

## Section 5. Cultural studies

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### THE STAGES OF THE “NURUNKEN KALAK MATE CAWIR METUA” RITUAL IN KARO REGENCY

**Abstract.** Death marks the end of the cycle of human life and brings sadness, except in Karo, where death is viewed a combination of sadness and happiness. This paper intends to describe the ritual stages of *nurunken kalak mate cawir metua*. Since death is believed to be “a travel to another world”, the ritual provided for the dead is very significant, requiring tens of millions in Indonesian currency and it is funded either by the deceased herself or by her *anak beru*. This article is qualitative, based on the empirical observations and ethnographic studies. The research question concerns how the actual stages of the *nurunken kalak mate cawir metua* are carried out. The results show that the stages include preserving the deceased by injection, placing the coffin in the middle of the living room, dressing the deceased in a red *kebaya* with *tudung uis gara* and a *kain panjang* her daughters and daughters-in-law and, bringing the coffin by her *bebere si mate* to the *jambur*, placing the coffin in the south being adjacent to the south wall of the *jambur*, the farewell utterance started by the *sukut* party, followed by the following parties,

such as *senina*, *sipemeren*, *sipengalon*, *kalimbubu*, *anak beru*, *perpulangan kecamatan*, villages, churches, and mosques, providing lunch by the *anak beru* party, the *erkolong-kolong*, and removing the coffin from the ritual hall at 6:19 p.m. and brought to the private grave.

**Keywords:** stages, *si mate*, farewell utterance, burial of the deceased.

### Introduction

Death marks the end of the cycle of human life (Pawiro et al. [6, 82; Pawiro[5, 1]) and generally brings sadness. However, the perspectives on death among the Karo (an ethnic group living in three regencies – Karo, Deli Serdang, and Langkat – in North Sumatera Province, Indonesia and the research in this paper was carried out in the highlands of Karo Regency) is different. The people of this ethnicity believe that “a *si mate* (the deceased) travels to another world” when s/he dies; therefore, s/he must be respected with an intimate ritual in which almost all invited mourners sob and describe their special experiences with her/him.

The longer the mourners state their utterances before the deceased’s coffin and the other mourners, the more intimate their relationship was when s/he was alive. Sobbing is important during the ritual because it symbolizes the mourners’ respect for the deceased and for her/his family members and clan. Sobbing should be consciously engineered for some mourners. For those who are not able to cry easily, they force themselves to summon tears or to speak in short burst, giving some reasons for their existence.

### Methodology

The research is qualitative; it was based on the empirical observation and used ethnographic studies as the strategy of inquiry (Creswell [1, 3–19, 173–189, 12–15, 283–294]; Muhadjir [4, 100–106]). The objective of this research is to describe the general stages of the NKMCM—the set of traditional rituals focusing on the local process of fragmentation of human evolution reflected in the ritual development in a particular period. Since little research has been performed on the ritual, the central research question concerns how the actual stages of the NKMCM are carried out.

The participants in this study were a group of people and the entire organization behind the ritual which was held in a *jambur* in Dolar Rayat village, Dolat Rayat district, Karo Regency. The purpose of this research was to gather data on the stages of the ritual. The data collection was such that the researcher became the complete observer. Data analysis involved the description of the ritual events, which were represented in the qualitative narrative and entailed the interpretation of the stages. To present the specifics, features and goals of the ritual, the findings of ethnographic studies are analysed from a theoretical perspective. This paper highlights and exemplifies the most important aspects of the stages in the NKMCM.

### Theoretical review

Two sub-classifications of death are *nurunken kalak mate* (lit. to bring down the deceased Prints [7, 131–153]) and *nurunken kalak mate cawir metua* (lit. to bring down the deceased whose son(s) and/or daughter(s) are already married). Each of these classifications has a slightly different mechanism. This paper is mainly focused on the *nurunken kalak mate cawir metua* (or NKMCM for short) which is a special ritual because it is considered rare; therefore, the NKMCM receives substantial appreciation, not only from the deceased’s son(s) and/or daughter(s), relatives, clan members, neighbours, and officers from village and district offices, but also from religious groups, such as churches and mosques. In short, the NKMCM is very special. In this paper, some of the procedures are documented, for example, preserving and placing the deceased into the coffin, preparing a make-up for the deceased, transporting the deceased from her/his house to the traditional *jambur*, positioning of the coffin in the *jambur*, performing a farewell ritual for the deceased, serving lunch to

the mourners, giving chance to the *perkolong-kolong* (or the singing session) to perform, and bringing the coffin to the graveyard in the evening.

"The rites of separation are highly developed at a funeral, but there is again a period of transition, both for the deceased on his or her way to the afterlife, ... during the period of mourning people may alter their lifestyles a little, refraining from celebrations and jollification perhaps, and making regular visits to the grave of the loved one (Hendry [2, 76–77]). The rite of passages process usually begins with something that has come to an end in our lives (Wendling [8, 1]). As such, the total ritual process is composed of three rites: separating people from their original status, involving a period apart from normal status, and conferring a new status upon the individual (Holm and Bowker [3, 3]).

### Results and Discussion

The description is based on the stages (or processes) of the NKMCM ritual, which lasts for more than ten hours and is carried out by mourners, although, one or two hours before the end of the ritual the number of mourners continuously decreases. Actually, the decrease begins approximately one hour after the lunch ends. The stages here have the following sequences: preserving the deceased and place her into the coffin, dressing and making up the deceased, transporting the deceased from her home to the *jambur*, the positioning of the coffin in the *jambur*, delivering a farewell speech to the deceased by mourners, serving of lunch, singing (*perkolong-kolong*), and carrying the coffin to the cemetery.

A. Preserving and placing the deceased (*si mate*) into the coffin

The deceased was preserved by an injection of formalin shortly after she died. The subject of the study had passed away on Saturday, 12 (*beraspati tangkep* in the Karonese calendar) January (*tambak*, covering December to January or *gayo*, January to February) 2013 at approximately 18.30 in the evening (*mberngi*). The researchers had not reached the deceased's home when she was placed into the cof-

fin; therefore, this information is based only on the memories of some informants, namely, the biological daughters of the deceased. One of the informants explained that placing the deceased into a coffin was carried out by *kempu dilaki* (grandson) on Sunday, 13 (*cukera lau / cukera dudu*) January, 2013 at 7 in the morning (*erpagi-pagi*). There is no ritual for this event. The coffin was placed in the middle of the living room, with the head was oriented to the west (*kesunduten / pustima*) and the foot to the east (*kebincaren / purba / pultak*) so that the face of the deceased can be seen easily once the mourners enter the living room. The deceased was dressed in a red *kebaya* shirt that she liked best when she was alive. The traditional red cloth (*tudung uis gara*) and a long cloth (*kain panjang*) were placed on her right shoulder, and she was covered with black cloth.

The head was supported by a pillow so that its position was higher than the body. The position of the coffin was not regulated by *adat*, although this was only because the living room faced the east, measuring 3 × 6 m, with the position of the front door pointing to the east. The public road stretched from the north (*butara*) to the south (*daksina*). The living room was not decorated and was left as it was. People sitting around the deceased did not wear clothes with special colors; that is to say, they were not wearing clothes symbolizing grief. This is the stage of placing the deceased into the coffin.

#### B. Dressing and making up *si mate*

The researchers were not present when the deceased was dressed and made up, so this description was based only on the explanation of her daughters who witnessed the process. On 14 January, 2013, after being cleaned with wet cloth, the deceased was then dressed by her biological daughters and daughters-in-law at approximately 7 in the morning. She was dressed with three cloths, namely, the *kebaya* clothes which she liked very much when she was alive, the *uis sungkit*, which is red in colour and functioned as the hood, and the *sarong* (*sarung kampuh*), which had no determined colour. The face of

the deceased was made-up. In total, this stage lasted approximately 45 minutes. Neither her nails nor her hair were cut. Then, the *sukut* party – including her biological sons and their wives, and her biological daughters and their husbands – enjoyed breakfast altogether, which was prepared by her wife takers (*anak беру*) party.

Some items, such as a set of clothes (which could be used as her stock for travelling in her another world), betel supplies (*perlengkapan makan sirih*), including a container for betel leaves (*tutu-tutu belo*), betel lime (*kapur sirih*), *gambir* fruit, areca nut, and tobacco, and some money were placed in the coffin near the head. However, the informants could not explain the *adat* custom about the exact location of the objects. There are no customary rules regarding the amount of money given to the deceased. The meaning of providing betel supplies is that the deceased could enjoy these objects while in another world; meanwhile, the meaning of giving money is that the deceased can buy the things she wants while being there. Karonese believes that death (*mate*) means moving or travelling from the mortal realm to the occult / grave realm; however, death does not mean “having no soul” at all.

#### C. Transporting the deceased (*nurunken si mate*) from house to jambur

After breakfast, at approximately 9:00 in the morning, on Monday, 14 January, 2013, a number of young men (*bebere si mate*) who were appointed brought the coffin from the house. This event was called “transporting the deceased” (*nurunken kalak mate*). The *bebere si mate* might include sons of the deceased’s husband’s sisters and the deceased’s sons-in-law (in this case, sons-in-law were represented by their blood sons). There were six *bebere si mate* who lifted the coffin (two in front, two in the middle, and two at the back), such that the deceased’s head was brought out first. There was no traditional ceremony when the coffin was taken out. After being put into an ambulance, the coffin was transported to the *jambur*, accompanied by the *sukut* and others. The car was

driven at a very slow speed. The distance between the house and the *jambur* was approximately one kilometre. All of this is called the phase of removing the coffin from the house to the *jambur*.

At 9:28 the coffin arrived at the *jambur* and was immediately brought in with a small cross (Christian symbol) and was accompanied by Karo’s traditional instrumental music. Her sons walked immediately behind the coffin, dressed in suits and black pants, and they wore the *uis gara* which were draped over their shoulders, with two edges of the cloth on the right and left shoulders (in the opposite directions). The group following behind her sons were biological daughters, daughters-in-law, and sons-in-law. All of her daughters and daughters-in-law wore *kebaya* shirts and hoods (*tudung*) designed from *uis gara* cloth. The sons-in-law dressed freely (some wore *batik* or regular shirts with pants of their choosing) and wrapped *sarongs* around their waists or put them on their shoulders, but they did not have headgears (or *peci*). The hood was shaped with a wide side at the top of the face and a tip at the back. All of this is referred to as the beginning of placing the coffin (*naruhken peti jenazah*).

#### D. Positioning the deceased’s coffin in the jambur

The coffin was placed in the southern end of the *jambur*, adjacent to the south wall. The deceased’s head was towards to the southern side, facing the north with her feet in the north. A wooden stick with a diameter of approximately 15 cm was placed under the coffin in the head position to create a slope of 25 degrees so that, with this slope, the face of the deceased was easily visible.

The lid of the coffin was opened and replaced with a white lace fabric that only covered the legs to the chest. Her sons and daughters, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law sat in positions surrounding the coffin, forming the first circle. Her grandchildren were standing in a second circle and almost all of them gathered around the head. Her biological daughters and daughters-in-law cried the entire time and one of them even sobed continuously. During this time,

there were still very few invited mourners present in that location. This is called the phase of placing the coffin and opening the lid.

#### C. A farewell utterance to the deceased

Precisely at 9:52, master of the ceremony (or protocol) whispered something to one of the deceased's sons, who then seemed to set the circle around the deceased. When being about what he whispered, the protocol had given an opportunity to the entire close family members of the deceased to start a farewell utterance to the deceased before the traditional ceremony officially began. In an orderly fashion, the farewell was initiated by her biological sons and their wives, followed by her daughters and their husbands, and then by her grandchildren. Almost all of these mourners were wailing a great deal.

The farewell was officially started by the *sukut* party, then continued by the *senina*, *sipemerren*, *sipengalon*, *kalimbubu*, and *anak beru* parties. The other parties, for example, the *perpulungen kecamatan*, the representatives from villages, churches (the GBKP (Batak Karo Protestant Church) and the GPDI (Protestant Church in Indonesia)), and mosques. All of these processes were carried out from morning to evening. Lunch was the separating moment that separated the morning and evening phases; after lunch, there were no breaks. Each member of the parties, who often said lamentations, sincerely conveyed his/her utterance. Wailing lends a very sad nuance, and the sadness could be seen from his/her attitudes and tears, and from the voices when he/she mourned. In short, the lamentations can be said as the icons in the farewell moment.

#### D. Serving lunch

Lunch was held from 12:30 to 13:30 in the local time, and it was provided and served by the *anak beru* party, whose members stood in two lines in the right and left sides of the *jambur*. Each line had ten to twelve persons who were ready to serve and who communicated with participants regarding what they required during their lunch. These lines extended from the kitchen out to the participants.

Several dozen of plates, which were made of cans, were distributed first; then, the white rice, soup, and beef were provided.

All of the activities were carried out in chains. Those who had received a complete lunch were welcome to eat first. While they were eating, the *anak beru* party went around in all directions to determine whether any participants wanted to eat a second lunch, or if they simply required additional rice, soup, or meat. Dozens of mineral water bottles, which were purchased from the local mart, were provided. All cooking devices and plates belonged to local mutual aid group (or STM), and they were stored in the wagon belonging to the *jambur*.

After lunch, the *anak beru* party had 30 minutes of free time which they used to collect all of the eating utensils, and to bring the utensils to the kitchen to be cleaned before they were stored. The other members of the party cleaned the mats, which would be used again in the ceremonial place. This free time was also used by participants to relax by smoking, drinking tea, and/or socializing with other parties or with members of their clan or their party.

Some other participants left the *jambur* and went to the nearest tavern to drink coffee or tea. Unfortunately, some of them also resigned because they had other business to conduct or to continue on that day. At approximately 2:00 in the afternoon, the ceremony began again, and, at the commencement of the ceremony, all of the members of the *anak beru* party took their lunch in the kitchen but not in the ceremony hall.

The *anak beru* party had their own service when taking lunch, that is, they ate individually. The remaining portion of the lunch could be taken by members of the *anak beru* party, who brought the dishes to their homes. This practice was common, but the participants sitting in the main hall were not allowed to take even a small portion of the remaining food. With regard to the NKMCM ritual, the "kitchen" and all kinds of things in the kitchen conceptually belonged to the *anak beru* party.

### E. Singing (*Erkolong-kolong*)

The *erkolong-kolong*, which means ‘repeating and singing from the verse of a song’, was performed by a traditional singer (or *perkolong-kolong*). In this study, the *perkolong-kolong* was a woman in her forties who was accompanied by traditional music while singing. The traditional instruments were small drums, a flute (*serunai*), a small gong, and a large gong. The drums were called five drums of *sedalanan* (*gendang lima sedalanan*) and were comprised of three small drums which were also named *enek-enek*. Two drums were played by one person, and the rest of the drums was played by one player. There was also a modern keyboard instrument. The combination of the two types of music is commonly found at the death ceremony. In this ritual, the *erkolong-kolong* was performed four times.

### E. Transporting the coffin to graveyard

The coffin was removed from the ritual hall at 6:19 in the evening and was carried on the shoulders of six young men (two in front, two in the middle, and two at the back); they were the deceased’s grandchildren. As soon as the coffin was outside of the ritual hall, it was then placed into an ambulance and immediately taken to a cemetery that was only about one kilometre from the ritual place. Only close family members accompanied the coffin from behind. A few minutes later, the coffin was removed from the ambulance by the same young men who then brought the coffin to the graveyard and pushed it into the grave. The head of the deceased was inserted first. The position of the head was oriented to the west and the feet to the east. This process was short, and, at 6:45 in the evening, all of the grieving people had left the grave

site after they had scattered various types of flowers as a symbol of their love for the deceased. None of the mourners shed tears again.

The grave was in the location of the private property of the deceased. The area was prepared long before the owner of the area died. The location faced a public road and was on higher ground than the public road. The grave was not excavated but was built permanently on the ground (not in the ground) with a hole to insert the coffin. The hole faced the road. This tomb was attached to the deceased’s husband’s grave; the location of the deceased was to the left of her husband. This grave had a permanent roof with four concrete pillars. Because this area was narrow and private, so there were only two plots, comprising the tomb of this couple.

### Conclusions

The deceased was preserved by the injection of formalin shortly after she died in the evening. The deceased was dressed in a red *kebaya* shirt, *tudung uis gara*, and a *kain panjang*. One day after her death, she was transported by her *bebere si mate* to the *jambur*. The coffin was placed in the southern end of the *jambur*, adjacent to the south wall. The farewell was officially started by the *sukut*, *senina*, *sipemeren*, *sipengalon*, *kalimbubu*, *anak beru* parties, and by representatives from *perpulungen kecamatan*, villages, churches, and mosque. There was a break during lunch, which was provided and served by the *anak beru* party. The *erkolong-kolong* was performed by a traditional singer (or *perkolong-kolong*). In this ritual, the *erkolong-kolong* was performed four times. The coffin was removed from the ritual hall at 6:19 in the evening and was transported to the private grave yard.

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