

LITERATURE AS A MEDIUM FOR INHERITING BATAK TOBA CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE PALITO NI SI BORU TOBA ANTHOLOGY

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Abstract

Globalization and modernization have brought significant changes to the way communities understand and preserve their cultural identities. In this context, literature plays a vital role as a medium capable of both representing and passing on cultural values to future generations. The Toba Batak community possesses a wealth of cultural values reflected in its kinship system, respect for tradition, social solidarity, and the role of women in family and community life. The anthology *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* is a literary work that highlights the life experiences of Batak Toba women and represents various cultural values that remain alive in the community. Although previous research has addressed issues of women and patriarchy in this anthology, studies on its role as a medium for the transmission of cultural identity remain limited. This study aims to describe the forms of Batak Toba cultural identity transmission represented in the *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* anthology. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis to examine the narratives, dialogues, and cultural depictions found in the texts. The data were analyzed from a cultural studies perspective to identify the cultural values passed down through literary works. The results of the study indicate that this anthology represents the cultural values of the Batak Toba people, such as respect for tradition, the importance of kinship ties, the value of *boru ni raja*, family responsibility, and awareness of ethnic identity. Through these representations, literature functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission that helps preserve Batak Toba identity amidst social change. These findings confirm that literature serves not only as a medium for artistic expression but also as a vital instrument in the sustainable transmission of cultural identity.

Keywords: Toba Batak, cultural identity, *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba*, cultural transmission, literature

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, technological advancement, and increasing cultural mobility have significantly transformed the ways individuals and communities construct, negotiate, and

preserve their cultural identities (Appadurai, 1996). While these developments provide opportunities for intercultural exchange and social progress, they also present challenges to the sustainability of local cultures (Jenkins, 2006). The growing influence of global culture often leads to the marginalization of indigenous knowledge, traditional values, and local cultural practices, particularly among younger generations. Consequently, preserving cultural identity has become an important concern in many multicultural societies, including Indonesia. Cultural identity is not merely a marker of ethnic belonging; it encompasses shared values, beliefs, traditions, language, and collective memories that connect individuals to their communities and historical heritage. Therefore, efforts to maintain cultural identity are essential for ensuring cultural continuity and strengthening social cohesion in a rapidly changing world.

One of the most effective means of preserving and transmitting cultural identity is literature. Literature functions not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a cultural institution that records, represents, and disseminates the values and experiences of a particular society (Gultom, n.d.). Through narratives, characters, symbols, and cultural representations, literary works provide readers with insights into the worldview of a community and contribute to the preservation of its cultural heritage. According to cultural studies scholars, literature serves as a site where cultural meanings are produced, negotiated, and transmitted across generations. Literary texts often embody cultural memories and social values that might otherwise be forgotten or diminished due to modernization and social transformation. In this regard, literature can be understood as a medium of cultural transmission that plays a significant role in sustaining local identities within contemporary society.

In Indonesia, literary works have long functioned as vehicles for preserving cultural values and documenting the diversity of ethnic identities that characterize the nation. As a multicultural country consisting of hundreds of ethnic groups, Indonesia possesses a rich literary tradition that reflects various local cultures and social realities (Sinambela & Agustriano, 2021). Many literary texts portray the customs, traditions, and belief systems of particular ethnic communities while simultaneously addressing contemporary social issues. Such works contribute not only to literary discourse but also to cultural preservation by

introducing local values to broader audiences. Through literature, readers gain access to cultural knowledge that may not be readily available through formal educational institutions or everyday social interactions. Consequently, literary texts become important resources for understanding and maintaining cultural identities in the face of social change (Gultom, n.d.).

Among Indonesia's many ethnic groups, the Batak Toba community is recognized for its strong cultural traditions and distinctive social structure (Sinaga, 2024). The Batak Toba people inhabit the region surrounding Lake Toba in North Sumatra and possess a rich cultural heritage that continues to influence social life both within and beyond their homeland. Central to Batak Toba culture is the kinship system known as *Dalihan Na Tolu*, which regulates social relationships and establishes obligations among family members and community groups. This cultural philosophy serves as the foundation of social interaction and reflects values such as mutual respect, cooperation, solidarity, and responsibility. In addition, concepts such as *hagabeon* (having descendants), *hamoraon* (prosperity), and *hasangapon* (honor) play significant roles in shaping individual aspirations and collective identity within Batak Toba society. These cultural values have been transmitted across generations through various means, including family practices, customary ceremonies, oral traditions, and cultural performances.

However, contemporary social changes have altered traditional mechanisms of cultural transmission. Urbanization, migration, technological development, and globalization have reduced opportunities for younger generations to engage directly with customary practices and traditional cultural institutions. Many Batak Toba individuals now live in urban environments where exposure to global culture often exceeds interaction with local traditions. As a result, concerns have emerged regarding the continuity of cultural knowledge and the preservation of Batak Toba identity among younger generations. In response to these challenges, alternative forms of cultural transmission have become increasingly important. Literature represents one such medium through which cultural values can be preserved, interpreted, and communicated within contemporary contexts.

The relationship between literature and cultural identity has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Previous studies have demonstrated that literary texts contribute to identity formation by representing cultural experiences, social norms, and collective

memories. Literature not only reflects existing cultural realities but also actively participates in constructing and reinforcing cultural identities. Through narrative representation, literary works provide readers with cultural models that shape their understanding of belonging, tradition, and social values. Furthermore, literature creates spaces where cultural identities can be negotiated in response to changing social conditions. Consequently, literary analysis offers valuable insights into how cultural values are maintained, transformed, and transmitted across generations.

One literary work that provides a rich representation of Batak Toba culture is *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* (Gultom, n.d.). This anthology consists of short stories written by twenty authors and centers on the experiences, struggles, and resilience of Batak Toba women. The anthology presents diverse narratives that portray social realities within Batak Toba society while highlighting the cultural values that influence women's lives. Through its depiction of family relationships, customary expectations, social obligations, and gender roles, the anthology offers a nuanced representation of Batak Toba identity (Solina Gultom, 2025). The stories reveal how cultural values continue to shape individual experiences and social interactions, even as communities encounter modern influences and changing social dynamics.

Existing studies on *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* have primarily focused on issues related to gender, patriarchy, women's representation, and social inequality. Researchers have examined how the anthology portrays the challenges faced by Batak Toba women within a patriarchal social structure and how female characters negotiate their identities in response to cultural expectations. These studies have contributed significantly to understanding gender relations within Batak Toba society and have highlighted the anthology's role in promoting gender awareness and social critique. Nevertheless, despite the growing body of research on the anthology, limited attention has been paid to its function as a medium for the transmission of cultural identity. Specifically, there remains a lack of scholarly discussion regarding how the anthology preserves, represents, and communicates Batak Toba cultural values to contemporary readers.

This gap is important because cultural identity constitutes a central aspect of the anthology's narrative structure and thematic concerns (Hanan H, 2012). Beyond portraying

women's experiences, the stories also reflect cultural principles, social norms, kinship values, and collective beliefs that define Batak Toba society. These cultural elements contribute to the preservation of local identity by embedding cultural knowledge within literary narratives that can be accessed by readers across generations. Therefore, examining the anthology from the perspective of cultural transmission provides a broader understanding of its social and cultural significance. Based on this context, the present study investigates how *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* functions as a medium for transmitting Batak Toba cultural identity. Drawing upon cultural studies and literary analysis, this research explores the representation of cultural values embedded in the anthology and examines how these values contribute to the preservation and continuity of Batak Toba identity.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the transmission of Batak Toba cultural identity in the anthology *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba*. Qualitative research was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting cultural meanings, values, and identity representations embedded in literary texts. Rather than measuring phenomena quantitatively, this approach sought to provide an in-depth understanding of how cultural identity is constructed and transmitted through literature. The primary data source of this study was the anthology *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba*, which consists of short stories written by twenty authors. The unit of analysis included narrative descriptions, dialogues, characterizations, cultural symbols, and social practices represented in the anthology. These textual elements were selected because they contain cultural values and identity markers associated with Batak Toba society.

Data were collected through close reading and documentation techniques. The researcher repeatedly read the anthology to identify textual evidence related to Batak Toba cultural identity. Relevant excerpts were then categorized according to recurring cultural themes, such as kinship relations, customary traditions, family obligations, women's roles, ethnic identity, and cultural values reflected in the philosophy of *Dalihan Na Tolu*. Notes and textual quotations were systematically documented to facilitate analysis.

The study employed content analysis as the primary analytical method. Following the procedures of qualitative content analysis, the collected data were coded, classified, interpreted, and organized into thematic categories (Berk F.M, 2016). The analysis was

guided by a Cultural Studies perspective, which views literature as a cultural text that reflects and reproduces social meanings, values, and identities. This framework enabled the researcher to examine how cultural values are represented in the anthology and how these representations function as mechanisms for transmitting cultural identity to readers. Data interpretation was supported through theoretical triangulation by comparing findings with previous studies on Batak Toba culture, cultural identity, and literary representations of ethnicity. The findings were then interpreted to reveal how *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* serves not only as a literary work but also as a medium for preserving and transmitting Batak Toba cultural identity across generations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Representation of Kinship Values as Cultural Identity

The analysis reveals that kinship is one of the most dominant cultural elements represented in *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba*. Throughout the anthology, family relationships are portrayed not merely as biological connections but as cultural institutions that regulate social behavior and individual responsibilities (Khairina, 2022). The characters frequently make decisions based on family expectations, collective interests, and obligations toward relatives. Such representations reflect the Batak Toba understanding that an individual is inseparable from the larger kinship network to which they belong.

Within Batak Toba society, kinship serves as a fundamental marker of identity. Family lineage determines social position, responsibilities, and participation in customary activities. The stories in the anthology demonstrate how family members are expected to support one another emotionally, economically, and socially. This expectation reinforces communal values that prioritize collective welfare over individual interests. The recurring portrayal of familial obligations suggests that kinship remains a significant mechanism through which cultural values are maintained and transmitted.

The representation of kinship also reflects the cultural philosophy of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, which governs social interactions within Batak Toba society. Although the anthology does not always explicitly mention this philosophy, its principles are reflected in the

interactions among family members and community groups (Sinaga et al., 2025). Respect, reciprocity, and mutual support emerge as recurring themes that shape the behavior of the characters. Through these representations, readers are introduced to the cultural logic that underlies Batak Toba social relations. From Hall's perspective, cultural identity is constructed through shared histories, experiences, and cultural practices. The kinship values represented in the anthology contribute to the construction of Batak Toba identity by reinforcing a collective understanding of social responsibility and belonging. Literature therefore functions as a cultural space in which these values are preserved and communicated to contemporary audiences.

Women as Guardians of Cultural Continuity

A significant finding of this study concerns the role of women as guardians of cultural continuity. The female characters depicted in the anthology often occupy positions that require them to preserve family relationships, maintain social harmony, and uphold cultural values. Despite facing various forms of social pressure and gender inequality, they continue to demonstrate commitment to family and community responsibilities (Arifah A & Siregar I, 2022). The stories portray women as individuals who actively negotiate their identities within a patriarchal cultural structure. Rather than being represented solely as victims of social constraints, many female characters exhibit agency, resilience, and moral strength. Their ability to balance personal aspirations with cultural expectations illustrates the complexity of women's experiences in Batak Toba society.

Furthermore, women are frequently depicted as transmitters of cultural knowledge. Through everyday interactions, storytelling, caregiving, and participation in customary practices, they contribute to the preservation of cultural traditions. Their role extends beyond domestic responsibilities to include the maintenance of cultural memory within families and communities (Sihombing, 2018). This finding aligns with Assmann's concept of cultural memory, which emphasizes the importance of social actors in preserving and transmitting collective knowledge. Women in the anthology function as cultural mediators who ensure the continuity of traditions and values across generations. Their experiences and actions become symbolic representations of the broader process of cultural preservation. The anthology therefore challenges simplistic interpretations of women's roles within traditional

societies. While acknowledging the existence of patriarchal structures, it simultaneously highlights women's contributions to cultural sustainability. Through literary representation, the anthology recognizes women as essential agents in the transmission of Batak Toba cultural identity.

The Preservation of Traditional Values through Literary Narratives

The anthology contains numerous representations of traditional Batak Toba values that continue to shape social life. Among these values are respect for elders, responsibility toward family members, perseverance in facing adversity, communal solidarity, and commitment to customary traditions. These values are embedded within the narratives and serve as guiding principles for character behavior. Respect for elders emerges as a particularly significant value. Characters frequently demonstrate obedience, appreciation, and consideration toward older family members. Such behavior reflects cultural norms that regard elders as sources of wisdom and authority (Siahaan & Barus, 2023). By portraying these interactions, the anthology introduces readers to an important aspect of Batak Toba culture that remains relevant despite contemporary social changes.

Family responsibility is another recurring theme. Many characters prioritize family welfare over personal interests and are willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of their relatives. This emphasis on collective responsibility reflects the communal orientation of Batak Toba culture, where individual actions are often evaluated in relation to their impact on the family. The narratives also highlight perseverance and resilience. Several stories depict characters confronting economic difficulties, social challenges, and personal struggles while maintaining their commitment to family and cultural values. These representations reinforce cultural ideals concerning determination and endurance in the face of adversity. Importantly, the anthology does not present these traditional values as static or unquestionable. Instead, it portrays them as dynamic principles that are continuously interpreted and negotiated within contemporary contexts (Resdati, 2024). Characters often encounter situations that require them to reconcile traditional expectations with modern realities. This process of negotiation demonstrates the adaptability of cultural values and their continued relevance in changing social environments. According to cultural studies

perspectives, literary texts serve as sites where cultural meanings are produced and contested. The anthology fulfills this function by presenting traditional values not as rigid prescriptions but as living cultural resources that guide individuals in navigating contemporary challenges.

Cultural Memory and Collective Experience

The concept of cultural memory provides a useful framework for understanding how *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* contributes to cultural preservation. Cultural memory refers to the collective knowledge, experiences, and values that communities transmit across generations. This memory is often preserved through symbolic forms such as narratives, rituals, and cultural texts. The anthology functions as a repository of cultural memory by documenting experiences that reflect the social realities of Batak Toba society (Oktovia et al., 2024). The stories preserve cultural knowledge that might otherwise be lost due to modernization and social transformation. Through literary representation, readers gain access to collective experiences that connect them with the historical and cultural heritage of the community.

The preservation of cultural memory is particularly important in contemporary contexts where traditional mechanisms of transmission are becoming less prominent. Urbanization, migration, and technological change have altered the ways in which cultural knowledge is communicated. As younger generations become increasingly exposed to global influences, literary texts can serve as alternative channels for cultural education and identity formation. The narratives contained in the anthology contribute to the continuity of cultural memory by recording experiences related to family relationships, customary obligations, social expectations, and cultural values (Appadurai, 1996). These representations enable readers to engage with the cultural heritage of the Batak Toba community and develop a deeper understanding of its identity. From this perspective, literature functions not only as entertainment but also as a cultural archive. The anthology preserves collective memories and makes them accessible to future generations. This role is particularly significant in multicultural societies where cultural diversity constitutes an important component of national heritage.

Literature as a Medium for the Transmission of Cultural Identity

The findings of this study indicate that *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* functions as an effective medium for transmitting cultural identity. Through narrative representation, the anthology introduces readers to various aspects of Batak Toba culture, including social values, family structures, gender roles, and customary traditions (Resdati, 2024). These cultural elements are integrated into the stories in ways that make them accessible and meaningful to contemporary audiences. Unlike formal educational materials, literary narratives engage readers emotionally and imaginatively. This engagement enhances the effectiveness of cultural transmission because readers are able to connect with cultural values through the experiences of fictional characters. The emotional dimension of literature facilitates empathy and encourages deeper reflection on cultural issues. The anthology also demonstrates how cultural identity can be preserved without isolating itself from contemporary realities (Solina Gultom, 2025). The stories acknowledge social change, modernization, and evolving gender relations while continuing to emphasize the importance of cultural values. This balance between tradition and modernity enables the anthology to remain relevant to contemporary readers.

Furthermore, the anthology contributes to the visibility of Batak Toba culture within broader literary and cultural discourses. By representing local experiences and cultural practices, it provides readers from different backgrounds with opportunities to learn about Batak Toba identity. In this way, literature supports intercultural understanding while simultaneously strengthening local cultural awareness. The findings support the argument that literature plays a crucial role in cultural sustainability (Gultom, n.d.). Through the preservation and transmission of cultural values, literary works contribute to the continuity of cultural identity across generations. In the case of *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba*, literature functions as both a cultural artifact and a cultural agent, actively participating in the maintenance and reproduction of Batak Toba identity. Overall, the anthology demonstrates that cultural identity is not a fixed or static phenomenon (Sinambela & Agustrisno, 2021). Rather, it is continuously reconstructed through narratives, memories, and social practices. By representing cultural values within contemporary literary forms, *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* contributes to the ongoing process of preserving and transmitting Batak Toba cultural

identity in an increasingly globalized world.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that *Palito Ni Si Boru Toba* plays a significant role in preserving and transmitting Batak Toba cultural identity. Literature functions not merely as artistic expression but also as a cultural instrument that supports the continuity of local values and collective identity. Future studies may explore other contemporary literary works from different Indonesian ethnic communities to further understand the contribution of literature to cultural preservation and identity formation in multicultural societies.

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