

## WHEN TRADITION AGAINST MODERNITY Batak Angkola Men's Resistance towards Gender Equality

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### Abstract

Modernity brings about gender equality, but in Padang Lawas, this gender equality is not universally accepted by Batak Angkola men. Resistance under the guise of masculine identity exists based on cultural reasons. This study aims to explore the reasoning behind Batak Angkola men's defense of their masculine identity in the public and domestic spheres amid the prevailing gender equality of the modern world. This study relies on a socio-anthropological approach. Data were obtained through observation and interviews. This study concludes that Batak Angkola men maintain their self-esteem (ego) and uphold their identity as part of the Batak patriarchy by using preventive cultural masculinity reasoning. This use of reasoning keeps them from being deprived of religious and cultural understanding. In essence, the modernity echoing gender equality auto-encourages Batak men to empower and safeguard their masculinity in their own ways and according to their own standards. This affirms that latently, Batak Angkola men's resistance to modernity is rooted in their traditional paradigm. Consequently, this is by no means enough to alleviate Batak women's longstanding unfavorable circumstances, a double-burdened trap.

[Modernitas melahirkan kesetaraan gender, namun di Padang Lawas kesetaraan gender ini tidak diterima secara universal oleh laki-laki Batak Angkola. Perlawanan dengan kedok identitas maskulin ada berdasarkan alasan budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi alasan di balik pembelaan identitas maskulin laki-laki Batak Angkola di ruang publik dan domestik di tengah kesetaraan gender yang berlaku di dunia modern. Kajian ini bersandar pada pendekatan sosio-antropologis. Data diperoleh melalui observasi dan wawancara. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa laki-laki Batak Angkola

mempertahankan harga diri (ego) dan menjunjung tinggi identitasnya sebagai bagian dari patriarki Batak dengan menggunakan penalaran maskulinitas budaya preventif. Penggunaan penalaran ini membuat mereka tidak kehilangan pemahaman agama dan budaya. Intinya, modernitas yang menggemakan kesetaraan gender secara otomatis mendorong laki-laki Batak untuk memberdayakan dan menjaga kejantannya dengan cara mereka sendiri dan menurut standar mereka sendiri. Hal ini menegaskan bahwa secara laten, resistensi laki-laki Batak Angkola terhadap modernitas berakar dari paradigma tradisional mereka. Konsekuensinya, ini sama sekali tidak cukup untuk meringankan keadaan tidak menguntungkan perempuan Batak yang sudah berlangsung lama, sebuah perangkat berbeban ganda.]

### Keywords

Patriarchal cultural reason, Batak Angkola men's masculinity, gender equality

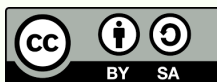
### Article History

Received 21 October 2022

Approved for Publication 7 March 2023

### To Cite this Article

Ulfa Ramadhani Nasution, "WHEN TRADITION AGAINST MODERNITY: Batak Angkola Men's Resistance towards Gender Equality," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 16, no. 1 (2023): 23-42, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2023.16102>.



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### Introduction

"*Tungkot in landid, suluh in golap*" [a stick on a slippery path and a lamp in the dark]

This term describes the general behavior of Batak men in their families and environment. Batak men play the role of sticks on slippery roads and lamps in the dark, as protectors and

peacemakers for their families and their environment.<sup>1</sup> Batak men are expected to work diligently in order to meet the cultural expectations that are constantly socialized to them by the nuclear family, extended family, and environment.<sup>2</sup> Male identity formation becomes an inevitable phenomenon. In Batak society, being born a male signifies carrying a clan, attaining eternal life, continuing lineage/heredity, bolstering parental authority, and assuming family leadership.<sup>3</sup>

The domination of men is getting stronger with the patrilineal kinship system of the Batak people. This structure governs all aspects of the Batak way of life, including inheritance, government and land ownership, marriage and religious worship, administration of justice, settlements, and land cultivation, which are all directly related to the male line.<sup>4</sup> Male masculinity is present in all subgroups of the Batak, including the Muslim-majority Batak Angkola subgroup.<sup>5</sup> Although Muslim-majority, Batak Angkola people admit that they are descendants of the Batak king, different from subgroups of the Mandailing tribe (since 1922).<sup>6</sup>

In addition to Batak cultural values, the Islamic doctrine of male leadership over women and men as leaders substantially shapes the self-concept and identity of Batak Angkola men. This religious doctrine determines how men interact with women (gender roles) and how they educate boys and girls. At this point, it can be concluded that the Batak Angkola men have at least two sources of legitimacy to perpetuate their patriarchy: customs and religious doctrines that position them as priests or leaders and women's protectors.

<sup>1</sup> Interviews with Hamdan Dauly (academician), Ahmad Rizal Hasibuan (traditional leader), and Aspan Pulungan (traditional and religious leader), in 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Karina Meriem Beru Brahmana, "The Influence Of The Socialization Of Gender Roles On Patriarchal Culture and Masculine Ideology On The Emergence Of Gender Role Conflict In Men Of Karo Tribe," in *International Conference on Psychology and Multiculturalism 2017* (Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia, n.d.), 94–101.

<sup>3</sup> Judika N Sianturi Sianturi, "Makna Anak Laki-Laki Di Masyarakat Batak Toba (Studi Kasus Di Kota Sidikalang Kabupaten Dairi Provinsi Sumatera Utara)," *Jurnal Online Mahasiswa (JOM) Bidang Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 4, no. 2 (n.d.): 1–14.

<sup>4</sup> Sianturi.

<sup>5</sup> The results of the 2010 Occupation Census show that the population of the Batak Angkola tribe in the southern part of Tapanuli is 493,785 people with 97.8% Muslim. (*Source: Percentage of Religion based on Batak sub-ethnicity in North Sumatra refers to 2010 BPS data*)

<sup>6</sup> The results of the discussion on October 23, 2017 at the Madani Medan hotel which was published by the Waspada newspaper on October 25, 2017 with the title "Mandailing Claims: Unraveling the Anthropological-Historical Background of the Mandailing, not Batak".

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This argument is also supported by the Batak Angkola people's adherence to the principle *bombaric ni adat dobot ibadat* [customs and religion always go hand in hand/customs alongside religion].<sup>7</sup> It means custom and religion are inseparable. This fact has led to the phenomenon that the Batak Angkola culture is the result of the acculturation of customs and Islam. Customary and Islamic relations in the Batak Angkola family have produced works that discuss the Islamization that occurred in the Batak culture,<sup>8</sup> including the issue of marriage.<sup>9</sup> In addition to religion and tradition, modernity exerts a significant impact on the culture of the Batak patriarchy. The expansion of women's rights as independent human beings and the equal rights of men and women in various aspects of domestic and public life, including political rights, education rights, job rights, and reproductive health rights, reflects modernity in the context of gender relations.<sup>10</sup>

In the quest for the remaining strong patriarchal culture, this article discusses the resistance and negotiation of Batak Angkola men in facing change brought by modernity. A number of studies prove that there has been a shift position of Batak Angkola men and women due to the process of modernity.<sup>11</sup> With the use of Berger's theory of processes and

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Muhammad Rizal Hasibuan, Batak Angkola Traditional Leader, 24 January 2020

<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Kurnia Ritonga, "Islamisasi Tradisi: Studi Analisis Terhadap Martahi Marpegepege Pada Batak Angkola Dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam," *Tazkir: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Dan Keislaman* 6, no. 1 (2020): 35–54, <https://doi.org/10.24952/tazkir.v6i1.2361>. See also Marija Dalimunthe, "Nilai-Nilai Islami Dalam T tutur Masyarakat Adat Batak Angkola Tapanuli Bagian Selatan" (Pascasarja IAIN Sumatera Utara, 2010); Muhammad Habibi Siregar, "Angkola Batak Tradition: Islam, Patrilineality, Modernity: Reviving and Challenging," *TAWASUT* 3, no. 1 (2015); Churmatin Nasoichah, "Makam Kuno Sutan Nasinok Harahap, Pola Penguburan Etnis Batak Angkola-Mandailing Di Padang Lawas Utara," in *Forum Arkeologi*, vol. 30, 2017, 55–64, <https://doi.org/10.24832/fa.v30i1.120>; Abbas Pulungan, *Dalihan Na Tolu: Peran Dalam Proses Interaksi Antara Nilai-Nilai Adat Dengan Islam Pada Masyarakat Mandailing Dan Angkola Tapanuli Selatan* (Perdana Publishing, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.24832/fa.v30i1.120>.

<sup>9</sup> Puji Kurniawan, "Memahami Pertautan Agama Dan Budaya Studi Terhadap Tradisi Marpege-Pege Di Batak Angkola," *Yurisprudencia: Jurnal Hukum Ekonomi* 2, no. 2 (2016): 35–53, <https://doi.org/10.24952/yurisprudencia.v2i2.670>; Hasan Bakti Nasution et al., "Akulturasi Hadis Dengan Tradisi Perkawinan Masyarakat Batak Angkola: Studi Di Kabupaten Tapanuli Selatan, Sumatera Utara," *AL QUDDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 6, no. 2 (2022): 511–32, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v6i2.3997>.

<sup>10</sup> Muhadjir Darwin, "Maskulinitas: Posisi Laki-Laki Dalam Masyarakat Patriarkis," *Center for Population and Policy Studies Gadjah Mada University* 4 (1999): 1–10.

<sup>11</sup> Helmi Suryana Siregar, "Perubahan Kedudukan Perempuan Pada Masyarakat Batak Angkola," *Jurnal Ius Constituendum* 6, no. 1 (2021): 252–68, <https://doi.org/10.26623/jic.v6i1.3281>. See also Desniati Harahap, "Implikasi Sistem Kekebabatan Dalihan Na Tolu (Studi Pada Keluarga Urban Muslim Batak Angkola Di Yogyakarta)," *Religi: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 12, no. 1 (2016): 121–34, <https://doi.org/10.14421/rejusta.2016.1201-07>; Yasir Maulana Rambe and Muhammad Adika Nugraha,

stages of internalization, objectification, and externalization partially and contextually, this article argued that various method of resistance and negotiations carried out by Batak Angkola men is the results of the internalization process of Batak patrilineal culture. Referring to the type of masculinity by Connel,<sup>12</sup> Batak Angkola man is similar to the category of hegemonic masculinity by utilizing recognized privilege in a manner cultural and social.

This research is field research. It is conducted by immediately going to Padang Lawas and becoming a participant as well as an observer. The main source of research was obtained from observations of the Batak Angkola community by interviewing directly the informants selected by purposive sampling technique, considering their position, status, role, and position in the group, knowledge, and experience of the issue being studied. The collected data was analyzed qualitatively.

### **Batak Men's Struggle for Identity: Daily Life**

The Batak Angkola community upholds cultural/traditional and religious (specifically Islam) values, which are summed up in the phrase *bombar do adat dohot ibadat* (customs besides religion).<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising that Batak men strive to maintain their masculine identity in the face of modernity and gender equality because they believe that this identity is a combination of religion and custom that must be defended, not only the construction of custom but also religious values about being a man. The construction of Batak male masculinity appears to be based on images formed by their subconscious in response to the prevalent discourse in their culture. The following factors commonly influence Batak men's determination of their masculinity.

“Dinamiika Revolusi Industri 4.0 Dalam Dimensi perempuan Dan Dalihan Na Tolu Masyarakat Batak Angkola,” in *Seminar Nasional Multi Disiplin Ilmu Universitas Asahan*, 2019; Muhammad Habibi Siregar, “Quasi Equality in -Batak Angkola Community: Challenging the Pathriarchal Domination,” 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Robert W Connell, “Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1801–25, <https://doi.org/10.1086/427525>.

<sup>13</sup> Fera Siska Nasution, Kamaluddin Kamaluddin, and Wahyu Wiji Utomo, “Konsep Hombar Do Adat Dohot Ibadat Dalam Masyarakat Batak Angkola (Studi Kasus Perkawinan Semarga Di Kecamatan Padang Bolak Julu Kabupaten Padang Lawas Utara),” *Nusantara: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* 9, no. 8 (2022): 2914–23, <https://doi.org/10.31604/jips.v9i8.2022.2914-2923>.

### 1. Environment and Social Communication

The construction of how to be a real man in the Batak Angkola has been imprinted in the hegemony of masculinity and passed down from generation to generation. Even though it looks established, the fact is that the concept of masculinity in Batak society is not static, but it is more dynamic in accordance with the popularity of the standards surrounding people's lives. Considerations for the sake of shared interests and in order to maintain self-esteem in social relations are the main basis for unwritten rules regarding the concept of masculinity for Batak Angkola men in general who are able to survive.<sup>14</sup>

Men are viewed as leaders and household heads, as they interpret it according to religion and custom. Men who are described as leaders for women and "kings" in their families have never been in a subordinate position. Men always occupy the main and preferred position in the social relations of the Batak Angkola community in the Padang Lawas region. The treatment of the Angkola people, both men and women, always places men as the main patron in every activity. Decisions related to shared interests, for example on the scale of a *buta* (village), are always represented by men. For various traditional events and or religious commemorations, such as wedding ceremonies, welcoming babies, death or mourning ceremonies (*silutluton*), and *upa-upa*,<sup>15</sup> the main executors are men. Women are limited as a companion to men.

This inequality in gender relations is also evident in the concept of kinship, *dalihan na tolu* (three-tiered stove referred to three elements of social life)<sup>16</sup>, which is the initial basis for each Batak community to establish relationships and communication with other Batak people. Although women are related to the clans of their fathers and husbands, they are never considered full members of either. Men are the superior group, while women are inferior. In *dalihan na tolu*, women are relegated to the role of objects, while men are the subjects. This condition is accepted by women as fate, and there is no need to question it. Batak men inherit it through hegemony, and Batak women can only accept men's decisions.

<sup>14</sup> Nursapia Harahap, "Communication Interaction Of Double Burden Batak Women In Patriarkhi Family In Gender Analysis In North Sumatra," *International Journal Of Humanities Education and Social Sciences (IJHESS)* 2, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.55227/ijhess.v2i2.266>.

<sup>15</sup> *Upa-upa* is an activity of giving prayer as a symbol of magnanimity (gratitude). (interview with Patuan Nabanggar, 12 April 2018).

<sup>16</sup> The concept of the functional relationship between the *dalihan na tolu* clans consists of: (1) *kabanggi*, namely the male family from the male parental lineage, (2) *boru* children, namely the male family of the husband's married sister/sister, (3) *mora*, namely the male family of the wife's brother.

Environment and communication based on *dalihan na tolu* have a dominant portion in influencing the mindset and actions of Batak men in viewing their identity as men. Therefore, the concept of male masculinity is never separated from the environment in which he lives and the social communication that takes place.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Attitude toward Parenting

In addition to the environment, norms, most of which originate from parents, siblings, or partners, are frequently used to construct male identity. The need to become the ideal man is socialized as early as possible by both the nuclear family and the extended family, as well as their environment.<sup>18</sup> Batak men are continuously trained in the social dynamics of a patriarchal society. Belief about men having to lead the household and being responsible for providing for the family is often said repeatedly to oneself (self-talk) so that they become well-entrenched in Batak men's cognition. And here, Batak women who have been trapped in a patriarchal social order also train their sons to apply this concept, a concept that indirectly supports male dominance over women.

Regarding child rearing, mothers in the Batak community appear to place a great deal of responsibility for the future of the family on men, or at least mothers as women assess their sons' potential to carry out family responsibilities as being significantly greater than that of their daughters. Here, the mother attempts to mold her daughter into a replica of herself.<sup>19</sup> She teaches abilities that are typically associated with females. For instance, daughters must be able to cook, wash, sweep, and alleviate the domestic burden. Nonetheless, boys are not required to possess this domestic skill. In fact, the majority of Batak families prohibit boys from performing domestic work, especially if women are available. Domestic responsibilities are viewed as a manifestation of the feminine form.

<sup>17</sup> Marudut Bernadtua Simanjuntak et al., "Batak Women in Globalization and Feminism," in *International Conference on Communication, Policy and Social Science (InCCLuSi 2022)* (Atlantis Press, 2022), 57–63, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-07-7\\_7](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-07-7_7).

<sup>18</sup> Brahmana, "The Influence Of The Socialization Of Gender Roles On Patriarchal Culture and Masculine Ideology On The Emergence Of Gender Role Conflict In Men Of Karo Tribe."

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Chodorow, "The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender" (University of California Press, 1978).

### 3. Understanding of Batak Angkola Patriarchy and Its Encounter with Islam

The pattern of society with a system of roles and kinship defines the identity of the individuals in that society and the totality of their lives.<sup>20</sup> People's knowledge about the totality of their lives is usually inseparable from an understanding of religion or the community's belief system. The phenomenon of understanding religion and custom is currently difficult to separate in view of Batak Angkola people who seem to always draw a common thread between culture and religion (*bombar ni adat dohot ugamo*). Even if there is tension between customary law and religious law, customary law is put aside. For example, in terms of inheritance distribution, currently, Batak women possess the right to inherit.<sup>21</sup>

Batak men, in order to identify themselves as men, confidently state that their perspective on Batak patriarchal culture does not conflict with the perspective of the Islamic religion. The Islamic culture of Batak Angkola men is the same as the Islamic culture of Arab men.<sup>22</sup> However, when I asked further about what they know regarding the Islamic culture of Arab men, they only explained that Arab men are synonymous with their patriarchy, they are leaders for women. Then the concept of male leadership, especially in the family, cannot be debated by what, how and whomever it is. Almost all informants, both male and female agreed and emphasized that religion and custom clearly place men in charge of protecting and providing for the family's needs. Man is the head of the household despite the fact that the fulfillment of the basic needs of a family is not solely met by man. This in no way shifts the position of men as leaders because male leadership is about effort and responsibility, not only about income and fulfilling household needs.<sup>23</sup> The obligation for men to work and provide for the family is now less rigid. Batak women and men understand this and agree to provide for the family together. Batak man focuses more on responsibility and hard work. Such narratives are often found in the field when conducting interviews.<sup>24</sup> Here, religious teachings and Batak culture seem to have merged, and the informants also relate the ability to work as a wife as part of the will of religion.

<sup>20</sup> Dominikus Rato, *Hukum Dalam Perspektif Konstruksi Sosial: Kasus Ngadha, Flores, NTT* (Universitas Jember, Fakultas Hukum, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Sulistyowati Irianto, *Perempuan Di Antara Berbagai Pilihan Hukum: Studi Mengenai Strategi Perempuan Batak Toba Untuk Mendapatkan Akses Kepada Harta Waris Melalui Proses Penyelesaian Sengketa* (Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Aspan Pulungan, August 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Hamdan Daulay, October 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Hamdan Daulay, in October 2020.



This means, even though religion and custom require men to earn a living, fulfilling family maintenance is one of the self-identities of a man, the fact is that religion itself allows a wife to work if she wants to and the husband agrees. There is no coercion from the wife or husband, this is where the fusion of religion and custom appears in constructing the self-esteem of Batak men.

## Experience of Change in Patriarchal Culture

Discussing the masculinity of Batak men in the midst of the onslaught of modernity and the echoes of gender equality, there are at least two aspects of change that can be explained, namely women who have access to higher education and women who work and earn money.

### 1. Education

The influence of education does not only stop at the level of *basangapon* (honor and social status) but can also be the reason for achieving the principle of *hamoraon* (wealth). Because generally, the acquisition of a good education will also correlate with a good job, and a good job increases the person's economic level. At this point, It is no wonder that Batak parents are willing to work hard, pawn goods, or even borrow money, as long as their children can go to school and get a proper and high education. Because the matter of sending children to school is not just for the sake of getting a degree and a job, but will also be a long-term investment for these parents because a successful son raises their dignity and social status. Such in the past, Batak women only worked, either in the kitchen or in the rice fields.<sup>25</sup>

The explanation of the informants indicates that the understanding of not discriminating between men and women in obtaining education has not been around for a long time. It has only been started in the last two or three generations.<sup>26</sup> Education is one of the trigger points that influence Batak men in viewing their male identity. It is also education that reduces the rigidity of patriarchal customs. The masculinity of Batak men appears to melt and adapt to modernity. Therefore, education encourages Batak men to negotiate their masculinity construction.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Aspan Pulungan, August 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Tancher Situmorang, "Gengsi Etnis Batak Toba Dalam Pendidikan (Studi Di Desa Urat Timur Kecamatan Palipi Kabupaten Samosir)" (Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2017).

## 2. Working women and breadwinners

If in the past women worked only to help and did not produce (in the sense that they were not paid), but now women play a fundamental role in the family's economy. The Angkola Batak men themselves are proud of and appreciate women who work by giving them customary dowries higher than women who do not produce at all. This indicates that the employment of women is a complex phenomenon that is not merely a matter of the woman's own will to decide whether to work or not to work. The continuation of women's work and earning money today is a real form of responsibility for fulfilling the family's needs.<sup>27</sup> Even in Padang Lawas region, it is common to find that women are the main breadwinners as explained by my informants.<sup>28</sup>

An informant who is also an academician stated that there had been a cultural shift related to the phenomenon of wives working and helping the family economy. Namely, there is an adaptation effort from the Batak Angkola patriarchal custom to the phenomenon of modernity and gender equality, in which Batak men are currently inviting their women to work and earn a living with respect.<sup>29</sup> It appears that there is a tendency for a more open understanding of gender when men support women's productivity in the public sphere.

Economic cooperation between men and women is a real-life challenge, given the increasing demand and consumption of households, the high cost of raising children, and the demand to fulfill typical modern technological objects, such as gadgets, laptops, motorcycles, and cars. In addition, the fact that supplies of inherited land forest and agricultural land, also the pride of Batak men, is dwindling. In fact, most of them have been sold and divided among several heirs. Then it is natural that if the wife participates in the household economic endeavor. It is not enough to rely solely on the husband. Moreover, it has become a habit for Batak women to work helping their husbands.

Women's breadwinners are one of the factors that influence the identity of Batak men's masculinity. Uniquely, neither women nor men have the option to set aside and avoid the phenomenon of having to work today. Economic demands foster the changes in men's view of women as breadwinners. When men see it as normal for women to work as

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Aspan Pulungan, August 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Bones, January 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Hamdan Daulay, October 2020.

breadwinners, the consequences will be reconceptualized and reconstructed the identity building of Batak men's masculinity, because they do not want to admit the fact that women have an important role and position and can regulate the direction of the family because the husband's position as the responsible person for the main income has been shared with the wife or has even been replaced by the wife.<sup>30</sup>

### **Defending Masculinity and the Dilemma in Resisting Change: Between Customary Dowry and Household Responsibility**

According to Batak people, having children is very important, as important as having self-esteem.<sup>31</sup> This is in line with their philosophy of life, namely *bagabeon* (have descent), *hamoraon* (have treasure), and *hasangapon* (have social status).<sup>32</sup> Uniquely, the Batak cultural concept of children only refers to men.<sup>33</sup> This is based on the fact that one day a daughter has to leave her parents' house to become a member of her husband's family. Only boys are recognized as full family members, and he is expected to be able to maintain the continuity of the lineage and develop his family and village.<sup>34</sup> Traditionally, sons are called *tampukni pusu-pusu*, *ibotni ate-ate*, *tumtummi siubeon*, which means that boys are everything and very valuable. If a Batak Angkola family does not have a son, it is likened to *napurpur tu angin*, *na maupo tu alogo*, which is like flying into the air and being carried away by the wind. Because the family tree will be cut off forever without the presence of a son. For that,

<sup>30</sup> Ulfa Nadra, Purbayu Budi Santosa, and Hadi Sasana, "Working Time Allocation of Rice Farmer Households Based on Gender Dimension of Batak Toba Culture at Toba Samosir North Sumatera," in *Proceeding Of The International Seminar and Conference on Global Issues*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enfcli.2019.07.095>.

<sup>31</sup> The highest self-esteem of Batak parents lies in the success of their children. Not only on himself. (Interview with Dr. Hamdan Daulay, in October 2020).

<sup>32</sup> Morinah Tambunan, "Perubahan Fungsi Dan Makna Anak Laki-Laki Pada Komunitas Batak Toba-Kristen: Suatu Kajian Antropologis Pada Masyarakat Desa Cinta Damai Kecamatan Percut Sei Tuan" (UNIMED, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Implicitly, indeed, girls are seen as having the same meaning as boys, so fair treatment must be given to girls just like boys. However, in matters related to inheritance, for example, fair understanding does not mean giving equal access to girls and boys. See Irianto, *Perempuan Di Antara Berbagai Pilihan Hukum: Studi Mengenai Strategi Perempuan Batak Toba Untuk Mendapatkan Akses Kepada Harta Waris Melalui Proses Penyelesaian Sengketa*.

<sup>34</sup> Sianturi, "Makna Anak Laki-Laki Di Masyarakat Batak Toba (Studi Kasus Di Kota Sidikalang Kabupaten Dairi Provinsi Sumatera Utara)."

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anything will be done in order to get sons to have the next generation, heirs, to inherit, maintain and implement customary law.

Men in customs always have a central position and have strong and dominant bargaining power compared to women who are generally only considered complementary. Men's high position makes them known as kings. Whomever the man, whatever the circumstances, wherever and whenever is, he will always be a man and a king. A king is a leader who on the one hand has power and on the other hand, also has great responsibility. Here, Batak customs and culture attach this leadership authority to every Batak man.<sup>35</sup>

I found the fact that there is a thick wall covering the construction of masculinity within the Batak Angkola man. Through this view, it also seems difficult to find common ground for negotiating or bargaining between patriarchal cultural reasoning which has long been embedded in the thoughts and actions of Batak men and modernity which contains values and principles of gender equality. Bearing in mind, even the interpretation of religious narratives related to the position of men and women, those who are included in the Batak Angkola community also merge and coexist with the custom itself. Religion seems to strengthen the existing patriarchal pattern.

I underlined some aspects that influence changes in a patriarchal culture and encourage Batak men to defend themselves in order to protect Batak's patriarchal culture. The Batak men's defense or resistance is also in response to the Batak women's resistance to a patriarchal culture which goes hand in hand with globalization and the consequences of modernity. One manifestation of Batak women's resistance to patriarchal culture related to the construct of male masculinity is the idea of gender equality in access to education, the realm of work, distribution of inheritance, and access to other political economies if Batak men are at a disadvantage politically. Men's resistance to gender equality is considered quite 'natural' or occurs naturally. Men and women have actually been arranged in the historical structure and formation of gender power relations, and they reproduce this gendered power. In this case, male power is more dominant operating at various levels.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Dr. Hamdan Daulay, in October 2020.

Thus, requiring men to change their power relations requires changes in the relations of men to women, men to children, and men to men.<sup>36</sup>

### 1. Maintaining High Customary Dowry for Educated and Working Women

The high price of this dowry is a common phenomenon among the Batak people. As a result of research by Damayanti, the fact is that the price of real estate (*sinamot*) has never decreased and is something that must be given to the bride. This is because the customary dowry is closely related to the self-esteem of the woman and her own family, even this customary dowry is also part of the social prestige or prestige for the bride and groom's families.<sup>37</sup> According to Damayanti, this practice persists amidst the currents of modernity, because the custom of giving *sinamot* is permanent and is used as a legal basis so that a valid marriage procession can be held.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to having *sinamot* related to self-esteem, *sinamot* or customary dowry is also related to evidence of Batak men's masculine identity. Giving *sinamot* to a woman and her family indirectly raises a man's self-esteem. It symbolizes the man is able to meet the nominal dowry that has been determined. This also becomes a source of pride for the man. It also means that the man fulfills traditional expectations, carries out religious mandates, and is able to go hand in hand with the current increasing dowry phenomenon which is considered to be part of the normal changing times. In this context, it is arguable to interpret that the more men maintain the habit of giving high dowries to educated women, the more they maintain self-esteem. Thus, regarding these highly educated and working women, Batak men did not put up any direct resistance. Because if they frankly forbid women from obtaining higher education and working in the public sphere, it is the same as them going against the tide of modernity and will slowly be run over by the times. Therefore, the resistance of men towards higher education strata for women or career women is realized in the form of giving a high dowry. High dowry appreciation can indirectly be interpreted as an alternative form of male agency in dealing with patriarchal cultural change.

<sup>36</sup> Jeff Hearn, "Men and Gender Equality: Resistance, Responsibilities and Reaching Out," in *Men and Gender Equality Conference (Swedish EU Presidency Calendar of Meetings)*, 2001, 15–16.

<sup>37</sup> Ria Damayanti, "Fenomena Jumlah Sinamot Dalam Perkawinan Suku Batak (Studi Kasus Di Desa Hajoran Julu, Kabupaten Labuhan Batu Selatan, Provinsi Sumatera Utara)" (UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Damayanti.

Through this argument, we conclude that when women appear to be able to keep up with men in obtaining education, at the same time men respond by giving these women fantastic customary dowries as justifications that men are above women even though women have a higher level education than them. Like a tit for tat, the awarding of a high traditional dowry seems to be increasingly encouraging Batak women to get the highest education possible and try to work in the best possible place, in order to raise their self-esteem and that of their families and maintain their social status along with the high prices dowry to be given by the groom.

Understanding this situation, rather than appreciating it, customary dowries are high and sometimes seem coercive, are anomalous, and have their own paradox, because giving dowry indirectly divides women and limits their expression. Although we do not deny that the awarding of this high customary dowry has a good impact on the continuity of the patriarchal Batak culture. Therefore, this phenomenon is still maintained now.<sup>39</sup> This is because both men and women of the Angkola Batak are reluctant to be uprooted from the Batak culture that they understand and practice from generation to generation.

### 2. The Dilemma of Helping Domestic Work

Informants in this study emphasized that accepting working women does not mean that men also oblige to help their wives with household chores. Earning a living is the responsibility of the husband, and taking care of household chores and raising children is the duty and responsibility of the wife. They emphasized that the wife's work is pure because of the wife's will, and no matter how much the wife earns, it will not change their status as a man and the head of the household. Therefore, they also have no obligation to help their wives to do domestic work as it is a woman's responsibility as a wife. Even if the husband helps, it is purely because of his will, just as a wife who works for a living is purely the will of the wife herself. There is no compulsion in this matter because men have never ordered women to work for a living, let alone force them, and vice versa.<sup>40</sup>

Based on the interview narration above and the researchers' observations of men who were informants in this study, it can be understood that Batak men on the one hand accommodate women's desire to work, even supporting them with the trend of giving high

<sup>39</sup> Damayanti.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Usman Harahap, January 2020.

dowries. However, on the other hand, at the same time, men also protest, namely against women ordering them to help with domestic work. There appears to be an effort to accommodate protests from Batak men when they allow women to work and are adamant that they are reluctant to help women complete household chores. The main form of their protest is when they do not want to be ordered by their wife when the wife asks for help with domestic work or raising children. They feel their self-esteem is threatened when obeying the order. As stated by one informant.

"It is not because you are lazy to help your wife or not because you do not feel sorry to see that your wife is already working to make money and the wife also has to do all the housework, but because it is the male ego that is the problem. So, actually, the husband's unwillingness to help the wife is in order to maintain his dignity as a man and the head of the family by not wanting to be ordered by women."<sup>41</sup>

The egoism of men to maintain their self-esteem, which was also acknowledged by the informants in this study, according to our observations, is a form of response of Batak men to the onslaught of modernity and gender equality. In fact, there is concern that men feel when they see women working hard here and there, in the domestic and public spheres, as expressed by several male informants. However, there are things that they consider to be the main norms that must be maintained, namely customary norms, regarding patriarchal values that have already shackled the Batak Angkola people and are considered to be worthy of being maintained so as not to lose their identity as civilized men. This is what we understand based on the responses of Batak men when they see their wives who have to complete two 'burdens' at once.

If Batak men feel foreign to housework because they have not interacted with this type of work since childhood, then for women there completing domestic affairs has become a habit, considering that since childhood they have been familiar with all kinds of household chores. During the fieldwork, I did not find women who were concerned about the 'double burden' that they uphold because domestic work for women was not a real type of work. The will of women to expect men to be sensitive and willing to help them is a utopia.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Akhtar Harahap, January 2020.

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However, the fact that has happened recently comes to be a little different. Helping domestic work has become a representation of the dilemma of the Batak men themselves. On the one hand, they cannot bear to see their wife doing everything, but on the other hand, they also don't want to risk their pride as men.<sup>42</sup> Even though they are opposed to men doing women's domestic work, silently men are starting to help women little by little.<sup>43</sup> Female informants who know that their husband helps them with household chores are aware of this dilemma.

The ambivalence of Batak men in doing domestic work is an illustration of how these men are resisting gender equality. A threshold phenomenon is when Batak men understand the fact that they can no longer hold the principle that men cannot do domestic work, men are no longer fully in authority and power, but on the other hand, Batak men cannot leave their patriarchal. This is what might be called by Connel the patterns of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to cultural dynamics in the condition of a group that claims and perpetuates a position in social life that is culturally privileged.

Based on the efforts of Batak men in responding to the gender equality agenda and referring to the operating pattern in explaining masculinity and gender proposed by Connel, it can be concluded that Batak men in general fall into the category of hegemonic masculinity. However, they did not respond to the gender equality agenda with the hegemony of masculinity in the form of physical violence (KDRT), nor did they openly prohibit women from expressing their interests, talents, and educational background, nor did they feel inferior or competed with women who made more money than lots of men. More precisely, the hegemony of Batak men's masculinity is manifested by their defensive attitude not to obey their wife's orders, and by their consistently not wanting to get involved in helping their wives complete domestic work and raising children which they try in various ways.

Cases that also often occur in men's efforts to avoid household chores and/or refuse the wife's orders are by going to *lapo* (traditional coffee shop)<sup>44</sup> which is usually a hangout

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Usman harahap, in January 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Salma Siregar, in June 2020.

<sup>44</sup> *Lapo* is a stall or shop that provides drinks and other typical Batak food. See Sri Lestari Samosir and Bakhrul Khair Amal, "Lapo Tuak' Sebagai Ruang Publik Perspektif Jurgen Habermas" (Yayasan Al-Hayat, 2016).



place for Batak men. Apart from being an affordable place to relax and quench the thirst, *lapo* is also a vehicle for producing identity, especially male identity. Because *lapo* is a reflection of the male association itself. When a man never sits and jokes in his *lapo*, this indicates that he is not social enough. He was also considered not to socialize, because he only chose to stay at home all the time, instead of visiting the *lapo* occasionally. It means *lapo* also functions as a medium for social and cultural interaction for the Batak people. Furthermore, *lapo* is also used as a vehicle for producing, preserving, and establishing Batak patriarchal values, the transmission. Even though the existence of the *lapo* existed earlier than the recent emergence of gender issues, it cannot be denied that the *lapo* is an important space that strengthens the legality of the Batak male patriarchy in dealing with issues of gender equality. *Lapo* is a medium for strengthening the masculine identity of Batak men and is used as an escape room for men, an excuse so they can avoid certain situations that allow women to ask men for help in doing domestic work.

### **Conclusion Remarks**

The existence of a masculinity field and the strict identification of male norms encourage Batak men to negotiate with the masculinity that has dominated their culture. These negotiations reflect the inability of Batak men to fulfill masculinity norms and serve as a form of self-defense to prevent their uprooting from Batak traditions and customs. In this instance, it is evident that preventive masculinity is a term based on the efforts of Batak men to resist aspects of change in a patriarchal culture by surviving or avoiding them. When non-patriarchal elements are discovered, the community, particularly the Batak men, will immediately mobilize resistance efforts. By either rejection and resistance, avoidance and dilemma, or acceptance followed by protest actions, resistance is practiced in the form of continuous negotiation.

It is undeniable that Batak men view productive women with a more open understanding of gender. On the other hand, men's understanding of masculinity has not changed significantly; rather, they have resisted issues that threaten their masculine identity in patriarchal societies. Openness and decision-making opportunities for working women are indeed taken into account, but this does not imply that their status has changed. Domestic duties and childrearing remain the responsibility of women, and nothing can transfer these duties to men. As there is nothing and no circumstances that can alter the

position of Batak men in the family and social community in the Padang Lawas region, their status cannot be altered.

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