

## Management Analysis in the Traditional Ceremony of Mbaba Belo Selambar of the Karo Batak Ethnic Group: A Study of the History of Customs and Culture

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### Abstract

*This study examines the analysis of management in the traditional ceremony of Mbaba Belo Selambar, as one of the cultural traditions in the Batak Karo community. Mbaba Belo Selambar is a traditional ritual that has a deep meaning in the social structure system of the Batak Karo community. In this context, it can be explained how the concept of Mbaba Belo Selambar in the socio-cultural structure of the Batak Karo community and the values contained in the Mbaba Belo Selambar ceremony in the Batak Karo community. This study aims to examine in depth the concept of Mbaba Belo Selambar in the socio-cultural structure of the Batak Karo community and identify the values contained therein. This research method uses a qualitative approach with data collection on secondary data sources from literature studies and documents on Batak Karo cultural literature. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews: conducting structured and semi-structured interviews with key informants of Mbaba Belo Selambar practices in various social contexts. The results of this study indicate that Mbaba Belo Selambar has a complex cultural management structure involving rakut sitelu in the Batak Karo community, including traditional elders, and local communities. This practice is managed through a mutual cooperation system that reflects the strong values of social solidarity in Karo culture. This study contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of traditional cultural management in the context of Indonesian society, especially in terms of how ethnic communities maintain and manage their cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** Mbaba Belo Selambar, Management of Traditional Ceremonies, Karo Batak Ethnic Group.

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelago located in Southeast Asia and is known as one of the countries with the greatest cultural diversity in the world. With more than 17,000 islands and hundreds of ethnic groups, the Indonesian nation has a wealth of traditions, languages, arts, and unique value systems. This diversity is both a strength and a challenge in realizing an inclusive national identity. (Peter & Simatupang, 2022). One of the ethnic groups that has contributed color to the mosaic of Indonesian culture is the Batak Tribe. This tribe inhabits the northern region of Sumatra Island and is known to have a complex customary system and philosophy of life that is reflected in various aspects of daily life. (Pranata et al., 2019).

The Batak tribe itself is divided into several large sub-tribes, namely the Toba Batak, Simalungun Batak, Karo Batak, Pakpak/Dairi Batak, and Angkola/Mandailing Batak. Each of these sub-tribes has its own language dialect, kinship structure, belief system, and unique traditional heritage. (Halo, 2022). Among these sub-tribes, the Karo tribe is one of the most

dominant and has an important position in the context of North Sumatran culture. (Tarmizi, 2018). This tribe is generally located in the highland area known as Karo Regency or Tanah Karo, an area that has fertile nature and beautiful mountain panoramas. This area is known by the motto "Tanah Karo Simalem," which means "comfortable Tanah Karo," reflecting the hope for a peaceful, harmonious, and sustainable life.

One of the traditional ceremonies that still exists and has a high symbolic value in Karo society is "Mbaba Belo Selambar". This tradition is one of the initial stages in the process of proposing to a woman by a man in the Karo traditional marriage system. Mbaba Belo Selambar is not just a formality, but part of a value system that prioritizes deliberation, respect for family authority, and harmony between kinship groups. The name "Mbaba Belo Selambar" itself has a deep philosophical meaning, where "belo" refers to betel - a plant that is considered sacred and has social symbolism in Karo culture.

The tradition of chewing betel or "man belo" in Karo culture is not only a daily habit, but also a part of cultural identity and spiritual ritual.

Betel is believed to have symbolic meaning as a social glue, a sign of respect, and a link between the material and spiritual worlds.(Adriansyah et al., 2022). In the context of the Mbaba Belo Selambar ceremony, betel is used as a medium to convey good intentions and as a symbol of openness of intention in establishing family relationships. This ritual involves various parties in the extended family structure, including sembuyak, anak beru, kalimbubu, and other family members. Each party has a role and a say in determining whether the proposal is acceptable, so that a collective and democratic decision is made according to custom.

Through this ceremony, the Karo people show how traditional values are still very much alive and relevant in modern life. This ceremony also reflects a deep value system regarding the importance of blessing, agreement, and harmony in building a household. In the context of cultural anthropology, this ceremony is one of the real forms of how culture works as a system that unites individuals with their communities through meaningful symbols, rites, and traditions. Although mbaba belo selambar in the Karo Batak ethnic group has been the object of study in several studies, cultural management regarding mbaba belo salambar in the Karo Batak ethnic group is still rarely studied. As stated by(Marini, 2023)Mbaba Belo Selabar means bringing a betel leaf, which is an event to propose to the woman. Here the woman will be asked about her readiness and her family to be proposed to by the man's family. Mbaba Belo Selabar is also an event for the meeting of the two families of the bride and groom. Usually held at Kalimbubu's house with the man's side coming to bring food complete with rice and side dishes. The food brought will be served at a lunch event with both families. After the lunch event is over, the two families will begin to discuss the next tradition plan, namely Nganting Manuk. In the Mbaba Belo Selabar procession, the spokespersons are each Anak Beru of the two families witnessed directly by Kalimbubu and the other two families of the prospective bride and groom.

Based on the background, this study aims to examine in depth the concept of Mbaba Belo Selambar in the socio-cultural structure of the Batak Karo community and identify the values contained therein. Main problem formulation: First, how is the concept of Mbaba Belo Selambar in the socio-cultural structure of the Batak Karo community? Second, what values are contained in the Mbaba Belo Selambar ceremony of the Batak Karo community?

## **METHOD**

This research method uses a qualitative approach with data collection on secondary data sources from literature studies and documents on Batak Karo cultural literature. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews: conducting structured and semi-structured interviews with key informants of Mbaba Belo Selambar practices in various social contexts. The results of this study indicate that Mbaba Belo Selambar has a complex cultural management structure involving rakut sitelu in Batak Karo society, including traditional elders, and local communities. In this context, it can be explained how the concept of Mbaba Belo Selambar in the socio-cultural structure of Batak Karo society and the values contained in the Mbaba Belo Selambar ceremony in Batak Karo society. This study aims to examine in depth the concept of Mbaba Belo Selambar in the socio-cultural structure of Batak Karo society and identify the values contained therein. Location and Time The research was conducted in Saran Padang Village, Dolok Silau District, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra Province. In this research information will involve traditional figures and Karo community leaders<sup>1</sup>, practitioners and perpetrators of the mbaba belo selambar tradition<sup>2</sup>.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Karo Batak have customs, traditional ceremonies and noble values that are part of the Karo tribe's culture, which have ultimately become a preserved culture.(D. A. R. B. Bangun et al., 2022). Here are some cultural characteristics that will distinguish it from other ethnic cultures:

### Karo Tribe Identity

1. Marga is a unique identity owned by the Karo tribe. Karo people usually use this marga when interacting with each other. The people come from the word "meherga", or "expensive" in Indonesian, showing how important the Karo tribe is. In addition to marga, there is also something called "berebere", which is the mother's marga. These marga include karo-karo, ginting, tarigan, sembinging, and perangan-angan, and each marga has branches.
2. Karo language is the work of the Karo tribe, which has invaluable cultural value. The Karo tribe has script and letters, showing that they are not illiterate. also, the second oldest language in Indonesia after Sanskrit.
3. Karo art is drums and traditional clothing. Drums are usually performed in traditional events such as weddings, deaths, and mengket rumah, which means building a house. Karo traditional clothing is usually identical with the color red.
4. Culture is a tradition of the Karo people, usually used in events such as weddings, deaths, and building a house. Every event carried out by the Karo people always begins with Runggu first.

### The Batak Karo Tribe's Kinship System

Marga silima, rakut sitelu, and tutur siwaluh are terms that are often used to describe the social system of the Karo tribe:

1. Marga silima: Karo people have a clan as their identity. The term for men is "marga" and for women is "marga". The back of the name usually has the name of the clan and beru. In the Karo community, this clan is known as "marga silima", which consists of Ginting, Karo-karo, Perangan-angan, Sembinging, and Tarigan. In addition, the five clans have clan branches in their divisions.(Siregar et al., 2023)
2. Rakut Sitelu: Rakut sitelu is a traditional kinship structure of the Karo people that divides social status into three main categories: kalimbubu, sukut, and anak beru. This term comes from the words "rukut" (bond), "si" (connection), and "telu" (three). The concept of rakut sitelu reflects the three fundamental kinship relationships that form

the social order of the Karo people, where each component is interrelated and respects each other.(B. Tarigan, 2017a)

3. Tutur Siwaluh: Tutur siwaluh is a kinship classification system in Karo society that regulates various types of family and kinship relationships. This system includes relationships between siblings, members of the same clan, nephews, and other kinship relations.(B. Tarigan, 2017b)

The siwaluh speech consists of eight categories of kinship relationships:

1. **Hidden**: the relationship between siblings who have the same father and mother
2. **clear**: kinship through the maternal line of siblings
3. **Monday is the brightest**: a sibling relationship through a mother's or grandmother's sibling, although the surnames may be different
4. **Ordered for you**: relationship with brother's wife
5. **Baby boy** : daughter in a family
6. **Minister's son**: kinship relations that include all daughters from the families of the beru sukut, sembanyak, senina, senina sipemeran, and senina siparibanen
7. **Kalimbubu**: kinship relations through wives of the sukut, sembanyak, senina sipemeran, and senina siparibanen
8. **The Kalimbubu temple** : kinship relationship that comes from our kalimbubu.

Marriage is the most important stage in the life cycle, or circle of life. It is the transition from adolescence to family life. Marriage is an integral part of the various stages that must be passed.(Anisaningtyas & Astuti, 2011). This is due to the fact that culture shapes the structure of society, including marriage rules. Therefore, marriage ceremonies vary in several regions in Indonesia, including the Karo tribe's marriage ceremony. Therefore, the process of carrying out the marriage must follow the stages and customary rules that apply. This is important to avoid deviations or violations that could bring down the dignity of the family. For the Karo tribe, marriage has a significant meaning because marriage is a difficult bond that unites the two families.(Ginting & Nofasari, 2021)

In the Mbaba Belo Selambar (MBS) tradition, which literally means "carrying betel

leaves", it is a Karo traditional engagement procession. This procession involves the handing over of a woven container filled with betel, lime, tobacco, areca nut, and gambir by the groom to the bride. (A. B. Bangun & Ritonga, 2024). The main purpose of MBS is to ask the willingness of the prospective bride, parents, and all close relatives such as *sembuyak* (father's family), *anak beru* (aunts/siblings from the father), and other families regarding the proposal. Before the MBS procession, a deliberation or *runggu* is usually held in which the role of men tends to be more dominant. The MBS event begins with the giving of six *kampil kehamaten* (respected *kampil*) by the applicant's party. Five of the *kampils*, which contain betel and cigarette eating utensils, are given to the *sukut*, *anak beru*, *kalimbubu singalo bere-bere*, and *kalimbubu singalo perkempun* from the woman's side. The last *kampil* is given to the *kalimbubu singalo ulu emas*. The *Mbaba Belo Selambar* tradition is carried out at night after dinner, but now it can be done during the day or in the afternoon.

### Stages of Karo Traditional Marriage

In Karo traditional traditions, there are four main stages that must be carried out to hold a wedding ceremony:

1. *Mbaba Belo Selambar* stage, this stage is the initial step in the form of an official meeting (*runggu*) between the extended families of the prospective groom and bride. In this meeting, in addition to conveying the intention to propose, various important things are also discussed such as:
  - Determination of the amount of honest money
  - Determining the time and format of the wedding party (*ringgit-ringgit gantang tumba* or *ersinget-singet*)
  - Giving a sign of bond in the form of a *puhun* pillow from the man's family to the woman's family

The legal consequence of giving the *puhun* pillow is that if the man breaks the promise, then the *puhun* pillow will belong to the woman. Conversely, if the woman breaks the promise, then she must replace double the value of the *puhun* pillow. This stage also includes *sijalapan*, which is an

official announcement of the identities of both parties and the scheduling of subsequent events.

2. The *Ngembah Manuk* or *Nganting Manuk* stage is a continuation of the previous stage which aims to finalize the agreements that have been discussed. In this stage, the two extended families deliberate more deeply regarding:
  - Customary obligations that must be fulfilled
  - Technical details of organizing a wedding party
  - Determining the location, size of the party, and who is responsible for the invitations
3. *Wedding Party Stage (Erdemu Bayu)*, After all the agreements are mature, a wedding party is held by inviting all relatives who are grouped based on the Karo customary categories (*seninan*, *anak beru*, and *kalimbubu*). In this party, honest money (*unjuken*) is handed over from the groom's family to the bride's family as part of the customary obligations.
4. *Stage of handing over the bride*, After the party is over, the bride is taken by the groom's relatives to the groom's parents' house or a predetermined residence. In the evening, a *mukul* ceremony is held which in various regions of Tanah Karo is also known as *mecahkan tinaroh* (egg-breaking ritual) or *pengrebun* (determination of communication rules in a new family) (Ramadhani et al., 2024)

### Preparation Stage Before Implementing the Mbaba Belo Selambar Tradition.

#### a. Pre-Implementation Deliberation Process of the Mbaba Belo Selambar Tradition

The Karo people have a strong tradition of deliberation known as "*runggu*", which is a forum for discussion and dialogue between related family members. The practice of *runggu* or deliberation is an integral part of various Karo traditional ceremonies, including in wedding processions, death rituals, and other general deliberations that aim to respect and accommodate diverse views. (Y. A. Tarigan & Wiratma, 2025). Before the *Mbaba Belo Selambar* tradition is held, a small-scale deliberation is first held as a preparatory stage. The deliberation process

has been documented by researchers based on information from various sources involved.

- Results of an Interview with Mr. Mudun Tarigan, Traditional Figure of Saranpadang Village According to the explanation of Mr. Mudun Tarigan, a traditional figure in Saranpadang Village, the initial deliberation stage before the implementation of the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition is carried out with the following procedure: The first step is to conduct a dialogue or communication between the anak beru from both parties who will carry out the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition. The parties involved include the mpo (representative of the male party) and the sereh (representative of the female party). Then an in-depth discussion is carried out to measure the level of sincerity of intention from both parties. In this process, the aunt from the female party has a special role to test the seriousness of the prospective daughter-in-law through certain methods. The aunt will carry out a kind of test by offering her son to the woman concerned. If the woman rejects this offer, it shows that she is really serious about her relationship and is not easily tempted. After the seriousness of both parties is confirmed through this testing process, then the discussion continues regarding the time to carry out the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition.

- Conclusion from Interview Results

Based on the results of the interviews that have been conducted, it can be concluded that the deliberation stage before the implementation of the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition is a procedure that not only exists, but also has a very crucial role in the entire series of this tradition. The main function of this deliberation is to verify and ensure that both parties truly have a serious commitment and sincerity to undergo the marriage bond, and to confirm that no third party interferes in their relationship. After both parties are proven to have sincere seriousness, then the status of their relationship becomes final and can no longer

be questioned or disturbed by any party. Only after reaching this stage of confirmation of seriousness can the family proceed to determine the right time for the implementation of the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition.

**b. Parties Participating in the Mbaba Belo Selambar Tradition**

The implementation of the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition is generally attended by individuals who have kinship ties or family relationships from both parties involved.

- Results of an Interview with Mr. Mudun Tarigan, Traditional Figure of Saranpadang Village

According to the explanation of Mr. Mudun Tarigan, the parties who must be present in the implementation of Mbaba Belo Selambar are the kuh sangkep, which consists of: sukut, singalo bere-bere, singalo perkempun, singalo perbibin, singalo perninin, and ulu emas. The role as coordinator and organizer of the event from beginning to end is entrusted to the anak beru party. From the male party, those present include: the prospective groom, both parents, sembuyak, senina, kalimbubu singalo ulu emas, and anak beru. While from the female party, those present consist of: the prospective bride, both parents, and the kuh sangkep which includes sukut, anak beru, kalimbubu singalo bere-bere, kalimbubu singalo perkempun, and singalo perbibin. From all the parties involved, the responsibility for organizing and carrying out this entire tradition is entrusted to the anak beru from both parties.

**Analysis of Kinship Structure in the Mbaba Belo Selambar Tradition**

Based on the results of the interviews that have been conducted, it can be seen that the typical characteristics of the Karo people are having Kuh Sangkep, namely a kinship structure system in the Karo tribe that originates from the father's and mother's lineage. In the implementation of various Karo customary traditions, including the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition, Kuh Sangkep functions as a guide to determine who has the right and must attend

based on the clan that will hold the traditional ceremony.(Sebayang, n.d.).

The following is an explanation of the parties involved in the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition:

1. Representation of the Male Party:
  - a. **Parent**: both parents of the prospective groom
  - b. **Hidden**: individuals who have the same bere (mother's surname), with the special provision that this sembanyak status only applies to men
  - c. **clear**: individuals who have a kinship relationship through the same surname
  - d. **Kalimbubu Ulu Emas**: a sibling who has the same surname as the mother or uncle from the male side and **Baby Boy**: father's sister and sibling
2. Representation of Women:
  - a. **Default**: the party acting as host, namely the parents of the prospective bride
  - b. **Baby Boy**: father's sister and sibling
  - c. **Kalimbubu Singalo Bere-Bere**: a sibling who has the same surname as the mother or uncle from the female side
  - d. **Kalimbubu Singalo Village**: bere-bere (surname) of mother or grandmother from the female side and **Singalo Perbibin** : sibling (brother or sister) from the father's side on the Female side.

Here is a paraphrase of the text:

\* The Role and Responsibilities of Anak Beru in the Mbaba Belo Selambar Tradition, The entire series of traditions from Mbaba Belo Selambar to Nganting Manok are under the coordination and arrangement of the anak beru from both parties. This is because the anak beru have full obligations and responsibilities to ensure the smooth running and completion of all customary processions to completion. The details of the tasks and responsibilities carried out by the anak beru include:

1. **Coordinator of the Conference**: Manage and facilitate the running of the Runggu (deliberation), document all discussion results, and act as a communication link between the two parties.
2. **Consumption Provider**: Provide food and drinks according to the agreement that has been

set in the meeting.

3. **Equipment Preparation**: Prepare all the equipment and necessities needed to carry out the tradition.

4. **Interim Financial Manager**: Cover all costs required temporarily, with the provision that after the event is over, the parents and family will reimburse all expenses.

5. **Invitation Coordinator**: Responsible for the process of delivering and distributing invitations to all parties involved.

6. **Mediator**: Act as a mediator or peacemaker if a dispute or difference of opinion occurs during the process.

### The Values Contained in Mbaba Belo Selambar

Some of the values found in it are:

1. Religion: This ritual generally includes certain prayers or practices related to the beliefs of the Karo Batak community.
2. Commitment: Mbaba Belo Selambar is the first step in the marriage series, signifying the agreement of both parties to move forward to the marriage stage.
3. Mutual Cooperation: This ritual involves various individuals, from men and women, who work together to prepare the event.
4. Gratitude: The ceremony serves as an expression of gratitude for God's blessings and hope for a new life after marriage.
5. Hard Work: Preparation for Mbaba Belo Selambar requires dedication and effort from both parties.
6. Honesty: In this ceremony, transparency and honesty are very important in conveying intentions and hopes.
7. Gender Management: This ritual reflects the functions and responsibilities of men and women in the marriage process.
8. Cultural Preservation: Mbaba Belo Selambar is a component of the Karo Batak tradition that must be preserved.

In addition, this ceremony also contains other values such as:

- The Importance of Family: Mbaba Belo Selambar involves many family members and shows how important the role of family is in the

marriage process.

- Importance of Consent: This ritual aims to obtain consent from parents and family regarding the marriage.
- The Importance of Communication: Mbaba Belo Selambar is a process of interaction between two parties to reach an agreement.
- Importance of Honor: This ceremony reflects respect and recognition between the two families involved.

## CONCLUSION

The Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition is one of the important cultural heritages of the Karo Batak people which shows the complexity and richness of the kinship system in their social life. Based on the discussion that has been done, it can be concluded that this tradition is not just a proposal procession in the context of marriage, but rather a manifestation of the noble values and social system that have been rooted in Karo society for centuries. The Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition shows how orderly the Karo people's kinship system is through the concept of Kuh Sangkep which is based on three main pillars: Marga Silima, Rakut Sitelu, and Tuter Siwaluh. This system clearly regulates who has the right and obligation to be involved in every traditional ceremony, including the Mbaba Belo Selambar procession. The involvement of various parties such as sukut, anak beru, kalimbubu, sembuyak, and senina reflects how the Karo people view marriage as the union of two large families, not just two individuals. One aspect that stands out in this tradition is the importance of deliberation or *runggu* as an initial stage that cannot be ignored. This process shows that the Karo people have implemented democratic principles in family decision-making, where each party has the right to express their opinion and agreement must be reached through consensus. The stage of testing the seriousness of both parties also shows caution and maturity in making decisions that will have long-term impacts. The role of the anak beru as the main coordinator in the entire series of Mbaba Belo Selambar traditions to Nganting Manok shows an effective system of sharing responsibilities in the Karo community. Anak beru not only plays a role as a technical organizer, but also as a mediator, communicator,

and guardian of harmony between families. This reflects the high values of trust, responsibility, and sacrifice in Karo culture. The Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition contains various noble values that are relevant to modern life, including:

- **Religious and Spiritual Values:** This tradition shows recognition of God's intervention in the marriage bond and the importance of asking for blessings for married life.

- **Social Values and Togetherness:** The concept of mutual cooperation and cooperation between families is a strong foundation in implementing this tradition, reflecting high social solidarity in Karo society.

- **Moral and Ethical Values:** The emphasis on honesty, commitment, and transparency at every stage shows that marriage in Karo culture is based on strong moral values.

- **Cultural Preservation Values:** This tradition is an effective means to maintain and pass on Karo culture to the next generation.

## SUGGESTION

To ensure the sustainability of the Mbaba Belo Selambar tradition, more comprehensive documentation efforts, socialization to the younger generation, and adaptation of the form of implementation that does not reduce the essence of the values contained therein are needed. Further research is also needed to examine other aspects of this tradition that have not been revealed in depth.

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