

Representation of Women's Roles in *Toba Batak* Oral Poetry in Gender Bias Relations: A Study of Oral Tradition

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Abstract

This study discusses the representation of women's roles in Batak Toba oral poetry as a form of cultural expression that records social relations and gender construction in community life. Batak Toba oral poetry, such as *umpasa*, *andung*, and other forms of traditional speech, not only functions as an aesthetic medium, but also as a means of transmitting values that contain society's views on women. This study aims to describe the forms of representation of women in Batak Toba oral poetry, identify patterns of gender bias that emerge through the choice of diction, symbols, and speech structures, and explain how women's positions are formed through cultural discourses that are passed down from generation to generation. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a literature study approach. The research data are in the form of Batak Toba oral poetry texts studied from cultural literature, folklore, and previous research. Analysis is carried out through critical reading by examining the themes, imagery, and cultural values contained in the speech, then linked to the perspective of gender studies. The results show that Batak Toba oral poetry represents women in two main tendencies, namely as a symbol of family honor and as a party placed in the domestic sphere and subordinate relations. Gender bias is evident through the reinforcement of stereotypes of women as family servants, guardians of dignity, and objects of social control within the patrilineal kinship system. However, oral poetry also demonstrates positive representations of women as sources of affection, strengtheners of solidarity, and supporters of customary continuity. This research is expected to contribute to the study of oral traditions and gender studies by positioning Toba Batak oral poetry as a cultural document that captures the dynamics of power relations within society.

Keywords: *women, oral poetry, gender bias, Toba Batak*

Introduction

Oral traditions are a vital part of intangible cultural heritage, living through the stories, rituals, and communication practices of communities passed down from generation to generation. These traditions serve not only as entertainment or aesthetic expression, but also as a means of conveying the values, norms, and worldviews of their supporting communities. UNESCO states that oral traditions are a key element of intangible cultural heritage because they contain knowledge systems that shape social identity and the sustainability of the community's culture (UNESCO, 2003). In the Toba Batak context, oral traditions are present in the form of *umpasa*, *andung*, *hata adat*, *tonggo-tonggo*, and other forms of oral poetry used in traditional ceremonies and social life. These oral poems serve not only as linguistic expressions but also as a medium for recording how the Batak people view kinship relations, honor, and the social position of individuals within the cultural structure (Sibarani, 2012).

Toba Batak oral poetry is distinctive because it is conveyed within a strong social context, such as wedding ceremonies, funerals, the giving of ulos, and customary deliberations. In this context, oral poetry does not stand as a standalone text, but rather as part of a cultural practice with social and symbolic functions. Endraswara emphasizes that oral literature is a cultural product that lives within society, so its meaning lies not only in the aesthetics of language but also in its social function that regulates community behavior and values (Endraswara, 2013). Thus, Toba Batak oral poetry can be read as a cultural document that represents the social structure of society, including views on the role of women in the customary system. Through oral poetry, the Batak people not only convey moral messages but also shape social constructions of gender identity.

In Toba Batak society, the patrilineal social system strongly influences women's position in social and customary life. Women are often placed in relationships related to family honor, domestic duties, and customary rules that emphasize men's role as successors to the clan. Koentjaraningrat explains that the patrilineal kinship structure in Indonesia tends to place women in a subordinate position because lineage and inheritance are primarily passed down through men (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). This situation has implications for cultural constructs that influence how society views women, including through oral traditions. Toba Batak oral poetry often contains symbols that emphasize women as guardians of honor, the bond between social relations, and those who must submit to customary norms. Therefore, oral poetry provides an important platform for examining how gender bias is produced and transmitted through cultural language.

Gender studies view women's roles in society as not simply natural, but rather the result of social constructions shaped by cultural values and power structures. Fakihi explains that gender inequality often emerges through stereotypes, subordination, marginalization, and the double burden experienced by women as a result of the patriarchal social system (Fakihi, 2013). In the Toba Batak context, gender bias can be found in customary practices that position women as having significant moral responsibility for the dignity of the family, but lacking equal power within customary decision-making structures. Oral poetry used in customary ceremonies has the potential to reinforce this construction because the language of oral traditions often legitimizes values considered true by the community. Therefore, this study considers Toba Batak oral poetry to be necessary to analyze as a cultural text that represents women's roles while simultaneously reproducing gender bias in social life.

Representation in cultural texts not only captures social reality but also shapes that reality through language and symbols. Hall explains that representation is a process of meaning production that allows culture to shape society's perspectives on a particular group or identity (Hall, 1997). In Toba Batak oral poetry, women are represented through word choices, imagery, and symbols that illustrate their nature, function, and position in social relations. These representations can be positive, such as portraying women as sources of affection and strengthening the family, but they can also be biased, positioning women as objects of social control and subordination. Therefore, analyzing the representation of women in Toba Batak oral poetry is important for understanding how oral traditions contribute to constructing gender perceptions in Batak society.

This research is also relevant because oral traditions are not always neutral but can serve as a space for the reproduction of social ideology. Ratna states that literary works, including oral literature, often reflect societal ideology because they contain dominant views passed down through cultural texts (Ratna, 2011). In patriarchal societies, gender ideology often emerges subtly through language that regulates the social behavior of

women and men. Toba Batak oral poetry can convey messages about female obedience, domestic responsibility, and sacrifice as ideal values, ultimately shaping the stereotype of women as those who must always serve and maintain harmony. However, oral poetry can also harbor the potential for social criticism through expressions of sadness or *andung* (feelings of sorrow) that depict women's suffering within customary structures. Thus, oral poetry can be read as a dialectical space between cultural legitimacy and women's social experiences.

The research problem is directed at how the representation of women's roles is constructed in Toba Batak oral poetry and how gender bias emerges within these narrative structures. Furthermore, this research questions the dominant forms of symbols and diction used to depict women and the cultural meanings of these representations when linked to the patrilineal social structure of the Toba Batak. Sugiyono explains that the formulation of qualitative research questions must be able to direct the research toward a deeper understanding of social phenomena through contextual interpretation of data (Sugiyono, 2019). Therefore, this study focuses the analysis on oral poetry as the primary data source, containing cultural symbols concerning women. This problem formulation serves as the basis for understanding how oral traditions play a role in shaping and maintaining gender relations in Batak society.

The purpose of this study is to describe the representation of women in Toba Batak oral poetry, identify patterns of gender bias that emerge in the discourse, and explain the socio-cultural function of oral poetry in shaping society's gender perceptions. This study also aims to provide an understanding that oral traditions are not only an aesthetic heritage but also contain ideological structures that can influence social consciousness. Creswell states that qualitative research aims to uncover hidden meanings and patterns in social practices through the interpretation of textual and contextual data (Creswell, 2014). Thus, this study positions oral poetry as a crucial resource for understanding gender dynamics in Toba Batak culture.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of oral traditions and gender studies in the context of local Indonesian culture. This research also contributes to the development of folklore studies and literary anthropology by demonstrating that oral poetry contains ideological values that reflect the social structure of society. Endraswara emphasized that research into oral literature can contribute to cultural preservation while simultaneously unlocking understanding of the social values hidden within tradition (Endraswara, 2013). Practically, this research can provide material for reflection for the Toba Batak community in understanding the position of women in custom and serve as a reference for efforts to promote more gender-equal cultural education. Therefore, this research is not only academically oriented but also relevant to socio-cultural development.

The research gap in this study lies in the lack of studies specifically addressing the representation of women and gender bias in Toba Batak oral poetry. Several previous studies have focused more on Batak oral tradition as a medium for transmitting traditional values and identity, but have not focused on how women are positioned within these narrative structures. Sibarani stated that Batak oral tradition is rich in cultural values, but research that positions oral tradition as a framework for analyzing social power relations is still needed (Sibarani, 2012). On the other hand, gender studies in Indonesia often highlight issues of patriarchy within traditional structures, but few have utilized oral poetry as primary data to uncover gender bias. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by simultaneously approaching oral tradition and gender perspectives.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on analyzing Toba Batak oral poetry as a cultural text that represents women and symbolically embodies gender bias. This research not only describes the form of oral poetry but also interprets how traditional language constructs stereotypes and the social position of women. Hall states that representation in culture operates through language and symbols that shape society's perspectives on a group (Hall, 1997). By utilizing representation theory and gender studies, this study offers a new perspective: Toba Batak oral poetry can be understood as both a medium for the production of patriarchal ideology and a space for the expression of women's experiences. Thus, this research makes a new contribution to the study of oral tradition, focusing more critically on gender power relations.

The theoretical framework of this research combines oral tradition theory, representation theory, and gender theory. Oral tradition is understood as a cultural system passed down through spoken language and has a strong social function in society. UNESCO emphasizes that oral tradition is a form of cultural heritage that maintains collective identity and serves as a medium for transmitting social values (UNESCO, 2003). Representation theory is used to analyze how women are represented in oral poetry texts through language, symbols, and imagery. Hall states that representation enables culture to create meanings that shape social perceptions of particular identities (Hall, 1997). Gender theory is used to understand how bias emerges through culturally legitimized subordination and stereotypes. Fakihi explains that gender inequality is a social product that often emerges through a patriarchal cultural system that regulates the roles of women and men (Fakihi, 2013). Through this framework, the research is expected to interpret Toba Batak oral poetry as a cultural text containing complex gender meanings.

Based on this description, this study confirms that Toba Batak oral poetry is an important source for understanding the representation of women in local culture. This study views oral tradition as not only a means of transmitting traditional values, but also a space for the reproduction of gender ideology that can influence how society views women. Ratna states that literary works have a social function because they can shape collective consciousness and record power relations that occur in society (Ratna, 2011). Therefore, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of women in Toba Batak oral poetry and open up space for critical study of gender bias in oral tradition as part of a living cultural heritage.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an oral tradition study design to analyze the representation of women's roles in Toba Batak oral poetry in relation to gender bias. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study is oriented towards understanding the meaning, symbols, and social constructions contained in traditional speech. Creswell states that qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena through in-depth interpretation of data in the form of texts, symbols, and the cultural context that underlies them (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive design was used because this study does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to systematically describe how women are represented in Toba Batak oral poetry and how gender bias is reflected in the structure of these speech acts.

This type of research is library research with a cultural text analysis approach. This library study was chosen because Toba Batak oral poetry can be found in cultural documentation, folklore books, ethnographic journals, and academic works that record speech forms such as *umpasa*, *andung*, and traditional expressions. Zed explains that library research is conducted by exploring relevant written sources to build an in-depth

conceptual understanding through a process of critical reading and systematic analysis (Zed, 2014). Therefore, this study utilizes documented oral poetry texts as the primary data source, while gender and representation theories serve as an analytical framework to interpret the socio-cultural meanings contained within the poems.

The subject of this study is Toba Batak oral poetry texts that contain representations of women, both in the form of *umpasa* (instrumental expressions), *andung* (instrumental expressions), and traditional expressions commonly used in the context of marriage, death, and customary deliberation. The object of this study is the elements of female representation in oral poetry, including diction, symbols, imagery, meaning structures, and cultural values that position women within specific social relations. Endraswara emphasizes that oral literature is a cultural text that must be analyzed based on the relationship between language, social function, and the values of the society that gave birth to the utterances (Endraswara, 2013). Thus, oral poetry in this study is positioned as a cultural document that captures Batak society's social views on women within a patrilineal customary structure.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data consist of Toba Batak oral poetry texts obtained from oral tradition books, folklore documentation, and previous research that includes original *umpasa* or *andung* utterances. Secondary data consist of journals, theoretical books, and research on Batak culture, gender studies, and the representation of women in oral tradition. Moleong explains that secondary data in qualitative research can enrich the analysis because it provides a theoretical foundation and social context that supports the interpretation of the primary data (Moleong, 2018). Therefore, secondary data sources are used to interpret cultural symbols in oral poetry and relate them to the concept of gender bias in Toba Batak society.

The sampling technique used purposive sampling, selecting oral poetry texts that explicitly or implicitly depict women, domestic roles, values of honor, or women's relationships within the customary system. Sample selection was based on the following criteria: (1) the oral poetry texts originated from credible academic sources or cultural documentation, (2) contained linguistic elements that illustrated the position of women, and (3) were relevant to the issue of gender bias in the patrilineal social structure of the Toba Batak. Sugiyono stated that purposive sampling in qualitative research is used to select data that best aligns with the research focus, thus yielding in-depth information (Sugiyono, 2019). Therefore, the text samples analyzed were speeches considered representative for understanding how women are constructed in the Toba Batak oral tradition.

The researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection, reading, coding, and interpretation of the oral poetry texts. In qualitative research, the researcher plays the primary role because analysis relies on the ability to understand cultural symbols and relate them to social theory. Creswell emphasized that the researcher in qualitative research functions as both a data collector and an analyst, interpreting meaning based on the context of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). The supporting instruments used are data classification sheets and categorization tables containing columns for types of oral poetry, text quotations, women's themes, forms of stereotypes, indications of subordination, and cultural meanings contained in the utterances.

Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation studies, including literature searches, selection of oral poetry texts, and recording relevant quotations. The documentation process involved intensive reading of sources,

highlighting sections depicting women, and grouping data according to analytical categories. Bowen states that documentation in qualitative research allows researchers to obtain stable data that can be analyzed in depth because documents contain verifiable cultural information (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, all collected oral poetry texts were transcribed and compiled into written data to facilitate the analysis process.

The data analysis technique used descriptive-interpretive analysis with a thematic approach. The collected data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. Miles and Huberman explain that qualitative data analysis involves data reduction to select important information, data presentation to organize findings, and drawing conclusions to discover patterns and meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, data reduction was carried out by selecting texts that demonstrate women's roles, while data presentation was carried out through tables of representation categories. Interpretation was carried out by linking the findings to representation theory and the concept of gender bias. Data validity was achieved through source triangulation, which involved comparing oral poetry texts from various sources and matching interpretations with relevant Batak cultural studies and gender theories. Denzin explains that source triangulation is used to increase the validity of qualitative research by ensuring that findings are supported by a variety of different sources (Denzin, 1978). This step ensures that interpretations of women's representation are not merely subjective but are supported by a strong academic foundation.

Results

The research results show that Toba Batak oral poetry is a cultural text that consistently represents women in social relations bound by a patrilineal customary system. This representation emerges through *umpasa* (traditional expressions), *andung* (traditional expressions), and other traditional expressions used in various ritual contexts, such as weddings, funerals, and the giving of ulos (traditional clothing). In oral traditions, language is not only a tool for aesthetic expression but also a medium for transmitting values and social perspectives. UNESCO states that oral traditions function as a means of transmitting a community's norms and social identity, so that traditional speech often contains ideologies that are passed down from generation to generation (UNESCO, 2003). Therefore, Toba Batak oral poetry can be read as a cultural document that records the social construction of women in Batak society.

The analysis shows that women in Toba Batak oral poetry are predominantly represented as symbols of family honor. In many *umpasa* (traditional expressions), women are depicted as those who must maintain the dignity of the clan through behavior, politeness, and loyalty. Women are positioned as guardians of the family's good name, whose actions are considered to reflect the group's honor. From a cultural representation perspective, this symbol of honor demonstrates how women are made the center of social control through customary values. Hall states that representation shapes social meaning through language and symbols, allowing the identity of a particular group to be shaped by dominant cultural constructs (Hall, 1997). Therefore, the representation of women as a symbol of honor demonstrates the existence of a cultural mechanism that positions women as objects of collective morality in Toba Batak society.

The research also found that Toba Batak oral poetry portrays women as being centrally focused on domestic roles and family service. In several traditional narratives, women are often depicted as ideal housewives, providers of affection, and managers of the household. This depiction suggests that women are positioned as strengthening the family within the domestic sphere, while the public sphere is more associated with men's

roles. Fakih explains that gender bias often arises through an unequal distribution of roles, where women are placed in the domestic sphere and burdened with greater social responsibilities than men (Fakih, 2013). These findings suggest that Toba Batak oral poetry plays a role in reinforcing the stereotype of women as servants of the family and responsible for domestic harmony.

Beyond their domestic roles, the research shows that women are also represented as sources of affection and as a bond of family solidarity. In several *andung* (traditional poems), women are depicted as sacrificial, patient, and emotional support for children and the extended family. This depiction often appears in lamentations that emphasize women's grief at death or separation. Endraswara states that oral literature often contains emotional expressions of society and serves as a platform for presenting social experiences that are difficult to express directly (Endraswara, 2013). Thus, the representation of women as sources of affection demonstrates that oral traditions also maintain a cultural appreciation for women's emotional roles, even though they remain within a patriarchal framework.

The analysis also reveals the representation of women as subordinates in traditional social relations. In some oral poetry, women are depicted as subject to the decisions of the extended family and customary rules. Women are often positioned as decision-makers, rather than recipients. This situation demonstrates an unequal power relationship within the Toba Batak patrilineal system, where social authority rests more with men as the successors to the clan. Koentjaraningrat explains that the patrilineal kinship system tends to place men at the center of the social structure, while women occupy a more limited position in matters of inheritance and customary decisions (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). These findings suggest that Toba Batak oral poetry reproduces the structure of female subordination as part of cultural norms.

The study also found that gender bias in Toba Batak oral poetry is evident through stereotypes of women as weak, gentle, and obedient. These stereotypes emerge in expressions that emphasize women as ideal figures who are patient and do not challenge family rules. In gender studies, such stereotypes serve as a form of social control because they direct women to conform to certain cultural standards. Fakih states that gender stereotypes are a form of injustice that attaches certain images to women, thus limiting their freedom of movement and freedom (Fakih, 2013). Therefore, stereotypes in Toba Batak oral poetry indicate a cultural discourse that controls women through the idealization of certain traits and roles.

On the other hand, research findings indicate a positive representation of women as strong figures possessing social resilience. In several *andung* (traditional poetry), women are depicted as characters capable of enduring suffering, loss, and customary pressure. Women's longing, sadness, and struggle are often expressed through lamentations that demonstrate their fortitude. Hall states that representation is not always singular but can contain complex and contradictory meanings because culture is not entirely homogeneous (Hall, 1997). Thus, Toba Batak oral poetry not only represents women as subordinates but also demonstrates their emotional strength as part of the social dynamics of Batak society.

Based on the analysis, several key forms of representation of women in Toba Batak oral poetry were identified that are related to gender bias. These findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Women as a symbol of clan honor, meaning women are positioned as guardians of family dignity and the center of moral control in traditional customs. This concept demonstrates that women represent the family's reputation in social

- life. Hall explains that cultural representations often shape social identity through symbols attached to specific groups (Hall, 1997).
2. Women as domestic actors, meaning women are portrayed as ideal housewives tasked with maintaining family harmony and serving household needs. Fakh states that the division of domestic roles is a form of gender bias that places women under a double burden (Fakh, 2013).
 3. Women as subordinates in customary decisions, meaning women are positioned more as recipients of rules than decision-makers in a patrilineal structure. Koentjaraningrat asserts that the patrilineal system creates a social hierarchy that places men as the center of authority (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).
 4. Women as a source of affection and sacrifice, namely women are represented as emotional figures who bind family solidarity through their nurturing and sacrificial roles. Endraswara states that oral literature often displays collective emotional experiences as part of its socio-cultural function (Endraswara, 2013).

To clarify the research results, the following table summarizes the representation of women in Toba Batak oral poetry along with indications of gender bias that arise.

Table 1. The representation of women in Toba Batak oral poetry

Forms of Women's Representation	Form in Oral Poetry	Indications of Gender Bias
Symbol of Family Honor	Guardian of clan dignity	Moral control of women
Domestic Roles	The ideal housewife	Limited social space
Social Subordination	Compliance with customary decisions	Unequal power relations
Emotional Sacrifice	Patient and loyal figure	Double burdens and stereotypes
Women's Resilience	Wailing of suffering	Potential for symbolic resistance

The table shows that Toba Batak oral poetry contains cultural constructs that place women in complex positions. UNESCO asserts that oral traditions contain inherited social values and norms, allowing traditional texts to record the power relations that exist within society (UNESCO, 2003). Thus, Toba Batak oral poetry can be understood as a medium for transmitting patriarchal values as well as a space for expressing women's experiences.

Overall, the research findings confirm that the representation of women in Toba Batak oral poetry is dominated by patriarchal constructs that foster gender bias through stereotypes, subordination, and limited social roles. However, oral traditions also demonstrate cultural respect for women as sources of affection and emotional strength within the family. Hall states that cultural representations always involve a process of negotiation of meaning, allowing cultural texts to demonstrate both dominance and the potential for symbolic resistance (Hall, 1997). Therefore, Toba Batak oral poetry is not only a document of tradition but also a reflection of the dynamics of gender relations that persist within society.

Discussion

This research discussion demonstrates that the representation of women in Toba Batak oral poetry is a cultural construct shaped by the patrilineal social system and passed down through oral tradition. The finding that women are positioned as symbols of clan honor indicates that oral tradition functions not only as aesthetic expression but also as an instrument of social control. Hall states that representation operates as a mechanism for the production of meaning, shaping how society views certain groups through language and symbols (Hall, 1997). Thus, the representation of women as guardians of honor demonstrates that Batak culture places women at the center of collective morality, allowing women's bodies and behavior to become part of the extended family identity.

The finding regarding the dominance of domestic roles in Toba Batak oral poetry aligns with the concept of gender bias that places women in the domestic sphere. Women in traditional folklore and speech are often portrayed as ideal figures capable of taking care of the family, serving, and maintaining harmony within the household. Fakhri explains that gender inequality often arises through a division of labor that confines women to the domestic sphere, while the public sphere is predominantly male (Fakhri, 2013). In this context, Toba Batak oral poetry serves to reinforce the stereotype of women as family servants, thus making these values considered normal and passed down through generations. These findings also demonstrate that oral tradition can serve as a means of legitimizing patriarchal norms through poetic language that appears beautiful but contains social restrictions.

Research findings showing the subordination of women in customary decisions clarify that the Toba Batak social structure provides limited space for women in social authority. In the patrilineal system, men, as the successors of the clan, hold a dominant position in customary deliberations and decisions, while women are more often positioned as those who receive decisions. Koentjaraningrat stated that the patrilineal system tends to create a hierarchy that places men at the center of power in lineage, inheritance, and social legitimacy (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). This finding reinforces previous research on patriarchal culture in Indonesia, which indicates that women often experience marginalization within traditional social structures. Therefore, Toba Batak oral poetry can be understood as a cultural text that demonstrates the reproduction of power imbalances in gender relations.

On the other hand, findings regarding women as sources of affection and sacrifice indicate that Toba Batak oral poetry does not entirely position women negatively but also places women as the emotional center of the family. This representation is particularly evident in *andung*, which depicts women's grief and suffering in the event of loss. Endraswara states that oral literature is a space for emotional expression in society, often recording the social experiences of certain groups, including experiences of suffering and injustice (Endraswara, 2013). Thus, *andung* can be understood as a space that allows women's voices to emerge in the form of lamentations, while remaining within a patriarchal cultural framework. This finding suggests that oral tradition can be a medium for revealing women's inner experiences that are not always conveyed within formal social structures.

The finding of stereotypes of women as weak and submissive suggests that Toba Batak oral poetry serves as a medium for establishing ideal norms for women. These stereotypes give rise to cultural standards that require women to be gentle, patient, and non-violent. Fakhri asserts that stereotypes are a form of gender injustice that confine women's identities to specific categories, thus hindering their freedom and social

opportunities (Fakih, 2013). In Toba Batak oral poetry, these stereotypes are subtly present through poetic expressions that idealize women as the bearers of harmony. Therefore, the language of oral tradition can be understood as an ideological tool that normalizes gender inequality in ways that are not seen as outright oppression.

However, the finding of the representation of women as powerful figures suggests that the Toba Batak oral tradition has an ambivalent dimension. Women in *andung* are often depicted as figures capable of enduring customary pressures, suffering, and grief. Hall states that representation is not singular but can contain contradictions because culture is always experiencing a negotiation of meaning between domination and resistance (Hall, 1997). In this context, Toba Batak oral poetry can be understood not only as a tool for legitimizing patriarchy but also as a symbolic space demonstrating women's resilience. Lamentations in *andung* can be a form of symbolic resistance, demonstrating that women have complex social experiences, even though they are not always recognized within formal customary structures.

The results of this study align with studies of oral traditions, which emphasize that cultural texts often embody dominant societal values. UNESCO asserts that oral tradition is a means of transmitting social norms and identities, allowing patriarchal values to be passed down through speech considered sacred and true (UNESCO, 2003). Thus, the gender bias in Toba Batak oral poetry can be understood as a reflection of the social structure that places women in a domestic and subordinate space. However, oral traditions can also be a means of maintaining social solidarity, as oral poetry emphasizes the importance of women in maintaining family harmony. This suggests that oral poetry serves a dual function: reinforcing patriarchal social structures while also symbolically honoring women's roles.

This research's limitations lie in the use of data sourced from written literature, thus not directly involving the practice of oral poetry in the current social context of the Toba Batak community. Bowen states that document-based research is limited in capturing the shifting meanings that occur in contemporary cultural practices because documents are often static (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, further research is recommended using an ethnographic approach through observation and interviews with traditional practitioners to understand how oral poetry is practiced and interpreted in a modern context. Furthermore, further research could explore how Toba Batak women interpret these traditional narratives as part of their lived experiences.

Overall, this discussion confirms that Toba Batak oral poetry represents women within a patriarchal cultural construct that produces gender bias through stereotypes, subordination, and restricted social roles. However, oral poetry also displays a respect for women as emotional figures and pillars of family solidarity. Hall emphasizes that cultural representations have always been an arena for the formation of meaning that can perpetuate domination while also opening up space for critical interpretation (Hall, 1997). Thus, this study shows that the Toba Batak oral tradition is not only a cultural heritage, but also an important space for reading the dynamics of gender relations that continue to develop in society.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study shows that Toba Batak oral poetry is a cultural text that represents the complex role of women in the social structure of a patrilineal society. Women in *umpasa*, *andung*, and other traditional narratives are predominantly positioned as symbols of clan honor, guardians of family dignity, and those with a significant moral responsibility in maintaining social harmony. In addition, women are

also represented in domestic roles as caregivers, family servants, and strengtheners of emotional household relations. This representation shows that oral tradition is not only an aesthetic medium, but also a means of inheriting social norms that contain gender bias through stereotypes of women as weak, obedient, and sacrificial figures. Gender bias is also evident in the tendency for women to be subordinated in customary decision-making, where social authority is held more by men as the successors of the clan. However, this study also found that Toba Batak oral poetry does not entirely place women in a passive position, because in some *andung* women are represented as strong, patient figures, and possessing social resilience in the face of suffering and customary pressures. Thus, Toba Batak oral poetry can be understood as a cultural representation space that contains patriarchal domination while simultaneously showing women's emotional experiences as part of the dynamics of Batak community life.

This research emphasizes that the sustainability of the Toba Batak oral tradition needs to be understood not only as the preservation of forms of speech, but also as the preservation of values that are critical to gender relations. Oral tradition as an intangible cultural heritage has the potential to continue to reproduce gender bias if passed down without contextual and reflective understanding, so a preservation approach that considers the perspective of social equality is needed. Sustainability research can be directed at examining the transformation of Toba Batak oral poetry in the context of modernization, specifically how contemporary Batak women reinterpret *umpasa* and *andung* in their social lives. In addition, further research can use field methods through observation, interviews with traditional leaders, and reception studies to determine how oral poetry is used in contemporary customary practices and how social changes influence the construction of women's roles. Further research can also focus on the use of digital media as a new space for the inheritance of oral tradition, because digitalization can be a preservation strategy while opening up opportunities for reinterpretation of meaning to be more adaptive to the development of modern social values. Thus, this research not only contributes to the study of oral tradition and gender studies but also provides an academic basis for encouraging the preservation of Toba Batak culture that is sustainable, inclusive, and relevant for future generations.

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