

*Fashion as Communication: A Semiotic Analysis on Dagadu T-Shirts as Counter-Hegemony Toward Americanization*

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## 1. Introduction

In the struggle to be a consumer society, the Indonesian turned into a society that was idolized many things coming from the West. Western is a concept that refers to the over-developed countries majority in Europe, which in the era of colonialism colonized countries in Asia and Africa. Now, the West also includes the United States of America (USA) and Australia (Damono in Ibrahim, 1997: 4).

Although the USA did not enter the ranks of colonial powers in the era of colonialism, but It has become one of the most influential countries in the world. Political economic theorists, such as Armand and Michele Mattelart, Janet Wasko, Toby Miller, and Herbert Schiller (in Branston and Stafford, 2003: 408) argues that American dominance in the world began with the globalization of communication that triggered the interests of the various trading company based in the U.S. oil fields and the army since the Second World War. The power of the American media becomes a major factor in the American dominance around the world. Through the power of the media, America exports its lifestyle which becomes a reference for Third World countries.

The result of Surveyone in 2007 showed that American-style restaurant dominated the fast food restaurants that adored among young people in Indonesia ([www.surveyone.co.id](http://www.surveyone.co.id)). The top spots occupied by Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) followed by A & W and McDonald's. Other survey showed that Polo and Hugo Boss are the favorite fashion and perfume brands of young executives in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan.

Antonio Gramsci, as the originator of the theory of hegemony, defines hegemony as a means of cultural and ideological in which the dominant groups in society, including the ruling class, to maintain its dominance through consent spontaneously of the subordinate groups, including the working class (in Strinati, 2004: 147).

Referring to Gramsci's idea about hegemony, we have to face the fact that Indonesian people accept the domination of American culture by consent. The continued domination of American culture to the people of Indonesia will give a fairly alarming implications. If the Indonesian people constantly refer to American culture as a lifestyle and adopt the culture roundly, then what will happen to the local culture of Indonesia as a nation's identity? Branston and Stafford (2003: 408) suggests the local and traditional culture will be destroyed by a process as it is conceptualized by Schiller as media imperialism or cultural imperialism. In fact, Strinati (2004: 33) argues that Americanization can threaten a nation's cultural identity. Thus, the hegemony of American culture to the people of Indonesia must be confronted if we do not want to lose the true identity of this nation.

In spawned the idea of hegemony, Gramsci also revealed his idea of counter to hegemony. This thinking is based on the assumption that a society will not blindly accept all the ideas offered by the dominant power. At the same time, the public will use the same sources and strategies used by the dominant social group launched to oppose the hegemonic dominance. This is what Gramsci called as "counter to hegemony" (West and Turner, 2007: 397).

In Indonesia, one of significant movements against Americanization was the bombing of McDonalds restaurant in Makassar on December 5, 2002 that killed three people and wounded 11 others. Unfortunately, this kind of movement took innocent people's lives. Then, there should be other way in resisting Americanization in "soft-way" without losing the resistance mission?

In 1994, in Yogyakarta was born a creative design business called Dagadu Djogdja. It's main product are t-shirts with humorous designs. One of the concept of the designs was parodying

many famous icons from all around the world. Dagadu considers this concept as a universal formulation through which Dagadu want to illustrate that Dagadu has a taste that is also accepted internationally ([www.dagadu.co.id](http://www.dagadu.co.id)). Many of the selection of international icons that are derived from the United States, for example the logo of Superman, Starbucks Coffee, Dunkin' Donuts, YouTube, Warner Bros., or Melrose Place the series.

Lull (1995: 38) argues a tendency of resistance to hegemony formulated in the processes of communication, the interpretation, the social circulation, and use of media content. Expression of the dominant ideology sometimes reformulated to emphasize alternative messages in a form of anti-starch or resistance through humorous or sarcastic ways.

Considering Dagadu designs that parodies icons from America, then frame it with Lull thinking about resistance to hegemony, the author assumes that Dagadu designs are a form of counter-hegemony against American domination symbols. Fashion, however, is a phenomenon of communication. Every piece of clothing worn by someone states something, which communicates who the person behind the clothing. Dagadu T-shirts as part of fashion is a medium of communication. Dagadu plays as a communicator that encodes counter-hegemony toward American cultural domination in Indonesia.

This paper will reveal two issues; how do Dagadu t-shirts as a fashion do the communication directed to counter-hegemony againts Americanization by producing alternative values to the dominant values, and what ideologies are carried behind the counter-hegemonic designs of Dagadu t-shirts against Americanization?

## **2. British Cultural Studies**

British Cultural Studies pioneered by Richard Hogart and Raymond Williams in 1950 that examined the working class in Britain after World War II (Littlejohn, 2002: 216). At present, Stuart Hall led this movement. Cultural studies carried by Hall is based on the desire to uncover the role of elite institutions, such as the media, which often presents a misleading image (West and Turner, 2007: 389-390).

By using this British cultural studies perspective, this study will see how the United States as a dominant force in the international level, is still so powerful. United States is able to make it's culture so loved by everyone outside the country and make all countries around the world as the target market for all it's cultural products.

## **3. Antonio Gramsci: Hegemony and Counter-hegemony**

### **a. Hegemony**

Gramsci's notion of hegemony is based on the taught of Karl Marx about false consciousness, a condition in which individuals become unaware of the dominance in their lives (West and Turner, 2007: 395). In the thought of Gramsci, the audience can be exploited by the same social system that they support (financially).

In contemporary Western society, power relations between groups and institutions tend to emerge through the approval process rather than violence and coercion (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 2002: 246). In hegemony, ideology is not imposed on the individual, but offered to them. Thus, the ideology that goes through hegemony will be accepted as unavoidable.

### **b. Counter-hegemony**

West and Turner (2007: 397) suggest people will not always accept and believe everything presented by the dominant power. Community will use the same resources and strategy with the

dominant social groups to oppose the domination of hegemonic dominance. Gramsci called this thought as counter-hegemony.

Tendency of resistance against hegemony are formulated in the processes of communication, the interpretation, the social circulation, and the use of media content (Lull, 1995: 38). The expressions of the dominant ideology sometimes reformulated to emphasize alternative messages, and even in the form of anti-starch through humorous or sarcastic ways.

Lull infers that resistance to hegemony does not necessarily in the serious form of economic and political control as in the concept of Gramsci, Williams, Hall, Giddens, and Thompson (Lull, 1995: 40). However, Lull ensures that these forms actually express freedom of thought, creativity, determination, and resistance that can't be destroyed by hegemony.

By using the theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony of Gramsci, it was obvious that what was done by Dagadu through it's T-shirt designs that parodying global symbols from America is a form of resistance against American cultural domination of the Indonesian people.

#### **4. Fashion as Communication**

Fiske (1990 in Barnard, 2009: 41) states that there are two main schools in the study of communication. The first school sees communication as a process of sending and receiving messages, while the semiotic models understand communication as "the production and the exchange of meanings" (Fiske, 1990 in Barnard, 2009: 44).

Thus, the designs on the shirts Dagadu is a form of communication where the meaning of semiotic design will be entirely in the hands of readers. The meaning will vary as influenced by different things from one person to another person. The distinction of meaning by t-shirt readers differently can't be regarded as a failure of communication. Nevertheless, this study would not elaborate on the meaning of the Dagadu t-shirt designs. This section merely wanted to show that T-shirt as a fashion is also a form of communication. And, the communications made by Dagadu intended to launch criticism of the dominant party, which in the terms of Gramsci describes as counter-hegemony.

#### **5. Globalization, Glocalization, and Grobalization**

Ritzer, in *The Globalization of Nothing* (2006: 98), offers the concept of grobalization regarded as indispensable companion to the idea of glocalization. As the opposite of glocalization, grobalization will lead to the creation of homogeneity.

Ritzer lead us to understand the concept of glocalization through heterogenization which gives emphasis on diversity that is characteristic of glocalization. Heterogenization is in contrast to the homogenization that always accompanies grobalization.

Grobalization focused on the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and preferences and their willingness to put themselves in a variety of geographic areas (Ritzer, 2006: 98). Their main concern is to see the power, their influence, and in some cases see the growth (grow) their profits around the world. In Ritzer's thought, grobalization forms a binary opposition against glocalization.

One of the main driving forces in grobalization is the need of various companies, institutions, and countries to seek profits by increasing their cultural hegemony throughout the world. In Ritzer's perspective, grobalization was born as the impact of the American interests to gain profit by pushing it's cultural hegemony over the globe.

Three subprocesses of globalization that takes Ritzer's concern are capitalism, McDonaldisasi, and Americanization that actually inter-related (2006: 106). Americanization is the proliferation of ideas, habits, social patterns, industrial, and American capital to the world (F. Williams in Ritzer, 2006: 113). Ritzer assesses Americanization as a form of cultural imperialism, institutions, politics, and the American economy. Some negative impacts of Americanization include the destruction of the national artistic expression of the Hollywood film industry to national films in various countries and the spread of new facilities that encourage the consumption of American-style (even forcing us) to consume goods and services in an unprobable amount (2006: 114-115).

## 6. Semiotics

Ferdinand de Saussure defined semiotics as "the study of signs in society". He also showed that semiotics related to what gave rise to signs and what laws governing the signs (Saussure in Barnard, 2009: 115-118). For Saussure, a sign consists of two parts, "signifier" and "signified". Signifier is a physical part of a sign such as voice or word form. Signified is a mental concept which is a reference to the signifier. Taken together, they form a "sign".

## 7. Study Methods

This study uses critical constructionism paradigm. Heiner (2006: 7 -11) stated that critical constructionism is a synthesis of two influential theories in sociology; the conflict theory and symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism directs our attention to the meaning of social problems in society instead of the social problems that actually occur. Unlike the social constructionism, critical constructionism emphasizes the importance of the role of elites in the process of the construction of problems. By borrowing the concept of conflict theory, critical constructionism argues that the way social problems are constructed, formed, and presented to the public more often reflect the interests of the elite than of most people who are powerless.

A qualitative approach is utilized in this study. Baxter and Babbie (2004) emphasized that qualitative study methods are often carried out by interpretive and critical studyers. Qualitative study process can be described as inductive (not deductive) and ideographic (not nomothetic). The unit of analysis of this study is the Dagadu's t-shirt designs that indicate counter-hegemony toward popular objects from the United States. Primary data obtained by analyzing the T-shirt designs that reflect counter-hegemony toward Americanization. Secondary data obtained through interviews with the creative team of PT. Aseli Dagadu Djogdja.

This study is a review of the signs that appear in Dagadu's t-shirt designs, so the most appropriate analysis is semiotic. Patton (2002: 133) put semiotics as a study perspective that elaborates how various signs (words and symbols) direct meanings in certain contexts. In reading a text, Barthes (1974 in Wardani, 2006) divided it into units called lexia readings. Lexia consist of five basic reading code which aims to determine how the lections are interconnected and woven that form a whole text.

The five reading codes are hermeneutical code, semantics code, symbolic code, proairetic code, and cultural code. Hermeneutical code is a code of puzzle and connect with readers' hope to be able to find an answer to the question or enigma contained in a text. Semantics code or connotative code uses cues, clues, or glimpses of meaning that direct the readers to the themes in the story. Symbolic code is characterized by the repeated appearance regularly so they are recognizable. Proairetic code is also called as the action code. Cultural code is in the form of reference or allusion to the various things that have been there before and have been generally known.

This study is in the domain of text-production which elaborates how Dagadu Djogdja produce alternative messages by doing a parody of the global symbols that come from America. Thus, this study does not reflect the perceptions of consumers regarding Dagadu T-shirt messages that are counter-hegemonic against Americanization.

### 8. A Counter-hegemony toward Americanization on Dagadu T-Shirts

Referring to the original work, the parodying performed by Dagadu to various symbols from America intend to form a new reading to simply make jokes or innuendo slip, either on the image of the symbol and on the city and the Jogja culture. The creation of new meaning is in harmony with the concept of counter-hegemony offered by Lull that is not only done in a serious or extreme way, as in the concept of Gramsci, Williams, Hall, Giddens, and Thompson (1995: 40), but can also be done in 'easy' way without leaving its main mission, which is to fight.

In this study, studyer analyzes five Dagadu's designs that illustrate the counter-hegemony against Americanization. This study will only focus on the Americanization forms which are interpreted F. Williams as the proliferation of ideas, habits, social patterns, industry, and capital of America to all parts of the world (in Ritzer, 2006: 113). The keywords used in this analysis are *ideas, habits, social patterns, industry, and capital* of America that comes through its products in Indonesia.

The five designs analyzed in this study are; first, the design with the name "Always Jogja", parodying the Coca-Cola tag "Always Coca-Cola". Secondly, the design of "Sudirman" which parodied an iconic superhero "Superman" from Superman Returns movie version. Third, the design of "Malio Boro Mbikin Boros" that parodied "Warner Bros". Fourth, the design of "Jogjanya nyAman!" which is a parody tag of the fast food restaurant Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) "Jagonya Ayam". Fifth, the design of "Planet Semrawood" which is a parody of the "Planet Hollywood" restaurant.

If described in a matrix, the five symbols of Americanization can be seen in the following chart.

Parodied Symbols	Amerikanization Items				
	Ideas	Habits	Social Patterns	Industry	Capital
<i>Coca-Cola</i>		√		√	√
<i>Superman</i>	√			√	√
<i>Warner Bros</i>	√			√	√
<i>Kentucky Fried Chicken</i>		√		√	√
<i>Planet Hollywood</i>			√	√	√

Table 1. Americanization on the Symbols Parodied Dagadu

#### 8. 1. "Always Jogja" Design



Figure 1. Coca-Cola logo and the Design of "Always Jogja"

In the design of "Always Jogja", there are some lexia that can be read. The first lexia is the text written as "Always". This text can be categorized as a hermeneutical code for causing suspension of answers to what is meant by the word "Always". The second lexia and the most prominent is the text inscribed the word 'Jogja'. This lexia is a proairetic code because Jogja (Yogyakarta) refers to very well-known cultural city located in Central of Java, Indonesia with many stories behind it. The combination of the two lexia constitutes a phrase 'Always Jogja'. This phrase leads to a semantics code that will direct readers to the theme in the story.

The idea of Coca-cola advertisement, is that people "always" consume Coca-Cola as a daily drink. The message to be conveyed in the design of "Always Jogja" by taking the concept of binary opposition, is to do the contradiction between global vs. local. Dagadu tries to counter the hegemony of Coca-Cola as a global symbol that is identic with America by presenting Jogja as the representation of the locality of Indonesia.

As mentioned previously, the first and the second lexia of this design that generates the phrase "Always Jogja" can be categorized as a code of semantics. Referring to the image that Coca-Cola tries to build by it's ads that consumers always drink Coca-Cola, "Always Jogja" design wants to give connotative meanings that readers should just "always" think of the city of Yogyakarta. "Always Jogja" can also be included as a cultural code. As a cultural code, we can see how the Coca-Cola drink has become entrenched in all parts of the world because almost every person ever consumes Coca-Cola.

We could say the United States has successfully exported its culture to Indonesian people to make Coca-Cola as a daily drink replacing water. Through this design, Dagadu want to invite us to love Yogyakarta, as a city that was once became the capital of Indonesia from 1946 to 1949 (Suryo in Siswanto, ND : 4). Dagadu invites us to turn a love for Coca-Cola to the city of Yogyakarta. Coca-Cola and Jogja is no analogy to be equivalent, but Dagadu tries to replace the image of Coca-Cola which is so adored by Indonesian people to the city of Yogyakarta.

## 8.2. Design "Sudirman"



Figure 2. Superman Returns Movie icon and the Design of Sudirman

The first lexia appeared on the design of "Sudirman" is a "Sudirman" text. This lexia can be categorized as a cultural code because Sudirman is an Indonesian national hero who is closely related to the history of this nation to gain independence from the hands of the invaders. The second lexia is the visualization of General Sudirman opening his long greatness coat. This lexia can be classified as proairetic code. The third lexia is a Javanese traditional hat called "blangkon" and a Javanese traditional dagger called "keris" that can also be categorized as a cultural code since both are presenting Javanese culture.

The connotative meaning that emerges from the overall design is that Dagadu wants to remind us that we also have a true hero, not a fantasy figure, which may be more super than Superman who

has made a large contribution in the history of Indonesian nationality, General Sudirman. Superman and Sudirman, are both youth leaders who had the same "power" as a heroic figure and both are fighting for something. Superman fought against injustice, oppression, crime, in the construction of American values. Sudirman was a young Indonesian leaders who fought against the Dutch colonialists and Japan to win the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. If every Indonesian child idolized Superman as a super hero, why they do not idolize General Sudirman, a real character, who sacrificed body and soul for the sake of the sovereignty of this nation and has many exemplary values? The "S logo" should represent Sudirman , the true Indonesian hero.

### 8.3. "Boro Malio Mbikin Boros" Design



Figure 3. The Logo of Warner Bros. And the Design of Malioboro Mbikin

The first most prominent lexia of this design is a symbol of Warner Bros. (which is abbreviated as WB) parodied into MB by reversing the letter W to M, which stands for Mbikin Boros. First, this lexia could be classified as a cultural code. "Mbikin" is a word adopted from Javanese. This word represents "makes" in an nonformal language. Mbikin Boros means make someone extravagant.

This lexia can also be categorized as a hermeneutical code because it raises the question of what is meant by Mbikin Boros (make someone extravagant)? To be able to answer these questions, the reader will read other lexia, Malioboro which refers to a tourist site in the city of Yogyakarta. After reading this lexia, then comes the answer of the question: Malioboro Mbikin Boros (Malioboro makes someone extravagant). Why does Malioboro makes someone extravagant? To be able to answer this question, the lexia can be categorized as semantics code. Malioboro is one of the iconic site in Yogyakarta which is very popular among local Indonesian tourists. The connotations created from Malio Boro Mbikin Boros design is that because it is intended as a regional shopping center selling a variety of consumer goods, the travelers often unknowingly be spending a lot of money to spend in this place.

### 8.4. Design "Jogjanya nyAman!"



Figure 4. Kentucky Fried Chicken Logo and the Design of Jogjanya nyAman!



The visualization of Colonel Sanders wearing blangkon and surjan (both are the Javanese traditional clothes) can be categorized as semantics code. Through this design Dagadu would like to invite the Indonesian people to recall traditional Javanese clothes as Indonesian cultural heritage. Dagadu contradict globality with locality. Dagadu awares that KFC becomes a symbol of globalization. KFC in Indonesia proved to occupy the top position in the minds of the people for a place to enjoy fried chicken. This design can also be classified as semantics code. If KFC restaurants claim to be the champion process-based chicken dish, then Dagadu claims Yogyakarta as a city that can lead to a comfort life for anyone who comes (nyAman means comfortable). Overall, the design tries to contradict globality with locality.

#### 8.5. "Planet Semrawood" Design



Figure 5. The Logo of Planet Hollywood and the Design of Planet Semrawood

In the design of Planet Hollywood, Dagadu transform “Hollywood” into “Semrawood” said. The first lexia that can be read in this design is a hermeneutical code. An enigma appeared when the reader reads the word “semrawood”. Semrawood is the parodying word of “Hollywood”. It is the combination of two different languages. “Wood” in Indonesian is pronounced wud, when coupled with semra-, will generate a new word “semrawud” which is a play on the word “semrawut” (derives from Javanese) means chaotic. Thus, Dagadu encodes Planet Hollywood into Planet Semrawood, which means a chaotic/messy place.

The next code that can be read from the Planet design Semrawood is a semantics code. The semantic code reading will to an imaging of chaotic planet entirely different with the imaging that raises from Planet Hollywood restaurant. Planet Hollywood is identical with the modern life. On the contrary, by using semantic code reading, the reader can interpret the design of Planet Semrawood as a consumptive lifestyle brought by Planet Hollywood restaurant.

### 9. The Ideologies Behind the Dagadu’s Designs

Although since Dagadu was born it already had a firm commitment to criticize about the conditions around it, particularly with regard to issues of local Indonesian culture (read: the culture of Jogja), on the other hand however Dagadu that has become part of the cultural industries, will keep dragging us to be consumers. Dagadu is part of a business that still consider the profit that they earn so that their business can continue to run and support the people who support its operations. These actually are the two principals; cultural leg and economy leg that hoped to be able to go hand in hand explained Marsudi (The Creative Director of PT. Aseli Dagadu Djogdja). The cultural leg manifests itself in a variety of designs that demonstrate the locality of Jogja, although there is a possibility these kind of designs do not have selling points. However, idealism to commit to lift the endangered culture at a given time is greater than the desire to make a profit. That commitment also arises from the so-called oblongpedia designs that elevates the historical aspects and the cultural aspect of Jogja which has spawned three series, namely heritage, puppets, and topography.

That is Dagadu. Behind the various designs that are counter-hegemony toward Americanization, ideology, Dagadu proposes the nationalism (through the concept of “Jogjanization”) by lifting the

locality of Jogja in its parodying designs. On the other hand, Dagadu still carries the ideology of capitalism as an effort to spin the wheels of the business continues to become a new empire in the world of creative design.

## 10. Conclusions

From the analysis of the designs that are counter-hegemony toward Americanization that has been done as well as a review of the results of interviews with the Creative Manager and Creative Director of PT. Aseli Dagadu Djogdja, the conclusions that can be drawn from this study are:

- This study proves that the theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony echoed by Gramsci that domination of a force against a group of people by other people is conducted without coercion, the society often receive the domination by consent. In this study, America as a power in the various aspects of life, including culture, does hegemony to Indonesian society. This phenomenon brings to the thought of resisting americanization. Dagadu fights Americanization with Jogjanization. If drawn conceptually, it can be concluded that the cultural hegemony of a society can be countered with the production of locality.
- Dagadu tries to fight against the hegemony of American culture by parodying symbols from America with the locality of Jogja. The locality of Jogja becomes a 'tools' used to fight the domination. Americanization encountered with Jogjanization. Thus, Dagadu proposes nationalism along with capitalism, because the counter-hegemonic designs are financially profitable for Dagadu.
- Many of studies in communication related to fashion sees fashion as a tool for cultural hegemony. This study specifically shows how fashion used as a means of a resistance against hegemony. Dagadu as the representation of the youth with special characteristics; rebel and often eccentric, is a fashion that is part of a medium of communication, and it puts itself as a communicator that encodes globalized locality.
- This study answers Ritzer's question that resistance against Americanization does not have to always be done in a radical way, such as the bombing of the World Trade Center, but it can be done in creative ways that are not extreme.
- The historical and cultural background that makes the city of Jogjakarta becomes a cultural city, bring a strong influence for the born of many critical culturalists. Dagadu is one of the preservation actor of the local culture who was born in Yogyakarta. Through its products, Dagadu do counter-hegemony movement against Americanization. As a youth culture, Dagadu tries to foster a sense of nationalism among its consumers.

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The logo for the International Association for Cultural Studies (iafor) is centered on the page. It features the lowercase letters "iafor" in a light blue, serif font. The text is enclosed within a circular graphic composed of two overlapping, thick, curved lines. The upper line is light blue and the lower line is light red, creating a sense of motion or a stylized 'O' shape around the text.

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