ondel-ondel* is beyond what is visually noticeable such as faces, costume elements, colors, decorative patterns, and others. 3) The meaning of connotation creates myths to distort the first level of meaning that no longer refers to the reality. 4) Myth is actualized through ideology and naturalized to society through socialization. At the end, the myth is considered normal, valid, and true. The established myth eventually becomes ideology, in which various ideologies are related to the *ondel-ondel* model discourse.

The researcher went through several stages in the analysis process. First, I conducted a literature review to see the changes in the costume elements of the *ondel-ondel* and recorded them into a schematic analysis of the structure and the costume elements. Interviews with historians and cultural practitioners were conducted to find out who influenced the changes. The next part was tracing the important events and conditions that caused changes to the *ondel-ondel* costume elements. This was the beginning of the *ondel-ondel* models. I also recorded important activities and the people involved with *ondel-ondel* and connected the changes in the costume elements of each *ondel-ondel* model to read the message or ideology.

Cultural negotiation started from the ruling elite, which stole the previous model's form, combined with other forms to create the new model and used extensively in the society to justify it. In order for the new model to be accepted, the change process is carried out gradually and continuously until it is deemed reasonable and natural. The myth to naturalize history for acceptance and perceived natural through negotiation became a true or natural ideology. Then the ruling elite could run the policies without resistance. A synchronic process happened when *ondel-ondel* was viewed from the relation and tension of its costume elements, which created cultural negotiation. A diachronic process is about the development of all the models linearly and gradually.

By elaborating between the theories, contexts, concepts, events, and signs related to Barthes' semiotics and *ondel-ondel*, and then composed into a temporary unit, the researcher explained various aspects of the research problem.

## THE ONDEL-ONDEL MODEL DYNAMICS

### Structure and Costume Elements of Ondel-ondel

Reading the continuity and changes of costume elements in *ondel-ondel* means seeing community dynamics (contextual) through several models. This discussion also shows important events in Betawi society that led to continuity and changes in costume elements. This denotative analysis leads to the division of several *ondel-ondel* models. A pair of *ondel-ondel* consists of a male and female who have similar structures and shapes, but the costume elements have changed from time to time (Purbasari et al., 2019). Based on an interview with Yahya Andi Saputra, a Betawi cultural expert and head of the Betawi Cultural Institute's Research and Development Division, he mentioned that the *ondel-ondel* must be male and female, like day and night, good and bad. For its people, *ondel-ondel* is also a medium of communication between humans and the Creator, and a symbol of life balance.

A full set of *ondel-ondel* consists of the pair accompanied with a music team. The *ondel-ondel* structure resembles two upright triangles. Its big and tall size gives the impression of being sturdy, strong, and sacred. The *ondel-ondel* structure is divided into 3 parts, the top (head), middle (body), and bottom (legs). The head contains the costume elements: coconut flower, handlebar (crown), hair from natural fibers, and a mask (face) made from wood or fiber. As for the body, the elements of the male *ondel-ondel* costume have a *cukin* or sash, and the female has a *toka-toka* (chest cover). The male *ondel-ondel* wears a *sadariah* shirt (Muslim Betawi dress) and a belt, while the female *ondel-ondel* wears a *kurung* or *kebaya* top and a brightly colored belt. The last one is the lower part (legs); there is a sarong called a *jamblang* that covers the legs (Figure 1).

Based on an interview with Saputra, a coconut flower head accessory means that the Betawi people are ready to work based on their respective strengths and competencies for community benefits and welfare. The crown is a symbol of power and honor. The coconut fibers are planted as hair to cover the back of the head where the coconut flowers are embedded. The male *ondel-ondel* mask is painted red (giving a firm and scary impression), while on the female it is white to symbolize softness and purity. *Toka-toka* is a triangular shaped fabric with red ornaments as a breastplate for a woman, a symbol of fertility and prosperity. The male *ondel-ondel* has a neck and chest ornament, as a symbol of cleverness and defender of truth. A *sadariah* shirt and *kurung* or *kebaya*

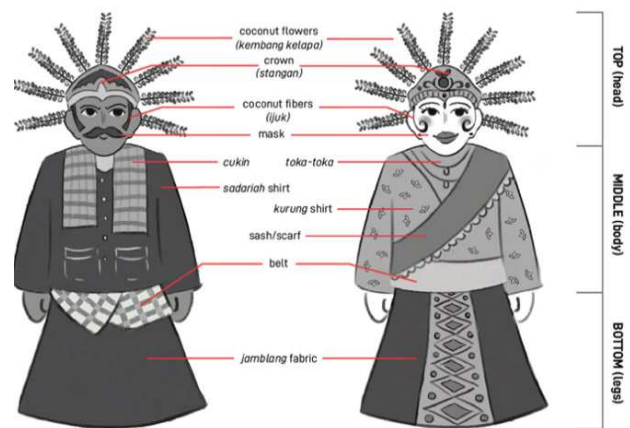


Figure 1. Structure and Costume Elements of the *Ondel-ondel*

are typical shirts of a Betawi male and female. The fabric belt is wrapped around the waist to bind the bottom cloth. *Jamblang* fabric is used to cover the legs.

During the performance, the *ondel-ondel* is accompanied by a special team of musicians, consisting of 6-8 percussions: 1-2 *tepak*, 1 *kecrek*, 2 *ningnong*, 1-2 small *gongs*, 1 large *gong*, and 1 *tekyan* (Purbasari et al., 2019) (Figure 2).

In this formation, Yasin, the leader of the *Beringin Sakti* studio, mentioned that all the participating members can switch instruments, except the *tehyan*, which has no substitute, because of its high level of difficulty (Purbasari et al., 2019). Currently, *ondel-ondel* street performances use a mobile sound system cart to replace the *tehyan*. The cart can also play Betawi and pop songs.

## ONDEL-ONDEL MODELS AND IDEOLOGIES

According to Barthes, a myth is a type of speech using stolen language taken from history but only its form is stolen, while its content is determined by the ruling elite group. The changes in the *ondel-ondel* costume elements and its accompaniments from time to time were tailored to the requests and desires of the ruling elite group to provide new and different values in Betawi society. The values have stood for a long time and continued to blend naturally, to be believed and become common. A myth has the ability to manipulate the reader toward an ideology. Myths are formed through generalized assumptions and societal experiences.

The continuity and changes in costume elements, meanings, and functions of *ondel-ondel* are in line with the Betawi community's social dynamics, especially



Figure 2. Ondel-ondel Accompaniment Instruments

amongst the ruling elites. It creates certain characteristics in costume elements. It not only brought the information or the messages, but also a structured sign system that reflected certain societal assumptions at any given time. Furthermore, it was interpreted differently from before by the Betawi people.

### Barongan Pre Ondel-ondel Model

*Barongan* became the early model and background of the other *ondel-ondel* models. *Barongan* appeared along with the belief that something big was considered to have the power to protect and fight evil. The earliest written record of *barongan's* presence could be found in *Geschiedenis Van Java Dell 2* by W. Fruin Mees, as it had been around since before 1605. Based on the *barongan* visual on a Twitter account from potretlawas in 2017 and digitalcollection.universiteitleiden.nl, *barongan* is twice the size of regular people.

The head had hair decorated with a crown surrounded by coconut flowers. Its face looked creepy with huge round and bulging eyes, long curved fangs, and broad ears, used to ward off evil creatures that disturbed the villagers. *Barongan* had the same form of structure and costume elements as *ondel-ondel*. The difference between them in the shape, size, and materials was the

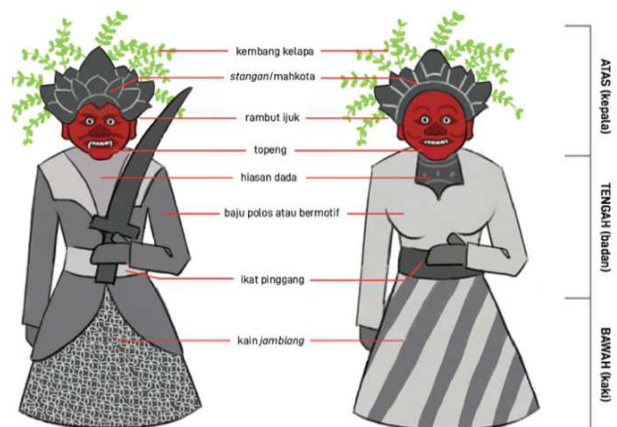


Figure 3. Structure and Costume Elements of Barongan Model

result of adjustments to the current conditions. The details of the *barongan* structure and costume elements can be described as follows (Figure 3).

Based on previous documentation (Figure 4), it is quite impossible to distinguish between the male and female. Looking at the picture, the two puppets appear almost identical in structure and costume elements. In rituals, true to its original function as a repellent, for



Figure 4. *Barongan* Museum Tropen - Nederland Collection in 1923, photograph by Rushdy Hoesein

reinforcements, earth offering rituals, village spiritual cleaning, and offering preceding a building construction for safety, the face of the male *ondel-ondel* was created to be horrific, frightening to dispel everything bad, which is undesirable (Purbasari et al., 2019).

The changes in appearance of *ondel-ondel* started in the beginning of the 20th century parallel with the shifting from an agrarian to an industrial urban culture. The ancient and sacred *ondel-ondel* that was once believed to be able to repel reinforcements or disturbances from the spirits, began to change function and take part in the celebration of folk parties and welcome distinguished guests at the inaugurations of buildings, entertainers for circumcision brides, or as part of the *Palang Pintu* procession in a Betawi traditional wedding. The changes of *Barongan* reached a climax in Governor Ali Sadikin's reign in the 1970s, where the *barongan* was revived through a Betawi Tradition Recreation in 1970 (Shahab, 2001). It was a process of nationalizing local traditions through new faces and functions.

### Personification Model

Jakarta experienced a transition from the traditional to the modern era, both physically and mentally. Jakarta had to improve itself to be able to compete with other capital cities. The determination of Jakarta's identity during the period of Ali Sadikin in April 1966 - July 1977 (R. A. K. Pratama et al., 2017) was a form of tug-of-war between the community, and political as well as personal interests for the declaration of this identity could run well and be accepted by all levels of society.

The Governor of DKI Jakarta, as a representative

of the ruling elite group, made policies by himself to make *ondel-ondel* as an icon of DKI Jakarta. The Governor of DKI Jakarta had to reach a consensus with the following parties who also had power in the Betawi tradition recreation process: the DKI Local Government (*Pemerintah Daerah* or PemDa), the Betawi Cultural Institute (LKB) and other Betawi organizations, as well as practitioners and artistic professionals (Shahab, 2001). The process of creating the Betawi tradition was initiated by the ruling elite group in the local government, which Ali Sadikin led. It lifted up Betawiness (*kebetawian*) in order to color Jakarta with local traditions but experienced many obstacles and conflicts. The second group is the Betawi Cultural Institute (LKB), which represents the community and acts as a liaison between the Local Government and the Betawi people (Betawi *Kota* or *Tengah* as the political and religious elite). LKB is fully funded by the local government, making it reliant on donors. The third group is practitioners or artists, dominated by the Betawi *Pinggir*.

Betawi organizations and LKB always had to accept the creations made by the local government. *Ondel-ondel* was included in one of the traditional arts in a Betawi tradition recreation project. To be accepted by all Betawi including religious and government elite groups, *ondel-ondel* had to change its appearance from a horrific and frightening giant to be a more humanistic and friendlier looking. The sacred ritual was simply set aside. The result of all this was an increase in Betawi art inventions, both in terms of quantity and quality (Shahab, 2001). This was a cultural negotiation, and one of the results of this bargaining was the birth of the *ondel-ondel* personification mode, which was a consensus involving all Betawi groups.

From an interview with Yahya (2017), nobody was certain what the word *ondel-ondel* means, but the word was popularized by legendary Betawi artists Benyamin Sueb and Ida Royani who sang *Ngarak Ondel-Ondel* written by Joko Subagio circa 1970. After that, the word *ondel-ondel* took over the word *barongan* (Yuwono, 2012). Since the declaration of *ondel-ondel* as a Jakarta icon, it is mandatory for government offices in DKI Jakarta to display a pair of *ondel-ondel* near the main entrance. From then on, *ondel-ondel* became state property. To become an icon of the city of Jakarta, *ondel-ondel* went through many changes, especially in its appearance and elements of costumes. Its appearance is more civilized and looks more like a human (personified).

The *ondel-ondel* resembled a large doll with a human-like body and a face representing a humanized *barongan* face. However, sometimes there are still fanged

and horrific looking *ondel-ondel*. This indicates that this model is still stealing from the previous model. The stolen part was combined with new elements in some changes. The adoption of several elements from *barongan* showed the art style that has flourished in the vortex of development ideology was still rooted in the past. The *ondel-ondel* was formed to become a symbol of the city of Jakarta when Jakarta was looking for an identity in a development program that had been intensively carried out since the 1970s. This model was a symbol of the birth of the Betawi human icon through *ondel-ondel*. *Ondel-ondel* was no longer horrific and terrifying as *barongan*, but it is not as beautiful as the *ondel-ondel* today (Figure 5).

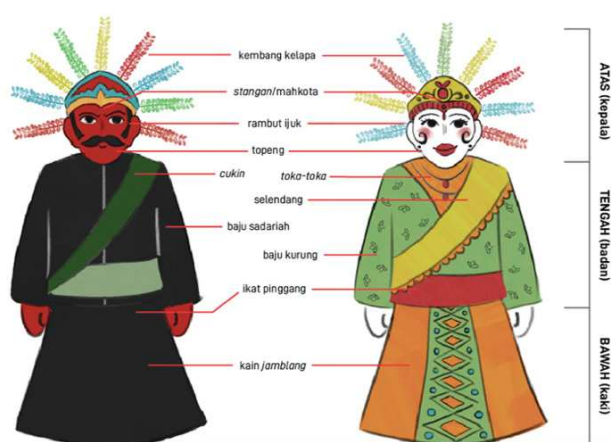


Figure 5. Structure and Costume Elements of the *Ondel-ondel* Personification Model

Regarding the research results, the important costume elements that were stolen from the history were: 1) Coconut flowers and *kemuning* leaves, a symbol of repellent against reinforcements, are now made from colorful paper to depict tolerance of diversity in Jakarta. 2) *Stangan*: the elongated shape, pointed and rough, was simplified with the flora and fauna motives, which were influenced by Chinese and Hindu elements. Then came typical Betawi motives such as *gigi balang*, tigers, and *tapak dara* flowers. 3) Mask: the horrific face was humanized even though it still has fangs. The masks were made of wood and fiber using various colors. 4) *Toka-toka*: the pentagon and triangle shape from fabric were replaced with a triangle decorated with pomegranate seeds, which means prosperity. 5) Sash: the placement of sash from left to right to match the woman is interpreted as a change in behavior from bad to good. Earlier, the sash was not worn by men but was later used as a promotional medium during political campaigns. 6) Dress: simple

changes changed into *baju kurung* with a simple motif. 7) Belts: from iron with a big buckle turned into a plain cloth with bright and contrasting colors to the dress. 9) Musical accompaniment: it started playing Betawi songs such as *kicir-kicir*, *jali-jali*, *centek manis*, and others.

A paradigmatic relationship is the relationship between signs in the same class or system. The elements which create the personification model were also a combination of some of the elements from the past (fibers as hair, coconut flowers, *stangan*/crowns, *toka-toka*, and fabric belt), and the additional elements such as a human face, *baju sadariah* clothes, and *kurung*. A paradigmatic relationship allows people to associate the presence of just one of these elements with *ondel-ondel*. A syntagmatic relationship directs the relationship of a sign to other signs, either preceding or following it. The existence of a sign in a syntax is mutually exclusive (Sunardi, 2013). The syntagmatic relationship here also concerns the *ondel-ondel* relationship of the personified model with the musical accompaniment, the audience, and every element of the costume elements in each *ondel-ondel* model. The connotation of all of this is that the position of the personification model as a means to encourage the development in Jakarta is so strong and not only for the Betawi community, but the immigrant communities also support the existence of the *ondel-ondel* personified model. This model was believed to be a unifying symbol for the people of Jakarta in carrying out the capital city's development post-independence.

This model was not as scary as *barongan*, yet still not as beautiful as today. In Jakarta, a Vespa community, via their blogspot account @scooterframe in 2013, showed an *ondel-ondel* in the 1970s. A photograph of a couple of *ondel-ondel*, with a large body portion of



Figure 6. *Ondel-ondel* in the 1970s by @scooterframe

almost two and half times the height of an adult human complete with large costume elements and rough looks, fierce but more humanlike (Figure 6).

This *ondel-ondel* model was popularized through myth as part of the naturalization process. The effect of myths naturalizing history into an ideology that can be accepted by society was also possible because ideological actualization takes place actively as seen from the tireless efforts of the local government in using the *ondel-ondel* personification model as a medium for development campaigns. Over time, Betawi people considered the presence of the *ondel-ondel* personification model as something normal, legitimate, and right. *Ondel-ondel* continues to take a position as an independent sign, so that it occupies the status as a symbol of Betawi society or culture, even though it keeps changing in color and shape. As a sign, *ondel-ondel* has deep roots in Betawi society and culture.

### Islamic Model

In the development of Jakarta, several important bloody tragedies happened in the 1980s related to Islam. In 1981, a fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) was issued on behalf of a respectable cleric, Buya Hamka (Islamic figure and chairman of the MUI at that time) to prohibit wishing Merry Christmas and joining its celebration for Muslims (A. B. Pratama, 2014). These incidents triggered many pros and cons from Jakarta Muslims. Buya Hamka placed himself higher than the government by issuing a fatwa unsupported by the government. This fatwa caused the radical Muslims to conduct sweeping during a Christmas celebration, which brought disunity and riot between them. The radical Muslim movement grew stronger and more aggressive to the dislike of the government, marked by harsh actions by the army, known as the Tanjung Priok incident in 1984.

Then, the New Order regime wanted to use the single state principle of Pancasila for all communities and organizations, but it was opposed by a mosques in Tanjung Priok (a strong Islamic base area with a dense population and a slum environment), which was followed by mass attacks on the apparatus (Danang, 2021). The situation heated up and certain people in the government were provoked to be hostile to Islam, resulting in clashes between the people of Tanjung Priok and the authorities which ended with arson and shooting incidents. Since there were many tragic incidents in Jakarta involving religion, the DKI Jakarta government needed to take action using a religious approach through culture to re-embrace the trust of the Betawi people.

Azhari Baedlawie, a figure who has dual influence

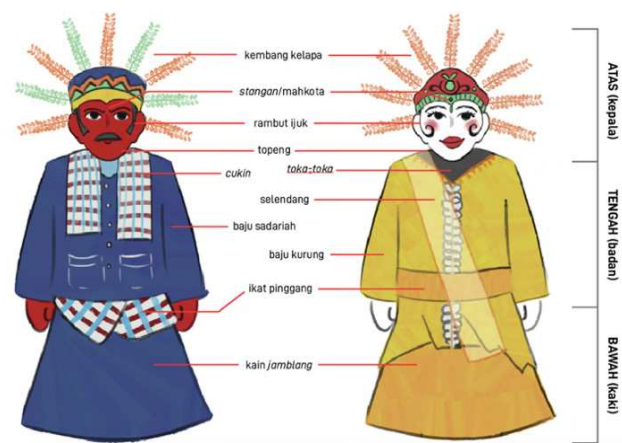


Figure 7. Structure and Costume Elements of the Islamic *Ondel-ondel* Model

as the Head of the DKI Jakarta Culture and Tourism Office and a public figure as the Coordinator of the Jakarta Islamic *Dakhwah Islamiyah* Coordination (KODI) (Wahidiyat, 2019), is authorized by the central government to resolve events related to Betawi Muslims. Based on his instruction, the Islamic model of *ondel-ondel* wearing *cukin* appeared in Betawi arts and culture activities with an Islamic flavor, one of which was Betawi *Lebaran*. Sash was replaced by *cukin*, reminding us of the pious youths of the *pesantren* or the famous Betawi warrior, Pitung. Both accessories give the impression that the male *ondel-ondel* looks pious and Islamic.

The Islamic *ondel-ondel* model had served to reconcile the relationship between the rulers and Muslims in the tragic violence. This model was formed to maintain unity with the authorities. The female *ondel-ondel* got an additional kebaya dress, which added flavor to the appearance of *None* (= miss) Betawi. The syntagmatic relationship in the Islamic *ondel-ondel* model was the function of the *ondel-ondel* personification model in different ideologies and forms adapted to its function.

The relationship between the Islamic *ondel-ondel* model and the musical accompaniment, the audience, and every element of the costume elements in each *ondel-ondel* model is shown in Figure 7.

According to the research, the changes in the costume elements of the personification to the Islamic model were found in 1) *Stangan*: the shape was shifted from an ornamented crown to a Muslim cap, also the decorative motifs of flora and fauna into geometric shapes. 2) Sash: meant as the bad behavior turned good, replaced by *cukin* that resembles *pesantren* youths and Betawi warriors *si Pitung*. 3) Dress: the *kurung* dress was replaced by a kebaya just like *none* Jakarta's costume



with a combination of bright and contrasting colors. 4) Belt: bright colored fabric replaced with a plaid sarong and wrapped around the waist inside the *sadariah* shirt. It is reminiscent of the suit of an *abang* Jakarta costume. 5) Music accompaniment: *tanjidor* music in nuances of desert (Arabic) music is enlivened in white *sadariah* uniforms.

The Islamic *ondel-ondel* model with a symbolic relationship explained the function and origin of this model. The depiction of a Betawi young man and woman couple who are firm, brave, gentle, and friendly in the personification model of *ondel-ondel* is considered insufficient. In addition, religious and faithful characteristics are included in this model. The *ondel-ondel* was made to describe the ideal young man according to the Betawi community at that time. Shapes and colors were combined to reflect the characteristics of the Betawi people who are pious and religious. The Islamic *ondel-ondel* model was a sign that represents the face of the *ondel-ondel* personification model that has been “Islamized”.

The paradigmatic relationship of the Islamic *ondel-ondel* mode, from one sign to other signs are one class or one system. The Islamic model was a one-class model with the *barongan* model and also the personification model, although the elements of the costumes come from the *barongan* model and the personification model applied to the Islamic model, which had experienced continuity and change. The syntagmatic relationship looks at the relationship between the Islamic model with the musical accompaniment, the audience, and every costume element in each *ondel-ondel* model. The syntagmatic sign relationship encourages people to understand the *ondel-ondel* of the *barongan* model and the personification model and to imagine other models that developed in the next period as continuity and change in preserving tradition. Preservation implies continuity and change and even in the case of the Islamic model, change was significant because the characteristics that were considered to be Islamic were forced to be present predominantly in *ondel-ondel*, although what was considered to be Islamic characteristics needs to be questioned.

The Islamic model carried the message of the improvement of the spiritual quality among the people. The connotation of all of this was the *ondel-ondel*, which has long since been a symbol of the Betawi people seems to have been “circumcised or Islamized”.

The Islamic model was created by stealing the form of the personification model, which was then adapted to the needs of the time to decrease the tension

from Jakarta’s bloody incidents. Using the same structure as the two previous models, the Islamic model transforms the sash costume elements into a *cukin* and the *stangan* into a *peci* or *kopiah*. It hoped to be the *ondel-ondel* model which looks more civilized, pious, and religious. They could neutralize the situation and conditions by giving the impression that the local government seemed to protect and favor Muslims at that time. This representation of the Islamic image was especially visible in the costume elements, which refer to the Islamic clothing elements commonly used, such as *peci* and *cukin*. The *ondel-ondel* had a more human-like appearance (Betawi young people) with elements of costumes that look more well-ordered, polite, and neat. Its better shape with more proportional body size than the *barongan* and personification models provides a picture of politeness, wisdom, devotion like a *santri* as a harmonious and virtuous Betawi human.

All stolen costume elements from the previous model were combined into one form, the Islamic *ondel-ondel* model, through a distortion process. In an effort to present an Islamic impression, *ondel-ondel* was forced out of the previous model through the attributes of *santri*, so that it was not rooted in Betawi culture. The artists represented by LKB opposed this because it gave the impression of exclusivity as if the *ondel-ondel* belonged to Islam. The negotiation was not easy and took some time to overcome. After a while, the Betawi people considered the Islamic model as something common, legitimate, and even true. The Islamic model was part of a myth that became a religious ideology, which was actualized in society.

Through *ondel-ondel* and *cukin*, the Betawi rulers were communicated symbolically with their people to convey the same identity and gain a positive response to the legitimization of their power. The addition of *cukin* as a decoration in the male *ondel-ondel* to appear like a Betawi Muslim was born through *ondel-ondel*. In controlling society, the ruling elite needed to spread myths that contained certain ideologies to support their ideology (Storey, 1993). Likewise, to unite the Betawi community, the local government needed to spread the myth of the need for unity by upholding the Islamic position in Jakarta, which experienced political instability. Through *ondel-ondel*, the message delivered to the young generation is that they are the nation’s hope and have good morality to reflect Islam. Broadly speaking, it seems to follow the saying “Don’t say you are Betawi, if you are not Muslim”.

The Islamic model was introduced to the Betawi community. After quite some time, enduring various criticisms and suggestions, an Islamic model was created,

which could be accepted as a symbol of the glorious morals owned by the Betawi people. These negotiations also did not take place drastically although the Betawi people tended to be tolerant, so they did not oppose the “Islamization” of *ondel-ondel*. The authorities provided a rational interpretation to justify this policy because it was to maintain the unity of the people and the immigrant communities living in Jakarta. Based on Barthes’ viewpoint, this case occurred deliberately different from the interpretation of the existing markers. Referring to Barthes, this interpretation included a stolen language, which the local government utilized *ondel-ondel* as an icon of “Islamizing”.

### Commercial Model

As part of national development, the tourism sector has played an important role as one of the driving powers of national economic growth since 1975 (Yakup, 2019). Therefore, *ondel-ondel* has started to be used as a tourist attraction (Khoiri, 2016). Its appearances and performances often attract attention and invite people to enjoy it. Sometimes the audience gives money to *ondel-ondel* as an appreciation of their hard work, while dynamically dancing during the festival such as Jakarta’s birthday, *Kirab Budaya*. With these advantages, institutions are willing to hire a complete *ondel-ondel* for a certain purpose.

To meet the demands from the tourism sector, *ondel-ondel* was utilized to intensify the excitement and income of the community. To attract the audience more, the costume elements were made to be more sellable. The male *ondel-ondel*, originally horrifying, became friendlier and more humane with a big smile. The makers gave the female blush and eyeshadow, dimples, curled lashes, and earrings. Due to commercialization, *ondel-ondel* was given the freedom to exist in an unlimited number of forms. There is a possibility that *ondel-ondel* can be used as a portrait of a beautiful and handsome Betawi that is pious, polite, gentle, clever in reciting, proficient in martial arts, modern, and contemporary.

The commissioned *ondel-ondel* often broke the rules of the existing costume elements so that the forms, colors, and placements in the *ondel-ondel* lose their meaning. The mass *ondel-ondel* in the parade appear as beautiful as possible with various shapes (sizes, elements of costumes, and colors). *Ondel-ondel* was shown diversely, without any rules. The relationship between symbolic signs in the commercial model has a role in the successful commercialization of all sectors in Jakarta. The *ondel-ondel* commercial model’s paradigmatic relationship relates the continuity and changes to the

elements of a costume in the commercial model and the previous model. The elements used and with experienced continuity as well as changes are the coconut flower, handlebar/crown, mask, *cukin*, *toka-toka*, sash, clothing, belt, and *jambulang* fabric. Meanwhile, the spirit of freedom in making *ondel-ondel* commercial models has led to anomalies in the emergence of the *ondel-ondel* child form. The *ondel-ondel* commercial model’s syntagmatic relationship came into being because of the need to functionalize the Islamic model in different ideologies and forms that experience continuity and change.

The commercial model was born derived from a longing for a new meaning that represents the hope of prosperity for the Betawi, which was based on the commercialization of all aspects of life. In the syntagmatic relationship, it is realized that the commercial model carries a message of increasing business and income for the people. The connotation was the *ondel-ondel* looked “commercialized”. The myth seems natural and contains the ideology of improving people’s welfare by commercializing *ondel-ondel* without abandoning tradition (Figure 8).

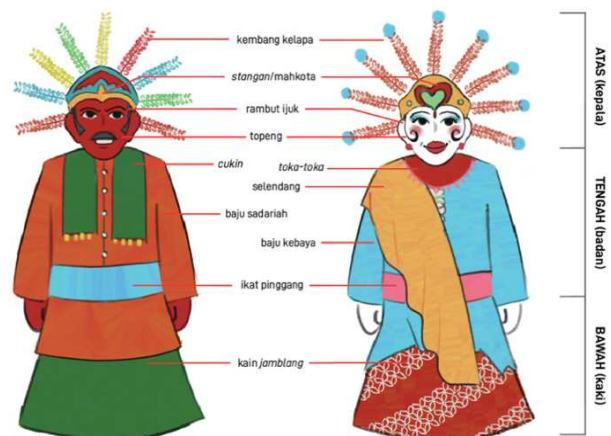


Figure 8. Structure and Costume Elements of the *Ondel-ondel* Commercial Model

The costume elements that had changed from the Islamic to the commercial model were: 1) Coconut flower: different colors with the pair, not uniform and metallic colors appearing with additional decorations at the ends in the form of flowers or paper balls. 2) *Stangan*: various decorative motives, traditional and pop with current trendy themes and also with bright and contrasting colors. 3) Mask: looked increasingly human-like. The male is given a smile with a mustache and neatly lined white teeth—the smiling woman has dimples, full make up, and earrings. Fiber masks are

more popular due to the price and time saving. 4) *Toka-toka*: very vast shapes with and without pomegranate seed decorations, used as a promotional means for studio owners. *Toka-toka* was treated as a mere meaningless neck ornament. 5) The sash or scarf was used out of the improperly (the correct way is from the left shoulder to the right hip). There were several variations of motifs, plaid and Javanese batik, weaving, and plain colors. 6) Clothing: the color depends on the order. Street *ondel-ondel* pairs often wear the same color of clothing to save costs. 7) Belts on the male *ondel-ondel* are sometimes used, sometimes not. 8) *Jamblang* fabric no longer uses Betawi batik because it is difficult and expensive, often replaced by plain or other Javanese batik fabric. 9) Music accompaniment: a combination of music playing Betawi and pop songs. The music accompaniment wears a bright color depending on the commission, while the street music accompaniment wears ordinary clothes. 10) Amount: *ondel-ondel* consisted of more than a pair both in the form of performing arts and decorations. 11) Size: very diverse, tailored to consumer demand. 12) Media transfer: *ondel-ondel* images are applied to other media such as scarves, wall hangings, souvenirs, cloth motives, birthday cakes, and so on. 13) Anomaly: *ondel-ondel* have children and can appear incomplete without a body (only the head).

To meet the market needs, the commercial model was made more sophisticated. This *ondel-ondel* was used to gather crowds in Betawi cultural events as promotional commodities, decorations of entrances, stages, and the local identity. After the economic crisis in 1998, the local government changed the interpretation from the previous *ondel-ondel* as a pious and religious Muslim figure. According to Barthes' stolen language, the local government stole *ondel-ondel* to be used as a new marker as a secular figure to shape it according to market tastes or commissions. *Ondel-ondel* has become an icon of modernity, a cosmopolitan Betawi icon that is modern and commercial. Through this naturalization, the Islamic *ondel-ondel* model's face was transformed into the free-form face of the *ondel-ondel* commercial model. Since the commercial model was very free to manufacture, it can be said that the stolen elements come from all the previously developed *ondel-ondel* models plus new creations.

All costume elements were combined into one form: the commercial model through a distortion process. This *ondel-ondel* myth was then popularized through ideological actualization in Betawi public events, such as Indonesia's Independence Day on August 17, the Indonesian People's Culture *Kirab*, and so on. Over time,

the Betawi people considered the commercial model's *ondel-ondel* as normal, legitimate, and right. The local government used the market ideology in *ondel-ondel*, fulfilling commercialization and trade needs, which can be felt through the "freedom" of appearance given to *ondel-ondel*. The negotiation happened in *ondel-ondel* in market ideology involving the local government as policymakers (rulers), actors of the *ondel-ondel* art (producers), the Betawi people themselves as art connoisseurs, and consumers.

The market ideology was full of "commissions", which means that the market's desire or commission determines the artistic decisions. The meanings and classical standards or norms previously found in *ondel-ondel* were ignored to satisfy market desires and economic demands for the craftsmen and artists. Along with the disappearance of these norms, the ideal standards of artists and craftsmen also faded. Thus, creating was no longer a daily pulse. The creative process happened a lot when there were donors.

The commercial model conveys the message of increased commerce and revenue through the commercialization of *ondel-ondel*. The connotation is it appeared "commercialized". This myth seems natural and contains the ideology of increasing people's welfare by commercializing *ondel-ondel* without leaving the tradition. In reality, the *ondel-ondel* tradition is mostly violated in the commercial *ondel-ondel* model. The continuity and changes in the costume elements in the commercial model that were packaged following this order created a market ideology. A market ideology is a vortex of freedom of creation or high community creativity to produce various *ondel-ondel* colors and shapes. When the costume elements and colors in *ondel-ondel* are only used for fun, aesthetics, and emphasis, the traditional meanings and values of it will disappear by themselves. Market forces control the craftsmen in creating *ondel-ondel* forms. The *ondel-ondel*, originally a pair, now appears in more than a pair, even in large numbers in parade formats. *Ondel-ondel* in the market ideology provides a humorous, modern, and cheerful association.

The discussion results and findings above can be illustrated with a scheme as below (Figure 9).

*Ondel-ondel* resulted from art and culture that can be analyzed with the synchronic theory and diachronic changes in history. The three *ondel-ondel* models were analyzed by using Roland Barthes' myth theory, naturalization, and ideology, while the *barongan* model was only used as a research background. An important finding related to the ideology was that changes in the

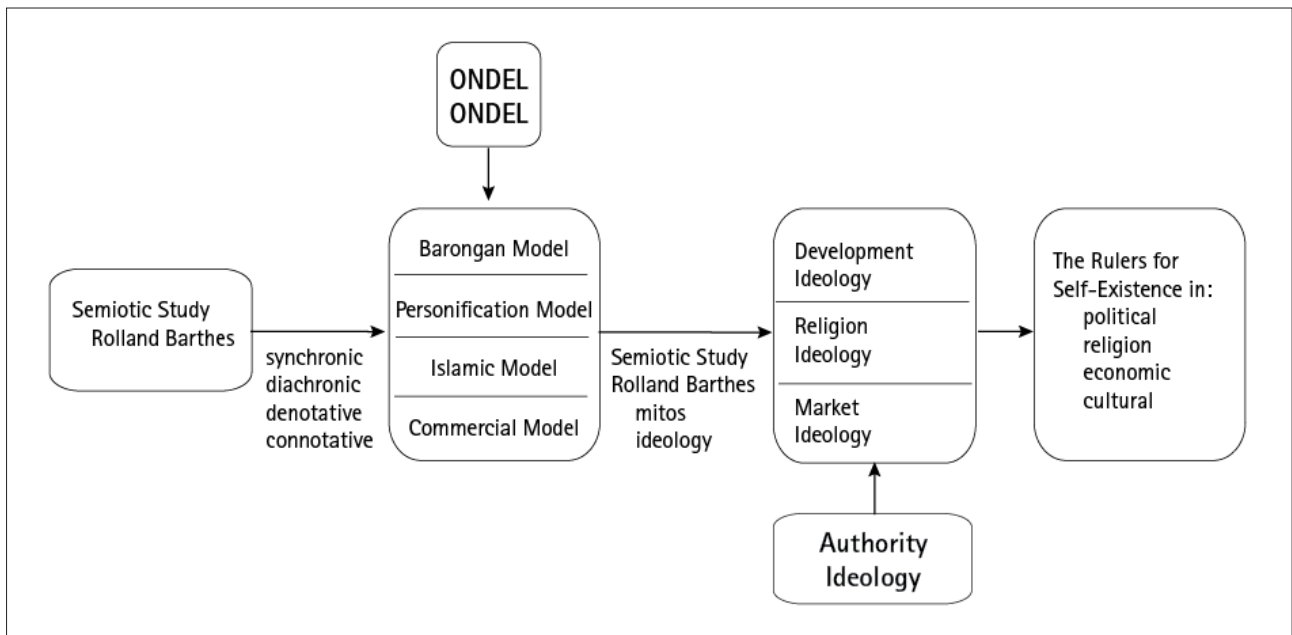


Figure 9. Schematic Findings in *Ondel-ondel*

ideology vortex (ideology of development, religion, and market) were controlled by the main ideology, called the authority ideology. This Betawi ruling elite group consists of several rulers who can work together to create a political, economic, social, and religious consensus to maintain the integrity of the Betawi community.

## CONCLUSION

Through the continuity of and changes to costume elements of *ondel-ondel*, I identified three *ondel-ondel* models based on the “original” *barongan* model used as background research: the personification model, the Islamic model, and the commercial model, wherein each model brought their own ideology.

In the personification model, *ondel-ondel* was reborn as a Betawi icon through the power of Jakarta’s ruling elite, as part of Jakarta’s identity creation in the development phase. *Ondel-ondel* has become a unifying symbol in the development ideology. The Islamic *ondel-ondel* model presents an image of religious Betawi in reflection of the ruling elite’s efforts to reharmonize with the Betawi Muslim people through influential Muslim figures. The image of polite and religious Betawi people is part of the religious ideology. In the commercial model, the economic elite have significant influence because of people’s dreams of prosperity, which make *ondel-ondel*’s commercialization dominant. *Ondel-ondel* has become

an icon of modernity and cosmopolitan living, which is the result of market ideology.

*Ondel-ondel* was used as a campaign medium for success in presenting an ideology. Once established, the ideology became a cultural construction by the rulers to ensure their existence through identity, politics, religion, economy, and culture. The changes of the costume elements in *ondel-ondel* were influenced by the fact that there has been a change in culture or traditions, both physically (in place) and non-physically (knowledge of *ondel-ondel*). *Ondel-ondel*, which was originally part of the Betawi culture, has now turned into a cultural platform for the rulers’ existence.

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