

Padung-Padung: A Cultural Identity of Karo Women in the 19th-20th Centuries in the Records of Foreign Explorers

Ariani¹, Imam Santosa², Achmad Haldani Destiarmand³, Agus Sachari⁴

Abstract

The exotic natural beauty, indigenous lifestyles, traditional architecture, wearable artifacts, and other cultural uniqueness of Tanah Karo in North Sumatra intrigued foreign explorers during the 19th to 20th centuries. One of the cultural artifacts that caught their attention was padung-padung jewelry, large silver earring shaped like a double spiral. This jewelry serves as a cultural identity for Karo women and symbolizes the essence of Karo tribal culture, making it a prominent topic in the explorers' journals. Notable explorers documenting padung-padung include Jules Clane, J. H. Neumann, J. E. Jasper, Mas Pirngadie, and Edwin Meyer Loeb. This article explores Karo culture materialized in padung-padung, as perceived by foreign explorers. The explorers' notes become one of the references to study Karo culture at that time, especially about padung-padung and Karo women. The study employs the ethnohistorical method, combining old literature research and interviews with knowledgeable sources. Findings reveal that padung-padung was worn by Karo women from high social status, emphasizing their significant role within the patriarchal culture.

Keywords: *padung-padung, cultural identity, Karo women, explorer records.*

Introduction

The allure of Tanah Karo in North Sumatra lies in its natural and cultural authenticity, attracting explorers worldwide. Their primary objective is to create an ethnographic account of the Karo people, covering history, culture, religion, beliefs, art, and geography. In the 18th to 20th centuries, numerous foreign explorers visited Tanah Karo and documented the cultural phenomena they encountered. These records offer invaluable insights into uncharted areas, encounters with indigenous communities, and the local culture. Among the prominent foreign explorers were William Marsden (History of Sumatra, 1783), John Anderson (Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra in 1823, 1840), Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn (Beschreibung der Battaländer, 1847), Jules Claine (Deli et les Bataks-Karos de Sumatra, 1892), Wilhelm Volz (Nord-Sumatra, 1909), Anton Willem Nieuwenhuis (Die Veranlagung der Malaiischen Volker des Ostin-

¹ Doctoral Candidate in Visual Art and Design, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia. Email: 37020006@mahasiswa.itb.ac.id, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5966-4459>

Lecturer of Product Design Department, Faculty of Art and Design, Universitas Trisakti, Jakarta, Indonesia
² Doctor in Design and Visual Culture Research Group, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia. Email: imamz@itb.ac.id, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1241-6893>

³ Doctor in Crafts and Tradition Research Group, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia. Email: ahaldani@itb.ac.id, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6729-3827>

⁴ Doctor in Cultural Studies, Aesthetic, and Science of Art, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia. Email: aasachari@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4596-5063>

Dischen Archipels, 1913), J. H. Neumann (De Smid, 1903; *Een Jaar Onder De Karo-Bataks*, 1917, *Bijdrage tot de Geschiedenis der Karo-Batakstammen*, 1926), M. Joustra (*Batak Spiegel*, 1926), and Edwin Meyer Loeb (*Sumatra: Its History and People*, 1935). Alongside foreign explorers, Indonesian explorer Mas Pirngadie, accompanied by J. E. Jasper, explored the archipelago, including Tanah Karo. Their journey was documented in the book “*De Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië*” in 1927. The travel reports and expedition findings of these explorers were published in the print media of the Dutch East Indies, becoming a crucial source of knowledge about the islands (Termorshuizen, 1993: 10).

Among the diverse cultural aspects of the Karo tribe, their tangible artifacts, particularly their artistic creations, have captivated the interest of foreign explorers. Notably, one such item is earrings known as *padung-padung*. As a material culture, jewelry holds profound significance in human life and has been instrumental in expressing cultural interactions throughout history. These artifacts play a vital role as they offer insights into the mindset and cultural practices of the people who uphold these traditions. The Karo people possess a remarkable sensitivity to artistic works and exhibit exceptional skills in crafting intricate jewelry pieces that carry both aesthetic beauty and profound meaning. The emergence of jewelry within the Karo community is intertwined with the underlying culture and society. *Padung-padung*, a double-spiral-shaped earring, stands as a symbol of cultural identity for Karo women. Beyond its ornamental function, this jewelry serves as a status symbol, signifying the position of Karo women in a society inherently structured around patriarchal norm.

The *padung-padung*, with its distinct shape and extraordinary size beyond the conventional norms of earrings, holds a captivating appeal. This piece of jewelry is worn by attaching one end to a headdress, alleviating the burden on the ears due to its solid silver composition, weighing approximately 1-2 kg. These adornments come in varying lengths, ranging from 9 cm to 17.5 cm (Carpenter, 2011: 80), and were commonly worn by Karo women during the 19th to 20th centuries (Sibeth, 1991: 186). The *padung-padung* received attention and mention in the journals of foreign explorers who visited Tanah Karo, including Jules Claine, J. H. Neumann, J. E. Jasper, Mas Pirngadie, and Edwin Meyer Loeb. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into Karo culture during the 19th to 20th centuries. Additionally, other foreign explorers such as Kristen Feilberg, Tassilo Adam, Charles J. Kleingrothe (through photography), P. A. J. Moojen, and Rita Kleyn Fortuin (through paintings) also displayed a keen interest in Karo culture, particularly the *padung-padung*.

The primary goal of this article is to comprehend Karo culture, with a particular focus on Karo women, as manifested through the *padung-padung*. The explorers' observations and accounts of the *padung-padung* form the foundation for understanding the position of Karo women during the 19th to 20th centuries. Available previous research on Tanah Karo has predominantly focused on geography, natural conditions, culture, customs, language, and local beliefs. However, information regarding *padung-padung* and other cultural artifacts of the Karo tribe has been relatively inaccessible. This article discusses *padung-padung* within the records of foreign explorers from the 19th to 20th centuries, encompassing its users, materials, manufacturing processes, and physical and non-physical forms.

Methods

This study employed an ethnohistorical approach, utilizing historical and ethnographic data. Ethnohistorical research often refers to the historical realm and shared myths and historical memories (Smith, 1991: 14). If understood based on its constituent parts, "ethno" refers to a depiction of an ethnicity, ethnic group, or community. Meanwhile, "history" refers to past events (Axtell, 1979). Thus, ethnohistory means depicting a particular ethnic group or community through an examination of its history. According to Strong (2015: 1), ethnohistory is an interdisciplinary approach to indigenous, colonial, and postcolonial culture and history, which developed as a coherent field of inquiry in the United States in the 1950s. Strong (2015: 8-9) also notes that ethnohistorians typically rely on a variety of data, which must all be used with great care. These include: (1) Colonial documents and other institutions, including travel journals, missionary accounts, administrative records, judicial records, treaty records, memoirs, policy statements, and published narratives; (2) Written records in the local community's native language, or oral culture in translation form; (3) Archaeological evidence, which may offer a much longer diachronic dimension than historical and ethnographic evidence; (4) Collections, including maps, illustrations, photos, and artifacts; (5) Oral traditions, including oral history, genealogy, folklore, and place names; (6) Ethnographic research, including systematic participant observation, aimed at discovering traces or attitudes toward the past in the present. The study obtained comprehensive information through interviews with various sources and an extensive literature review. Additionally, colonial archive photographs depicting Karo women adorned with padung-padung and other cultural identities were utilized for visual insights.

Results and discussions

The discussion in this article focuses on the travel notes of foreign explorers regarding the padung-padung along with the aspects surrounding it, revealing that this jewelry is one of the cultural identities of Karo women that reflects the cultural symbols of the Karo tribe. Aspects highlighted by foreign explorers who came to the Tanah Karo include Karo women as users of padung-padung, the padung-padung viewed from its material composition, production process, physical form and non-physical form, as well as the padung-padung as materialization of Karo women's cultural identity.

Encounters with Karo women

Explorers visiting Tanah Karo find indigenous women to be intriguing subjects of observation. They are captivated by their physical appearance, clothing, adornments, and daily activities. These women's exotic appearance is evident in their dark brown skin, long black hair, and distinctive attire, which includes the padung-padung jewelry adorning their ears, headdress, and uis (Karo weaving) garments. During the colonial period, indigenous people, often referred to as exotic 'native types', were highly popular subjects, including Karo women with their ethnic identities, such as padung-padung. Photographer C. J. Kleingrothe captured this essence, reproducing the image on a postcard titled "Groet uit Sumatra O.K" (Greetings from Sumatra's East Coast). The East, often associated with universal themes of "primitiveness", "exoticism", and a "distinctive" spiritual background (Said, 2016: 181), attracted the attention of explorers like Claine, Neumann, and Loeb during their exploration of Tanah Karo. Meanwhile, Jasper and Pirngadie focused their observations on the padung-padung jewelry, studying its design, materials, and how it is worn on the ears.

In his travel records “Deli et les Bataks-Karos de Sumatra”, published in the French weekly travel journal “Le Tour du Monde nouveau journal des voyages” in the first half of 1892 (369-384), Claine recounts his encounter with the natives of Tanah Karo. After traveling by train to Déli-Touah (Deli Tua) and then to the village of Pertoembokem (Pertumbuken), Claine took the opportunity to interact with the locals. He observed that the village head was a small stature, very thin, and had a distinct appearance. The men’s attire seemed more Malay compared to that of European visitors. The young ladies appeared quite pleasant, while the older women dressed in thick, dark cloth, wrapped around their bodies and tied at the waist. They covered their chests and half of their back with a shawl, leaving their shoulders and arms exposed. At night, they protected themselves with a light shawl made of dark blue cotton, using a folded piece of cloth resembling a Neapolitan fisherman as a head covering (tudung). Notably, almost all adult Karo women wore solid silver earrings (Claine, 1892: 369-384). The silver earrings that Claine was referring to were padung-padung.

In his travel records to Tanah Karo on 17 April 1916, J. H. Neumann (Johann Heinrich Neumann), a missionary who arrived in Tanah Karo around 1900, echoed similar observations. He described encountering a group of local residents, particularly the women adorned in their finest attire, wearing captivating and large ear ornaments. These jewelry pieces, known as padoeng-padoeng or padung-padung, were made of silver and sometimes adorned with gold alloy flowers. The women complemented their appearance with a beautiful blue headdress, adorned with pinned padung-padung. Some women carried their youngest children on their backs, while others hold hands with their skipping children. Carrying baskets or wicker containers on their heads, they brought gifts of rice, exquisite cloth, and kampil (betel tools) for the host. It was common for them to carry chickens as gifts for the occasion. Men followed behind, dressed in clean white or blue clothes, with older individuals wearing uis woven shawls over their shoulders. Some men wore trousers, though this was not a prevalent garment, while younger men donned ankle-length cloth resembling Chinese trousers (Neumann, 1917: 48-49).

Loeb, during his expedition to Sumatra in 1926-1927, made similar observations regarding the indigenous people he encountered. In 1928 and 1929 he was granted a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation scholarship for the purpose of writing a book based on his Sumatra field work and a compilation of Dutch and another source material. The writing was done in Leiden and in Vienna, where the book was published under the title *Sumatra: Its History and People* (Toffelmier, 1967: 200-203). In his book “*Sumatra: Its History and People*”, Loeb described how both Karo men and women wore cloth that covered their bodies and reached down to their feet, along with headdresses. Wrapping cloths were used to protect the upper body, but now various types of jackets are more common. Additionally, kings adorned themselves with specially made robes adorned with glass beads. Other than that, Karo women parted their hair and pin it behind their heads. Notably, the striking feature of Karo women, whether married or not, was their heavy U-shaped silver earrings, known as padung-padung. Even after marriage, Karo women continued to wear these earrings in their ears, supporting the weight with decorative headdresses (Loeb, 1935: 25-26).



Figure 1. Karo woman (circa 1920-1923) with uis wrapped their bodies and wore padung-padung tucked into her hoods (tudung)

The Karo people's favorite color was blue (or dark red during a war). While Claine, Neumann, and Loeb did not explicitly mention the clothes worn by Karo women, they did note that the women wore dark blue woven cloth (uis) and shawl over their shoulders. The prevalence of the blue color in Karo textiles was intriguing, considering the Karo tribe's early involvement in the plantation economy on the East Coast. With the earnings from their work, Karo laborers purchased imported cloth from Europe and India (Niessen, 1993: 124).

About padung-padung

Claine, Neumann, and Loeb, as well as Jasper and Pirngadie, all expressed admiration for the padung-padung jewelry worn by the Karo women they encountered. Johan Ernst Jasper (1874-1945) was an Indonesian-Dutch ethnographer and colonial civil servant, while Mas Pirngadie (1875-1936) was an artist and painter who grew up in the Molek Indies school (Mooi Indië), having studied under the painter Du Chattel. Together, Jasper and Pirngadie traveled to remote areas in Indonesia, documenting folk arts and crafts through records, photographs, and illustrations. Their ethnographic findings were compiled into a five-part monograph titled "De Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië". The volumes cover various aspects of the archipelago's fine arts and crafts: the first volume deals with woven (1912), the second volume deals with weaving (1912), the third volume deals with batik (1916), the fourth volume deals with gold and silver (1927), and the fifth volume deals with metals other than gold and silver (1930). In the fourth volume of the book, among other topics, Jasper and Pirngadie delve into detailed explanations of padung-padung, including its form, manufacturing techniques, and usage. The sixth volume dealing with leather, pottery and woodworking was never published, and the manuscripts were lost and possibly destroyed during the second World War (Niessen, 2013: 7).

On 12 August 1908, Jasper and Pirngadie arrived in Kabanjahe, the Karo highlands, and encountered well-known earrings among the Karo people called padung or padung-padung. This accessory consists of a very heavy silver earring in the form of a rod folded in half, with both ends forming a large spiral. It is a distinctive accessory worn by Karo women, with the two spirals on the right ear facing forward and those on the left ear facing backward. The solid silver jewelry is so weighty that it must be supported by a head cloth or headdress. Creating padung-padung requires the expertise of a special craftsman, and the manufacturing process involves pulling a fairly thick rod, similar to pulling

filigree or precious metal threads, rather than forging it. Each padung-padung can be arranged in a way that allows the stem to be cut into two parts, which can later be reconnected with a shear cylinder. Alternatively, the rod can be inserted directly into the wearer's ear and then forged to form a spiral at the other end, making the jewelry immovable without causing damage to the ear canal. This intricate forging process necessitates the earring to be placed near an anvil (Jasper and Mas Pirngadie, 1927: 133-134).

The permanent application of padung-padung to the ears of Karo women bears a striking resemblance to what Claine observed and documented in his travel records. Claine described Karo's peculiar silver earrings, which are about 12 centimeters long and weigh an average of one and a half kilograms, sometimes even two kilograms. These ornaments are attached to the women during puberty, and the process of installing them is a highly engaging event witnessed by a lively audience. To wear padung-padung permanently, a Karo girl is tied to a hard-wooden pole, positioned at the village square, surrounded by residents. The goldsmith, often the head of the village, inserts a massive silver cylinder into the upper ear lobe, previously pierced with a hole that can accommodate a pencil. This hole serves as the insertion point for the inner slit of one of the padung-padung that has not been closed yet. Gradually, the goldsmith bends the shafts of the spiral ornaments, bringing the ear into the void formed by these unique ornaments. Once the first result is achieved, a spiral point is fixed at the ending point of the column. The girl then turns to help bring the metal closer, while the goldsmith hammers it into the conical part of the column, which serves as an anvil, until it is fully closed. This process results in the peculiar ornament being worn for life and can only be removed after the woman's death by cutting her earlobes (Claine, 1892: 378).



Figure 2. The process of wearing padung-padung permanently

Based on the accounts of Neumann and Claine, it becomes evident that there are two ways of using padung-padung: one designed to be removed (with a sliding cylinder at the end) and another meant to be worn permanently. This observation is further supported by field research and literature studies conducted in old literature on jewelry, which include photos of padung-padung. The field research involved observations of padung-padung owned by various collectors, as well as those displayed in the Karo Heritage Museum in Berastagi and the National Museum in Jakarta. Notably, some padung-padung feature additional ornaments on their spiral surface. These ornaments take the shape of stars, resembling star anise, while others utilize filigree and granulation techniques with mood material (a gold and copper mixture). The process of wearing padung-padung

permanently is visually depicted in a photograph, later painted by Edouard Riou (1833-1900), and can be found in Claine's travel records on page 377 (figure 2).

Based on the accounts of Claine, Neumann, Jasper, Pirngadie, and Loeb, *padung-padung* can be described as large, double spiral ear ornaments made of heavy solid silver, requiring attachment to a headdress for support. Additional sources that mention the form of *padung-padung* include the *Catalogus Der Afdeeling Nederlandsche Kolonien* (Catalog of the Dutch Colonies) compiled by Veth, Wilken, and Klinkert (Veth et al., 1883: 42), which defines *padung-padung* as solid silver earrings. Wilhelm Volz, a German professor of geography, in his book *Nord Sumatra*, describes Karo women's earrings as a double spiral made of silver wire, known as *padung-padung* (Volz, 1909: 304). Volz further emphasizes the cultural significance of the spiral shape, which is found in various objects. Additionally, the *Karo-Bataksch Woordenboek* (Karo-Batak Dictionary) compiled by Joustra (1907: 81) states that *padoeng-padoeng* or *padung-padung* refers to the heavy ear ornaments of Karo women, shaped like a lute.

Findings from the literature studies and interviews provide additional insights into the form of *padung-padung*. It is described as spiral-shaped jewelry used by Karo women in the late 19th to early 20th centuries (Sibeth, 1991: 190). The classical Bronze Age inspired the spiral shape, possibly drawing inspiration from the unopened shape of a fern or a nautilus shell, although further evidence is needed to confirm this (Carpenter, 2011: 44). The spiral shape is often associated with agricultural societies, particularly from the Early Neolithic to classical antiquity. It holds various meanings, ranging from symbols of apostrophes, such as snakes and labyrinths, to symbols of motion, time, or rotation. This motif is widely found across time, cultures, and spaces, especially in central Europe and the Aegean during the Bronze Age (Klontza-Jaklova, 2016: 42-44). The cultural pattern of the Karo people was shaped by their agricultural lifestyle, which significantly influenced their culture. Their deep connection to nature, abundant agricultural resources, and appreciation for the ecosystem contributed to the development of their traditions and culture. This appreciation for nature is reflected in the inspiration drawn from natural shapes applied to everyday objects, including *padung-padung*. The basic form of *padung-padung*'s spiral shape is believed to be adapted from the rolling shape of a millipede (Sitepu, 1980: 55).

According to Juara R. Ginting, an anthropologist and observer of Karo culture, the curved, spiral-like shape of *padung-padung* is believed to be inspired by the shape of the shoots of ferns (*paku* in Indonesian). This particular type of fern can reproduce through its leaves. In Karo ethnic decoration (*gerga*), the young leaf shoots of ferns are known as '*tulak paku*', where '*tulak*' denotes a motif. Hence, '*tulak paku*' translates to fern motifs. The Karo people adapted the shape of these fern shoots to create the *gerga tulak paku* design. The form of *padung-padung* is associated with human luck and glory, while some interpret it as a symbol of human greatness or majesty (Sitanggang, 1992: 44). Beyond its function as a decorative ornament for house interiors, it is believed to bestow longevity. The structure of the *gerga tulak paku*, resembling tendrils, is then applied to the design of *padung-padung*. This adaptation of natural forms reflects the Karo people's deep appreciation for nature and their cultural expression through jewelry design.

The main raw material for crafting *padung-padung* is silver obtained from melted coins. Approximately 1 kg of coins, which equates to about 100 coins, is required to create a single piece of *padung-padung*. When ordering silver earrings, customers specify the desired ratio and weight of silver and copper to be used in the alloy, expressed in gold units. For instance, 1 dollar's worth of

silver mixed with 3 cents' worth of copper is represented as 2 gold units. If an order for 50 gold units of jewelry is received, the silversmith knows to mix 25 dollars' worth of gold with 75 cents' worth of silver to create the item with the desired silver content (Jasper and Pirngadie, 1927: 16-19). In the Kota Cina region, the Karo people extensively use silver ornaments, including heavily polished padung-padung, silver necklaces, and numerous silver finger rings. This significant usage led to a scarcity of silver in the area (Neumann, 1903: 16). Additionally, dollars of Carolus the 3rd and 4th, once used for pepper trading, became scarce as locals hoarded the money, either hiding the dollars or melting them down to create jewelry (Anderson, 1840: 188-189).

The beauty of padung-padung, both plain and ornamented, owes much to the exceptional skill and expertise of the Karo blacksmiths in metal processing. Karo blacksmiths are renowned as the most talented in Sumatra for their proficiency in working with gold and silver (Carpenter, 2011: 74). Within Karo society, blacksmiths hold a special position, and their skills are traditionally passed down to their sons. Their tools are considered family heirlooms and cannot be sold. The tools are believed to possess a spiritual essence and that they choose to be passed down to the descendants of the blacksmiths. Failure to honor the spirit within the tools could lead to misfortune for the family. In every village, there was a dedicated workshop for blacksmiths, while silversmiths worked in the yards outside their homes. The blacksmiths' workshops and tools held a position of religious reverence, with undisclosed names known only to the blacksmiths themselves. Sacrifices were regularly offered, especially by those who fell sick from contact with iron, typically in the form of a red and black rooster (Loeb, 1935: 26-27). In crafting padung-padung, Karo silversmiths shape large silver bars (cylindrical rods) not through hammering but by a drawing process similar to creating thin metal threads. The metal material is pulled through a large tensile iron plate, attached to the tension post, and then rotated and pressed until a large bar is formed. If the diameter of the bars is still not small enough, the same process is repeated with a smaller hole in the tension steel plate. This procedure is akin to wire pulling but given the weight of the padung-padung bars, larger equipment is required (Jasper and Pirngadie, 1927: 63). The art of metalworking was passed down from an Indian ancestor known as Si Benua Koling, and all metalworking activities are accompanied by significant rituals. The tools of the blacksmith are accorded special names in this cultural context (Neumann, 1917: 15-20).

In conclusion, the main material used to make padung-padung is silver, particularly coins like Carolus, Spanish, Mexican, and Japanese coins, prevalent during the 19th and 20th centuries (Sibeth, 1991: 187). Crafting this jewelry requires a complex process, making padung-padung expensive. In the Karo community, the five main clans, including Karo-karo, Ginting, Sembiring, Tarigan, and Perangin-angin, are found in each village, with one clan considered the oldest and most powerful in each district. Male representatives of this clan are referred to as kings or sibajak (sibayak), signifying wealth and fame (Loeb, 1935: 45). In colonial archive photographs, Sibayak women, the wives or family of the kings, were seen wearing padung-padung. Based on the results of interviews with Darul Kalam Lingga Gayo, the grandson of Sibayak Lingga Pa Kerung (Laksa Sinulingga), on 20-03-2022, in Tigabinanga village, North Sumatra, information was obtained that only women from certain social groups, such as the upper class, were allowed to wear this jewelry. The photos show these women wearing padung-padung in various daily activities and traditional rituals, but it remains uncertain if they wore them regularly in their daily lives.

Padung-padung as the materialization of Karo women's cultural identity

Materialization is the transformation of ideas and values into tangible forms, such as ceremonial events and symbolic objects (DeMarais and Earle, 1996: 16). Padung-padung, as a cultural artifact, represents the embodiment of Karo women's identity. Cultural objects like this jewelry play a role in expressing complex aspects of culture, including social patterns, politics, economic activities, and individual identities. In the context of the Karo tribe, padung-padung serves as a communal identity marker, reflecting the position of Karo women in the patrilineal system prevailing in their society.

Evidence suggests that the Karo people's way of life has been influenced by Indian or Hindu ideologies, beliefs, and practices. Customs such as the cremation ceremony, river purification rituals (*erpangir ku lau*), and reverence for *gurus* (religious teachers) exhibit this influence. Moreover, aspects like house architecture, chess, cotton cultivation, and the use of Hindu vocabulary and writing systems have shaped their cultural practices and identities, including clan surnames (Loeb, 1935: 20-21). The Karo community comprises five clans (*merga silima*): Karo-karo, Ginting, Tarigan, Sembiring, and Perangin-angin. The Sembiring clan is believed to have direct connections with Tamil traders, evident in certain sub-surname names originating from South India (McKinnon, 1984: 85-86; Parkin, 78: 82). Practices like secondary cremation and scattering of ashes (*pekualuh* ceremony), characteristic of Tamil people, are unique to the Dairi lands and the Karo people (Siahaan, 1964: 114-115). Clans serve as fundamental kinship units, transmitted through patrilineal lines.

In the 19th century, Karo women lived within a strong indigenous community that upheld their traditions and the patrilineal system, where descent was traced through the father's side. This system emphasized the importance of sons as the next generation, limiting the roles and rights of women in both the family and society. Women were confined to domestic tasks, shielded from interference by men due to societal taboos. The patriarchal customs in Karo life constructed a model of husband-wife relationships within the family, placing Karo women in challenging positions during the 19th to 20th centuries. Apart from managing household affairs, Karo women engaged in various labor-intensive activities, including agricultural work, fetching water, tending to livestock, and selling crops in the market. They also demonstrated their expertise in crafting *uis* (Karo weaving), betel containers (*kampil*), mats (*amak mbelang*) from woven pandanus, and vegetable baskets from woven bamboo. The patrilineal system's implications resulted in distinct social positions between men and women, evident in practices like traditional marriages and inheritance distribution within Karo society.

The Karo tribe's traditional marriage is a longstanding practice that continues to be upheld today. It involves a series of pre-wedding traditions, such as *maba belolambar*, *nganting manuk*, *peradaten* ceremony, *mukul*, and *ngulihi tudung*. Each event holds specific procedures and meanings, coordinated with other relatives. During *maba belolambar*, a man's family proposes to a woman's family, seeking their consent for the marriage. If approved, the next event, *nganting manuk*, focuses on discussing the dowry or *jujur* money, which legitimizes the man's ownership of the woman (Ginting, 1994: 87). This *jujur* money is considered a purchase or gold exchange, leading to the perception that women become the property of their husbands after marriage, reinforcing male dominance in marital relationships. In the past, the dowry was seen as a legitimate purchase of the future wife, and after its exchange, the man would refer to it as a 'purchase item' (Loeb, 1935: 58). The dowry amount varied between 50 and 300 dollars (Claine, 1892: 378). Previous records also mention valuable gifts, such as buffaloes or horses, given to the woman's parents by the

man seeking to marry her. This practice positioned women at a lower level compared to men, as if the marital relationship were akin to a transaction of sale and purchase (Marsden, 1783: 296).

In contrast to the idea of padung-padung being a purchase, Juara Ginting, in an interview on 10-04-2021, presents a different perspective, stating that it is part of an exchange system in Karo culture during weddings. The woman's family also gives various items, including buffalos, to the man's side as part of this exchange. The father of the bride also gifts padung-padung to his daughter on her wedding day to symbolize her new status after marriage (Brinkgreve and Stuart-Fox, 2013). This practice was common at that time, and by wearing padung-padung, the bride's family emphasized their daughter's respected background. Daughters were considered the father's wealth, and according to Karo's patrilineal custom, they belonged to their fathers, then their husbands, and later became the property of male relatives after the husband's death (Loeb, 1935: 57).

The spiral shape of padung-padung holds a diverse range of symbolic meanings. It represents the power of natural elements such as the sun, moon, air, water, thunder, lightning, vortex, and creative energy. Paradoxically, the spiral also symbolizes the cyclical nature of life, encompassing the rise and fall of celestial bodies, growth-development-death, contraction, entanglement, openings, birth, and death (Cooper, 1987: 158-159). When explored further, the act of giving padung-padung to a daughter carries a profound message from the father. It serves as a reminder for her to be wise in navigating the challenges that may arise in her married life. The way padung-padung is worn, differing between the right and left ear, further conveys implicit meanings. On the right ear, it is worn backward in a slightly raised position, while on the left ear, it faces forward in a lower position. This distinction symbolizes the ups and downs of married life, where there will be both joyful moments (represented by the upward position) and challenging times (symbolized by the downward position). Thus, in a marital relationship, husband and wife are meant to support each other (Rodgers, 1985: 322).

Karo women, despite their position below men in society, hold a significant role as guru sibaso or shamans. This revered profession is highly respected and sought after by people seeking assistance with both worldly and supernatural matters. Guru sibaso possesses comprehensive knowledge of history, theology, customs, and more. They are often consulted for fortune-telling, economic advice, conducting ritual ceremonies, communicating with spirits or supernatural entities, and tending to the sick. According to Neumann, guru sibaso is a center of information that exists within the Karo people and serves as a medium to summon ancestral spirits (Neumann, 1917: 54). The term "guru" in the Karo language refers to a person with specialized knowledge, while "baso" originates from "erbasoh" or "erburih", meaning "to clean" or "to purify". Consequently, guru sibaso is exclusively associated with women, as they are believed to possess a subtle soul or spirit (tendi) necessary to serve as a conduit for spirits in the unseen realm (begu) to enter their bodies. This conviction forms the basis for the belief that only women can fulfill the esteemed role of guru sibaso.

Guru sibaso possesses the unique ability to communicate with supernatural spirits or the souls of deceased individuals. They act as intermediaries, with a protective spirit guiding and leading them during ceremonies. In a trance-like state, the guru sibaso communicates with the supernatural entities, and when they speak, it is no longer their voice but that of the spirit that has entered them (Loeb, 1935: 81). During these rituals, individuals who believe in this practice are known as perbegu or sipelbegu. According to an interview with Darul Kamal

Lingga Gayo, guru sibaso can establish communication with ancestral spirits up to three generations back. While inhabited by the spirit, the guru sibaso assumes the persona of the deceased ancestor, even wearing clothing associated with them during their lifetime. The summoned ancestral spirits can reveal previously unknown information to their families. Remarkably, while being women, guru sibaso can transform into the persona of men when a male ancestral spirit enters their body.

The belief in dibata is central to the worldview of these individuals, and they perceive dibata as the creator of all things and possessing supernatural and all-encompassing power. Ritual ceremonies involving offerings are dedicated to dibata, but the distribution of these offerings takes place in sacred locations. In such communities, people maintain a strong connection with the spirits of their deceased relatives, particularly ancestors whom they deeply respect as the founders of their villages and guardians of their customs. These spirits are believed to hold benevolent influence, impacting the safety and well-being of their descendants, and ensuring the prosperity and protection of their children and grandchildren.

In addition to safeguarding human physical and spiritual balance, dibata plays a crucial role in maintaining social norms and customs among the Karo people. Disturbance in this balance may lead to the ancestors' anger and cause harm to human life. For the Karo community, customs hold greater importance than religion, and they firmly believe that the social roles of their deceased ancestors persist. Although physically departed, their spirits can still be summoned for discussions and sought for opinions or advice on social and customary matters. According to Steedly in her book "Hanging Without a Rope", traditional Karo healing ceremonies involve the female body as a vehicle for the spirits. (Steedly, 1998: 198). Quoting Michel de Certeau, "There is someone else speaking within me: thus, speaks the possessed woman", and Spivak, "women's stories as information-retrieval sites", Steedly illustrates how Karo women speak in the public sphere. Karo women's voices, which are often ignored in regular circumstances, gain significance in this context. They speak as someone else, allowing their words to be listened to and heeded. This paradoxical situation grants women a unique space of influence.

The role of guru sibaso in traditional Karo beliefs extends beyond occult spirits and rituals. These gurus are instrumental in restoring balance ('equilibrium') within their community. Possessing extensive knowledge about the universe ('cosmos'), guru sibaso works to rectify intentional or unintentional disruptions to the cosmic balance (Spradley and McCurdy, 1975: 423-432). This includes creating harmony within the individual ('micro-cosmos') for inner peace and health and fostering equilibrium with the environment ('macro-cosmos') to ensure shared prosperity, business success, and the prevention of natural disasters (Sembiring, 2005: 123-129).

Conclusion

Almost all foreign explorers who visited Tanah Karo documented their fascination with padung-padung, a large silver jewelry piece that not only held unique physical attributes but also symbolized the cultural identity of the Karo people during that period. The form of this ornament sparked different opinions, with some likening it to a coiled millipede insect, while others saw it as resembling the shoots of ferns, a form also found in gerga tulak paku, another Karo ornament. Despite these varied interpretations, the physical shape of

padung-padung reflects the Karo people's close connection with nature, which profoundly influenced their daily lives and artistic expressions.

Creating padung-padung is a complex process, requiring the melting of hundreds of Carolus coins and other types of coins to form a silver cylinder rod. Only specialized silversmiths, known as *pande padung*, can undertake this task, and they must perform specific rituals before starting the craftsmanship. Based on the materials, manufacturing process, and intended users of padung-padung, it can be deduced that these earrings were reserved for individuals from the upper class, particularly the wives or descendants of Sibayak. Beyond its seemingly simple spiral shape, padung-padung carries significant meanings. It represents the position of Karo women within a strongly patriarchal society. While explorers might perceive Karo women as constrained by the patriarchal system, they hold a special place. Padung-padung, gifted by fathers to their daughters on their wedding day, symbolizes paternal love and care, even though the lineage is passed through sons in the patrilineal system. It serves as a message to the groom to treat his bride with utmost respect and care.

Moreover, Karo women play a crucial role as *guru sibaso*, intermediaries who can summon ancestral spirits. This esteemed profession, exclusive to women, relies on their subtle soul or spirit (*tendi*) to connect with the unseen realm (*begu*) and communicate with the spirits of deceased ancestors. *Guru sibaso* acts not only as a bridge between the human and spiritual worlds but also as a mediator in maintaining the balance of sociocultural life. In conclusion, according to the records of foreign explorers, padung-padung is worn by affluent Karo women from high-status families, particularly those associated with Sibayak. The jewelry also symbolizes a father's love for his daughter and highlights the important role of Karo women in the patrilineal system. Despite traditional dowry practices, the gift of padung-padung on a daughter's wedding day signifies an elevation of her status. Additionally, the role of Karo women as *guru sibaso* demonstrates their significance in maintaining cultural balance. In essence, padung-padung materializes the cultural identity of Karo women, reflecting their social standing and pivotal position within the patriarchal culture.

References

- Anderson, J. (1840), *Acheen and the ports on the North and East coasts of Sumatra*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints.
- Axtell, J. (1979). *Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint*. *Ethnohistory*, 26(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.2307/481465>.
- Brinkgreve, F and Stuart-Fox, D. J. (2013), *Living with Indonesian art: The frits liefkes collection*. Volendam, Netherlands: LM Publishers.
- Carpenter, B. W. (2011), *Ethnic jewellery from Indonesia; Continuity and evolution*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.
- DeMarais, E., Castillo, L. J., Earle, T. (1996), *Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies*. *Current Anthropology*, 37(1), 15-3.
- Claine, J. (18920), *Un an en Malaisie, Le Tour du Monde, 1er semestre [A year in Malaysia: First semester world tour]*. France: Librairie Hachette et Cie. pp. 369-384.
- Cooper, J. C. (1987), *Encyclopedia of traditional symbols*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Ginting, E. P. (1994), *Adat Istiadat Karo: Kinata Berita Simeriah Ibas Masyarakat Karo [Karo Customs: There is an important news for Karo people]*. Kabanjahe: Abdi Karya.
- Jasper, J. E. and Pirngadie, M. (1927), *De Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indie, vol. 4: De Goud-en Zilversmeedkunst [The Indigenous Arts and Crafts in the Netherlands East*

- Indies, vol. 4: The gold and silversmithing]. Den Haag: De Boek- Kunstdrukkerij V/H Mouton Co.
- Joustra, M. (1907), Karo-Bataksch woordenboek [Karo-Batak dictionary]. Leiden: E. J. Brill
- Klontza-Jaklova, V. (2016), Use of Aegean Bronze Age symbols by the local elites of prehistoric Europe. *Inspiracje i funkcje sztuki pradziejowej i wczesnośredniowiecznej [Inspiration and Functions of Prehistoric and Early Medieval Art]*. Biskupin–Wrocław, pp. 39-61.
- Loeb, E. M. (1935), *Sumatra: Its History and People*. Austria: Vienna Institutes fur Volkerkunde.
- Marsden, W. (1783), *The history of Sumatra*. London: Thomas Payne.
- McKinnon, E. E. (1984), *Kota Cina; Its context and meaning in the trade of Southeast Asia in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries*, 2 vols. [PhD thesis, Cornell University].
- Neumann, J. H. (1903), *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche zendelinggenootschap, Volume 47 [Communications from the Dutch Missionary Society, Volume 47]*. Rotterdam: Zendingsbureau.
- Neumann, J. H. (1917), *Een jaar onder de Karo-Bataks [A year under the Karo-Batak]*. Medan: TYP. Varekamp & Co.
- Neumann, J. H. (1926), *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der Karo-Batakstammen, Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië, 82 [Contribution to the history of the Karo-Batak tribes, Contributions to the language, land and ethnology of the Netherlands East Indies, 82]*. Leiden: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde.
- Niessen, S. (2009), *Legacy in cloth: Batak textiles of Indonesia*. Nederland: KITLV Press Leiden.
- Niessen, S. (2013), *Menyusuri Jejak Penelitian Jasper dan Pirngadie [Retracing Jasper and Pirngadie's Footsteps]*. Jakarta: Museum Tekstil Jakarta.
- Parkin, H. (1978), *Batak fruit of Hindu thought*. Madras: Christian Literature Society.
- Rodgers, S. (1985), *Power and gold: jewelry from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines from the collection of the Barbier-mueller museum Geneva*. United Kingdom: Pretel Pub.
- Said, E. W. (2016). *Orientalisme: Menggugat hegemoni Barat dan mendudukkan Timur sebagai subjek [Orientalism: Challenging Western hegemony and situating the East as a subject]*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Semiring, S. A. (2005), *Guru Si Baso dalam ritual orang Karo: bertahannya sisi tradisional dari arus modernisasi [Guru Si Baso in Karo rituals: the survival of the traditional from modernization]*. *Jurnal Antropologi Sosial Budaya ETNOVISI*, 1(3), 123-129.
- Siahaan, N. (1964), *Sedjarah kebudayaan Batak [History of Batak culture]*. Medan: C. V. Napitupulu & Sons.
- Sibeth, A. (1991), *The batak: Peoples of the island of sumatra (Living with ancestors)*. United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson.
- Singarimbun, M. (1975), *Kinship, descent and alliance among the Karo Batak*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sitanggang, H. (1992). *Arsitektur Tradisional Batak Karo [Karo Batak Traditional Architecture]*. Jakarta: Proyek Pembinaan Media Kebudayaan, Ditjen Kebudayaan, Depdikbud.
- Sitepu, A. G. (1980), *Mengenai seni kerajinan tradisional Karo, seri A [Understanding traditional Karo crafts, series A]*. Medan: E Karya.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National Identity*. London: Penguin.
- Spradley, J. P and David W. M. (1975), *Anthropology: The cultural perspective*. New York: John Wiler & Sons, Inc.
- Steadly, M. M. (1998), *Hanging without a rope: Narrative experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Strong, P.T. (2015). *Ethnohistory*. In James D. Wright (ed.). *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed., Vol, 8) (pp. 192-197). New York: Elsevier.

- Termorshuizen, G. (1993), *In de binnenlanden van Java: Vier negentiende eeuwse reisverhalen* [In the inland of Java: Four nineteenth-century travel stories]. Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij.
- Toffelmier, G. (1967), Obituary: Edwin Meyer Loeb 1894–1966. *American Anthropologist*, 69(2), pp 200-203. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1967.69.2.02a00070>.
- Veth, P. J., Wilken, G. A., Klinkert, H. C. (1883), *Catalogus der afdeeling Nederlandsche Koloniën van de internationale koloniale en uitvoerhandel tentoonstelling (van 1 Mei tot 1 October 1883) te Amsterdam* [Catalog of the section Dutch Colonies of the international colonial and export trade exhibition (from May 1 to October 1, 1883) at Amsterdam]. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Volz, Wi. (1909), *Nord Sumatra* [North Sumatra]. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer (Ernst Vohsen).