

The Symbolic Meaning of The Traditional Roof in The Houses of KARO North Sumatera, Indonesia

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Abstract: The aesthetic elements of traditional house of Karo divided by three parts. They consist of upper part, middle part and lower part. This article explains about Gerga Siwaluh Jabu as Karo's Traditional House, in Desa Lingga. North Sumatera, Indonesia. This article focus on the roof as the upper part of the house. The roof has the historical, sosial and cultural background. There are the ornaments attached on the roof that has some important roles in Karo's community. The aims of this qualitative research is to encourage the awareness about the meaning behind the symbols used in Karo's house. Cultural studies approach used in this research as well as tradition aesthetic theory. The article provide different perspective towards the historical and traditional artifact as the cultural identity. Not only has aesthetic purpose, that aesthetic elements on the Karo's house roof seen as the guard of the inhabitants.

Keywords: Aesthetic Elements, Traditional House, Karo, Gerga Siwaluh Jabu, Culture

Introduction of Karo's Traditional House

Indonesia is an archipelago country and located at the world's strategic place, it's become a place where western and eastern cultures crosses. It is highly probable for Indonesia to be an entrance gate for foreign countries to enter and left their cultures as well as their beliefs. Those things enriches Indonesian cultural values. The newest problems Indonesia has been facing – especially in younger generations - are cultures, crisis, identity crisis, and cultural roots crisis. There are lots of things about how to contribute help to mend those problems. As scholars, one of the methods is to do some research about Indonesian cultures. Indonesian cultures that interest the researchers is Karo ethnic's culture, one of the ethnic that located on the northern side Sumatera Island, Indonesia. This ethnic is indigenous tribes of highland mountain areas like Berastagi and Kabanjahe.



Figure 1 Location Map of Karo District

The most important element from Karo ethnic is their traditional house. The traditional house is not only functioning as a place to take shelter from the weather, but also has a deeper meaning. This house is split into three components which are the top part that includes the roof, middle part which called as the body where all the activities took part, and lastly the bottom part of the house. All the house components have their own meaning which is related to Karo community traditional life. Those meanings was born from several aesthetic elements which can be found at the Karo traditional house three components and this article will focusing on its roof component.

At the beginning, Karo lived in the small size houses, its shape was simpler and could only inhabit by one family which called barung-barung. The houses construction based on the teamwork nature and the activity is mainly initiated by Sangkep Sitelu (sukut, kalimbubu and anak beru) assisted by Anak Kuta (local village community). Karo people belief that traditional house is where the ancestral spirits reside. Therefore, to build a traditional house is the same as to build a "house" of spirits. Rituals must be performed before construction of the house until it's finished. The earliest ritual process is peoples deliberate or called Runggu in which to determine the right day to begin the construction, and on that day there will be a ritual of laying down the house foundation. The ritual aims to ask for protection from the Karo ancestor so that the construction process of the house protected from danger. When the house has been completed, the people will immediately performed ritual Mengket Rumah Mbaru, which means to enter a new house. This ritual intended as a gratitude to the ancestors as well as a plead for survival in the harmonious and full of blessings living. Their lives were based on mutual interest and unity for the defense from wild beasts and outside attacks. As time went by, the

community is growing larger, and small houses are increasing in numbers, creating the desire to build a bigger and stronger house to accommodate several families (Fauzi, 2013; B.A Simanjuntak, 2015). The direction of Karo house is built based on the direction kenjahe (downstream) and kenjulu (upstream) in line to the village's water flow. A bigger and stronger house will make them feel comfortable and secure. A traditional house is a common property, not only intended for a single family. Its ownership consists of children beru, senina and kalimbubu. Each part of the custom house or called jabu-jabu is designed according to its position and function.

Karo traditional house inhabited by eight families, while the kitchen in the house is only four, that is why each jabu divided into two, making it into jabu-jabu Sedapuren Bena Kayu, Sedapuren ujung Kayu, Sedapuren lepar Bena Kayu and Jabu Sedapuren Lepar Ujung Kayu. The wood material used to build the Karo Traditional House consists of 3 types, namely Ndrasi wood, which has a function to keep family members from diseases; Ambartuah wood, so that the family gets a livelihood or life welfare; and Sibernaik wood, which aims to obtain the ease of livelihood.

The traditional house usually divided into three parts, which are:

1. Top area (the house top part: roof), representing the God
2. Middle area (the house body), representing the human world
3. Upper area (the house basement), representing the underworld



Figure 2 The Parts of Karo Traditional House

Research Methodology

This paper is developed through a literature review and the process of identifying the research focus was based on a survey regarding the research site to investigate the facts in Desa Lingga, Kabupaten Kabanjahe, Karo, North Sumatera. The researchers have started to collect the data in 2016. The researchers met with local people, as the first informant, named Mr. Tersek Ginting. He is the

generation of his family who lives within Desa Lingga. Beside interview method, in order to get specific data needed, this research will require the collection of visual documentation in detail during the field research. This qualitative paper is using tradition aesthetic theory in order to increase the understanding on the topic and issues. The major issue is to bring forward the symbolic meaning of Karo traditional house's roof aesthetic element.

Research Background

The traditional aesthetic elements motif utilizes many geometric elements such as curved and straight lines, circles, triangles, quadrangles, meander forms, swastika which is symbols or ornaments with a cross-like shape with crossword cross-angles, interpreted as a symbol of the universe circulation, as well as the sun and a gyre form. This decoration was originally made with strokes following the shape of a decorated object, in its development this motif can be applied to various places in a building and using various techniques, namely painted, drawn, carved, printed. Karo traditional house's roof motif are using the hand drawn and painted techniques.

According to Jakob Sumardjo (2014), the ornament meaning can be traced on the basis of its local culture. There are basic patterns of the various aesthetic elements possessed by various cultures in Indonesia, which pattern one up to pattern five based on its cultural artifacts and arts from every ethnicity. These patterns can lead to the significance embodied in it so as to indirectly discover the 'identity' of a traditional society. Aesthetic or ornamental elements in cultures generally appear as a boost of aesthetic needs along with other traditional knowledge. In the Karo community, in addition to the aesthetic needs, the kinship system and belief system are the most influential aspects of the traditional house presence, which can be seen in more details in the presence of various aesthetic motifs in the house building components. Both systems evolved to form the social order that became the cultural basis of the Karo community. There are several variations of ornaments that have the objective of repelling the evil spirits or as a treatments medium by Guru Mbelin. But in other variations, many ornaments serve as symbols of the beliefs, ideals and worldview of a society (Kriswanto Ginting, 2014).

Discussion of Karo Traditional House Roof's Aesthetic Elements

The aesthetic element at the triangular facade part of the Karo traditional house roof's is called Ayo-Ayo with the buffalo horns located at the top of the roof. Aesthetic element in Karo traditional house Ayo-Ayo part of the roof is a variation of geometric motifs and a combination of five distinctive Karo's colors namely black, green, red, yellow and white. The combination of motifs and colors has an important role in symbols meaning. Based on the observation, the researchers see that the repetition arrangements of geometric shapes can form horizontal or vertical lines. (figure 3)

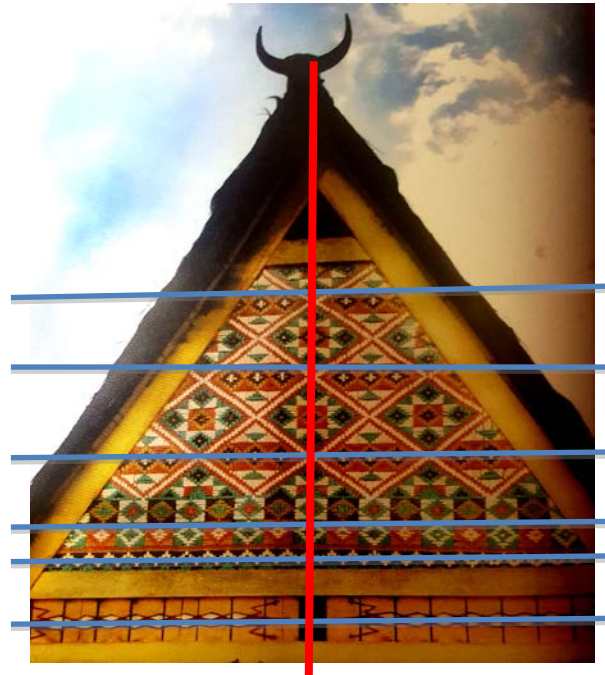


Figure 3. Horizontal and Vertical Lines at Ayo- ayo's Karo Traditional House

Horizontal and vertical lines created from geometric motifs arrangements are divided into five patterns. The first pattern arrangement forms a horizontal line which symbolizing human life. The interpretation is supported by dominant red color application. The red color is a representation of the middle world in which all living creatures lives and interact in it, including humans. The rhombic motif has three colors, representing the 'layers' of Karo community's world belief which are the Upper World and the Under World (figure 4).



Figure 4. First Pattern at Ayo-Ayo's Karo Traditional Roof

The second and fifth patterns are the same motifs that are the stilation of the Gundur flowers, but there is little difference in the middle of color arrangement pattern (figure 5 & 6). Flower Gundur is a type flora ornament which is an ornament that uses natural plant forms as a decoration form. Flower Gundur has a function as misfortunes repellent. The depiction of flora ornaments in ornamental art is done by various techniques; both natural and artistic in accordance to the wishes of artists, as well as the types of plants which became the inspiration, also its differ depending on the environment (nature, social, and beliefs at a certain time) where the pattern was created.



Figure 5. Gundur Flower



Figure 6. The Second Pattern at Ayo-Ayo's Karo Traditional House

At decoration pattern, this Gundur flower is placed repeatedly and form a vertical line which representing the upper world. There are two floral patterns that still look intact in the traditional house Karo's roof, which located at the lower part with a black center and gradually changing its color into yellow to the top part of it. According to Jakob Sumardjo (2014), yellow represents the upper world

while black represents the underworld. If seeing a different flower pattern based on the color in the middle, then the life meaning is increasingly going 'up' to the 'cleaner' and holier (figure 7). Another form of Gundur stilt form on the Ayo-Ayo is the third pattern called Gundur Sitelenen which has a function not only as a misfortune repellent, but also as a sign of luck for the families who live in the house (figure 8).

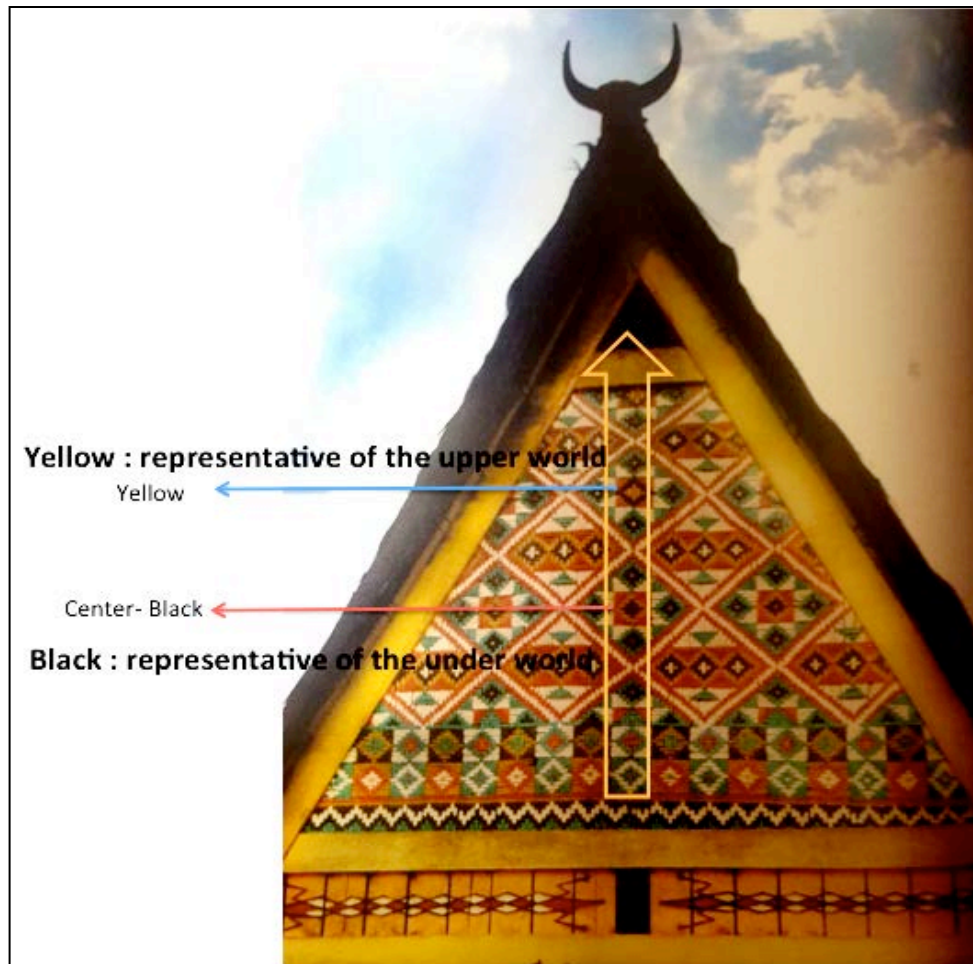


Figure 7. Gundur Flower Vertical Lines



Figure 8. Third Pattern - Gundur Sitelenen Flower

The fourth pattern at the 'head' of the Karo traditional house is located at the bottom of the Ayo-Ayo, near the 'body' of the house. The fourth pattern is called Pancung-Pancung Cekala, which representing bamboo shoots. The bamboo shoot stilation resembles triangular shape and on this fourth pattern, the triangular shape is horizontally repeated, representing human life as well as other living things in the middle world (figure 9). This motif as the underworld symbol is characterized by the dominant black color and green color application that 'wraps' the white color symbolizing the eternal upper world. This motif is functioning as a 'bridge' that connects the upper world and the underworld. The expression of the upper world and underworld relations is a life harmonization (figure 10). In the book Aesthetics Paradox written by Jakob Sumardjo, such motifs do mean a harmonious life, with the hope that residents of Karo's house will have a harmonious life.

Figure 9. The fourth pattern - *Pancung-Pancung Cekala*

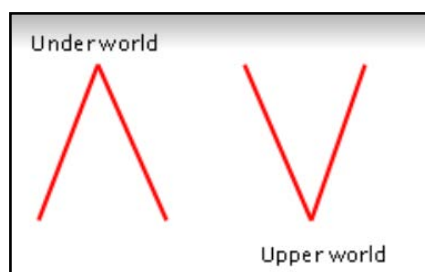


Figure 10. Stilation Meaning of Bambo Shoot Pattern – Upper World and Underworld

The fifth pattern is called as a cover pattern on the 'head' of the house, located at the bottom of the Ayo-Ayo. In contrast to previous patterns that derived from natural plants, this pattern has a shape that resembles a lizard with its two heads located on the right and left ends of the body called the pengretret. The pengretret is considered as a mystical beast symbolizing strength, a guardian against demons or a bad influence from the outside home and a family unifier (figure 11).

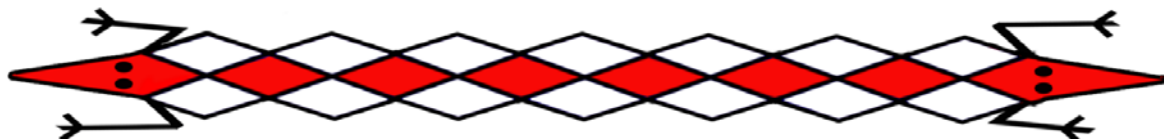


Figure 11. Fifth Pattern - *Pengretret* at Ayo-Ayo's Karo Traditional House Roof

Conclusion

Empirically seen only a single part intact roofing motif. but actually there are several patterns at once that have related meaning to the life of Karo ethnic. Karo ethnic has three different basic patterns, they are called the pattern two, three and four on the Karo traditional house roof motif. Pattern two comes from the pattern 'one' after which the pattern two paradoxes gives rise to three entities, so that three are 'one' unity and one is three. Pattern two characterized by conflicting words, such as horizontal-vertical, top-down and right-left. Horizontal lines and vertical lines as well as the upper and lower worlds are representations of two patterns that emphasize opposition rather than complementary. Therefore, the third pattern is born as a 'harmonization' of both. The pattern three is characterized by a 'middle world' on the beliefs of Karo ethnic traditions, as a balance as well as a bridge between two other worlds, upper as the sacred-the celestial while the under is profane. The pattern four is known in the farming community's culture. On the Karo traditional house Ayo-Ayo's motif is marked by the form of rhombic motifs that have four 'life' ribs, such as sky, earth, land, sea and north (upstream), south (downstream), west, east.

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