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Cultural Wedding Rituals Among Batak Toba Millennials and Gen Z: Perceptions in the Modern Era - An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract: *Indonesia has many different ethnic groups. Among them, the Batak people stand out. Batak weddings are known for being long and elaborate, but with modern times, things are changing. Modernization has made Batak wedding ceremonies more convenient and has changed the way people think, with many preferring practicality. This study explores the perspectives and experiences of the Batak community regarding the traditional Batak wedding ceremony and its relevance in modern times. A qualitative research method with an Ethnography approach was employed. Through five interview questions, the study aims to understand whether the Batak wedding rituals are perceived as challenges or advantages, whether the process remains relevant, and how individuals respond to the idea of shorter and more practical wedding ceremonies. Purposive sampling was used to select Generation Millennial and Generation Z respondents for in-depth interviews.The interview results from four respondents indicate that despite the complex and time-consuming nature of the Batak wedding rituals, the Batak community still regards them as a sacred cultural heritage. Respondents believe that the lengthy process brings benefits such as a deeper appreciation for marriage and lower divorce rates. The two generations share the same views on traditional marriage, with shared values of the sacredness of marriage and preserving cultural heritage. Overall, this study highlights the importance of preserving and passing down Batak wedding traditions while accommodating societal changes.*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an important event that unites the physical and emotional bonds of a man and a woman as husband and wife to build a happy and eternal family based on belief in God Almighty. However, beyond that, marriage is not only about the relationship between the couple but also about the relationship between their families (Firmando 2021). In Indonesian society, which consists of diverse cultures, wedding ceremonies have various forms and variations depending on the nation, tribe, religion, culture, or social class. One of the tribes in Indonesia known for its deeply rooted wedding traditions is the Batak tribe.

The Batak tribe is one of the major tribes in Indonesia, originating from North Sumatra. The Batak tribe itself is divided into six sub-tribes: Batak Toba, Batak Karo, Batak Simalungun, Batak Pakpak, Batak Angkola, and Mandailing. These six tribes occupy their respective central regions in North Sumatra Province (Rumapea and Simanungkalit 2015). Traditional weddings for the Batak people are one of the life chains whose implementation follows inherent customary laws originating from the ancestors of the Batak community (Banjarnahor and Widihastuti 2022). According to Rumapea and Simanungkalit (2015), the implementation of wedding ceremonies in Batak society is considered sacred and cannot be conducted arbitrarily but must adhere to regulations and requires time. Firmando's (2021) research also adds that the Batak community views traditional wedding ceremonies as an expression of gratitude to God, a social responsibility, and evidence of solidarity with relatives and the community.

The traditional wedding rituals of the Batak tribe are considered quite complex and time-consuming. The wedding rituals begin before the wedding day, on the wedding day, and after the wedding day. The stages before the wedding day consist of *paranakkon hata* (delivering the proposal by the paranak or the male's side to the parboru or the female's side), *marhusip* (discussing the procedures that must be carried out by the paranak in accordance with local customary provisions and the wishes of the parboru), *marhata sinamot* (discussion regarding the sinamot or dowry), and *marpudun saut* (discussing agreements related to matters concerning the marriage). The wedding ceremony on the wedding day is called *ulaon unjuk*, which consists of several rituals, namely *marsibuha-buhai* (opening ritual of ulaon unjuk), entering the ulaon venue (entering the party venue), delivering *tudu-tudu sipanganon* (submission of symbolic traditional food), delivering *dengke simudurudur* (submission of si mudur-udur fish), *manjalo tumpak* (requesting for love offerings), *mambagi jambar* (distribution of symbolic traditional food), *marsiseanan* (customary conversation), delivering *penandaian* (submission of recognition symbols), delivering *tintin marangkup* (submission of unity rings), and *mangulosi* (presentation of ulos) (Harvina et al., 2017). A few days after the *ulaon unjuk* ceremony is completed, there is the implementation of *paulak une* accompanied by *maningkir tangga* (mutual visits) (Lama and Lephen 2023).

The rapid development of the times, also referred to as modernization, has influenced cultural shifts. The presence of modernization has brought various changes to the traditional wedding ceremonies of the Batak people, where modernization has provided many conveniences for society, resulting in a shift in mindset, including among the Batak community, who tend to prefer practical matters, especially among millennials and Generation Z. This has increasingly raised awareness among the Batak people that the series of traditional ceremonies consumes a lot of time and money. Modernization can lead to a loosening of the traditional wedding ceremonies of the Batak community, potentially obscuring the meaning contained in each stage of the traditional ceremonies (Rumapea and Simanungkalit 2015).

Observing this phenomenon, the researchers became interested in studying how the Batak

community perceives the Batak traditional wedding traditions, particularly among millennials and Generation Z, who are most affected by modernization. Therefore, the researchers decided to take the research topic entitled The Procedures of Batak Toba Traditional Wedding: Perceptions of Millennials and Generation Z in the Modern Era with the Ethnographic Method with the aim of identifying the shared perception or shared values of the Batak community, particularly among Generation Z and millennials, toward the Batak traditional wedding traditions.

METHODS

In researching the Perception of Millennials and Generation Z in the Modern Era towards Batak traditional marriage in the modern era, the researcher uses the ethnographic research method. Ethnographic research is non-quantitative, relying on data that cannot be measured, such as behavior patterns or cultural practices (Xu et al., 2020). The primary data used consists of individuals who are part of a certain cultural group, with the main purpose of the research. The primary data of interest are individuals within a certain community group (Hendro & Nirmala, 2019). Since the data used in ethnographic research is unstructured descriptions, data analysis requires interpretation of its meaning, starting with observation, description, and justification.

Ethnographic research is a type of research that does not rely on statistical data. This condition requires the use of ethnographic research solely to collect observational data. This theory explains a process, action, or interaction among humans. The ethnography conducted in this study is a case study, meaning it is part of a detailed exploration of a limited system (such as activities, events, processes, or individuals) based on the collection of extensive data (Creswell, 2007).

Respondents were selected through typical sampling, where sample selection is based on characteristics relevant to the research goals, namely millennials and Generation Z, followed by snowball sampling method. In this study, two respondents representing the millennial generation, born between 1981-1996, and three respondents from Generation Z, born between 1997-2012, were selected. Data collection was carried out using the in-depth interview method with the informants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted using a direct interview method with 4 (four) respondents. The respondents interviewed were Generation Z and Millennials aged between 20 to 42 years old who share the same ethnic background. The respondents' identity data can be seen in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Respondent's identity

No	Name	Age	Generation	Ethnic group
1	Daniel Beltazar Sitompul	28 Years old	Millennial	Batak Toba
2	Hamzah Parsaoran Sinaga	41 Years old	Millennial	Batak Toba
3	Bernanetta Pasaribu	20 Years old	Gen z	Batak Toba
4	Vaisal Raju Siahaan	22 Years old	Gen z	Batak Toba

There were 5 (five) questions in the interview that was conducted, namely regarding the respondents' views on the series of Batak traditional wedding ceremonies, whether the entire traditional wedding process poses challenges or benefits for the respondents, whether the traditional series is still relevant in the modern era, and their responses to a shorter and more practical wedding process. The interview results can be seen in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Interview Result

No	Question	Respondent's			
		Daniel	**Hamzah**	**Bernanetta**	**Vaisal**
1	What are your views on the complex and time-consuming series of Batak traditional wedding ceremonie ?	Marriage in Batak tradition, in my opinion, is very solemn and sacred, where cultural values are deeply embedded in every aspect of the wedding, providing perspectives and deep meaning in every process.	I have come to value Batak traditional marriage as precious, it is sacred, and therefore, I highly respect marriage.	Yes, I myself sometimes get confused because the process is really long, but it is indeed the tradition, and tradition must be followed, especially if we are really Batak, it must be done. Moreover, my parents are also very Batak, so it has to be done. Therefore, the entire Batak wedding process is a cultural heritage that must be preserved.	Nowadays, young people don't really know the sequence of the ceremonies because there are too many. Moreover, today's youth prefer things to be quick rather than neatly arranged from the beginning like people in the past. For me, there has to be a process, even if it's long; we must preserve the Batak Toba culture that I have.
Value		Solemnity and sacredness	Sacredness	Preserving cultural heritage	Preserving cultural
2	How is your experience or observation regarding the time-consuming process of Batak traditional marriage? Does this become a challenge or a benefit for you?	It's a benefit, where I, as a young person of Batak descent, can learn more about the traditions in Batak weddings.	Actually, it's a benefit, because with the long process, I come to appreciate marriage more and consider it sacred. It can even be said that the divorce rate in Batak society is low because even getting married is complicated, and if someone wants to separate, it's also complicated; it's not easy. So,	Because I really want to make it a benefit, I would love it if there were **gondang batak** (traditional Batak music) during the wedding, it would be so much fun. It's a benefit because it creates beautiful moments.	In my opinion, it's a benefit because, aside from preserving it, we can also experience each part of the ceremony, and later on, we can pass it down to our children. Nowadays, a lot of things are being eroded by time, so we shouldn't eliminate any important parts

			the rate of marriage failure becomes low.		of the traditional ceremonies in Batak weddings. Each of those parts has its own meaning.
Value		Batak as self-identity	Marriage rituals are symbols of sacredness	Creating moments	Preserving culture
3	Do you think the complex and lengthy process of Batak traditional marriage is still relevant in the context of modern society? Why is that?	For me personally, Batak traditional marriage is a ritual that should be carried out and not abandoned, because within the Batak traditional wedding ceremony, there are various things that I believe are very important for the couple who are getting married, such as: - **Marhusip – Marhusip** (Proposing) - **Marhata sinamot** (Discussing the dowry) - **Martumpol** (Engagement) - **Martonggo Raja** (A large meeting held by both families) - **Manjalo Pasu-Pasu Parbagason** (Marriage blessing) - **Ulaon Unjuk** Traditional	It is still relevant because, as I mentioned, the meaning is stronger and truly makes marriage something sacred. However, in terms of time, it can still be shortened, as long as the existing stages are not skipped.	In my opinion, it is still relevant, just like Jessica Mila and her husband—they are modern, but they still incorporate Batak traditions. It's because it's a heritage, and even though it might be minimal, it still has to be there.	It is still relevant because, in today's time, many people still want every part of the ceremony to be carried out. We know that if it's not done properly, there might be negative impacts for us as well. Marriage isn't just something we plan on our own; we've been taught since we were young. If we want to marry according to Batak traditions, it has to be done this way. If we reduce or skip any part of the ceremony, it might lose its meaning.

		wedding celebration			
Value		Important for the couple	Sacredness	Cultural heritage	There are consequences if not carried out
4	How do Millennials and Gen Z respond to the complex and time-consuming Batak traditional marriage process? Are they more open to a shorter or more practical process?	As I am part of the millennial generation, I personally have no problem with the Batak traditional marriage process that should be carried out. In my opinion, every step of the Batak wedding process is sacred and meaningful, containing deep life lessons.	. I remember that at my wedding celebration, it lasted until 11 PM, even though it was already shortened. However, none of the stages were skipped. In my opinion, it's fine if the process is shortened, as long as every stage is still followed.	If I look at my friends (Generation Z), they still want to have Batak traditions in their weddings. No matter how it's modified, they still want the Batak traditions to be there because it's a unique heritage.	In my opinion, it's better to carry out all of the processes. As I said earlier, everything has its meaning. So, if we skip or make the ceremony shorter, it might be okay, but the person will probably prefer the more complex process because we don't want any part of the ceremony to be lacking.
Value		Sacredness	All stages must be carried out	Preserving culture	Meaningful
5	Do you think there are efforts from relevant parties to simplify or modernize the Batak traditional marriage process in order to accommodate the needs and preferences of modern society? Can this be widely accepted by the Batak community?	It would be good if, before simplifying the Batak traditional marriage process, there was communication with the elders of the Batak community. This is because every step in the Batak wedding	There can be changes, but the Batak traditions will still remain. The modern part could be in the form, for example, replacing the **ulos** with an envelope, but the overall sequence of the ceremony would still be carried	From my experience, my closest relatives, when hosting a wedding celebration, still apply about 80-90% of Batak traditions. Even though they have migrated to Jakarta, the celebration still emphasizes	From my perception, as far as I know, there is no intention to shorten the process. In fact, we Batak people prefer it to be longer, as I mentioned earlier. If it were to be sped up, there would likely be some

		ceremony is sacred and has meaning. As for whether it can be accepted by the wider community, I believe if an agreement is reached, modernizing it could be possible.	out. For example, if traditionally the men's family would visit the women's family two weeks after the celebration, it could now be done in one day. Also, events like **marhusip**, **martonggo raja**, and **martumpol**, which are usually done separately, might be combined into one day, especially in urban areas.	Batak customs. For Batak people, when they get married, it has to be in a hall, and the menu is a must—there has to be goldfish, cassava leaves, and pork.	issues or challenges.
Value		Sacredness	Preserving culture	Preserving culture	Consequences

After conducting interviews with the respondents, the values of each respondent were identified. From these values, shared values or common values in interpreting the Batak traditional marriage were then identified. The results of the values and shared values can be seen in Table 3 below.

Tabel 3. Value Resulut & Shared Value Respondent's

No.	Respondent's Name	Values	Shared Values
1	Daniel	The values from this respondent are: 1. Batak traditional marriage is a solemn and sacred matter. 2. The Batak ethnicity is their identity. 3. Batak traditional marriage is important for the couple.	There are several values that we concluded as shared values from the respondents in interpreting Batak traditional marriage, including: 1. Sacredness 2. Preserving culture
2	Hamzah	The values from this respondent are: 1. Marriage rituals are symbols of sacredness. 2. Preserving cultural heritage.	
3	Bernanetta	The values from this respondent are: 1. Preserving cultural heritage. 2. Creating moments	

4	Vaisal	The values from this respondent are: 1. Preserving cultural heritage. 2. There are consequences if not implemented. 3. Batak traditional marriage has meaning.	

Based on the research results, it was found that each respondent has their own values regarding Batak traditional marriage. However, each respondent shares common values, also known as shared values. From this study, two main shared values were identified: sacredness and preserving culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on the interviews with the four respondents, a combination of Millennials and Generation Z, regarding their views on Batak traditional marriage rituals in the modern era, it can be concluded that both generations share the same perspective on traditional marriage, with shared values of sacredness and preserving culture. They feel connected to their cultural roots through the long and complex Batak marriage rituals and view them as sacred rituals. Although there have been efforts to simplify the process, Batak traditional marriage remains highly valued and still relevant in the context of modern society today, with the goal of preserving cultural heritage.

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