

SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE KARO ETHNIC MBARU HOUSE MENGKET CEREMONY

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Abstarct: This study explores the symbolic meaning of the Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony, a traditional ritual of the Karo people that is increasingly rare, especially in Kutabuluh Gugung Village, Karo Regency. Using snowball sampling, data were gathered and analyzed through collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion. Triangulation was applied to ensure data validity by combining information from different informants and observation times. The findings highlight the impact of modernization and globalization on this tradition and stress the importance of preserving this cultural heritage for future generations as a reflection of Karo identity.

Keywords: symbolism, Mengket Rumah Mbaru, Karo tradition, cultural preservation, modernization

Introduction

Culture encompasses all actions performed by humans, including knowledge, beliefs, works of art, morality, laws, traditions, and many other activities. Culture is not only limited to art or tradition, but also includes knowledge and beliefs. The values and morals that people believe in are reflected in culture. Culture influences the way people think and act because it plays an important role in shaping individual and group behavior. In addition, culture includes the legal system that regulates people's behavior, which is a hereditary tradition, along with other customs and habits (Syakhrani, 2022) .

The Karo tribe, an ethnic community living in the Karo highlands of North Sumatra, Indonesia, is one of the largest in the region. They have a distinctive culture and traditions, especially in customs and traditional music. The Karo tribe is known for its kinship system, where the line of descent and inheritance is passed down through the father. The area where the Karo tribe lives, known as Karo Regency or Tanah Karo, is also famous for its natural beauty, such as hills, mountains, and fertile agricultural land (Setiawati et al., 2023) .

The Karo tribe is one of the six Batak groups consisting of Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak, Toba, Angkola, and Mandailing, with the strongest patrilineal system in Indonesia. However, Karo people prefer to refer to themselves as Karo rather than Batak Karo. This statement shows that Karo ethnic identity is more prominent than Batak ethnic identity as a whole, although they are still part of the Batak ethnic group. This confirms that their identity as Karo people is more dominant than Batak identity in general (Henry Guntur Tarigan, 2020) .

Karo culture can be said to be intact and highly values its traditions. The completeness of Karo culture reflects the seriousness in preserving traditions. This shows that the Karo people still strongly uphold their cultural values and traditional heritage. This shows a strong commitment to their identity and cultural resilience (Nadapdap, 2008) .

The Karo tribe has various forms of celebration, one of which is Mengket Rumah Mbaru. Mengket Rumah Mbaru is an important celebration for the

Karo people. In this celebration, they celebrate the construction or renovation of a traditional Karo house called “Mbaru.” This event is not only a symbol of the physical construction of the house, but also a social and cultural event that involves the entire community. This event is not only a symbol of the physical construction of the house, but also a social and cultural event that involves the entire community. This tradition plays a very important role in strengthening social relations between members of the Karo community, while maintaining the values of togetherness and cooperation in preserving the cultural heritage of the ancestors. The Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony is also a meaningful time to pay tribute to ancestors and ask for blessings and protection for the house and family. This tradition is an integral part of the Karo cultural identity that is preserved and passed on by each generation (Silalahi et al., 2010).

The Mengket Rumah Mbaru celebration involves not only the family building or renovating the house, but also the entire community. In this tradition, community members work together to complete the construction work, from preparing building materials to the final process of decorating the house. The spirit of mutual cooperation or gotong royong in addition to community service, the Mengket Rumah Mbaru event is also filled with traditional rituals such as a house blessing ceremony by traditional leaders or elders in the community. They collect prayers so that the new house becomes a safe and blessed place for the family living in it (Melisa & Sembiring, 2019) .

These rituals often involve traditional dishes, music and Karo dances that add to the solemnity of the event as well. The Mengket Rumah Mbaru tradition shows how the Karo people interpret the house not only as a place to live, but as the center of social, spiritual, and cultural life. Through this celebration, the values of togetherness, respect for ancestors, and cooperation between citizens that continue to be inherited, maintain the integrity of Karo cultural identity (Emil & Tarigan, 2020) .

Karo people, especially the youth, are slowly losing their identity as their culture fades and disappears. The phenomenon of identity loss among Karo youth is a serious concern due to the continued fading of their traditional culture. Rapid cultural changes and the pressure of modernization have caused

many aspects of traditional Karo life to disappear. Karo youth often face challenges in maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity in their daily lives. The fading of Karo culture can cause youth to lose their sense of identity and strong cultural roots. The fading of Karo culture can make the younger generation feel alienated and lose closeness to their ancestral heritage. This situation raises concerns about the continuity of Karo culture and identity in the future (Pandapotan et al., 2018) .

Views on this tradition vary. Some young people consider it an important element of cultural identity that needs to be preserved, emphasizing the importance of traditional values and ancestral heritage. For them, this tradition is an opportunity to better understand the history and culture that has been passed down by their ancestors (Wibiyanto, 2023).

Efforts need to be made to provide Karo youth with opportunities and support in recognizing and appreciating their cultural heritage. Through cultural education and awareness of the importance of preserving traditions, Karo youth can become agents of change in keeping their culture alive. Developing community initiatives and programs that promote pride in Karo culture can help address the challenge of identity loss among Karo youth. Spreading knowledge about Karo culture to all members of the community, especially the current generation of Karo youth, is vital. Understanding Karo culture is a valuable heritage that must be passed on to all levels of society, especially today's Karo youth. The aim is to maintain the sustainability and identity of Karo culture amidst the ever-growing modernization and globalization. By expanding the understanding of Karo culture, the younger generation can appreciate and preserve the traditions and values inherited by their ancestors (Wesnina, 2011) .

It can also be a means to build a sense of pride and identity through comprehensive and integrated cultural education. With this approach, the Karo can ensure that their cultural traditions remain significant and are preserved as the times evolve. This indicates that Karo culture is not only a historical record, but also a source of inspiration and pride for future generations (Saputra et al., 2024) .

In addition, in order for Karo culture, especially the Mengket Rumah Mbaru tradition, to continue to be implemented and passed down from generation to generation, awareness and commitment from all Karo people are needed. The main role in preserving this tradition is not only in the hands of Karo youth, but also involves all members of the community, from the older to the younger generations. The importance of preserving the Mengket Rumah Mbaru tradition as an integral part of Karo culture should be widely understood and promoted among the Karo community (Alemina & Sibarani, 2020) .

To ensure that the tradition of Mengket Rumah Mbaru remains alive and is passed down from generation to generation, collaboration between various parties in the Karo community is needed. Awareness of the importance of this tradition must be instilled from an early age, starting from the family environment to local educational institutions. Learning about traditional values, including mutual cooperation, respect for ancestors and togetherness, can start as part of the curriculum or extracurricular activities in schools, so that the younger generation understands and loves culture. In addition, the role of community leaders and traditional leaders is crucial in maintaining the authenticity and values contained in the Mengket Rumah Mbaru tradition. They can be role models for the younger generation by providing examples and explaining the symbolic meaning of each process in the celebration. Their presence and involvement also provide legitimacy to the event, reinforcing cultural values (Dewi, 2022) .

In this modern era, social media and digital technology can also be utilized to promote the Mengket Rumah Mbaru tradition. Documentation in the form of videos, photos or articles uploaded to digital platforms can increase awareness and appreciation of Karo culture, both among local communities and the wider public. Social media can also be a means of connecting overseas Karo people, so that they can stay involved and feel a bond with their ancestral culture. In the Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony, there are also symbolic meanings that contain understanding for a group. Many groups utilize symbols to convey their cultural concepts. Symbols are used by a culture to express its cultural values (Dewi, 2022) .

This research aims to identify the meaning of symbols contained in the “Mengket Rumah Mbaru” ceremony performed by the Karo people. The author is not only interested in the cultural values reflected in the ceremony, but also has a deep interest in the traditional customs of the Karo tribe. In addition, the author was concerned about the lack of implementation of the “Mengket Rumah Mbaru” ceremony in Kutabuluh Gugung Village, Kutabuluh District, Karo Regency. This concern arises because the tradition has the potential to be forgotten. Therefore, the author hopes that the community will be more concerned and try to maintain and preserve the existing cultural heritage.

This research aims to explore the symbolic meaning contained in the “Mengket Rumah Mbaru” ceremony which is part of the Karo tribe’s tradition. This ceremony is not just a traditional house-building ritual, but is also full of deep cultural, social and spiritual values. Each stage in this ceremony has a symbolic meaning that describes the relationship between humans, nature, and ancestors. Therefore, the author feels it is important to reveal and explain the meaning of each element in the ceremony, in order to better understand the community how important it is to preserve this tradition (Purba & Utara, 2023).

In addition, the author is also concerned that this tradition is becoming less and less common, especially in villages like Kutabuluh Gugung, where the Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony is increasingly rare. The rapid changes of the times, coupled with the influence of modernization and globalization, can cause traditional cultures like this to slowly be forgotten. The lack of understanding and awareness of the importance of this tradition, especially among the younger generation, can be a threat to the preservation of this cultural heritage. The author hopes that through this research, Karo people, especially those in Kutabuluh Gugung Village, can better understand and appreciate the meaning of this tradition as an important element in shaping their identity and self. It is also hoped that, with an increased awareness of the importance of maintaining and preserving local culture, the community will be encouraged to be active in maintaining and passing on this tradition to future generations. The Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony is not only a form of respect for ancestors, but also

an effort to protect and maintain cultural wealth which is an inseparable part of the history and heritage of the Karo people.

Method

This research was conducted in Kutabuluh Gugung Village, Kutabuluh District, Karo Regency, North Sumatra Province. The focus of the study was on one main aspect, namely the socio-cultural life of the Karo ethnic community who settled in the area. Data collection was conducted through a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods, which allowed researchers to deeply understand the events and experiences experienced by some of the younger generation of ethnic Karo. Information obtained from the field was used to describe the phenomenon as a whole, with the ultimate goal of compiling the results of the research into scientific writing such as articles or journals (Sari et al., 2023).

This research took place over four months, from May to August 2024. Data were collected through interviews with 15 informants. Observations were conducted at various times, namely morning, afternoon, evening, and night at the research site. In addition, the documentation used in this study included archives of Kutabuluh Gugung Village population data, video recordings from the village office, and photographs taken during the interview sessions (Sugiyono, 2022).

This research uses snowball sampling technique in sampling, which starts with a small number of informants and increases over time. The data analysis process was conducted in four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. After the data was analyzed, its validity was tested by triangulating the data. This triangulation was done through three approaches, namely source triangulation involving a variety of informants, technical triangulation involving interviews, and time triangulation including data collection in the morning, afternoon, evening and night (Nurdiani, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Etno Karo's Mengket Rumah Mbaru Ceremony

The tradition of mengket mbaru house in Karo culture is a ceremony that has high symbolic and spiritual values. The term mengket describes the act of starting or building something, while mbaru means new. This ceremony is carried out as a form of gratitude to God for the success of someone building their own house. In addition, the procession also reflects a sense of happiness and pride in the achievement. Mengket rumah mbaru is an important moment to strengthen social relationships with family and friends through togetherness in celebrating success. Prayers are also offered for the house to be protected from various threats, both from invisible creatures and from humans who have bad intentions. Furthermore, this tradition also contains hopes that the residents of the house will always be given health, safety and abundant sustenance (Perangin-angin et al., 2016).

The Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony is carried out through three different stages, each of which is determined by the time of its implementation.

1.Singuda Work (Small Event Implementation)

Singuda work is a level of housewarming that is carried out on a small and simple scale. At this level, the event is usually only attended by close relatives or immediate family, so the number of invitations is very limited. The preparation is also simpler than the other levels. In terms of consumption, the food provided is enough for one or two ayan of rice (the size of rice based on traditional containers) with the addition of some simple side dishes such as vegetables (bengkauna) prepared from 5 chickens. There is no need to serve a large number of dishes as the number of guests is small. Singuda work is generally chosen by families who want to carry out the tradition of setting up a new house while maintaining traditional values, but have restrictions in terms of cost or time. It is also suitable for families who want to focus more on the sacredness of the ritual without the hassle of organizing many guests or logistics.

2) Synchronized Work (Medium Event Implementation).

Kerja Sintengah is a level of housewarming that is held on a medium scale, with a larger number of participants than Kerja Singuda. At this level, the family invites a wider range of relatives, including distant relatives, neighbors and close friends. The food preparation at this level is larger than that of Kerja Singuda. The meal usually consists of 10 to 12 ayan of rice, with the main side dish being beef and vegetables (bengkauna). The use of beef is one of the characteristics of Kerja Sintengah, as it is considered more festive than using only chicken as in Kerja Singuda.

This event usually reflects the family's economic level, which is sufficient to involve more parties in the celebration. In addition, Kerja Sintengah also requires more preparation in terms of logistics and organization, given the number of guests attending. This level is often chosen by families who want to involve a wider community, but still on a smaller scale (Hardinsyah, 2018) .

3) Sintua Work (Implementation of Large and Festive Events)

Sintua work is the highest level of house-keeping, characterized by a grand and festive celebration. At this level, the family invites almost all acquaintances, ranging from close to distant relatives, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and even parties who have a formal relationship with the family. Preparations for Kerja Sintua are extensive and require careful planning in terms of time, energy and money. The food provided is usually very generous, including dozens of ayan of rice with various types of side dishes, including cattle and other animal-based dishes. It is not uncommon for the event to include traditional entertainment such as music or traditional dances to add to the festivities. Sintua work reflects the family's well-established economic capabilities, as these events often involve substantial costs.

However, behind its splendor, the Sintua Work also shows high social and cultural values. Through this event, families not only fulfill a customary obligation, but also strengthen social relationships by inviting many parties to join in the celebration. These three levels of execution reflect the similarities in the tradition of mengket rumah mbaru, which allows each family to customize the celebration based on their own capabilities and situation. Although the

scale differs, the essence of the event remains the same, namely as a form of gratitude and prayer for the blessing of the new house (Nasruddin, 2019) .

The procession of the new house mangket ceremony is justified by a quote made by the researcher by interviewing an informant named Mr. Simon Perangin-angin who was held at his house. the interview together with the researcher, namely myself, which was held at 20.00 at night in kutabuluh simole village. The following is evidence of the interview excerpt

“The ceremony of mengket mbaru house is a sign that tells relatives according to karo customs that we have made our gathering place, a family house, not a private house.”

From the picture of the interview above, the informant whose name has been mentioned and explained above is Overall, mengket mbaru house is not only a celebration, but also a way for Karo people to maintain traditions and strengthen family and community relationships, as well as asking for blessings for the new family who occupies the house.

The Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony is carried out in three different levels, which are determined by the time of implementation.

1.Singuda Work (Small Event Implementation)

Singuda work is a level of housewarming that is carried out on a small and simple scale. At this level, the event is usually attended by close relatives or immediate family only, so the number of invitations is very limited. The preparations are also simpler compared to the other levels. In terms of consumption, the food provided is enough for one or two ayan of rice (rice size based on traditional containers) with the addition of some simple side dishes such as vegetables (bengkauna) prepared from 5 chickens.

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Singuda. The meal usually consists of 10 to 12 ayan of rice, with the main side dish being beef and vegetables (bengkauna). The use of beef is one of the characteristics of Kerja Sintengah, as it is considered more festive than using only chicken as in Kerja Singuda. This event usually reflects the economic level of the family, which can afford to involve more parties in the celebration.

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“For the Karo people, the issue of building a new house is not a matter of just a place to live but a matter of achievement for Karo people who have married that they have succeeded in their business and made a new house, so it is an honor for the sangkep geluh, meaning the family of sembuyak senina kalimbubu and anak beru so that’s where the ceremony or party is made”.

The results of the interview above are also supported by documentary evidence in the form of photos taken during the interview with the informant named Mr. Kavar Sembiring. The following interview photos are shown below:

Conditions in the Mengket Mbaru House Ceremony of Karo Ethnic Runggu (deliberation)

After the determination of the day to carry out the runggu, the kalimbubu, sembuyak, anak beru will gather at the sukut house to carry out deliberations. In the deliberation discussing to determine the date when the event will be held, determining the date is very unique where in the past determining the date of the event using the Karo calendar which has a meaning on each date, so everyone who wants to make a party uses the calendar. As time goes

by, every time they make an event, they never determine the date using the Karo calendar, the one used is the current calendar. After that, it is also discussed whether the event is made as grand as possible or just small, what side dishes will be served, all will be determined at the time of carrying out the *runggu*.

“... For the people of the karo tribe, the issue of *mbengket mbaru* house is not a matter of just a place to live but a matter of achievement for karo people who have married that they have succeeded in their business and made a new house, so it is an honor for *sangkep geluh* means the family of *sembuyak senina kalimbubu* and *anak beru* so that's where the ceremony or party is made...”

The following interview evidence below is also supported by documentation in the form of photos during the interview with the informant Mr. Sidarta Perangin-Angin

Next is an explanation of how the procession of the new house *mangket* ceremony is carried out in the karo community

From the picture above *ngarak* is walking from the old house to the new house which is carried out in the morning, because according to the beliefs of the ancients in order to bring abundant and bright sustenance.

Rumah *mbaru* event, but every event will have *ngerana-ngerana*. *Kampil* and *isap* will be given to the *kalimbubu*, because they are a form of respect, and ask permission so that the house is blessed and always healthy and they will give advice to those entering the new house. Likewise, the other parties will also give advice to those entering the new house.

to those entering a new home.

“If we karo people are also entering a new house, we should know that in karo it is called *kalimbubu*, so the meaning is where the karo people enter a new house, so the *kalimbubu* from the male side and the female side come to give advice, so the *kalimbubu* gives advice to those entering the new house” (Interview Excerpt of Mr. Saktina Perangin-Angin conducted in the afternoon).

Explained from the picture above after eating together. Furthermore, the meaning of the flower board is explained, namely a symbol of honor and

blessing, flower boards are often used to convey respect, congratulations, and blessings to the host. In the context of Karo culture, this shows appreciation for the success of building a new house as a symbol of life, togetherness, and prosperity.

Symbolic Meanings in the Ceremony of Mengket Mbaru House of Karo Ethnic

Symbols are an important element in culture because they act as a medium that represents various aspects of human life. In everyday life, symbols are used to express ideas, values and meanings that are difficult to explain directly. In the realm of culture, symbols become a tool to shape and pass on patterns of behavior that develop through social interaction. These patterns can be clearly visible or hidden, and become part of the cultural identity that grows in a community group (Agustianto, 2011).

“The signs are made according to karo custom, when the new house is finished, we make lambe, lambe is made from palm shoots so we make the sign, so that it indicates that it is a new house”.

The mbaru house is not just a new place to live, but has a deeper meaning as a symbol of togetherness and family relationships. This house becomes the center of family activities, where relatives gather to strengthen the relationship. In addition, the mbaru house also serves as a place to hold various activities, such as small parties, recitations, or other family events. The presence of the mbaru house reflects the values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and respect for tradition.

The enau leaf symbol on a newly built house reflects a community tradition that is full of symbolic values and respect and also functions as a form of cultural communication to the surrounding community. By placing the enau leaves, the house owner indirectly conveys information that the house has just been built, as well as inviting prayers and good wishes. This tradition shows the close relationship between humans, culture and nature.

The results of the interview above are also supported by documentary

evidence in the form of photos taken during the interview. Here is a photo of the interview

The Mengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony in Karo culture is analyzed using the Symbolic Interactionism theory proposed by George Herbert Mead. In this theory, symbols in social life emerge, are used, and given meaning through agreements created among community members. These symbols, which have shared meaning, become a strong foundation in the process of forming and developing social relationships by individuals in society, where they are actively involved in the behavior they choose. The actions of the individuals lead them in the process of taking on roles in society.

They give to objects, signifying that humans are considered active agents in determining and giving meaning to the environment and situations. This theory explains that the meaning of a symbol is formed through social interactions that occur repeatedly in society. The meaning is not automatically embedded in the symbol itself, but develops through a process of negotiation between individuals. In addition, this meaning will continue to be updated along with the interpretations made by each individual when interacting with the objects they face. Based on this view, Symbolic Interaction theory focuses on human behavior in a group or society, as well as the dynamics of social action and relationships between individuals (Effendi et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The results showed that the Mbengket Rumah Mbaru ceremony in Karo society is a tradition full of cultural values and a deep philosophy of life. This ceremony is held as an expression of gratitude for the new house that will be inhabited. In addition, this ceremony also serves to strengthen harmonious relationships between the homeowner, family, community, as well as ancestors and spirits who guard the house. Overall, this ceremony illustrates the spirit of togetherness and mutual cooperation of the Karo people in creating a harmonious and peaceful life.

During the ceremony, various stages and symbols are used, from choosing a good day, praying together, to various ritual offerings. All of this shows how

important the value of tradition and ancestral teachings are to the Karo people. With the implementation of Mbengkhet Rumah Mbaru, it is hoped that the new house will bring blessings, safety, and prosperity to its occupants.

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