

INTERPRETATION OF CULTURAL CODES IN THE *GADIS KRETEK* NOVEL BY RATIH KUMALA

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Abstract

*This research aims to interpret the meaning of cultural codes in the novel *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala. This type of research falls under the category of literature review. The study is supported by references such as novels and other book sources like journals, theses, dissertations, and so fort. The method employed in this research is qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative descriptive method is used to systematically and accurately describe the data under study based on existing phenomena. The data in this research consist of written data extracted from the story text, comprising words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs indicating the presence of cultural codes in the novel *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala. This research employs structural narrative analysis using Roland Barthes' semiotic codes to read and understand signs, and then describe the meanings of these semiotic codes. The data source this research is the novel titled *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala published in Jakarta, by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2022 with a total of 275 pages. The findings of this research interpret the cultural codes that appear in the novel *Gadis Kretek*.*

Keywords: *Five semiotic code, semiotics, roland barthes, novel*

1. Introduction

A novel is a form of imaginative literature that reflects human life and the associated issues. Novels are familiar in everyday life, as they have long served the function of providing entertainment to the public. Today, novels are widely recognized as one of the most prevalent media, whether in print or digital formats. As a medium, the novel is regarded as an effective tool for conveying information or messages. These messages are encapsulated in language that represents meaning, ideology, or specific phenomena deemed necessary for exposition by the author.

The conveyance of messages, ideas, and concepts in a novel is achieved by the author through both explicit and implicit language. In terms of conveying implicit meanings, the author uses words as signs that represent or signify certain meanings. In other words, these signs carry meanings that create communication between the author and the reader about what is intended to be conveyed (Wulandari and Siregar, 2020). Budiman (1999:21) states that the signs present in literary works can generate communication and provide new understanding about the world.

Signs in literary works are analyzed based on a semiotic approach. Semiotics is a literary discipline that studies signs. The term semiotics itself is derived from the Greek word *semeion*, which means 'sign'. Terminologically, semiotics refers to the science that studies an object, as well as all cultural events that function as signs.

Based on this understanding, the author is interested in analyzing how cultural signs appear in the novel. The novel chosen for this study is *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala. *Gadis Kretek* was published in Jakarta by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2022 and consists of 275 pages, being the seventh edition. *Gadis Kretek* is Ratih Kumala's fourth work of fiction, first published in 2012 in Jakarta by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. The novel has now been translated into three foreign languages: German, English, and Arabic.

The novel *Gadis Kretek* is set against the backdrop of Javanese life. It has a unique appeal, featuring themes of struggle and loyalty. The novel narrates the history of past family conflicts, as well as stories of romance and business rivalry. It also presents accounts of the colonial period, particularly during the Japanese occupation, the post-independence era, and the G30S (September 30th Uprising) period. *Gadis Kretek* is also closely intertwined with many aspects of Javanese culture and is filled with unexpected events.

The stories in the novel *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala contain numerous codes with significant meanings, particularly cultural codes that emerge within the narrative. Thus, the main research question in this study is how to interpret the cultural codes present in the novel *Gadis Kretek*. The aim of this research is to interpret the cultural codes found in *Gadis Kretek*. To identify the cultural codes in the novel, the author employs Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method.

2. Method

The methodology in this research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Descriptive qualitative research utilizes explanatory tools to present findings in a descriptive form. It is termed descriptive because the research describes data objectively, according to the reality observed and the data obtained. It is called qualitative because the explanations of

interconnected concepts are conducted using words or sentences, rather than statistical numbers.

This type of research falls under the category of library research. It is referred to as library research because it is supported by references, including the novel itself and other supporting sources such as journals, theses, dissertations, and other materials relevant to the research problem. The data in this study are extracted from the narrative text, including words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs.

The primary source of data in this research is the novel “Gadis Kretek” by Ratih Kumala. This novel was published in Jakarta by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2022 and comprises 275 pages. The specific edition analyzed in this study is the seventh edition. The data collection techniques employed in this research include analytical reading and note-taking. The data analysis technique aims to interpret the meanings of cultural codes that appear in the novel “Gadis Kretek”, using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the aforementioned background, the research question in this study is: How can the meanings of semiotic codes in the novel “Gadis Kretek” by Ratih Kumala be interpreted? The objective of this research is to describe the interpretation of the meanings of semiotic codes in the novel “Gadis Kretek” by Ratih Kumala.

3.1 Cultural Code of the Umbilical Cord Wrapped Baby

The term "umbilical cord wrapped baby" refers to a situation where a baby is born with the umbilical cord wrapped around its body or intestines. This condition can slightly impede the delivery process compared to a normally born baby. In Javanese society, a baby born with the umbilical cord wrapped around it is believed to possess special attributes compared to other babies. This is evident in the case of Roemaisa giving birth to Dasiyah, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

“Walah... kelilit usus, Nduk, bayimu. Ra po-po, mengko dadi bocah sing pantes nganggo klambi opo wae” (Walah... terlilit usus, Nak, bayimu. Tidak apa-apa, nanti anak ini jadi anak yang pantas memakai kain apa saja)” (Kumala, 2022: 103).

(Oh dear... wrapped by the intestines, your child. It's alright, this child will grow up to be someone worthy of wearing any kind of cloth)

Based on the excerpt, this event describes the moment when Roemaisa gave birth to Dasiyah, also known as Jeng Yah. Mak Iti', the midwife, informs Roemaisa that her baby was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around its body or intestines. Mak Iti' believes that a baby born in such a condition will, as an adult, become a beautiful woman who can wear any type of clothing or color without the need for selection.

A baby born with the umbilical cord wrapped around its body or intestines is not an unusual occurrence for Javanese society, which refers to it as *tiba sampir* (a baby with the umbilical cord wrapped around it). The Javanese believe that a baby born in such a condition is considered ‘special’ because it is a rare event. According to Javanese beliefs, a baby born in *tiba sampir* condition will, upon reaching adulthood, become a person who is attractive, charming, and captivating, with the ability to enthrall and fascinate the opposite sex. They are expected to have an ideal or pleasing physique, possess a magnetic appeal, lead a life of abundance, and have a sharp intuition (Susilo, 2022).

However, the advantages of being born in a *tiba sampir* (umbilical cord wrapped) condition are accompanied by drawbacks. Javanese society also perceives babies born in this condition as being ‘tainted’ or having bad fortune.

To eliminate bad luck or misfortune associated with this condition, a *ruwatan* ritual (purification/liberation) is performed (Yahya, 2007: 26). This is a long-standing tradition in Javanese society that has been practiced for centuries. The *ruwatan* is carried out by people of all social strata, whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Thus, the birth of a baby in the condition of an umbilical cord wrapped around its body serves as a cultural code interpreted by Javanese society to mean that such a baby will grow into an attractive (beautiful/handsome) and captivating adult.

3.2 Cultural Code of Birth Rituals

Roemaisa has given birth to a baby girl named Dasiyah. Upon birth, the baby is not only given the *azan* (call to prayer) by her father, but there is also a special ritual for the placenta of the newborn. As a form of respect, the placenta is buried with specific procedures and prayers. It is believed that burying the placenta can provide health benefits to the baby, helping her to remain less susceptible to illness. This is illustrated in the following excerpt.

“Ari-arinya ditaruh di kendil, kubur di depan rumah, kasih sentir, biar terang. Kamu tunggui mulai Magrib sampai Subuh, seminggu jangan ditinggal” (Kumala, 2022: 104).

(The placenta is kept in a jar, buried in front of the house, and a lantern is provided to keep it well-lit. You should guard it from Maghrib until Fajr, and for one week, never leave it unattended)

Based on the excerpt, this represents a traditional ritual practiced in Javanese society, passed down through generations, occurring when a baby is born. The tradition of burying the placenta is commonly referred to as *mendhem ari-ari*. Although different regions in Java, with its various provinces, have their own customs for performing birth rituals, the practice of placenta burial or *mendhem ari-ari* is generally observed across Java.

The tradition of *mendhem ari-ari* or burying the placenta follows specific ceremonial procedures in accordance with prevailing customs. The equipment used for this ritual includes providing a jar (a vessel made of clay), or alternatively, using a coconut shell and

coconut husk (an intact coconut with its skin). Next, a hole is dug in the ground, with the depth adjusted according to the size of the jar. Before placing the placenta in the jar, the jar is first lined with *senthe* leaves. Once the placenta is placed inside the jar, various items required for the ritual of *mendhem ari-ari* are placed on top.

The requirements for this ritual include the following items: (a) a flower of *setanam*, perfume, *kunir* (turmeric) used as a cutting board for the intestines, and *welat* (thin bamboo strips resembling a knife) used for cutting the intestines; (b) candlenuts, needles, salted fish, red rice, turmeric, and salt; (c) pencils, books, and paper inscribed with Arabic, Javanese, and Latin script. Additionally, if the baby is a girl, *empon-empon* (a collection of traditional herbs) such as black turmeric, *dlingo bengle*, garlic, red onions, and thread are added. For a boy, coins are included. Once these items are placed in the jar with the placenta, the jar is then sealed with a new *lemper* (a dish made of clay). The jar is then wrapped in new *mori* fabric. After that, the baby's father, dressed in a *bebedan* (traditional long garment) and wearing a *belangkong* (headgear), performs the burial of the placenta or *mendhem ari-ari*. The jar is buried in front of the house, specifically to the right side of the main entrance (or alternatively, beside the house). Once buried, the area around the burial site is enclosed with a fence to protect it from animals such as frogs. Additionally, the site is adorned with *setaman* flowers (jasmine, rose, *kenanga*), and illuminated with a light source (Maryani, 2010: 1-2).

Javanese society believes that there is a special connection between the baby and the placenta. This belief implies that the placenta can experience what the baby feels, as it is considered by the Javanese to be a sibling to the baby while in the mother's womb. Therefore, the placenta must be treated and cared for properly. One form of respect and protection for the placenta is by burying it appropriately and placing it in a suitable location.

“Selama tujuh malam sang ayah menjaga ari-ari bayinya, bapak-bapak seputar kampung kumpul di rumah si empunya bayi dan *lek-lek'an*. Keluarga si empunya bayi wajib menyiapkan segala macam penganan dan *kretek* untuk warga yang datang” (Kumala, 2022: 106).

(For seven nights, the father keeps vigil over the placenta, while the men from the surrounding village gather at the home of the baby's family for socializing and *lek-lek'an*. The family of the baby is required to prepare a variety of food and *kretek* (clove cigarettes) for the visiting community members)

Based on the excerpt, this describes a tradition observed in Javanese society when a baby is newly born. The tradition of *lek-lek'an* (staying up all night) is a long-standing practice performed by the Javanese to welcome a newborn. *Lek-lek'an* takes place at night at the home where the baby was born and is typically carried out by adult male relatives, local residents, or community members. This practice continues from the time of the baby's birth until the umbilical cord falls off.

The *lek-lek'an* (staying up all night) tradition is not only practiced when a baby is newly born but also during significant events such as weddings, house construction or repairs, and even during misfortunes like death or illness (Japar, 2020: 70). In the *lek-lek'an* tradition, the community not only offers voluntary physical assistance to the host but also stays awake throughout the night until morning. This practice is a manifestation of vigilance, meaning that when someone participates in *lek-lekan*, they are at a peak of awareness (both physically and mentally) and are prepared to respond to any unforeseen events. Therefore, the birth ritual is a cultural code in Javanese society, signifying that a baby is considered a blessing or good fortune.

3.3 Cultural Code of Naming (*Kabotan Jeneng* or Burden of the Name)

The term *kabotan jeneng* or burden of the name is a significant consideration for the Javanese when naming their children. For the Javanese, naming a child is not done haphazardly. Generally, Javanese customs dictate that names given to children must be appropriate to the social status of the parents. The Javanese believe that if parents give an inappropriate name to their child, it could lead to misfortune for the child, as the name is considered too burdensome. This belief in the concept of *kabotan jeneng* or burden of the name is evident from the following excerpt.

“Diam-diam, Idroes Moeria mencibir bahwa Soedjagad adalah lelaki bodoh yang *kabotan jeneng* alias keberatan nama” (Kumala, 2022: 52).

(Secretly, Idroes Moeria disparaged Soedjagad as a foolish man who is burdened by his name, or *kabotan jeneng*)

Based on the excerpt, *kabotan jeneng* or burden of the name is applied to the character Soedjagad. Idroes considers that the name Soedjagad is inappropriate because he is the child of a poor farmer. Thus, Soedjagad's name is regarded as too burdensome or *kabotan jeneng*. This is illustrated in the following excerpt.

“Mbah Djagad pun tidak serta-merta terlahir dengan nama Soedjagad. Soe berarti ‘sumber’, djagad berarti ‘dunia’. Nama yang besar, bukan? Nama yang berat. Senyatanya ia lahir dengan nama yang sederhana, sesederhana doa: Uripno. Dalam bahasa Jawa, urip berarti ‘hidup’, sedang tambahan -no berarti ‘-kan’. Uripno artinya hiduipkan. Dia terlahir sebagai bayi kecil yang lemah dan nyaris mati kurang gizi” (Kumala, 2022: 190).

(Mbah Djagad was not originally born with the name Soedjagad. “Soe” means ‘source’, and “djagad” means ‘world’. A grand name, indeed, a heavy one. In reality, he was born with a simple name, as simple as a prayer: Uripno. In Javanese, “urip” means ‘life’, and the suffix “-no” means ‘-make’ or ‘-cause to’. Thus, “Uripno” means ‘make live’. He was born as a frail baby, almost dying from malnutrition)

Names carry specific meanings for each individual, and thus, a person will not be the same when given a different name. In Indonesia, especially within Javanese culture, names are considered highly significant. People often feel the need to change their names in order to alter their life path.

The character Soedjagad was born into a family of poor farmers, living in conditions far from adequate. Initially, Soedjagad was given the name Uripno. In Javanese, *urip* means 'life', while the suffix *-no* means 'to make' or 'to cause'. Thus, *Uripno* can be interpreted as 'make live'. This name was intended to signify a hope for the child to be granted a long life and good health by the Creator, given that Soedjagad was born physically weak and almost died from malnutrition. As a teenager, Uripno changed his name to Soedjagad. The name Soedjagad carries its own meaning: in Javanese, *soe* means 'source', and *djagad* means 'world'.

The name change was not spontaneous; rather, the name Soedjagad was given as a form of prayer, intended to signify a hope that Soedjagad would change his family's fortune and become successful in the future. Today, Soedjagad is known as a prominent *juragan* (tobacco merchant) and the owner of Kretek Djagad Raja. However, society believes that a name considered 'too burdensome' can influence one's character and behavior (Suhardono, 2023: 270). Therefore, the interpretation of a name being too heavy or *kabotan jeneng* (burden of the name) can have a significant impact on a person's life.

3.4 Cultural Code of Belief in Mystical Matters

Many of the Indonesian people, particularly the Javanese, is deeply connected with the mysticism of their culture and beliefs. Before the arrival of Islam in Indonesia, the majority of Javanese people practiced *kejawen* beliefs. Adherents of *kejawen* recognize the existence of God, specifically Allah Swt., but also acknowledge and believe in mystical matters. This belief system persists to this day. This can be observed from the following excerpt.

"Idroes Moeria memutuskan pergi ke Gunung Kawi. Banyak yang kerap mengunjungi makam pembantu Pangeran Diponegoro, Mbah Djoego, di gunung itu. Orang lain membawa segala perlengkapan untuk pemujaan dengan lengkap, bahkan makanan yang bisa dikatakan lebih cocok untuk pesta pun ada yang membawanya: tumpeng nasi kuning dan ayam utuh yang keliatannya dipanggang. Aroma dupa yang sesekali lewat menyengat hidungnya. Tanpa ragu, Idroes Moeria mengambil sebatang tingwe bikinan Dasiyah dan diletakkan di antara kembang setaman miliknya yang kemudian ia taruh di samping makam bersama tumpukan sembahsan milik orang lain. Ia merasa lebih khusyuk ketika berdoa" (Kumala, 2022: 145-147).

(Idroes Moeria decided to go to Mount Kawi, a site frequented by many who visit the grave of Pangeran Diponegoro's servant, Mbah Djoego, located on the mountain. Others came with complete offerings for worship, including food that could be described as more suitable for a feast: *tumpeng nasi kuning* (yellow rice cone) and a

whole roasted chicken. The scent of incense occasionally wafted through the air. Without hesitation, Idroes Moeria placed a stick of incense made by Dasiyah among his offerings of *kembang setaman* (mixed flowers) and set them beside the grave, alongside the offerings of others. He felt a deeper sense of devotion as he prayed)

Based on the excerpt, it is clear that Idroes Moeria went to Mount Kawi to perform a ritual and pray at the grave of Mbah Djoego, the servant of Pangeran Diponegoro. Idroes Moeria believed that praying at Mbah Djoego's grave would provide him with guidance regarding his kretek business. This belief is evident from the following excerpts.

“Idroes Moeria pamit padanya dan memberikan uang ala kadarnya. Ia juga bercerita, bahwa dirinya semalam bermimpi anak gadisnya”. (Idroes Moeria took his leave and gave money as it was. He also mentioned that he had dreamt of his daughter the previous night).

“...mungkin Bapak harus ngasih nama dagang yang sesuai dengan anak Bapak”. Idroes Moeria tertegun dengan ucapan penjaga makam itu. Masa? Masakah ia telah mendapatkan petunjuk?”. (...perhaps you should name your business after your daughter. Idroes Moeria was taken aback by the cemetery keeper's words. Could it be? Had he received a sign?).

“Apa saya sudah dapat berkah petunjuk? Tapi tak ada potongan pohon dewadaru secuil pun yang saya dapatkan”. (Have I already received a blessing or guidance? But I haven't even gotten a single piece of *dewadaru* tree branch).

“Berkah bisa datang dalam bentuk apa saja. Termasuk lewat mimpi”. (Blessings can come in any form, including through dreams).

“Tiba di rumah, Idroes Moeria berpikir sejumlah nama dagang yang berhubungan dengan anak perempuannya”. (Upon arriving home, Idroes Moeria contemplated several business names related to his daughter) Kumala, 2022: 148.

The discussion of Javanese traditions is inherently tied to the beliefs that have become a way of life for the Javanese people. When discussing Javanese society, one encounters a long history of their beliefs. Before the arrival of Islam, the religious life of the Javanese was quite different. Prior to Islam's introduction to the island of Java, most Javanese adhered to animism and dynamism (Faqih, 2019: 20). In addition to these beliefs, the Javanese also practiced *kejawen* beliefs. Even after the arrival of Islam on Java and the conversion of many Javanese to Islam, they continued to adhere to *kejawen* beliefs, acknowledging the existence of Allah Swt. while also believing in mystical matters, such as reverence for ancestral spirits.

Idroes Moeria believed in mystical matters. Therefore, he went to Mount Kawi to perform a ritual, bringing offerings such as *kembang setaman* (mixed flowers), kretek, incense, and other foods as symbols of devotion to the ancestral spirits. Idroes Moeria prayed fervently in front of Mbah Djoego's grave, hoping to receive guidance. When Idroes Moeria had a dream, he believed that the dream was the answer and guidance from Mbah Djoego for his kretek business. Although there is no scientific research or study that refutes the rules or beliefs related to ancestors (Mintarsih, 2021: 63), people, especially the Javanese, still fear violating or neglecting the customs and traditions passed down through generations.

Moslem Javanese consider rituals as a manifestation of sincere devotion to Allah Swt., often expressed through ritual symbols that carry profound meaning. Ritual symbols serve as expressions or embodiments of appreciation and understanding of an "inaccessible reality", making it feel "very close." Through these ritual symbols, individuals can sense that Allah Swt. is always present and "united" within them. Ritual symbols can be understood as the embodiment of one's "intention" as a human being, revealing the truth within their heart before Allah Swt.

It is known that in Javanese Islamic tradition, people often experience changes in their life cycle. When such changes occur, they hold a *slametan* ritual, using various foods as symbols of their gratitude and acknowledgment of their relationship with Allah Swt. This practice reflects individual beliefs. Thus, it represents the Javanese people's interpretation of their belief in mystical matters.

3.5 Cultural Code of *Kretek* (Clove Cigarette)

The clove cigarette industry first emerged and developed in Kudus, Central Java, around 1870-1880. The cigarette was initially produced and introduced by a local individual named Nitisemito, who is known as the "King of Cigarettes" (Badil, 2011: 34). His success as a cigarette entrepreneur led to the establishment of other cigarette industries, ranging from small to medium and large scale, in Central Java.

The emergence of clove cigarettes not only captured the interest of the indigenous population but also attracted Chinese individuals to enter the cigarette industry. Subsequently, Chinese descendants established cigarette businesses in Kudus, leading to intense competition among indigenous, Arab, and Chinese traders.

The proliferation of various cigarette brands led Djamhari, a resident of Kudus, known as the "Trading City", to start a small business producing clove cigarettes, also popularly known as "medicinal cigarettes" (Badil, 2011: 138). Djamhari was the first to introduce and trade clove cigarettes, which were sold without packaging or brand names. Initially, the raw materials for clove cigarettes consisted only of corn husks, cloves, and tobacco. The Javanese community also believed that these cigarettes could cure asthma. This is evident from the following excerpt.

“Pemilik toko obat itu bilang bahwa pelanggannya yang datang dan membeli kretek klobot masih percaya dengan faedah kretek yang konon bisa menyembuhkan asma. Ya, kretek memang awalnya dikenal sebagai obat asma, dengan adanya cengkih yang terkandung di dalamnya” (Kumala, 2022: 63).

(The owner of the apothecary mentioned that customers who came to buy *klobot* clove cigarettes still believed in their benefits, which were said to cure asthma. Yeah, clove cigarettes were initially known as a remedy for asthma due to the cloves contained within them)

Initially, the Javanese people believed in the benefits of clove cigarettes as a remedy for asthma (Badil, 2011: 136). However, over time, clove cigarettes evolved beyond their original composition of corn husks, tobacco, and cloves. They now include special paper for wrapping, flavored additives, and other mixed ingredients, transforming clove cigarettes from a medicinal remedy into a popular consumer product.

Based on the formula used for clove cigarettes, which includes cloves, clove cigarettes are not only known as “medicinal cigarettes” but also commonly referred to as “clove cigarettes” or simply “kretek”. The term “kretek” itself first emerged from an accidental discovery by someone who was seeking a remedy for asthma. This transformation led to the popularization of the term. This is evident from the following excerpt.

“Dulu, di Kudus ada Pak Haji Jamari. Dia hidup tahun 1880-an. Bagaimana lelaki yang bernama Jamari itu sesak napas, dan mencari cara memasukkan *wur* (cengkeh) ke paru-parunya. Dia pun merajang cengkeh dan mencampurkannya dengan tembakau rajang yang lalu dilinting dengan klobot. Ketika api menyulut dan menghabiskan batang lintingan itu, terdengar suara *kretek-kretek* akibat terbakarnya cengkeh rajangan. Itulah asal mula kretek” (Kumala, 2022: 179).

(In the past, in Kudus, there was a man named Pak Haji Jamari who lived in the 1880s. Jamari, who was suffering from shortness of breath, sought a way to introduce cloves into his lungs. He chopped cloves and mixed them with shredded tobacco, then rolled the mixture with corn husks. When the rolled cigarette was lit and burned, the crackling sound of the cloves being burned was heard. This was the origin of the term “kretek”)

Based on the excerpt, according to Badil (2011: 138), it is not precisely known who first introduced and popularized the term “kretek”. However, in his book “Kretek Jawa”, Badil explains that the term “kretek” is an *onomatopoeia*, or “a name based on sound”. The word “kretek” was intentionally attached to “cigarette” because the sound produced by burning and inhaling the combination of tobacco and cloves is described as “kretek-kretek”.

The emergence of the kretek cigarette industry significantly transformed the lives and economy of the Javanese community. This industry has provided numerous benefits, particularly to the indigenous population, as it creates a substantial number of job

opportunities. Kretek cigarettes are not only enjoyed by enthusiasts but also benefit the surrounding community in Central Java. The industry has provided employment opportunities for factory workers and increased income for farmers, especially those cultivating tobacco. Clearly, the kretek cigarette industry has had a notable impact on the people of Java, particularly in Central Java.

Historically and culturally, the term “kretek” has become ingrained in Javanese society and has also gained general popularity among Indonesians. Smoking kretek has long been a cultural practice, deeply rooted in Javanese tradition, making it challenging for people to abandon this practice. The kretek industry has also become a crucial source of livelihood for the Javanese people. The deep familiarity and dependency on kretek can be understood as a reflection of the strong connection between Javanese life and kretek itself. Thus, kretek can be interpreted as a symbol of Javanese life.

4. Conclusion

The cultural codes presented in the novel *Gadis Kretek* are interpreted as aspects of Javanese culture. These cultural codes include: (1) umbilical cord wrapped baby; This is interpreted as Javanese belief that a baby born with the umbilical cord wrapped around the neck or with the intestines intertwined will grow up to be a handsome or beautiful and captivating person, (2) Birth Rituals; This is interpreted as a belief that a newborn is a blessing or fortune, signifying the ritual’s role in celebrating and safeguarding the new life, (3) Naming (*Kabotan Jeneng* or Burden of the Name); This is interpreted as the notion that giving a name considered too “heavy” can impact a person’s life, reflecting the importance of a name in shaping destiny, (4) Belief in Mystical Matters; This is interpreted as the Javanese belief in mystical matters, which has been practiced through generations, emphasizing the deep-rooted nature of these beliefs in daily life, (5) *Kretek* (Clove Cigarette) This is interpreted as a symbol of Javanese life, representing the integration of cultural practices with economic and social aspects of the community.

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