The Stereotype of Batak Marriage Custom Represented in the *Mursala* Movie

Lambok Hermanto Sihombing

Department of Communication, President University
lambok@president.ac.id

Abstract

Indonesia is a diverse country with a diverse range of tribes, religions, languages, and customs. Almost every region in Indonesia has its own uniqueness. Batak is one of the interesting tribes as it has unique custom to be analyzed especially their marriage custom. There are certain rules when Batak people have to find their couple. Those rules are depicted in Mursala movie. In this scientific study, the author aims to analyze the stereotype of Batak marriage represented in that movie, Mursala. In order to help the author doing this analysis, Mise En Scene approach from Manon de Reeper and Theory of Representation from Stuart Hall are used for this study. The result of this study indicates that this film represents the stereotype of Batak marriage which addresses Batak people should get married with Batak people and they are not allowed to marry the closest clan as it breaks their marriage customary law.

Keywords : Batak Custom, Marriage, Representation, Rules

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is culturally diverse, with hundreds of tribes residing throughout the country, and this diversity serves as an attraction (Murhadi, 2017). Culture encompasses a variety of aspects of life, including attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about something. In other words, culture is a configuration of taught behaviors. Then the behavior is accepted and spread by society members (Tafonao et al., 2015). Furthermore, Tafonao argued that culture serves as a means of communication and identity preservation for society. Culture is the accumulation of human endeavors, ideas, behaviors, and products within the context of a society that belongs to human beings and is used as a means of learning (Koentjaraningrat, 1997).

Batak is one of the Indonesian cultures that has its own uniqueness. Their distinctiveness is seen in their history, wedding ceremony, relationship system, and interactions with other tribes. The *Dalihan Na Tolu*, commonly known as "Tungku Nan Tiga," is the Batak people's philosophy of life. In *Dalihan Na Tolu*, we need to understand three aspects of the kinship system (*Partuturan*). Dongan Tubu (family with the closest clans), Hula hula (wife's family), and *Boru* (family from our son-in-law). They are the three parts of the family relationship. *Dalihan Na Tolu*'s work establishes a person's status, rights, and obligations, or organizes and controls one's behavior or groups in traditional life socialize. It also serves

as a foundation for Toba Batak society's deliberation and agreement (Naibaho, 2019). Naibaho also stated that Partuturan (etiquette) is one of the essential principles of their norm. Moreover, customary law is an unwritten law that is alive, grows, and develops in society. The custom owned by the community varies by region. These customs never end but continue to evolve. For the Batak, their customs are more than just rules or social order; they encompass all aspects of physical life and spirituality, both present and future, interactions with others and with "the Creator." Human existence is ruled by customs, and each individual adheres to them. The term "custom" refers to an individual's behavior or habits. If a large number of people consistently follow a particular habit, it becomes customary. When a custom is violated, society and the government react by regulating the custom (Naibaho, 2019).

In Batak custom, there is one of interesting rules that makes the author interested in analyzing their custom. It is the marriage law. Specific rules apply to who can marry and who cannot, depending on the vow already been made; individuals who cannot marry each other for a pair with the same clan's name. On the other hand, Batak people idealistically should marry the uncle's daughter, called *pariban* (Saragih et al., 2015). This condition is depicted in *Mursala* movie. Mursala is actually the largest island in the Central Tapanuli region. It is located southwest of Sibolga City in the Barus sub-district of Central Tapanuli. Mursala Island was adapted into a drama film with a running time of around 1 hour 30 minutes 6 seconds, titled Mursala which is directed by Viva Westi. The Mursala film is about the struggle of a Batak youth named Anggiat Simbolon. Anggiat relocates to Jakarta from his hometown of Sorkam in Central Tapanuli and establishes himself as a prominent attorney. His mother (*Inang* in Batak culture) Romauli and his father (*Amung* in Batak culture) Hotman anticipate Anggiat marrying his pariban3. However, in Jakarta, Anggiat had already fallen in love with a woman of Batak ancestry, Clarissa Saragih, a television presenter. The issue arises when it is discovered that Anggiat and Clarita cannot marry according to Batak traditional customs. All in all, Mursala is a love-drama film set in Batak culture. It depicts the story of Anggiat Simbolon, a lawyer who is attempting to preserve his love for Clarissa Saragih despite the customary restriction. It is a film that emphasizes the importance of following and preserving Batak customary marriage rules. The conflicts arise when romantic desires collide with conventional ideals among families and indigenous people.

To support the analysis, the author used *Mise en Scene* approach from Manon de Reeper to see how the camera works and the dialogue contributes to this film and the theory of Representation from Stuart Hall to analyze the stereotype of Batak marriage custom represented in the *Mursala* movie. According to Manon de Reeper (2016), everything in a film or television show is crafted to fit on the screen. The creators carefully consider every element presented in the scene; nothing is a coincidence. *Mise en Scène*

is a term that alludes to the director's vision for the scene and film. By determining what is presented inside the confines of that screen, the author can impact the audience's cognition. *Mise en Scène* can be utilized to transmit meaning to the spectator almost as well as conversation and story. It is critical for media and film studies analysis because it explains how to identify relevant visual codes and how some may have been employed to generate meaning (The Media Insider, 2020). Moreover, Reeper emphasized that in order to aid in the study and interpretation of a scene, we must consider not only who and what is present, but also their relative places - we must also consider makeup, expressions, costume, setting, look, visuals, sounds, and lighting. Numerous elements can be incorporated into the film's analysis. There are three of them: editing, camera, and lighting.

Firstly, editing. Editing is a method of condensing time and place into a logical sequence of photos. It is mainly seamless. It entails segmenting and reassembling captured film segments (shots) to preserve the sense of continuity and coherence. Typically, photographs are edited to give the appearance of a sequence of events (Reeper, 2016). Secondly, the camera. While analyzing a film, one of the most crucial aspects to consider is the camera. It offers information about the shots taken and the camera angles used. A shot is comprised of a single take. It can be utilized to establish a scene or mood and immerse the spectator in it. Meanwhile, the camera angle has a significant effect on the film's tone and almost always transmits meaning.The final step is lighting. Lighting is critical in establishing the tone and setting of a film. Interestingly, even lighting can help to a film's construction of meaning. Full-facial lighting draws attention to a subject's face and may impart an air of openness and truthfulness. Typically, shadow and poor contrast are associated with unpleasant emotions, such as fear, wrath, and distrust (Reeper, 2016). These factors may help the author do the analysis. Moreover, as stated by The Media Insider (2017), there are other approaches for understanding cinematography. One of them is to provide context for the photograph. By ascribing meaning to a shot, we can establish how the film intends to express a concept, a message, or a meaning through the lens.

To analyze the stereotype of Batak marriage custom represented in the *Mursala* movie, the author applied the theory of Representation from Stuart Hall. According to Hall (1997), representation is associated with the meaning of human brain concepts or the production of meaning through language. It has to do with how meaning is conveyed, how something is described, or how something is depicted. Here, representation has never been a complete or whole depiction of reality but has always been more than a synthesis of many elements' concepts (Hall, 1997). As he further elaborates, in any representations there is a mixture of the thing itself, such as the opinion of the people doing the representation, the

reaction of the individual to the representation and also the context of the society in which the representation is taking place. Hall sees representation to be a reconstructive effort rather than a reflecting one. For example, the woman depicted in this month's Cosmopolitan magazine is not typical of a women's look. Despite the image reconstructing something, it is not a woman. According to Merriam Webster's definition of representation, it is "anything that represents or is represented: as a likeness, picture, model, or another replica" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). To represent is to carry an area's or group's identity faithfully, honor it, and educate others. Representation is a way of expressing and experiencing society (Hall, 2013). In common usage, "representation" refers to a collection of processes by which signifying acts appear to represent or describe another item or practice in the real world. Thus, representation is a symbolic act that reflects the existence of a self-contained object world. However, in cultural studies, representation reflects 'things' that exist in an autonomous object world in symbolic form; instead, representations are constitutive of the meaning of the thing they purport to represent (Barker, 2004). He continued by stating that representation bestows meaning and intelligibility on material objects and social behaviors, establishing the culturally constitutive maps of meaning. As a result, the study of culture is commonly confused with representational processes. While culture involves representations, practices, and physical arrangements, one may argue that the process of representation confers meaning and significance on behaviors. In this regard, the researchers believed that the film contained deliberate meanings that attempted to be conveyed to the viewer.

Indriani (2015) makes another argument in support of representation. She continued to explain how representation is a critical aspect of cultural production. The term "representation" refers to the act of using language to convey meaningful information about or to represent the world to others. Language's meaning in culture is exchanged through representation. It is culturally dependent on how those cultures interpret the language, as each culture is unique. Furthermore, Indriani believed that language is one media by which a culture's thoughts, concepts, ideas, and feelings are portrayed. Only our shared access to language enables us to exchange meaning. Thus, language is essential to meaning and culture and has historically been the primary reservoir of cultural values and meaning. The researchers viewed representation as encompassing all aspects of media creation in this study. It is regarded as a mirror of its culture's central beliefs and values (Turner & Duckham, 2006). Thus, the author viewed the representation through the lens of the film's words or texts and visuals or scenes.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research analyzed the stereotype of Batak marriage custom represented in *Mursala* movie. *Mise En Scene* approach from Manon de Reeper and the theory of Representation from Stuart Hall were used for this study. To figure out how the stereotype of Batak marriage custom represented in this movie, the author analyzed it by applying several stages. First, the author analyzed *Mursala* movie using the film elements, *Mise En Scene*. The author analyzed the scenes, angles, camera, and editing on the movie. Second, the author connected the movie elements with the interpretation and Batak cultural context. The last, the author concluded the whole observation of the stereotype of Batak marriage custom represented in *Mursala* movie.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to fully understand the result of this research, firstly, the author observed the elements of the movie in the *Mursala* scenes, angles, shots, lighting, editing, etc. This observation would be beneficial as it could help the author know how the stereotype of Batak marriage custom is represented in this movie. First, to see how the stereotype of Batak marriage custom is represented in this movie, I started my observation from the scene on minutes 16:21-16:27 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ulie was surprised to hear what her friend's statement is

In this scene, we will see a Batak wowan with a purple tanktop on a boat named Ulie having small dialogues with his best friend, Sahat. Ulie works for Marine Conservation Non-Governmental Organization. She also often does some research in her hometown, Central Tapanuli, North Sumatera. At that time, she was shocked as Sahat shouted and said ,"Hi beautiful *pariban*. Get ready to dress up." "Whose pariban?", asked Ulie. "Your *pariban*," answered Sahat. "There is no *pariban*. It's just an old tradition." said Ulie. From these small dialogues, it can be understood that the there are two characters that have a stereotype about what *pariban* is. *Pariban* is a cousin. In Batak kinship, a man calls a daughter

from *Tulang* as *'Pariban'*. *Tulang* refers to an uncle, mother's brother, or sister. On the other side, a woman calls her *Namboru*'s son as '*Pariban*'. *Namboru* refers to aunt or father's sister (Sitanggang, P, 2019). In ancient times, matchmaking among *Pariban* was highly recommended (Hutagaol & Nurussa'adah, 2021). Hence, this Batak customary marriage law shares a family bond as siblings from different clans.

Closer examination reveals that the scene above attempts to depict the stereotype of Batak people's problem of finding a life spouse. According to their customary law, Batak people are strongly advised to marry within their tribe. Additionally, they have the privilege to marry their *pariban* (a cousin) if their ancestors propose it. That marital custom does exist in Batak culture, and they must adhere to it if they wish to inherit Batak ancestors. Thus, this film can be viewed as part of constructing a representation of Batak marriage customary law.

The second observation goes to the scene on minutes 19:50-20:10 (Figure 2). The shot focuses on two new characters, Anggiat Simbolon and his mother. Anggiat is a Batak lawyer that works in Jakarta. He comes home as his daughter wants to get married. In Batak kinship, Anggiat is Ulie's *pariban*. During the conversation between Anggiat and his mother, his younger sister comes and says, "Anggiat, you are much cooler now.

Figure 2. Anggiat and his mother with some dialogues

It's totally different from the moment when we accompanied you to Jakarta. You must have a girlfriend right? She must be Bataknese, right? What is her clan (*boru*)?" Anggiat has not answered yet as her first sister's wedding ceremony is about to start. However, her younger sister is really excited to know Anggiat's girlfriend. The camera shots focus on his little sister's questions that ask the tribe and the clan (*boru*) of Anggiat's girlfriend. The dialogues can be understood that in getting a partner, Batak people are

concerned about the tribe and the clan. In my point of view, this scene attempts to show how Batak people build their stereotype in finding a couple for their relatives.

The next observation is from scene on minutes 22:02 to 22:47 (Figure 3). In this scene, we will see Anggiat was approaching his mother, sister, and *ompung* (a call to every parent whose age is the same as the father's or mother's parents). He introduced his girlfriend, named Clarissa Saragih. In the next scene on minutes 22:45 to 22:50, we will see Anggiat's mother and *ompung* with some dialogues. The camera focuses on Anggiat's mother that suddenly worried about Anggiat's relationship.

Figure 3. Anggiat introduced his girlfriend to his parents

On their conversation, they mentioned Clarissa's clan, Saragih. They both panicked as they concern about the clan that Clarissa has which is Saragih and Anggiat's clan, Simbolon. They said that those clans were relatives. It means, they are not allowed to have a special relationship. In a closer context, Saragih and Simbolon clan are included in *Pomparan ni si Raja Naiambaton*. Batak people usually call it PARNA. PARNA refers to the clans that are descended from King Naiambaton. That is, they are similar to brothers and sisters (Namariboto). Parna clans are not permitted to marry one another. In other words, Parna clan's descendants closely adhere to the restrictions banning them from marrying other Parna clan members, as directed by the Parna clan's Patriarch, King Naiambaton. Indigenous Batak people, particularly the Parna clan, must adhere to the rules strictly. If this law is broken, they will face severe consequences, including being expelled from their clan group and exiled from his hometown (Nastiti et al., 2021). Hence, I view this scene attempt to highlight the stereotype of Batak culture before deciding on a partnership. It is forbidden for a clan that is considered a familial clan to have a closer relationship.

The next analysis is taken from the scene on minutes 22:32 to 23:46 (Figure 4). In this scene, we are shown how Batak people hold a wedding ceremony. The shot focuses on the bride's family that greets the groom's family. They greet each other and dance together. In a closer context, there is some process that

Batak people have to do when they want to get married. Some of the processes that are on the scene were *Marsibuha-Buhai,* marriage blessing in the church, and *Mangulosi. Marsibuha-Buhai* is the stage when the groom's family has to pick up the bride in her house. Then, the groom gives the flowers to the bride and continues having prayer and breakfast before they go to the church. The bride and groom make a vow to stay committed to one another until death separates them.

Figure 4. Batak marriage process

They are witnessed directly by the groom and bride's relatives, as well as the church administrator. Following the wedding blessing, they perform the traditional *Ulaon Show* ceremony. The event is structured as follows; a. welcoming the bride and groom, b. *Panjouon* or inviting guests from the male and female families, c. *Pasahat Tudu-Tudu Ni Sipanganon, serving* certain parts of the slaughtered animal are placed in the middle as a symbol of respect for the *hasuhuton* to his invitation, especially the *hula-hula* (the wife clan group, the mother clan group (father's wife), the *ompung* wife clan group, etc). d. eating together and informing what *hula-hula* and *Bona Ni Ari* (the wife clan group from *ompung*) has brought in *Marhata Sinamot* (dowry*),* e. having a prayer time after eating, f. introducing *Raja Parhata* or *Parsinabul* from each male and female. *Raja Parhata* is an old folk in the same familial group or area. Meanwhile, *Parsinabul is the* customary spokesperson picked by a hierarchical agreement starting from the closest circle that holds the ritual (Hutagaol & Nurussa'adah, 2021).

To support the author's analysis, the next observation is taken from the scene on minutes 24:35-24:37 (Figure 5). In this scene, the camera focuses on the next process of Batak marriage which is *Mangulosi.* Clarissa who saw the process of marriage asked Anggiat what process it was. Then, Anggiat told Clarissa that it was called Mangulosi. In my opinion, I view that there are two issues that this scene would like to attempt. First, showing one of the marriage processes in Batak custom, *Mangulosi*. Second, showing the character named Clarissa did not know about that custom as she grows up in Jakarta and her mother is from Surabaya.
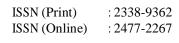
Figure 5. *Mangulosi,* Batak marriage process

As a result, she does not know all customs that Batak has even though her *boru* is Saragih. In a closer context, *Mangulosi* the act of giving or covering Ulos is accompanied by *umpasa-umpasa* (prayer) and is considered a gift of blessing, an outpouring of love, hope, and other virtues. Raja Parhata, a traditional representative, reads prayers and family hopes for marriage in a Toba Batak traditional wedding received from each bride and groom as leaders in the Toba Batak wedding. Raja Parhata himself is not simply anyone who can be chosen as a speaker for custom, but those who are picked from the clan's ranks and deemed the most informed about customary law and its implementation. Raja Parhata has a vital position since his function is when the traditional wedding takes place and from the event before the wedding, termed *Martupol. Martupol* is an event with the approbation of each household. In general view, *Martupol* is the same as fiancé if there is a bargain over *Sinamot* (dowry).

The next analysis is taken from scene on minutes 25:58 to 26:50 (Figure 6).

In this scene, the camera focuses on Anggiat, Anggiat's mother, and Anggiat's sister with some dialogues. Anggiat tells Clarissa's family background to his mother. Then, their conversation stops as Anggiat's sister comes and joins their conversation.

Figure 6. Dialogues among Anggiat, Anggiat's mother, and his sister

She said, "Don't you know that you are actually not allowed to have a special relationship with her, Bang Anggiat? You can not marry her. If you marry her, you will get *parna*." "What is *parna*?", asked Anggiat. From this conversation, it can be understood that due to the custom they have, Saragih clan and Simbolon clan can not stay together in form of marriage as their clans are considered family.

The last, to see another stereotype on how Batak people build their marriage custom, it could be seen from the scene on minutes 34:22 to 34:57 (Figure 7). In this scene, we will see Anggiat, Anggiat's mother, and sister having a discussion with some traditional spokesmen in the cottage near the beach. Anggiat wanted to know about the custom that did not allow them to marry Clarissa Saragih. One of the representatives told him that Anggiat absolutely is not allowed to marry Clarissa as Saragih and Simbolon are the clans that include in *Parna* clan of *Raja Naiambaton*. They are still family *(Namariboto)*. Hearing the answers and explanation from the traditional spokesman, Anggiat is angry.

Figure 7. Some discussion about Batak marriage law

The camera focuses on the moment when he slammed his fist on the table. It can be understood that he was angry and couldn't accept what happened to him. He continued saying, "I don't want to be born as Simbolon. Clarissa also doesn't want to be born Saragih. I just want to love and to be loved." Anggiat's utterance was responded by the traditional spokeman that said, "Simbolon and Saragih are parts of Parna clan of Raja Naiambaton. You are not allowed to get married." From the dialogues, we can see that even though Anggiat who represents a Batak man feels disappointed about the custom, the custom is the one that must be obeyed. That is what the Batak people believe. In a closer context, the descendants of the Parna clan rigidly follow the traditions prohibiting them from marrying other Parna clan members, as mandated by the Parna clan's Patriarch, King Naiambaton. This is because they are still siblings *(Namariboto)* (Nastiti et al., 2021). The Parna clan is the most consistent in abstaining from interclan

marriages and following to the *Padan (tona)* agreed upon by Ompung Raja Nai Ambaton Tupinoparna. If someone violates the prohibition, they shall face the traditional punishment agreed upon by their ancestors. Thus, this is the penalty that will be meted out to the tribe when it conducts weddings with other clans; expulsion from the village. Although individuals who marry members of the same clan are exiled from the tribe and are no longer recognized by custom, they are nonetheless provided with preparations for life outside the village and told to reflect on their mistakes (Pandiangan, 2016). In my opinion, this scene attempts to depict the customary law of the Batak people that doesn't allow the members of the same clans to have a closer relationship.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, some characters represent Batak people that strongly believe and obey the custom, especially marriage custom. On the other hand, other characters represent modern Batak people that believe in their custom but still question whether that custom is a must or it can be adjusted. Batak people nowadays believe in their custom, but they are more open-minded in finding their companion. They do not even think whether they come from the same clans or not. Hence, this movie tries to construct different representations on how Batak people find their companions.

REFERENCES

Barker, C. (2004). *The Sage dictionary of cultural studies*. Sage.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, *2*, 13–74.

Hall, S. (2013). Stuart Hall Interview–2 June 2011. *Cultural Studies*, *27*(5), 757–777.

Hutagaol, F. W., & Nurussa'adah, E. (2021). ETNOGRAFI KOMUNIKASI TRADISI PARIBAN DALAM PERNIKAHAN ADAT SUKU BATAK TOBA. *Verba Vitae Unwira*, *2*(2), 141–156.

Indriani, N. (2015). Representation of Values through Popular Literature: A Case Study on Transracial Adoption in American Movies. *Rubikon: Journal of Transnational American Studies*, *2*(1), 59–69.

Koentjaraningrat. (1997). *Metode-Metode Penelitian Masyarakat - Metode Wawancara*. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Representation Definition & Meaning*. Merriam Webster. Retrieved April 28, 2022, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/representation

Murhadi, W. R. (2017). *THE CULTURAL TOURISM: AN INDONESIAN PERSPECTIVE*.

Naibaho, H. (2019). *Sistem Kekerabatan (Partuturan) Marga Batak Toba Pada Komunitas Mahasiswa Batak Toba Di Pekanbaru*.

Nastiti, Y., Ginting, S. D. B., & Simbolon, I. S. (2021). NILAI DAN MAKNA LARANGAN MARSIOLIAN SESAMA MARGA PARNA SUKU BATAK. *Jurnal Basataka (JBT)*, *4*(1), 7–12.

Pandiangan, L. (2016). Analisa Hukum Perkawinan Satu Marga Menurut Adat Batak Toba. *Jurnal Hukum Tô-Râ*, *2*(3), 453–462.

Reeper, M. De. (2016). Film Analysis For Beginners: How To Analyse Movies. *Kindle Edition*.

Saragih, W. W., Naryoso, A., Suprihartini, T., & Lukmantoro, T. (2015). Representasi Aturan Adat Pemilihan Pasangan (Romantic Relationship) Masyarakat Batak dalam Film Mursala. *Interaksi Online*, *3*(3).

Tafonao, A., Wibowo, A., & Ningsih, M. G. S. (2015). an Analysis on the Meaning in Hombo Batu Culture in Bawomataluo Village, Teluk Dalam. *Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa Dan Sastra*, *2*(2), 58–75.

The Media Insider. (2017). *How to read cinematography | Shot analysis explained - YouTube*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhWIDCnktwc

The Media Insider. (2020). *How to read mise en scéne | Visual film analysis explained!* YouTube.

Turner, G., & Duckham, M. F. (2006). *Film as social practice*. Routledge.