

Representation of Cultural Elements in *Tombak Sulu Sulu* Among the Batak Toba Community: A Semiotic Analysis Using Roland Barthes' Perspective

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Abstract—This research explored the representation of cultural elements in *Tombak Sulu Sulu* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which focused on denotation, connotation, and myth. This folklore was chosen due to its significance as a cultural artifact within the Batak Toba community in North Sumatra, Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing Barthes' semiotic framework. Data collection methods included interviews with traditional resource persons, observations, and analyses of graphic documents such as photographs and field notes. The data was examined using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis approach, which involved data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that *Tombak Sulu Sulu* conveys the Batak Toba people's cultural values, social norms, and spiritual beliefs. This study highlighted the crucial role of folklore in preserving cultural heritage and collective identity, as well as its contribution to the study of semiotics in Indonesian literature and cultural discourse.

Index Terms—Roland Barthes's semiotics, folklore, Batak Toba Community, cultural elements

I. INTRODUCTION

Folklore is a vital cultural expression in Indonesia, reflecting the country's rich ethnic diversity and traditions. It encompasses various forms of narratives, such as myths, legends, and oral histories, which serve as vehicles for transmitting values, norms, beliefs, and worldviews across generations. This transmission process is crucial for preserving the cultural identities of diverse communities, as folklore embodies their collective experiences and shared memories (Ariyani et al., 2023; Setyawan & Kusuma, 2023).

The preservation of folklore plays a significant role in maintaining Indonesia's cultural heritage. Research has shown that integrating folklore into education enhances its importance in character development and the reinforcement of local wisdom among younger generations (Anwar et al., 2023; Dewi et al., 2023). Through engagement with these narratives, children and youth gain a deeper understanding of their cultural roots and the values that shape their identities.

Furthermore, revitalizing folklore through modern media, such as audiobooks and digital storytelling, has proven to be an effective strategy for ensuring its continued relevance in contemporary society (Alfarisy et al., 2021). This approach not only makes traditional stories stay accessible but also enables their adaptation to modern contexts, making them more engaging for today's audiences. By bridging past and present cultural expressions, such efforts facilitate an ongoing dialogue that strengthens cultural continuity.

The Batak Toba people, indigenous to North Sumatra, Indonesia, have a rich and profound cultural heritage, which is prominently reflected in their folklore, particularly *Tombak Sulu Sulu*. This folklore serves both as entertainment and as a significant cultural artifact, as it encapsulates the Batak Toba people's worldview, beliefs, and social practices. *Tombak Sulu Sulu* functions as a symbolic vessel that conveys the values and norms governing their interactions with the environment and social structures. This type of folklore plays a crucial role in transmitting moral lessons and social expectations, which are essential to the identity and continuity of Batak Toba culture (Pardede & Silalahi, 2020).

Folklore also reflects the Batak Toba people's relationship with nature, emphasizing the importance of respect and responsibility for the environment, which is at the core of their ecological traditions. For them, land is more than just a

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physical space; it is a symbol of social status and cultural identity, deeply embedded in local customs and traditions (Siregar et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with the broader understanding of cultural narratives as tools for fostering social cohesion and strengthening communal identity.

Tombak Sulu Sulu recounts the life journey of King Bona Ni Onan and his family, who encounter various trials and wonders. The story features significant cultural symbols, including the figures of King Bona Ni Onan and Boru Pasaribu, sacred locations such as *Tombak Sulu Sulu*, and supernatural events that reflect the Batak Toba people's spiritual beliefs and worldview. However, despite its rich cultural elements, the story presents challenges in interpretation, as its deeper meanings require contextual and nuanced understanding.

As an oral tradition, *Tombak Sulu Sulu* plays a crucial role in preserving the Batak Toba people's cultural identity. This folklore carries existential significance, as it is closely tied to the social structure and belief system of the community (Khairani & Wiradnyana, 2023). Safeguarding this narrative is essential for maintaining the cultural values that shape moral education and behavior in younger generations. Furthermore, revitalizing such stories in educational settings highlights their continued relevance and underscores the necessity of contextual and adaptive interpretations for modern Indonesian learners (Ginting et al., 2021).

Tombak Sulu Sulu embodies the cultural values, social norms, and beliefs of the Batak Toba people. However, many of these stories are often understood at a superficial level, leading to a diminished appreciation of their symbolic significance. This issue aligns with findings that urbanization and modern influences have contributed to the decline of traditional knowledge systems, particularly those passed down through oral traditions (Saikia & Parkash, 2016). Consequently, Batak Toba folklore, including *Tombak Sulu Sulu*, faces the risk of marginalization in the face of modernization, where contemporary narratives are often prioritized over traditional ones.

The cultural significance of folklore is vital in preserving the identities of indigenous communities. For instance, an analysis of Batu Umang folklore reveals how its narrative embodies the values and beliefs that define the relationship between society, nature, and historical context (Situmorang et al., 2023). Similarly, *Tombak Sulu Sulu* likely encapsulates the ethos of Toba Batak culture and their interaction with the environment. The loss of this folklore would not only erode the richness of cultural heritage but could also weaken social cohesion and communal identity.

The rapid expansion of globalization has led to the erosion of traditional folklore, making its preservation an urgent concern. Voshchenko (2023) explored how post-folklore phenomena emerge in modern society, often causing a disconnect from the original meanings of indigenous cultures. This phenomenon is also evident in the Batak Toba community, where the original context of folklore, such as *Tombak Sulu Sulu*, has been lost or misinterpreted due to adaptation to contemporary environments. The challenge lies in revitalizing these narratives so that they are not merely regarded as stories but recognized as essential components of cultural identity that convey fundamental values and beliefs.

Taba (2023) highlights the role of folklore in maintaining cultural continuity, emphasizing the significance of oral literature in preserving cultural memory amid an evolving media landscape. The Batak Toba people's engagement with their folklore, including *Tombak Sulu Sulu*, plays a crucial role in safeguarding their heritage against modern influences. By actively interacting with these narratives, communities can deepen their understanding of social norms and beliefs, ensuring that folklore remains relevant and meaningful for future generations.

The *Tombak Sulu Sulu* embodies various cultural elements that reflect traditional values and local beliefs. Characters such as Raja Bona Ni Onan and Boru Pasaribu are not merely fictional figures but symbolic representations of cultural concepts like power, honor, loyalty, and purity. Additionally, sacred places like the *Tombak Sulu Sulu* serve as spiritual spaces where the human and divine realms converge, illustrating the Batak Toba people's worldview and their perception of the universe.

To fully grasp the cultural significance embedded in this folklore, an approach capable of uncovering its symbolic and layered meanings is essential. This is where semiotic analysis, particularly Roland Barthes' framework, becomes highly relevant. Through this perspective, *Tombak Sulu Sulu* can be examined as a text composed of cultural signs, where each element—characters, events, symbols, and narratives—conveys specific messages about Batak Toba culture (Noviana, 2022; Simon et al., 2014; Zein, 2015).

This study aims to analyze the cultural elements within *Tombak Sulu Sulu* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, focusing on denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. By applying this framework, the research is expected to provide valuable insights into how folklore serves as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and shaping collective identity. Furthermore, the findings will contribute to semiotic studies in Indonesian literature and culture while strengthening efforts to preserve Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Folklore

Folklore is a rich and complex phenomenon that encompasses a community's artistic expressions and cultural practices. It serves as a medium for communication, identity formation, and cultural preservation, continuously evolving alongside social changes and technological advancements. Understanding folklore requires an appreciation of its dynamic nature and its crucial role in shaping human experiences and social relationships (Abou-Zaid, 2013).

Folklore plays a vital role in education, cultural preservation, social cohesion, and community identity. One of its primary functions is education, particularly in shaping children's character development (Kusnita et al., 2017; Masrura et al., 2023). Additionally, folklore serves as a medium for communication and the transmission of societal values and norms. As a repository of collective wisdom, it encapsulates a community's beliefs, traditions, and way of life (Budiana et al., 2023; Murdianto, 2023). Furthermore, folklore reinforces social norms and strengthens collective identity, fostering a sense of belonging among community members (Rahmawati et al., 2021).

B. Cultural Element

Cultural elements are multifaceted constructs comprising various components, each contributing to the overall social structure of a community. According to Koenjaraningrat (2015, p. 156), culture consists of seven main components: language, knowledge systems, social organization, tools and technology, livelihoods, religious systems, and art. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in shaping people's identities and daily practices.

Language serves as a fundamental medium for social interaction and cultural transmission. It is not only a means of communication but also a tool for expressing cultural values and norms. Linguistic anthropology underscores the importance of language in understanding cultural dynamics, as it reflects a community's worldview and social structure (Utami, 2023). Research further supports the idea that language shapes socialization processes and the adoption of cultural norms (Martin et al., 2023).

Knowledge systems encompass a community's collective understanding of its environment, technology, and daily life practices. This includes traditional ecological knowledge, which is essential for sustainable practices and community resilience (Hukmi & Khair, 2023). Indigenous knowledge systems are increasingly recognized for their contributions to environmental management and cultural sustainability, highlighting the significance of local wisdom in addressing contemporary challenges. These systems are not static; rather, they evolve through interactions with external influences, enriching a society's cultural fabric (Magni, 2017).

Social organization refers to the structures that govern social relationships, including kinship systems and marital customs. These structures define social roles and responsibilities, shaping how individuals interact with one another and with society. The study of social organization reveals the principles underlying social cohesion and the mechanisms through which cultural values are maintained. For instance, kinship systems often determine patterns of inheritance and social obligations, both of which are essential for maintaining social order.

Life tools and technology represent the practical aspects of culture, illustrating how people adapt to their environment through technological advancements. This component encompasses everything from agricultural tools to transportation methods, all of which play a crucial role in sustaining livelihoods and expressing cultural identity (Utami, 2023). The evolution of technology within a culture often reflects broader social changes and provides a lens for understanding cultural adaptation and innovation (Costa et al., 2020).

Livelihoods encompass the economic systems that sustain societies, ranging from traditional subsistence practices to modern industrial economies. Studies on livelihood systems explore how cultural values shape economic behavior and practices, influencing how societies interact with their environment (Utami, 2023). Economic anthropology highlights the connection between cultural traditions and economic activities, demonstrating how cultural norms influence economic decision-making (Guyer, 2017).

The religious system is central to understanding the beliefs and practices that shape a culture's worldview. This system includes rituals, ceremonies, and mythologies that provide meaning and context to life experiences. Religion plays a profound role in shaping moral values, fostering social cohesion, and guiding individual behavior (Utami, 2023). Research in this field often examines how religious beliefs intersect with cultural identities and social structures, highlighting the dynamic relationship between spiritual practices and cultural traditions (Chase et al., 2018).

Finally, art serves as a reflection of cultural identity and creativity. It encompasses various forms of expression, including visual arts, literature, music, and dance, all of which have evolved from local traditions into contemporary forms. Beyond aesthetic enjoyment, art functions as a medium for storytelling and cultural preservation, enabling communities to articulate their histories and values (Utami, 2023). The interplay between traditional and modern artistic expressions offers valuable insights into the cultural evolution of a society (Scott, 2023).

C. Roland Barthes's Semiotic Approach

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is fundamental in understanding the process of signification, primarily through the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth. Each element is crucial in constructing and interpreting meaning in the text. Denotation refers to a sign's literal and explicit meaning, i.e., a universally recognized direct interpretation. For example, a photo of a tree depicts a tree directly without any additional meaning (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). This level of meaning is significant because it is the basis for deeper interpretation. Barthes emphasizes that denotation is the first level of signification, in which the relationship between the sign (the form of the sign) and the sign (the concept it represents) is clear and unambiguous (Putri et al., 2023).

Connotation, on the other hand, involves additional meanings that arise from cultural and emotional associations associated with denotative meanings. This meaning is more subjective and varies depending on the context and culture. For example, even if a tree only indicates a tree, it can contain the meaning of life, growth, or shelter, depending on the observer's cultural background (Zhang, 2017). Barthes stated that connotation enriches the interpretation of signs,

allowing for a deeper understanding of text and images. This level of meaning often reflects people's values, ideologies, and personal experiences (Rosita & Prathisara, 2021).

The third component in Barthes's semiotic analysis is a myth, which he describes as a further form of abstraction that transforms connotative meaning into a narrative or ideology accepted by the culture. Myths serve to naturalize specific ideas, making them appear as absolute truths rather than as social constructions (Putri et al., 2023). For example, the myth of the "American Dream" is often seen in the representation of success and prosperity in the media, where hard work is associated with a path to success, thus reinforcing certain cultural ideologies (Zhang, 2017). Barthes argues that myths have tremendous power because they simplify complex social realities and present them as common sense, thus maintaining power structures and cultural norms (Makarim et al., 2023).

Based on this explanation, Barthes' framework affirms that denotations, connotations, and myths provide a thorough perspective on analyzing signs and their meanings. Denotations provide literal meaning, connotations add a cultural dimension, and myths uncover broader ideological narratives that influence our understanding of the world.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to analyze cultural components, including language, epistemological systems, social structures, tools and technology, livelihoods, religious systems, and the arts. The research was conducted in the Bakkara Valley, Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Primary data were collected from folklore excerpts through interviews and observations, while secondary data were obtained from graphic documents such as tables, notes, photographs, and recordings (Arikunto, 2013, pp. 21-22).

The data collection process consisted of five stages: interviews with the respondents, observations of the research site, documentation through photographs and videos, field notes, and transcribing interviews into a coherent narrative. To ensure validity, triangulation procedures were applied, encompassing the triangulation of data sources, methods, and theories (Creswell, 2015, p. 339). Data analysis was performed using Miles and Huberman's interactive framework, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion formulation (Miles & Huberman, 2007, pp. 139-140). Data reduction was used to streamline and categorize information, data presentation was employed to organize findings for analysis, and conclusion formulation was undertaken to interpret the data and generate insights into the cultural aspects of *Tombak Sulu Sulu* folklore through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotic approach.

Traditional elders were interviewed, specifically the *Raja Huta*, *Raja Adat*, *Raja Bius*, and the current or former village head in Marbun Tonga Marbun Dolok Village, Bakti Raja District, Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The *Raja Huta* is recognized as the principal leader of a traditional Batak village (*huta*), acting as a mediator and decision-maker within the community. He is responsible for upholding traditions, fostering communal cohesion, and safeguarding Batak cultural heritage through the values of the Batak Toba social system (Firmando et al., 2023; Simarangkir, 2018). The *Raja Adat* is entrusted with preserving Batak customary laws and norms, mediating conflicts, and advising the community during significant events such as marriages, births, and funerals to ensure cultural continuity and adherence to traditional values (Harahap & Hasiah, 2023; Harahap et al., 2019; Parinduri et al., 2020). The *Raja Bius* has traditionally served as a healer or shaman, possessing extensive knowledge of traditional medicine and spiritual practices. He provides guidance and healing through rituals and herbal remedies while safeguarding indigenous knowledge essential to Batak identity (Irwansyah et al., 2020; Sihotang & Sitanggang, 2022).

The designated informants were identified as SP, PS, MS, NS, KM, BS, and KS, with further elaboration provided below.

TABLE 1
INFORMATION REGARDING RESOURCE PERSON DATA

No	Sources	Age	Gender	Work	Interview Date
1.	SP	66	Man	Former village chief	03 June 2024
2.	PS	78	Man	<i>Raja Huta</i>	11 June 2024
3.	MS	61	Man	<i>Raja adat</i>	14 June 2024
4.	NS	64	Man	<i>Raja adat</i>	18 June 2024
5.	KM	80	Man	<i>Raja Bius</i>	27 June 2024
6.	BS	61	Man	<i>Raja Huta</i>	29 June 2024
7.	KS	64	Man	<i>Raja Huta</i>	03 July 2024
TOTAL					7 respondents

The respondents were selected based on specific criteria: (1) individuals actively engaged in Toba Batak ethnic customs, including *Raja Huta*, *Raja Adat*, *Raja Bius*, and the current or former village head; (2) community leaders over the age of 50; and (3) individuals recognized as native to the Bakkara Valley. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the mythology surrounding the Sulu Sulu Spear, it is essential to gather insights from those with substantial expertise and familiarity with its narratives.

Prior to selecting the interview subjects, the researchers conducted an extensive literature review and consulted other cultural experts in the Bakkara Valley. This consultation aimed to identify individuals recognized as specialists in cultural studies, particularly those knowledgeable about the Sulu Sulu Spear. After compiling a list of potential

respondents, the researchers initiated initial contact to assess their willingness to participate and to confirm their possession of relevant knowledge and experience related to the study's focus.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of cultural elements in the *Tombak Sulu Sulu* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach reveals that these elements function not only at the literal (denotative) level but also convey deeper meanings (connotative) and ideological narratives (myths) that reinforce the identity and cultural values of the Batak community. Each cultural aspect is represented by symbols that contribute to a comprehensive structure and significance, highlighting culture as a dynamic and socially relevant construct.

TABLE 2
REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL ELEMENTS USING ROLAND BARTHES' SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

No	Cultural Elements	Data	Denotation	Connotation	Myths
1.	Language	<p><i>"Tangisannya kian sering terdengar dan di tempat-tempat sunyi ia kerap menyucurkan air mata memohon dengan penuh harap kepada Mula Jadi Nabolon agar sudi menilik duka cita hatinya."</i></p> <p>"Her cries were heard more and more often, and in quiet places, she often shed tears pleading hopefully to Mula Jadi Nabolon to look into her grief."</p>	Language conveys dialogue, narratives, and prayers, for example, when Boru Pasaribu pleads with <i>Mula jadi Nabolon</i> . The language in this story serves as a means of communication and expression of feelings.	The language in this text also expresses Batak's cultural values, such as spiritual beliefs in <i>Mula Jadi Nabolon</i> (the supreme god in Batak belief). This prayer phrase connotatively means surrender and hope to divine power.	At the mythological level, this language reinforces the ideological narrative that supernatural forces are an essential part of daily life, affirming the Batak people's belief in the influence of divine forces in determining fate.
2.	Knowledge System	<p><i>"Boru Pasaribu bersama putrinya Siatnatundal berangkat menuju Tombak Sulu-Sulu untuk mencari salaon, sejenis tumbuhan yang dapat diolah menjadi pewarna benang tenunan."</i></p> <p>"Boru Pasaribu and her daughter Siatnatundal went to Tombak Sulu-Sulu to look for Salaon, a plant that can be processed into woven yarn dye."</p>	The narrative used the plant "Salaon" as a yarn dye to signify the local expertise regarding natural resources.	Using the plant "Salaon" as a natural dye signifies the Batak people's deep connection with nature and traditional skills in weaving. This hints at traditional ecological knowledge and the importance of sustainability in everyday life.	This knowledge emphasizes that local wisdom, such as knowledge of plants, is not just a practical skill but an integral part of a cultural identity passed down from generation to generation.
3.	Social Organization	<p><i>"Raja Bona Ni Onan dikenal luas sebagai sosok yang sangat dihormati baik di kalangan kawan sekampung maupun hingga ke daerah-daerah yang jauh."</i></p> <p>"Raja Bona Ni Onan is widely known as a highly respected figure both among his fellow villagers and in far-flung areas."</p>	The social organization features a leadership hierarchy with King Bona Ni Onan as a revered societal leader.	The honor received by King Bona Ni Onan demonstrates the values of hierarchy and strong leadership in Batak culture, which respects the social status and role of the leader as the protector and guardian of the customs.	The story of King Bona Ni Onan helped naturalize the ideology of patriarchal and hierarchical leadership in Batak society, affirming the vital role of traditional leaders in maintaining social and cultural stability.
4.	Living and Technology Equipment	<p><i>"Dengan tangan-tangan terampilnya ia menenun Ulos Ragidup yang semakin hari semakin indah."</i></p> <p>"With her skillful hands, she weaves Ulos Ragidup, which is getting increasingly beautiful daily."</p>	The weaving of "Ulos" (traditional Batak fabric) by Boru Pasaribu exemplifies the integration of living utensils and technology, necessitating specialized skills and equipment.	Weaving Ulos is not just an economic activity but also a form of cultural and spiritual expression. It can be interpreted as a symbol of love, prayer, and hope, just as Boru Pasaribu weaves for his son, who will be born.	Weaving Ulos represents a broader narrative about Batak tradition and cultural heritage. This activity reinforces the importance of maintaining and preserving traditions as part of the collective identity.
5.	Livelihood	<p><i>"Raja Bona Ni Onan juga mencari istri baru yang kelak dapat membawa nama dan keturunannya."</i></p> <p>"King Bona Ni Onan is also looking for a new wife who can carry on his name and</p>	The king's duty to maintain the lineage and heritage, which is an essential task in Batak society, can be linked to the king's livelihood in this story.	The search for a new wife by King Bona Ni Onan is also related to the socioeconomic responsibility to maintain the status of the family and society. It reflects social values	This story reinforces the ideology that social success and status are often linked to the duty to continue heredity, which is a standard narrative in patriarchal culture.

		descendants."		about the importance of the sustainability of the bloodline and social reproduction.	
6	Religious System	" <i>Dari cahaya itu muncul sosok makhluk yang menyerupai manusia... 'Mula Jadi Nabolon telah mendengar tangismu.'</i> " "From that Light emerged a human-like figure... 'Mula So Nabolon has heard your cries.'"	The belief in <i>Mula Jadi Nabolon</i> and interaction with supernatural entities that bring divine messages to humans represents the religious system.	The representation of the beings of light carrying the message of Mula So Nabolon shows a deep belief in divine intervention in daily life. This indicates that religion and belief are spiritual and essential elements forming moral values and social cohesion.	This narrative emphasizes the central role of religion in shaping the worldview and identity of the Batak people. It also helps to naturalize the belief that the divine will affects all aspects of human life, including miracles and suffering.
7.	Art	" <i>Ogung Oloan, gong perunggu yang telah lama disiapkannya diperlakukan dengan penuh kehormatan dan khidmat.</i> " "Ogung Oloan, the bronze gong he had long prepared was treated with great honor and solemnity."	The artwork in this narrative is embodied by the Ogung Oloan (bronze gong) and Ulos (traditional woven fabric), utilised in ceremonies and everyday life.	Ogung Oloan and Ulos serve not just as artistic artefacts but also possess symbolic significance as ceremonial instruments and a conduit linking humanity with the cosmos. They embody the cultural and spiritual identity of the Batak people.	The incorporation of Ogung Oloan and Ulos reinforces the narrative of the significance of traditional arts in preserving and transmitting the community's cultural values and spirituality. It also demonstrates that art embodies the identity and history of the Batak people.

This study examines the cultural elements reflected in the *Tombak Sulu Sulu* among the Batak Toba people of the Bakkara Valley, Indonesia, through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. These elements include language, knowledge systems, social organization, living utensils, livelihoods, religious beliefs, and art. Language in the narrative functions as a medium for dialogue, storytelling, and prayer, conveying the Batak people's spiritual devotion to *Mula Jadi Nabolon*. It serves not only as a means of communication but also as an expression of cultural values and faith in divine power. The Batak knowledge system is depicted through an understanding of natural resources, exemplified by the use of the *Salaon* plant as a natural dye, which highlights a deep connection with nature and the significance of local wisdom. Social organization is represented by a hierarchical leadership structure, with King Bona Ni Onan revered as a stabilizing figure, reinforcing the values of authority and leadership in Batak culture. Traditional living utensils and technologies, such as *Ulos* weaving, function as both economic activities and cultural-spiritual expressions, strengthening collective identity. Livelihoods are portrayed in the context of lineage preservation, particularly through the king's responsibility to sustain social status and family heritage. The religious system is reflected in the Batak people's belief in *Mula Jadi Nabolon* and interactions with supernatural entities, emphasizing the role of faith in shaping moral values and social identity. Artistic elements, such as the *Ogung Oloan* (bronze gong) and *Ulos*, hold symbolic significance in rituals and daily life, reinforcing the cultural and spiritual values of the Batak community.

The use of language in *Tombak Sulu Sulu* as a medium for dialogue, narrative, and prayer underscores its function as both a means of communication and a vehicle for cultural values and spiritual beliefs. This aligns with the findings of Basaria et al. (2022), who emphasize the significance of language in understanding cultural contexts. Additionally, the Toba Batak script recognition system developed by Willian et al. (2023) highlights the role of language in preserving and promoting cultural identity by increasing the recognition of various forms of writing within the Toba Batak community.

The knowledge system depicted in this folklore, particularly local wisdom related to natural resources, echoes the findings of Nugroho et al. (2021), who examine the cultural identity of Toba Batak women through traditional weaving practices. The relationship between nature and cultural knowledge also aligns with research on soil theology in Batak culture, which underscores the interconnection between artistic practices and environmental management.

Social organization, particularly the hierarchical structure exemplified by King Bona Ni Onan, is a recurring theme in Batak studies. This is supported by the work of Pardede and Silalahi (2020), who explore the concept of leadership in Batak culture through oral traditions. The emphasis on leadership and social stability in folklore reinforces the cultural values surrounding authority and governance, which are essential for maintaining social cohesion.

Traditional tools and technologies, particularly *Ulos* weaving, serve not only as economic activities but also as cultural and spiritual expressions that strengthen collective identity and ensure social continuity. This aligns with previous research emphasizing that such practices are deeply embedded in societal structures, with lineage preservation playing a central role in maintaining cultural heritage under the guidance of community leaders.

Ulos weaving is a significant cultural practice that embodies the identity of the Batak Toba people. Nugroho et al. (2021) highlight that *Ulos* is not merely a fabric but a symbol of social status and cultural heritage, aligning with research that identifies traditional tools as forms of cultural expression. Furthermore, the economic dimension of *Ulos*

weaving, as discussed by Nugroho, underscores its role in both local and international markets, demonstrating its importance in sustaining livelihoods while reinforcing cultural identity. This dual function—both economic and cultural—has been a recurring theme in studies on Batak culture. However, Siregar et al. (2023) note that while land and natural resources hold deep ecological and cultural significance in Batak society, their direct connection to weaving requires further exploration.

The discussion of livelihoods in relation to lineage maintenance by a king in Batak society underscores the significance of social continuity, particularly in cultures where heritage and ancestry play a central role in social organization. This study both aligns with and diverges from prior research examining various aspects of Batak kinship, social structure, and cultural identity.

The emphasis on lineage and social status in Batak society is further supported by Nasution et al. (2023), who explore the role of traditional practices in reinforcing kinship ties and social structures across generations. The continuity of lineage extends beyond familial relations, forming a fundamental part of the cultural framework that shapes social interaction and cohesion. This perspective is echoed in Firmando's (2022) study on cultural conflicts and resolutions in Batak society, particularly regarding the heritage system, which plays a crucial role in maintaining social status and lineage.

In addition, traditional leadership roles, particularly those of kings, are a recurring theme in Batak studies. Sitanggang et al. (2024) explore how cultural values related to wedding ceremonies reinforce lineage and social status, demonstrating that the continuity of social hierarchy is not only an economic necessity but also a cultural imperative expressed through rituals and social ceremonies.

Conversely, Rezaldi and Alhafizi (2023) highlight cultural conservation through new media, illustrating how modern approaches contribute to preserving Batak traditions. While traditional practices remain crucial for maintaining lineage and social status, their study underscores the need for adaptation and innovation in cultural expression. This dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity suggests that the preservation of cultural identity can coexist with contemporary methods of dissemination and practice.

The religious system in *Tombak Sulu Sulu*, particularly the reverence for *Mula Jadi Nabolon*, aligns with anthropological insights from Nasution et al. (2023), who examine the influence of cultural traditions on healthcare practices among the Toba Batak. This intersection of spirituality and social identity is further explored by Sihombing (2018), who delves into the philosophical foundations of Batak social structures, emphasizing the role of religious belief in shaping communal values.

Artistic elements such as *Ogung Oloan* and *Ulos* function as cultural symbols that reinforce collective identity. This aligns with the findings of Sitindjak et al. (2016), whose analysis of ornamental decorations in Toba Batak houses reveals the deeper meanings embedded in artistic practices. The integration of art into daily life and rituals underscores its significance in shaping cultural heritage and social values.

The findings of this study indicate that *Tombak Sulu Sulu* serves as a crucial medium for expressing and preserving the cultural identity of the Batak Toba people. The interplay of language, knowledge systems, social organization, religious beliefs, and artistic expression highlights the depth and complexity of Batak culture. By confirming previous research and demonstrating the enduring relevance of traditional practices in contemporary society, this study underscores the necessity of both preservation and adaptation in the face of modern challenges.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of cultural elements in the Toba Batak folklore *Tombak Sulu Sulu* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, this study concludes that the folklore serves as a crucial medium for expressing and preserving the cultural identity of the Batak Toba people. Elements such as language, knowledge systems, social organization, religious beliefs, and the arts reflect core cultural values and reinforce the connection between tradition and collective identity. These findings align with previous research, reaffirming the central role of traditional practices in maintaining social cohesion and cultural continuity among the Batak Toba community. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of cultural preservation and adaptation in response to modern challenges, demonstrating that tradition remains both relevant and significant in contemporary society.

This research contributes to existing knowledge by applying Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which offers a nuanced understanding of how cultural elements are embedded within folklore. This methodological framework provides a fresh perspective on analyzing folklore, emphasizing the importance of semiotic analysis in uncovering the layered meanings within cultural narratives. Additionally, the study highlights the need to integrate traditional knowledge systems with contemporary environmental practices, offering pathways for sustainable cultural preservation.

However, this study has several limitations. First, its focus on a single folklore may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader aspects of Batak culture or other ethnic groups in Indonesia. Second, the reliance on qualitative methods introduces potential subjectivity in interpreting cultural meanings, highlighting the need for complementary quantitative studies to validate the findings. Third, the evolving nature of cultural practices means that these findings may not fully capture the ongoing transformations within Batak communities, particularly in urban settings.

Future research could expand on this study by examining additional Batak Toba folklore to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural identity. Comparative studies involving other ethnic groups in Indonesia could

also offer valuable insights into both shared and distinct cultural expressions. Moreover, investigating the role of technology and modern media in the transmission of folklore and cultural identity would be crucial, particularly in the context of cultural preservation through digital platforms. Lastly, an interdisciplinary approach that integrates anthropology, linguistics, and environmental studies could further enrich the analysis of cultural practices and their implications for sustainable development.

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