

Weaving and Cultural Identity of Batak Toba Women

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Abstract

Women weavers in the Toba area, North Sumatera, Indonesia, are the main key to the continuation of the Toba's *Ulos* cultural weaving and the preservation of artefacts through the process of the cultural inheritance. The women are spread in various regions around Lake Toba with a variety of their unique cultural characteristics reflected in their woven cloths. However, the existence of the women weavers has not been optimally empowered as a cultural heritage with high economic and artistic value. This study aims to uncover the social and cultural mapping of the current condition of *Ulos* Toba weavers by identifying female weavers in the Lake Toba region related to the inheritance of traditional weaving as the cultural identity of the Batak Toba. This research is expected to be the basis for designing strategies to utilize *Ulos* woven artefacts as one of the cultural heritages and identities in the Lake Toba region to provide sustainable benefits for the weavers, so that they can provide solutions to the problem of extinction threats to this Batak cultural inheritance. In detail, this study provides an overview of the social and economic conditions of women weavers in inheriting and maintaining *Ulos* weaving as a cultural identity of the Batak Toba community, North Sumatera, Indonesia.

Keywords

Women, traditional weaves, *Ulos*, Batak Toba, cultural identity

Introduction

Ulos (a woven traditional cloth) in North Sumatera, Indonesia is a cultural preservation of the Toba Batak tribe, as well as the community's strategy to improve their economy. Almost every day, hundreds of *Ulos* are sold in both local markets and in out of town to overseas markets as well. Therefore, Toba traditional weaving industry, the main material for making *Ulos* fabrics, is not only a potential business, but also a cultural tourism attraction of the island (Siboro et al., 2018). Considering its high aesthetic values, for Toba Batak people, *Ulos* is not just fabric, it is a symbol of position for those who wear them (Niessen, 2009). Hence, *Ulos* weavers who are predominantly women, not only play an unquestionable role in increasing their regional tourism, but they also participate in the preservation of the cultural heritage of Batak ancestors. The women weavers

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significantly contribute to the understanding of cultural, as well as the philosophical values of life that are reflected in the traditional *Ulos* that they make (Siagian, 2016). This weaver profession, however, is not considered a coveted job. Changes in the current conditions that place women weavers as small business workers need serious attention from business owners and the Indonesian government because the value of the *Ulos* sustainability greatly depends on the quality of the creators (Simatupang, 2017). There are still a few issues that affect the sustainability of the *Ulos* weaving craft, including the fact that the Toba traditional weaving does not provide economic benefits for the community of the weavers. The work of creation itself requires a lot of time and capital resources. As in various job sectors, women laborers in Indonesia are not appropriately recognized, yet they have an important role. Both trade unions and non-governmental organizations have neglected the women (Libraswulan, 2014).

Ulos women weavers are known as individuals who have inherited the culture from their former generation, and in turn passing it on to their future generations realizing the importance of weaving knowledge and skills for them. The insight into the traditional weaving of Toba as a cultural heritage has become the soul of these women. The existence of Toba women weavers, deemed as artists as well as individuals who have social, economic and cultural dimensions, is then contained in the cultural artefacts of Toba traditional weaving. The women are the wheels behind the continuation of Toba's intangible cultural artefacts of traditional weaving and the sustainability of the artefacts through the process of cultural inheritance (Siagian, 2016). Toba traditional weavers are scattered in various areas around Lake Toba with a variety of types and characters. The Toba region includes the districts of Simalungun, North Tapanuli, Toba Samosir, Samosir, Humbahas, Karo, and Dairi. In the seven regions of Lake Toba, weavers are spread out with various types and designs of weaving as well as their uniqueness.

In Indonesia, a number of studies on women weavers in the Toba area of North Sumatra have been carried out. Studies by Siboro et al. (2018 and Syahriani (2018) investigated the role of weavers in Samosir Toba in promoting tourism in Samosir district. Another study researched the three elements that are directly related to the *Ulos*: weaver; distributor; and buyer. The results of that study showed that the symbiosis of mutualism in the interaction between weavers, distributors, and consumers is a good effort to revitalize the cost of the value of the *Ulos* itself. Other research results show that the women weavers have the ability of its dual roles in the public and domestic spheres. Although many studies have investigated women weavers of *Ulos* from diverse point of views, none of those studies has addressed the women weavers' cultural identity. The current study tries to get a picture of the lives of Toba female weavers in their activities of preserving weaving crafts through field research. This research is expected to contribute to the development of science in cultural studies, especially in the field of intangible cultural conservation. It aims to obtain data and identify the current condition of traditional Toba weavers. In addition, this study aims to find out how Toba female weavers interpret their identities as working women and guardians of an intangible cultural heritage.

Ulos weaving as Batak Toba cultural identity

Identity can be seen as an interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations. Identity provides a picture of who we are and how we relate to other people and the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as other people who share the same positions, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not share the same positions. Representation is defined as a cultural process that establishes individual, collective identities and symbolic systems that provide possible answers to the questions of "who am I?", "what do I become?", and "I want to be like who?" (Woodward, 2019). Identity is characterized by some

aspects, such as differences (which are reinforced with exceptions), and also marked through symbols. Identity construction is symbolic and social, whereas identity is also united and impermanent. *Ulos* Toba traditional weaving is more than just an ordinary cloth, because it has meaning of giving grace, blessing, protection from the giving party to the given party as mandated for generations through the kinship system. *Ulos* is a cultural identity of the Toba Batak people which is part of the Toba Batak people's lives from birth.

Cultural identity based on Friedman (1994: 238, cited in Jensen, 1983) refers to social identity based on specific cultural configurations of consciousness. History, language, and race are the basis of cultural identity formation, and everything is a socially-built reality. Stuart Hall gives an understanding of cultural identity as an aspect of our identity that arises from the sense of belonging to ethnic, race, linguistic, religion and, most importantly, national cultures. Hall et al. (2012) describe that identity becomes "movement" party that form and transform continually in the relation our ways represent or handled in culture system surround us .

Batak Toba people as one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia have a genuine cultural identity in the form of the Toba Batak language, Parmaliem beliefs, and *Ulos* weaving. *Ulos* weaving plays an important role in the social and cultural structure of the Batak Toba community in every traditional event carried out by the Batak Toba community. Any traditional event must always be marked by the existence of the *Ulos* in *adat*. Giving or receiving *Ulos* has to be in accordance with the existing rules that comply with the "*Dalihan Na Tolu*" system; the *adat* that is being held must be in accordance with the desire and/or the goal of the Batak community, so that its implementation is legitimate in the eyes of the custom (Agustina, 2016).

In social relations, forms of symbolic and social differences are determined through the operation of classification systems. These systems apply the principle of population difference to divide them into at least two opposing groups, for example indigenous and non-indigenous, male and female, or workers and non-workers. In the context of this research, the theory of identity and difference is used to understand how the weavers interpret themselves as working women. In addition, this study tries to see how these female weavers are positioned in the Batak Toba culture as guardians of the intangible cultural heritage of Toba traditional weaving. In defining the Toba's *Ulos* weaving as a cultural inheritance, cultural identity and social differences are needed to explain the weaving activities and how these can help the women weavers in defining themselves. It is believed that the cultural weaving process in this context creates a juxtaposition of Batak Toba women's identity.

Research method

In this study, the researchers intend to see, understand, describe, and map a phenomenon that is the focus of the problem, namely the existence of *Ulos* weaving crafts as cultural heritage and cultural tourism assets. In its development, ethnography has experienced many changes along with the developments in the life of modern society. One of the developments in ethnography is the emergence of new ethnography methods. This study or method tries to be "fairer" to the realities of "other" lives. Saukko (2011) says that new ethnography rejects resistance, where social studies have made categorization and labelling of other individuals, which is not necessarily true. The new ethnography is not in the capacity to claim that one's view is right or wrong, but to see the truth from the perspective of others. To be able to conduct a new ethnographic study, direct research needs to be conducted to see the other's life more fairly.

Data collection is the most strategic step in conducting research. The data collection technique used in this research was cultural observation, that is, making direct observation of the daily

Table 1. Data for Toba traditional weavers in Toba Lake area.

Number	District	Number of weavers	Remarks
1	Muara weaver group	35	North Tapanuli
2	Siatas Barita weaver group	20	North Tapanuli
3	Sibandang weaver group	30	Muara, North Tapanuli
4	Parbubu I weaver group	70	Tarutung, North Tapanuli
5	Baribibaniaek village weaver group	15	Muara, North Tapanuli
6	Porsea	20	Toba Samosir
7	Samosir	20	Samosir

activities of the Toba traditional weaving crafters in seven districts in the region of Lake Toba. During the observation, the research team conducted in-depth interviews to eleven informants, namely the weavers (six persons), Batak Toba community leaders (two persons), *Ulos* woven fabric collectors (one person), and one person from the Curation and Production Division of the Directorate General of Culture from Education and Cultural Ministry of Indonesia.

In addition, the research team has produced an audio-visual documentation related to the lives of the female weavers in Toba as well. Some of the weavers were willing to meet the research team and to be interviewed as informants. They are the people who understand the development of traditional weaving art in the Lake Toba region. Many questions were asked to the weavers including “Since when have you learnt to weave and from whom did you learn it?” “What are the stages of weaving yarn into a piece of cloth?” and “What are the obstacles in doing weaving for traditional weavers?”

The research data were obtained through in-depth interviews to find out how the development and inheritance of intangible *Ulos* weaving occur in the Lake Toba regions. Some questions were asked to the Batak Toba community leaders: “How is the current conditions of the traditional weaving motifs in the Lake Toba region and the condition of the weavers?”, “What is the condition of the inheritance of traditional Batak weaving and how the process of inheritance takes place?”. Meanwhile, to the collectors and observers of Toba traditional weaving, the researchers asked the following questions: “What is the meaning of *Ulos* weaving for Toba Bataks?”, “What is the role of women in maintaining the cultural heritage of Toba Batak weaving?”, and also “How does this traditional weaving become a cultural identity of the Batak people?”

This research was conducted in two stages: the pre-research (initial observation) on 14–20 April 2018; and the research itself in the form of follow-up observations and interviews on 13–22 July 2018. Both observations and in-depth interviews were conducted for 8 hours per day, and during 17 days the research was carried out in several places: Island of Sibandang; Papande village; Muara; North Tapanuli District; Porsea village; Balige; Toba Samosir District; Hutaraja village; Pangururan; and Samosir District. Meanwhile, the interviews with the collectors, curators and observers of Toba traditional weaving were held in North Tapanuli on 15 October 2018 with Vilidius Siburian, with Keri Na Basaria in Jakarta on 25 March 2019, and with Lefidus Malau on 23 April 2019.

The research data were also complemented with some documents from the Nusantara Weaving Festival held by the Directorate General of Culture of Indonesia on 13–17 October 2018. In the activities of Indonesian platform, 200 weavers from around the Lake Toba region gathered; initial data were obtained on the number and the distribution of traditional weavers in the districts of North Tapanuli, Toba Samosir and Samosir (Table 1).

The development of the weaving activity in the Lake Toba area

At the beginning of this study, the research team conducted the observations in several areas where most of the traditional weavers reside in the Lake Toba area, namely Muara sub-district, North Tapanuli Regency, Porsea District, Toba Samosir Regency, and Samosir District, Samosir Regency. Most of the weavers are housewives who earn their living through weaving to support their family's economy. They do their jobs from early morning to noon and then resume their work after a midday break to midnight. The research team consisted of three main researchers, and four research assistants; they worked in groups according to the tasks in three districts: North Tapanuli; Toba Samosir; and Samosir. Aside from the direct observation of the three main areas and meeting the weavers, the research team also took part in the 2018 Nusantara Weaving Festival which was held at Tarutung Utara Tapanuli on 13–17 October 2018, where hundreds of traditional weavers from various places around Lake Toba attended the event. From the field observations and participation in the festival, the team had obtained data on the distribution of traditional weavers in three districts (Table 2).

Demographically, the majority of the traditional weavers are located in the North Tapanuli region. It is mentioned that 170 weavers (80%) are spread over five areas in North Tapanuli district. Of these five areas, Parbubu I and Muara sub-districts are the centre of the existence of traditional weavers. The research team conducted research in three villages in Muara sub-district: Papande village; Sibandang Island and Muara village. In Papande village four traditional weavers were interviewed; they were Oppung Siregar, Erison Siregar, Emy Pakpahan and Paloma Pakpahan. One of the community leaders called Kape Siregar was interviewed as well. In Toba Samosir district where there are around 20 weavers (10%), the research team visited the village of Nalela as one of the traditional weaving centres in Porsea sub-district and interviewed a weaver who has been weaving for more than 40 years called Opung Aluman Sirait. In Samosir district where there are about 20 weavers, the research team interviewed one informant, that is, Marita Sitorus in Hutaraja, Pangururan sub-district.

From the preliminary observations of the research, one of the problems that arises in the development of the weaving activity in the Lake Toba area is the condition of the women weavers. These women weavers are not only regarded as artists but also as individuals who are related to the culture of their ancestors and involved in the process of cultural inheritance. However, the lives of the women weavers who are the main pillars of the Toba traditional weaving process are not as good as the artworks they produce. According to Silbaugh when there is opposition to the payment of money for women's traditional work, "there is most likely a gender line in modification too" (Silbaugh, 1997). In other words, the reluctance to recognize the economic aspects of women weavers' activities and works may be related to perceptions and sensitivities concerning the gender bias of the long-held view that women's work fundamentally belongs to the non-market world.

Various studies on rural women that have developed rapidly after the 1980s concerning the modernization that has extended to the countryside concluded that this did not guarantee a better life for the women weavers (Whatmore, 2005). The development of rural area is being conducted to improve human welfare, especially to improve the standard of living in the developing world including Indonesia. In contrast, rural women, like those in Toba areas, are actually disadvantaged by the modernization in the rural areas. Modernization that is driven through development has not fully supported women as a marginalized group even though they have been integrated in the development programmes. The role of women in transmitting culture also situates them as creators and custodians of culture; consequently, many communities view women's adherence to and promulgation of cultural norms as essential to cultural survival (Babb, 2010, cited in Msuya, 2019).

Table 2. Research informants.

Name	Title	Reason
Opung Aluman Sirait	Weaver from Porsea, Balige, Toba Samosir	She has been doing weaving activities since she was a teenager. Up to now she has been weaving for almost 40 years. She masters the traditional weaving motifs of Toba and the philosophy of weaving motifs
Opung Siregar	Weaver from Papande village, Kecamatan Muara, Kabupaten Tapanuli Utara	She has stopped weaving activities due to old age and poor eyesight. She is one of the earliest heirs of traditional Toba weaving in Muara
Erison Siregar	Weaver from Sibandang, primary school teacher	One of the weavers in Papande village whose weaving works have been widely used by people in the Toba region and have reached Jakarta. In addition, Erison Siregar is an elementary school teacher in Papande
Emy Pakpahan	Female weaver from Papande, Muara, Tapanuli Utara	She is a student at a private university in North Tapanuli. Her weaving skills have been learned since elementary school age. She is currently weaving actively despite her tight lecturing schedule
Paloma Pakpahan	Female weaver from Papande, Muara, Tapanuli Utara	This informant is one of the young <i>partonuns</i> who inherited the weaving ability from her parents. She is 15 years old and is still in high school (Senior High School) in Muara district
Marita Sitorus	Female weaver from Hutaraja, Pangururan, Kabupaten Samosir	One of the young weavers who has been able to weave cloth quite well. She 13 years old and a junior high school student.
Kape Siregar	Toba community leader from Papande, Muara, Tapanuli Utara	An elementary teacher in Papande Elementary School, and also a community leader who is concerned about Batak Toba <i>Ulos</i> weaving
Vilidius R.P Siburian	Collector of <i>Ulos</i> Batak Toba weaving	Batak Toba <i>Ulos</i> weaving collector who has a complete collection of <i>Ulos</i> and who understands the types of Toba traditional weaving motifs
Amang Monang Naipospos	Toba cultural figure (A leader of <i>Permalim</i> : a local belief in Toba area)	One of the cultural figures in the Lake Toba region who fosters weavers in the Porsea region, Toba Samosir Regency and understands the history of the traditional weaving, especially those aspects related to the philosophy of traditional weaving motifs
Lefidus Malau	Curation and Production Division of the Directorate General of Culture	Toba's traditional weaving curator, who has become the driving force for weavers in the Toba region with the Nusantara Weaving Festival in 2018 on the Indonesiana platform, which took place on 13–17 October 2018
Kerri Na Basaria	Batak Toba <i>Ulos</i> weaving collector and Toba anthropologist	<i>Ulos</i> collector and has great interest in the sustainability of Toba traditional weavings and especially the sustainability of traditional weaving inheritance

The women weavers in Toba are now no more than labourers who work on the weaving production process based on the orders from the “*tauke*” (gaffer) who are also the retailers of the Toba traditional weaving products as well as the ones that set the prices of the woven fabrics. The “*tauke*” provide yarns as raw materials for the weaving process and at the same time prepare the

weaving designs for the weavers, making these weavers mere “labourers” in their own homes. The weavers then become part of the weaving capitalization chain for the main material of *Ulos* fabric.

Ulos is the main tool for performing traditional rituals for the Batak Toba people, hence the craft of weaving becomes inseparable from their life. *Ulos* is used in traditional rituals of someone’s birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, up to the day of his or her death. This makes *Ulos* as the basic need for Batak Toba people. From the economic point of view, the weavers should be able to live well from their work. Instead, these weavers fall into the clutches of the “*tauke*”; the traditional weavers of Toba also have to compete with non-machine weaving cloth (“*alat tenun bukan mesin*” (ATBM)) which can produce woven cloth faster than traditional equipment. Therefore, the weavers also have to face the invasion of “fake woven” fabric produced by garment factories using printing techniques.

In this research, we found the data of groups of weavers spread across several regions in the districts of North Tapanuli, Toba Samosir, and Samosir. North Tapanuli region has the most traditional weavers, with more than 250 in number, and most of them are women. The large number of weavers in North Tapanuli does not imply good weaving production yields in terms of quantity as these weavers merely wait for orders from the “*tauke*” or woven fabric retailers, and from the Regional Arts and Crafts Council (*Dekranasda*) of North Tapanuli Regency. With such a production system, it is difficult for the weavers to be prosperous; they are merely labourers who work only when they get orders, like those working in a clothing factory.

An area, which is a weaver village, in the vicinity of Lake Toba is Muara sub-district, North Tapanuli Regency. There are around 35 women weavers in this area, with 15 weavers in Barbaniak and 30 weavers in Sibandang Island, actively weaving using traditional equipment. They work on orders from the “*tauke*” who also provide yarns as the main raw materials for the woven fabric. These weavers in Muara work on weaving motifs or design orders from the “*tauke*” or from the Regional Arts and Crafts Council (*Dekranasda*) of North Tapanuli Regency. The majority of the weavers in Muara are women who are also housewives and support their family’s economy from weaving.

Weaving crafts in Muara have existed since the days of the ancestors and been passed down from generation to generation. Currently, the existence of Toba traditional weaving and its weavers are facing many problems related to the sustainability of the weaving skills among the younger generation in Muara. Kape Siregar, one of the community leaders in Papande village and who observes the development of weaving in Muara states:

Very few young people in Papande want to learn to weave, because they think weaving is very difficult to learn. And again, young people here notice that parents, who work as weavers are not prosperous (Kape Siregar, Interview, 2018).

The weaving culture in Muara is a national asset that must be protected and preserved. Various parties must work together to conserve this weaving culture. The cultural preservation process, which is inherited from generations to generations, must be maintained to avoid the extinction of traditional weaving. This calls for efforts on conserving and revitalizing the traditional weaving, especially now that the traditional weaving in Toba region is under threat from woven fabrics produced by non-machine looms (ATBM) and printing fabrics with *Ulos* woven motifs. The emergence of ATBM woven fabrics and woven motif printing fabrics have long threatened the continuity of the traditional weaving due to their lower prices than that of traditional woven fabrics.

The constraint to the inheritance of this intangible artefact may likely occur due to lack of interest of the young people in learning to learn to weave from their parents and family members

(Siagian, 2016). Knowledge about weaving is not taught in formal education in schools, but from their family. The learning method is not structured such as that of teachers when teaching their students. Weaving skills can only be learned through regularly observing their parents or siblings or other members of the older generation performing their skills.

Another region that has the potential of Toba weaving is Porsea, Toba Samosir Regency. From this area, the research team obtained data from interviews with Namboru Nalela, a weaver who has been weaving for almost 40 years. According to her, there are about 23 *Ulos* motifs in Toba region, some of which are very rarely produced due to the limited knowledge about the motifs among young weavers. In addition, there are very few enthusiasts or people who can translate woven motifs or designs into weaving formulas prior to its application into a woven fabric. In Porsea, there are only about 20 women (*partonun*) who are still actively performing weaving activities, and they are spread throughout several villages.

Women weavers as the guardians of the cultural identity of the Toba people

Toba traditional weaving is one of the intangible cultural artefacts that still exists today, resulting from the process of weaving using simple tools. Toba traditional weaving still exists in several areas of the Lake Toba region, which includes seven districts, namely North Tapanuli, Samosir, Toba Samosir, Humbang Hasundutan, Dairi, Simalungun, and Karo, where there are several weaving villages with dozens of traditional weaving motifs. Toba traditional woven cloth is the main material for making *Ulos*, which is a cloth used by Batak people in every traditional ritual, starting from birth, marriage, to death. *Ulos* cannot be separated from the lives of Batak people, because besides being a traditional ritual ceremonial tool, it is also a cultural identity of Batak people. For many centuries, *Ulos* has become a deep-rooted part in the lives of Bataks.

However, the current *Ulos* has experienced a shift in its meaning and basic philosophy from the roots of Batak culture. *Ulos*, which is a cloth with certain motifs, has different meanings and different uses. There are even some *Ulos* motifs that are only allowed to be used by Batak aristocrats. For example, *Ulos* Runjat from Porsea, Toba Samosir Regency, is used by aristocrats to show their social status. There is also a traditional woven cloth of the Ragidup Marhait *Ulos* motif, meaning “motifs of life”. The traditional woven cloth of this motif is identified as life hence it is worn by senior people. The ritual function of the Ragidup Marhait *Ulos* is to cover the corpses and coffins of old people who have died but have grandchildren. However, this *Ulos* also functions as a gift in a wedding ritual, given by the bride’s parents to the groom. In addition, Ragidup Marhait *Ulos* is given by parents to their daughters in their first pregnancy.

According to Batak people, the long-standing cultural heritage is very important. The business they did was not half measured. They taught knowledge about weaving to their children and grandchildren, and then subsequently produced a cloth. Distinctive motifs continue to be maintained so that they can be used as a sign of a traditional weaving in Toba. The benefits are not only for the weavers, but also for the government. Therefore, they continue to carry out such activities. As stated by Amang Monang Naipospos, one of the cultural figures, collectors and observers of weaving *Ulos* in Balige, Toba Samosir:

... why are we weaving *Ulos*? This is the tradition from our ancestors, from my grandmother, to my mother, from my mother when we were young my mother had woven *Ulos* to the market ... (Amang Monang, Interview, 2018)

Likewise, a statement was conveyed by another female weaver that we successfully interviewed, that is, Namboru Siregar from Papande village, Muara District, North Tapanuli Regency.

She said that weaving activities were studied and carried on for generations. As a weaver, Namboru Siregar is the third generation of her weaver family. Her mother used to learn to weave from her mother-in-law since she got married, not from childhood. This is different from Namboru Siregar who has learned to weave since elementary school, by observing her mother and older sister. Like most women weavers in the Toba region, Namboru Siregar works on traditional weaving according to orders from agents who are commonly referred to as “*tauke*”. These agents provide weaving yarn as well as weaving designs for the weavers. From this process it can be concluded that the women weavers are deemed “labourers” in this traditional weaving work, because they only get wages from agents for each woven fabric they produce from weaving yarns:

I do this weaving according to the *tauke* order, I can finish one woven fabric in two to three days. From one woven fabric I get a wage of one hundred and fifty thousand rupiahs. From the results of this weaving, I can help my husband for daily family needs. (Namboru Siregar, Interview, 2018)

Meanwhile, the fourth-generation member of women weavers in Papande, Boru Paloma who is now 16 years old inherited traditional weaving culture when she was 12 years old, from her mother, Namboru Siregar and also from her uncle Erison Siregar. At present, Boru Paloma is only able to work on the *martonun* stage and has not been able to work on the *Mangani* and *Manggugas* processes. As explained by Erison Siregar the process of making traditional weaving to become a piece of *Ulos* cloth requires a long process.

From the start, the *Manggatip* process was derived from the word *gatip*, which means the image or design that exists on the *Ulos* woven fabric. Next is *Mangunggas*, the process of enlightenment of the yarn, which aims to give a brighter impression on the yarn to be woven. After that it is the process of *Mangani* or stringing of woven threads, where the expertise of *Tangani* greatly determines the beauty of woven fabric according to the size and calculation of the number of thread strands according to colour composition. The weaving process (*Martonun*) is done after “going through a number of these processes. . .” (Erison Siregar, Interview, 2018)

From the weaving process that requires a fairly long process, the female weavers need a long time to finish the traditional woven cloth. The process takes at least three to seven days for a piece of woven cloth, depending on the level of difficulty of the weaving motif and the type of yarn. In addition, these women weavers must also continue to carry out their role as housewives who take care of the needs of their husbands and children. Even some female weavers are still helping their respective husbands to do work in the fields or in the garden as farmers. The women weavers in Toba are not only inheritors of traditional weaving culture, but also guardians of the cultural identity of the Toba people. *Ulos* serves as an important component in the Toba Batak society structure and as a cultural ritual tool which has a very important position. As stated by Kerri Na Basaria, an anthropologist who is also an observer of *Ulos*:

Ulos is not an inanimate object for Bataks, but lives . . . and what gives life in *Ulos* are women weavers, they give their own love and hope to the threads which they stranded.

The patriarchal Batak Toba people on the one hand have handed over the cultural inheritance of *Ulos* weaving to women, and on the other hand, these women have remained as socially, economically and culturally marginalized community groups.

The cultural identity of the Toba women weavers

Weaving cultural inheritance activities in Muara sub-district are still carried out at homes from generation to generation. There are two young people in Papande village who are interested in learning

to weave. The first is an 18-year-old girl named Emy Pakpahan, who is still attending a private university in Siborong-borong. Emy has learned to weave since elementary school by watching *Martonun* activities daily carried out by her mother and aunt at their home. With the guidance from her mother and aunt, Emy is now able to weave using fine yarns, which is more difficult than weaving with coarse yarns. Fine yarns produce woven fabrics that are softer and more expensive than woven fabrics made from coarse yarns. Emy said that she had learned to weave from elementary school age, starting from the process of *Mangani* to the process of weaving fine woven cloth.

Another weaver is a 15-year-old girl named Paloma Pakpahan. Boru Paloma has learned to weave since elementary school by watching and observing weaving activities carried out by her mother and aunt. Currently Paloma is able to do *Mangani* and *Martonun* activities, usually after returning from school at Muara State High School, North Tapanuli Regency. The next successor of the weaving skills is Marita Sitorus, from Hutaraja, Pangururan, Samosir. She is one of the young weavers who is still in junior high school in Hutaraja sub-district. Now Marita can do *Mangani*, which is stringing threads that will be woven into spools for an easy *Partonun* process.

The initial lesson she obtained from her mother was *Mangani*, which aims to introduce people who want to learn to weave using yarns – it is expected that their hands and fingers become accustomed to holding and handling the yarns.

In the Toba Lake area, it is very rare to find young people who are interested and want to learn to weave. They assume that the life of a weaver offers no prosperity due to reliance on orders from buyers or from *tauke*. This may very likely jeopardize the continuation and the sustainability of Toba traditional weaving. Women weavers who work every day at home doing weaving are not considered as career women whereas women who work as office employees, teachers, bank employees, and others are. Their position as guardians of Toba Batak cultural identity seems marginalized and their role is not recognized. This is one of the causes of them being marginalized and not recognized. Young women in the Toba region are less interested in learning traditional weaving, because work as traditional weavers is considered to be less recognized economically and socially.

The challenge in inheriting weaving is indeed felt by Erison Siregar as a man who is concerned with the sustainability of Toba weaving. Erison teaches his neighbours in the village of Papande the weaving process, and even to women in Muara District, who were his targets for preserving the weaving culture. However, only few local residents have a strong intention to preserve weaving culture, especially young people. There are only a few members of the young generation in Papande and Muara who want to learn to weave, because they sometimes feel ashamed to learn or to do the weaving. In addition, absence of a special place to learn the weaving process is another problem found in conserving this weaving heritage.

Erison as a male weaver in Sibadang Island wishes to own and build a studio where he can share his knowledge about and skill of weaving, to facilitate him to foster the community in learning weaving. However, up to the time this research was carried out in July and August 2018, Erison's dream to establish a weaving studio as a place to learn weaving for children and adolescents in Papande village has not come true. In addition to the lack of awareness of the local community for this weaving activity, Erison also faced difficulties in obtaining a property for building the studio. Erison could not even get permission from the North Tapanuli District Education Office to borrow a space behind the primary school building where he teaches. With the existence of a weaving studio, the transferring process of his weaving knowledge to the younger generation is deemed easier:

In the studio I can foster four to five people at the same time. If you go to their houses, their houses are far away. I even have to take a boat to the other villages to train the weavers who live there. (Erison, Interview, 2018)

The existence of a weaving studio is deemed to be able to prevent the potential of losing the weaving traditions, hence avoiding this tradition from stopping at its present generation. Weaving culture is precious; it is an asset of wealth and must be preserved. Aside from being one of the cultural heritages, weaving can also be a driver of the people's economy. Since the introduction of the use of fine yarns, weaving has become more economically valuable and can help boost the people's economy there. In addition to the existence of the studio, weaving activities are expected to become one of the cultural attractions that can attract visits from local and foreign tourists. It can also be a shared workshop for weavers in Papande village to make their works more widely known to the public.

The development and preservation of weaving culture, although still at its pioneering stage, continues to be carried out by the residents of the area, especially women weavers. The Toba traditional weaving is not only a cultural artefact, but also a tradition. The intention of these weavers in performing this traditional skill is not only to preserve culture, but also to look for a source of livelihood and an opportunity for economic improvement. As a result, their weaving product is currently based on orders from the "*tauke*" (agents) or from the Regional Arts and Crafts Council (*Dekranasda*) of North Tapanuli Regency. With these conditions, the income of the weavers has not yet been able to give maximum contribution to the economy of the family and the region. Weaving activities and processes carried out by women weavers in Toba area have not yet had a "selling power" among tourists who come to Lake Toba area. In addition, there is no concept of a tourism village in the area so they cannot yet make the potentials of natural and cultural resources in Toba Lake contribute maximum economic values to the society and the region. If well managed, the natural and cultural potentials of Toba Lake can be a source of community income in the region.

According to the interviewees, Toba traditional weaving as cultural heritage is very important. The women weavers continuously maintain the distinctive motifs so that they can be used as a signature of Toba *Ulos* weaving. The benefits are not only for weavers, but also for the government as they can enjoy the tax benefits from these weavers. Therefore, the government continues to foster these activities. Coaching activities for weaving are now ongoing, but they still need a lot of support from the government and local residents to encourage their will in preserving this culture. The weaving studio is considered the right place for young people to carry on the cultural heritage from their ancestors. A well-managed and sustainable weaving studio will be able to attract the interest of young people to learn to weave.

Erison's statement shows that the local government has not yet shown any serious effort to support the women weavers to maintain and develop their traditional weaving cultural heritage despite the fact that this traditional weaving, if managed properly and sustainably, can help the community's economy, especially in increasing the income of the weavers.

Conclusion

Women weavers in Toba region inherit the intangible traditional weaving heritage from generations to generations in their families, and there is neither a systemic nor sustainable inheritance system available. The threat to the sustainability of the traditional weaving lies, among others, in the lack of young people who are willing and able to accept this cultural heritage. In Toba region, Toba traditional weaving is done by women. They are not only weaving cloth, but also serve as guardians of the cultural heritage of the ancestors in the land of Toba. Women weavers give their love and hope in every thread they strand into a piece of weaving until *Ulos* cloth comes alive. However, their lives and positions in society are still marginalized. They are seen as a mere part of the weaving production chain, which places them in the working class. Women weavers' position as guardians of Toba Batak cultural identity is deemed marginalized and their role is not recognized. One of the causes is

that young women in the Toba region are less interested in learning traditional weaving, because work as traditional weavers is less recognized economically and socially.

The Batak Toba people should be able to give more appreciation to the role of women weavers as guardians of the traditional weaving heritage, which is the main identity of the Toba Batak people. With better appreciation, the younger generation of Batak can become more interested in inheriting traditional Toba weaving culture for generations. The government should be able to help women weavers so that their work can be valued more socially and economically within the Batak Toba community. This assistance can be in the form of the construction of traditional weaving organizations that can accommodate future generations to learn traditional weaving. Lastly, it can be suggested that the government provide workshops and training on weaving marketing online and provide Internet technology facilities to increase the selling value of the traditional weaving.

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