



The Transformation of *Perkolong-kolong* Cultural Values as the Life Principle of the Karo Tribe

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Abstract

This research was conducted to discuss the process of *perkolong-kolong* transformation nowadays and to explain the conceptions of cultural values transformation contained in *perkolong-kolong*. In this context, cultural values are defined as a system that includes abstract conceptions about what is considered bad (so it must be avoided) and what is considered good (so it must be adhered to). The method used is qualitative using a cultural anthropological approach. The research design used is a case study, where the findings in this study only apply to similar phenomena or characteristics and are carried out to analyze events, activities, and processes that are regulated in a cultural perspective. As a result, there are two forms of transformation found in *perkolong-kolong* activities, which are 1) the elimination of reciprocal rhymes or poems in the *perkolong-kolong* procedure, 2) different rules and procedures in implementing *perkolong-kolong*.

Keywords: *Cultural Values; Karo Tribe, Life Principles; Perkolong-Kolong; Transformation*

Introduction

A culture is assumed to be an inter-ethnicity product that reflects the reality of life that has occurred since ancient times in a structural context that was formed based on the strength of the local community as a reflection of the community's identity that inherits the culture (Lestari, Kelvin, & Rohmadi, 2018; Murtianis, Andayani, & Rohmadi, 2019; Suparlan, 2014). At the end, the culture has gone through various long journeys progressively and continuously with different levels of intensity (Jenks, 2017; Tarasov, Belyaev, & Pogorelova, 2019). This long journey was able to transform a culture (de Castro & Perl, 2019).

Transformation is defined as a change in form, nature, function, and various things that occur due to time changes in the same system (Njatrijani, 2018; Subawa, Widhiasthini, Pika, & Suryawati, 2020). Jorgensen (2003) explained in a more thorough way regarding nine possible forms of transformation, which are modification, accommodation, assimilation, integration, synthesis, conversion, transfiguration, and renewal. Karim, Fuzan, Ahmad, & Aziz (2021) revealed that there are two forms of transformation: physical transformation and individual transformation as the driving force of its process.

Individual transformation creates a cultural shift into something new, which results a change in the culture's pattern, either into a better pattern or a worse pattern (Harmawati, Abdulkarim, & Rahmat., 2016) ; Syahfitri, Pratiwi, Rahmayani, & Silalahi, 2020). Lack of attention towards cultural management is one of the triggers for the transformation conflicts emerge in a bad direction and leads to a loss of meaning for the culture to provide life principles that have developed since ancient times (Eshetu, 2017; Hammond, 2020).

A culture is considered as life values and principles by the local community or the culture owners which requires maintenance, care, and preservation towards the culture (Ibadurrahman, 2019; Pamungkas, Kelvin, & Rohmadi, 2018; Yonefendi, Pawito & Wijaya, 2018). Geographical, historical, and cultural permeability has led Indonesia to be a multicultural country with culture diversities from various tribes carrying its own uniqueness and values. One of those diverse cultures is Karo tribe from North Sumatra (Novitasari, 2010; Pusparini, Rohmadi, & Wibowo, 2021). *Perkolong-kolong* is one of the cultures of the Karo which has experienced several developments until today (Keliat, 2020). *Perkolong-kolong* is carried out at several important traditional ceremonies for the Karo tribe, such as weddings, funerals, or thanksgiving which is commonly known as *guro-guro aron* (Barus, 2016). In this study, the researcher will focus on the changes that have occurred in the *perkolong-kolong* which is carried out at the *guro-guro aron*.

Perkolong-kolong is carried out in pairs between a man and a woman, or better known as *perkolong-kolong* battle. *Perkolong-kolong* battle is carried out by talking, singing, then talking again, and so on until the whole show is completed (Ginting, 2020). In the battle, there will be advices from the Karo that will be implied through songs, rhymes, or conversations. Albeit the pair will recite rhymes, traditional Karo music and instrument will be played to give a compelling impression and to imply Karo's value and advice (Gule, 2012).

Aside from *perkolong-kolong*, there are certainly more traditions that the other ethnic owns. However, the unique and appealing activity makes *perkolong-kolong* and the other ethnic groups different (Karya, 2019). *Perkolong-kolong* contains various cultural values and implicit messages which are very valuable assets because that is the implication people want to convey to foster the Karo in carrying out their lives to be even better (Darman, 2017). However, over time, *perkolong-kolong* underwent various developments and changes which resulted in a transformation in the culture of the Karo tribe (Latifah, Abrianto, & Imran, 2022; Purba & Febrianto, 2020).

The emergence of new cultures along with globalization caused a lack of understanding and learning towards traditional cultures. The augmentation of people's lifestyles that is getting more advanced has brought the Karo traditional culture to the brink of extinction (Harmawati, Abdulkarim, & Rahmat, 2016; Tarasov, 2016). Previous relevant research that examined the issue of cultural transformation was carried out by several researchers from multiple countries. The transformation causes some ancient cultural heritage to erode and lose important values in Bangladeshi society (Rahman, 2014). On the other hand, some transformation also caused the tradition in Nias to change and develop drastically as the time changed, followed by the inclusion of religious teachings and the influence of globalization affected the transformation of Nias culture in the culture itself, forms, and values (Halawa & Rustandi, 2017). Other research regarding transformation in the Karo culture can be seen from changes in the function of Gendang Baka performance caused by adjustments to these days, technology advances, globalization, and the needs and living systems of the Karo people nowadays (Nasution, 2019). The findings from these cases became a basic consideration for the implementation of this research in providing an understanding of the importance of being more attentive towards the traditional culture so that people will not lose their identity. Therefore, it is crucial to provide space for cultural values so that they continue to develop in society to preserve the culture existence (Efendi, Sahrul, & Salma, 2020; Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

There are some facts that refer to several previous studies, the symptoms and conflicts of cultural values that have been described previously make this study intriguing and have a substantial urgency because of the *first* several considerations, the system of *perkolong-kolong* implementation which is no longer in accordance with the Karo customs and rules. *Second*, several values and order that have been established in *perkolong-kolong* implementation appear to be abandoned by the Karo nowadays. *Third*, the language used does not highlight and imply the cultural values of the Karo. *Fourth*, the transformation of a new culture which caused a loss of traditional cultural values is a great concern because of the broad influence in the social settings. *Fifth*, *perkolong-kolong* has never been studied from the point of view of linguistics and the transformation of their cultural values.

Based on the factors above, this study becomes a comprehensive analysis in raising issues regarding the transformation of Indonesian cultural values, so that a culture can continue to develop and survive in the middle of the emergence of new cultures and globalization. Therefore, it is essential to optimize traditional culture to strengthen and preserve national culture.

The focus of this study is to find out the process and form of *perkolong-kolong* cultural values transformation that is currently happening. These cultural values are not a single thing because they interact with each other in building their functions in society. In this context, cultural values refers to a system that includes abstract conceptions about what is considered bad (so it must be avoided) and what is considered good (and must always be adhered to) (Bahardur, Andayani, Suwandi, & Wardani, 2022; Milyartini & Alwasilah, 2012). Furthermore, this study will attempt to explain the forms of cultural transformation conceptions found in *perkolong-kolong*.

Method

The method used in this research is qualitative using a cultural anthropological approach. The research design used is a case study, where the findings in this study only apply to the same phenomena or characteristics and are carried out to analyze events, activities, and processes that are regulated in a cultural perspective (Creswell, 2012). This research was conducted in Batu Karang Village, North Sumatera with the main focus of the research being the cultural values of the Karo tribe in the implementation of *perkolong-kolong* at the *guro-guro aron* traditional ceremony.

The techniques in collecting data were conducted through observations, interviews and document studies. Observations were carried out in order to examine the condition of Batu Karang Village and directly analyze the activities and implementation of *perkolong-kolong* as well as the behavior of the community and people involved in *guro-guro aron*. In-depth interviews were conducted with *perkolong-kolong* performers and Karo performers who have understood the ins and outs of Karo culture. The interviews were conducted in depth so that they were more flexible, structured, and there was no pressure so that the atmosphere could be intimate (Verulitasari & Cahyono, 2016). Through document studies, monographic data from Batu Karang Village were obtained in the form of photographs of people's behavior, video recordings, transcription of *perkolong-kolong*, and notes on the origin of *perkolong-kolong*.

The validity of the data will be examined based on credibility criteria using triangulation techniques. On the other hand, data analysis techniques that used Alo Liliweri's cultural identity theory were done with analysis steps since the data was collected, reduced, presented, and verified.

Results and Discussion

The discussion regarding the transformation of *perkolong-kolong* cultural values as the life principle for the Karo tribe will be analyzed using the cultural identity theory by Alo Liliweri. The Karo's cultural identity is reflected in the cultural values of *perkolong-kolong* performance in *guro-guro aron*. This cultural identity is interpreted as a study of tradition and acceptance of these traditions, innate traits, language, religion, and culture's descendants (Liliweri, 2013).

The cultural values contained in *perkolong-kolong* are the shaping factors of the Karo tribe's identity. There are two transformations of cultural values seen in the implementation of *perkolong-kolong*.

1. The Elimination of Reciprocal Rhymes or Poems in *Perkolong-Kolong* Procedures

In *guro-guro aron*, *perkolong-kolong* played an active role in the ceremony because they had a duty to entertain the audience by singing and dancing. Prior to the 2000s, *perkolong-kolong* also entertained the audience with jokes in a form of rhymes and poems filled with tributes to the local community before starting the event. The rhymes mostly told stories about life, love, or even a satire that were entertaining and implying Karo cultural values.

There are three stages of rhymes implementation in *perkolong-kolong*:

- a) The rhyme battle at the beginning of the event aims to gain the audience interest to come to *Jambur* (multipurpose hall for the Karo tribe) and as a signal that the annual program or *Kerja Tahun* has started.
- b) The rhyme battle in the middle of the event was held to anticipate boredom of the audience who was watching at *Jambur*. In addition, this also aims to make the event alive and does not run monotonously. During the performance, *perkolong-kolong* will sing, dance, and tell rhyming jokes. The rhyme used in the middle of the event is different from the one in the beginning of the event.
- c) The rhyme battle at the end of the event was conducted by singing and dancing, as well as rhyming. In this stage, *perkolong-kolong* will dance even more freely, politely, and stick to Karo rules and customs. This step is usually the highlight of the event as Karo's hilarious and catchy pop song will be performed.

The uniqueness in the Karo's *perkolong-kolong* system and activity is what makes the interpretation different from other cultures. The committee will select several songs that will be used in *guro-guro aron*. Usually, the committee will ask the *perkolong-kolong* to sing three songs for the male dancers or *perende* and another three songs for the female dancers or *perende*. The selected songs were chosen based on its meaning and essence. All these activities are completely conducted using Karo language as a form of courtesy. Karo people believed that it should be taught from generations to generations in order to shape the thinking constructions of Karo people based on the advice implied through *perkolong-kolong* activities.

Perkolong-kolong becomes a principle to live as best as possible and doing good deeds within the family and community. This is reflected through the use of Karo language completely while conducting the whole activities. Aligned with Liliweri (2009), language plays an important role in influencing perception, forming, and uttering thoughts. The cultural value contains many teachings about ethics to live, regarding all perceptions through unique rhyme activities that are packed in a compelling way. There is a polite form in language that is believed by the Karo people, taught from generation to generation, and used as socializing ethics, which is greeting. The greeting is expressed especially to the oldest person in

the area where the *guro-guro aron* is implemented before finally starting *perkolong-kolong*.

The implementation of Karo language in rhymes strengthens the understanding within Karo people which gradually forms the community's thinking construction regarding the importance of greeting older people, either when they pass each other or meet someone, as well as in carrying out a traditional activity (asking for blessings or good prayers). These great principles will later be taught in forming the thinking construction that obliged us to always do good and maintain cultural values in the community with courtesy in behavior and language.

Based on the interpretation explanation towards *perkolong-kolong*, it can be perceived clearly that the cultural values were strongly cultivated and carried out using *perkolong-kolong* before the 2000s. However, in reality, based on the data found regarding the implementation of *perkolong-kolong* nowadays, there is an elimination on reciprocating rhymes and reciting poems in the procedures. This main point is one of the factors in the cultural values transformation that are very visible in Karo tribe's traditional activities implementation. Basically, a community should give opportunities for a culture to be able to transform for the better, instead of eliminating cultural values that should have been preserved (Harmawati, Abdulkarim, & Rahmat, 2016).

2. The Difference in Rules and Procedures of *Perkolong-Kolong* Implementation

In *guro-guro aron*, the dancers are not allowed to conduct the activities without following the rules because *perkolong-kolong* performances have several conditions. These conditions are formed in rules and procedures about whoever will be the first to dance, sing, reciprocate rhymes and so on. This rule has been applied since a long time ago and has become traditional customs for the Karo (Gule, 2012).

Based on the data found, several *perkolong-kolong* implementations have begun to transform in terms of rules and procedures since the 2000s. This implementation is not in accordance with the customary rules. There are several customary rules that are no longer implemented:

- a) Nowadays, it is known that *perkolong-kolong* is unable to bless or *memasu-masu* and sing traditional songs. Previously, people known as *perkolong-kolong* were able to bless the audience and sing traditional songs. The meaning of *memasu-masu* in this case is related to delivering good advice and prayer for the intended audience.

The examples of *memasu-masu* sentences delivered by *perkolong-kolong* previously:

- (1) *Erbelas2 ertoto aku bas lebe-lebendu gelah jenda nari pagi bebenana terus kupudi tambah dolat dagingndu km Sebayang marga kerina.*
(I speak and pray in front of you so that you will stay healthy now and forever *Sebayang Mergana*.)

- (2) *Emaka bage dage Sebayang Mergana ras beru Sebayang rikut ras impail nakerina, ijenda erkata aku erbelas gelah sehat kam kerina, seh sekolah ndu, mehamat man orang tua ras lampas jumpa atendu ngena.*

- (So this is how *Sebayang Mergana* and *beru Sebayang*, also for every cousin [*impal-impal*] of yours, I'm speaking here so that all of you are given good health, good education, and respect for your parents. As for those who are looking for a spouse, hopefully you meet the love of your life as soon as possible.)

The giving of the blessings (*pasu-pasu*) is delivered by *perkolong-kolong* to people whose the family name (*marga*) is the founder of the village. The family name can also be interpreted as the earliest in order or highest in importance. After that, traditional songs will be sung by the *perkolong-kolong*.

However, based on the field data found, the current *perkolong-kolong* does not do this anymore and they do not understand these customary rules. This causes a significant transformation between the cultural values of *perkolong-kolong* towards the life principles provision to the Karo.

- b) The current implementation of *perkolong-kolong* does not accentuate Karo's cultural manners. For instance, the implementation system only aims to entertain the audience in *guro-guro aron*. Cultural manners are supposed to concern the things that can and cannot be done by *perkolong-kolong*. However, an understanding regarding manners is no longer taught to the current *perkolong-kolong*. In fact, based on data sources, there was a lack of understanding within the Karo about the customary rules of *perkolong-kolong* implementation. It is acknowledged that this might occur as the result of the absence of traditional leaders who are supposed to preserve the principles for manners that should be carried out by the *perkolong-kolong*. Currently, the selection of *perkolong-kolong* is just based on how often the couple is invited to Karo events and how well known they are by the local community.

Aligned with Liliweri's theory (2013), the factors that formed a cultural identity are beliefs and behavior patterns of people. A belief is a substantial point in accepting one truth about culture learning. This belief becomes one of the factors in forming the community's identity. Based on the data found, the lack of belief and behavior patterns of people who follow modernization became one of the triggers for the transformation that occurred in rules and procedures for implementing *perkolong-kolong*. Aside from that, it can also be seen that the cultivation of cultural values is fading while there are actually great principles regarding proper behavior patterns that people can adhere to, not only by the Karo, but also by the other tribes.

These findings are in line with Rahman (2014) that the lifestyle and modernization followed by the community are dynamic and quickly change the social and cultural values of a community. As a result, there is a significant change regarding perspectives of people and ways of living in society.

The cultivation of behavior patterns is important for the community in providing perspectives towards a culture because it will be a factor in forming cultural identity, and our behavior patterns in society reflect the cultural identity that we adhere to (Mintargo, 1997). This action is an appropriate way to provide an understanding that globalization is able to coexist with the existing culture without leaving the authenticity of that culture behind, provide a transformation in a good direction, and preserve the authenticity of the culture.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and results, the researcher found that there was a cultural values transformation in the implementation of *perkolong-kolong* at *guro-guro aron*. There is a fact that in its current implementation, *perkolong-kolong* does not accentuate the original identity of the Karo in giving good advice or prayers as the life principle that used to be done by the Karo. Two main points found in this study are: 1) general descriptions and comparisons of the transformation of *perkolong-kolong* implementation before the 2000s with the current *perkolong-kolong* implementation regarding the elimination of reciprocal rhymes and poems in the procedures. This is aligned with Liliweri's theory regarding cultural identity about language which is a major factor in giving perceptions of culture into people, 2) the findings of the transformation regarding the rules and procedures for implementing *perkolong-kolong* which are different. Based on the results of the analysis using Liliweri's theory, this is due to a lack of belief and a more advanced lifestyle of people.

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