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Si Dua Jambar dan Paradoks Multikulturalisme: Pengakuan Historis dan Eksklusi Gender dalam Masyarakat Batak

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi konsep *Si Dua Jambar* melalui figur Namboru Nantinho dalam masyarakat Batak Toba serta transformasi maknanya dalam konteks modernitas. Secara historis, sosok Nantinho merupakan bukti pengakuan budaya Batak terhadap variasi gender yang melampaui dikotomi laki-laki dan perempuan. Namun, seiring perkembangan zaman, identitas tersebut mengalami stigmatisasi dan dianggap tabu. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis. Data dikumpulkan melalui studi pustaka dan wawancara mendalam dengan dua orang informan untuk memahami proses pergeseran pemaknaan tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya paradoks multikulturalisme: masyarakat tetap menghormati tokoh leluhur secara ritual, namun menolak realitas identitas gender yang diwakilinya dalam kehidupan sosial. Pergeseran dari inklusivitas menuju eksklusi ini dipengaruhi oleh dominasi doktrin agama, penguatan norma sosial heteronormatif, dan arus globalisasi yang menyempitkan pandangan terhadap keberagaman gender. Fenomena ini mengindikasikan adanya amnesia historis terhadap nilai-nilai inklusif yang sebenarnya telah mengakar dalam struktur budaya Batak. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pengakuan historis terhadap figur seperti Nantinho belum menjamin keadilan gender di masa kini, melainkan justru melahirkan eksklusi yang kontradiktif dalam bingkai multikulturalisme.

Kata kunci: *Batak, Gender, Masyarakat, Nantinho, Si Dua Jambar.*

Si Dua Jambar and the Paradox of Multiculturalism: Historical Recognition and Gender Exclusion in Batak Society

Abstract

This study explores the concept of si dua jambar through the figure of Namboru Nantinho in Batak Toba society and the transformation of its meaning in the context of modernity. Historically, the figure of Nantinho represents the Batak culture's recognition of gender variations that transcend the male-female dichotomy. However, over time, this identity has become stigmatized and considered taboo. This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through literature review and in-depth interviews with two informants to understand the process of this shift in meaning. The findings reveal a paradox of multiculturalism: while the community continues to ritually honor the ancestral figure, it rejects the reality of the gender identity it represents in social life. This shift from inclusivity toward exclusion is influenced by the dominance of religious doctrine,

the reinforcement of heteronormative social norms, and the currents of globalization that narrow perspectives on gender diversity. This phenomenon indicates a historical amnesia regarding the inclusive values that have actually been deeply rooted in Batak cultural structures. This study concludes that historical recognition of figures such as Nantinho does not guarantee gender justice in the present day; rather, it gives rise to contradictory exclusion within the framework of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Batak, Gender, Society, Nantinho, Si Dua Jambar.

INTRODUCTION

The Batak Toba people living on Samosir Island live in a rich traditional environment, where legendary tales form the foundation of their social identity and history. One of the most revered traditional narratives is the legend of *Namboru Nantinho*, cited from the book *Si Dua Jambar: The Batak Toba People's Understanding of Gender & Sexuality* (Purba & Lumbantobing, 2024). *Namboru Nantinho* is the daughter of Guru Tatea Bulan; she is regarded not merely as a folk tale but also as a part of the actual historical reality of the past. However, behind this reverence lies a complex reality regarding Nantinho's identity as a *si dua jambar*, someone possessing two genders or a gender identity that transcends the binary boundaries between male and female.

The story of *Namboru Nantinho* reflects a paradox within multiculturalism in indigenous communities. On one hand, there is a deep historical recognition in which Nantinho is regarded as one of the most respected figures by the indigenous community. On the other hand, however, her identity as a *si dua jambar* often leads to her exclusion and is viewed as a "*shame*" or a taboo subject that is not permitted to be discussed openly. The community has chosen to conceal these elements of sexuality to protect the honor of their ancestors, resulting in a lack of space for narratives of gender diversity within Batak culture.

Historically, the story of the two siblings in this legend is filled with experiences of violence and oppression by their siblings, leading to Nantinho's tragic choice to end her life in Lake Toba to avoid a forced marriage that she feared would tarnish her identity. This event reflects a conflict between traditional values that respect the diversity of God's will and a social reality that still grapples with stigma toward identities that do not conform to the binary norm.

This article aims to analyze how the narrative of *Namboru Nantinho*, known as *si dua jambar*, is constructed, interpreted, and understood within the contemporary Batak Toba community. By examining the shift in understanding from a historical perspective toward contemporary gender issues, this study seeks to uncover how the paradox of multiculturalism operates in acknowledging an ancestral figure while excluding the gender reality associated with her. Through this approach, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of human dignity and appreciation for diversity within the social and cultural structure of the Batak Toba community will be achieved.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the paradox of multiculturalism as it relates to the *si dua jambar* tradition in Batak society. The primary method used is a literature review, in which the researcher collects, studies, and analyzes various academic references such as classical texts on customary law, relevant scholarly books, and journals as the main foundation for understanding issues of historical recognition and gender exclusion. This literature-based information serves as an essential reference for constructing an in-depth conceptual analysis of the research theme.

To strengthen the analysis derived from these references, the researcher also conducted field data collection through in-depth interviews with two selected informants. These informants were chosen for their specific knowledge of Batak social structures and gender dynamics, to provide practical insights that complement the theoretical findings. The

data collection process was conducted systematically: beginning with the selection of high-quality literature, followed by informant interviews, and concluding with a critical synthesis of all sources. Through this descriptive-analytical approach, the researcher interpreted the collected data to reveal how *si dua jambar* function as both cultural heritage and mechanisms of gender exclusion within the framework of multiculturalism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Namboru Nantinho from the Perspective of Batak Society

Namboru Nantinho is known as *si dua jambar*. In the Batak language, “*jambar*” means part, but when applied to the human body, it refers to the internal parts of the body. Thus, the term *si dua jambar* refers to two parts or two sex characteristics. During interviews with respondents, some stated that *Nantinho* is a transwoman or a *waria*. This is because they possess the appearance and fulfill the roles typically associated with women within gender roles. *The book Si Dua Jambar: Pemahaman Masyarakat Batak Toba tentang Gender & Seksualitas* (Purba & Lumbantobing, 2024) describes that *Nantinho* dresses and presents themselves in accordance with societal expectations of women, for example: with long hair, gracefully, and wearing *abis datas* (traditional Batak women’s attire).

Namboru Nantinho is regarded as a sacred and holy figure; in various incidents on Lake Toba, according to my respondents, these events are connected to *Nantinho*. For example, the 2018 KM Sinarbangun incident was closely linked to *Nantinho*. At that time, many people prayed to *Nantinho* to save the victims of the shipwreck. In some stories, *Nantinho* is also portrayed as a kind person; through her weaving of *ulos* (hand-woven textile), she gives them to those in need to honor their bodies. *Ulos* is not just a woven cloth, but a symbol of warmth. The Batak people view three sources of warmth: the sun, fire, and *ulos* (Sitohang et al., 2023). *Pusuk Buhit* is a place where people pray to their ancestors, especially *Namboru Nantinho*, for prosperity, safety, and whatever else they may need. It is important to note that the Batak people have long been aware of the diversity of expressions and genders that transcend the binary (male and female). The Batak people recognize that identities regarding the self and the body are diverse. However, in modern times, this diversity seems to have been pushed far into the background, due to factors ranging from culture and colonialism to religion.

Shift in Acceptance: From Recognition to Exclusion

Historically, the concept of *si dua jambar* refers to a form of social and spiritual recognition of gender diversity within Toba Batak society, personified by the figure of *Namboru Nantinho*. Literally, *si dua jambar* means “one who possesses two parts” or “two rights.” In the genealogy of the Batak kings, this term was applied to *Nantinho* because she was born with physical characteristics that transcended the male-female binary, such as intersex or transgender traits. In the past, Batak Toba society possessed a highly fluid and inclusive collective memory in perceiving gender diversity through the sacred figure of *Namboru Nantinho* as *si dua jambar*, where her identity as a person with two genders was not viewed as a deviation, but rather as a manifestation of spiritual power and strength widely revered for her role as the protector and guardian of Lake Toba, transcending the boundaries of traditional patriarchy. However, based on interview findings, the current situation indicates a shift toward social exclusion. Modern society and systems “punish” *si dua jambar* individuals by stripping them of their social, cultural, and administrative rights, simply because they can no longer be categorized within the binary gender standards demanded by this so-called “progressive” era.

Many respondents stated that individuals who are perceived as different often face stigma or social rejection. For example, one respondent stated: “*Molo adong di jaman saonari si dua jambar, ditolak do i ala dianggap mangalanggar adat dohot agama.*” (If the concept of “*si dua jambar*” were to emerge in the context of modern society, it would likely face rejection because it is seen as violating traditional norms and religious teachings).

However, with the influx of colonialism and religious doctrines that introduced rigid binary norms, what was once a sacred recognition gradually shifted into exclusion and stigma, such that discussing the gender diversity of Namboru Nantinho is now considered taboo, triggering fear or guilt (*satabi*), and such gender-diverse identities are deliberately hidden or erased from the dominant societal narrative to maintain alignment with modern patriarchal structures that reject the existence of identities beyond male and female. This indicates that traditional societies have a certain capacity to understand differences.

Si Dua Jambar: From Shame to a Shift in Values

Since ancient times, the Batak people have acknowledged the existence of *Namboru Nantinho*, a *si dua jambar* individual as an integral part of society, respected, and regarded as sacred. However, through the interviews I conducted, the community views *Namboru Nantinho*, who possesses two biological sexes like intersex, as a source of shame. This is in stark contrast to historical reality, where they were a symbol of purity and were respected; yet in modern times, they are considered a disgrace, and if a two-gendered person appears in modern society, the expectation is that they undergo surgery to become a single binary gender. How has this become controversial and seemingly dismissive of the existence of two-gendered people? There are several underlying factors, namely: religion and evolving social norms.

- Religion

Most of the population in the Batak region and those interviewed are Christian; consequently, the results of the analysis are largely related to the religious values they adhere to rather than cultural values. "The Bible provides a foundational framework for gender rooted in God's creation of humanity as male and female." (Sura et al., 2025, p. 4). Christianity itself is rooted in and teaches only the existence of a binary gender system—that is, female and male. Consequently, the emergence of gender diversity and non-binary identities creates a contradiction within modern Batak society, particularly among Christians, as these do not align with the teachings they adhere to. This has led to a desire for individuals with non-binary genders, such as intersex people and those with two genitals, to undergo surgery and become part of the binary gender system.

- Social Norms

Individuals in society behave and act in accordance with norms established by society itself. Social norms also evolve over time in response to changing societal needs. "Foreign cultures can influence local cultures through various channels, such as the mass media, international tourism, commercial institutions, and the international cultural industry, and can have both positive and negative impacts on local cultures." (Hasan et al., 2024). Foreign cultures entering Indonesia have also played a significant role in shaping the national identity of Indonesia, from the colonial era to the current era of globalization. This has also impacted local cultural identities, which are increasingly eroded as a result of globalization. The Batak people's interpretation of *si dua jambar* as a disgrace is a construct of evolving norms, while the suggestion to undergo surgery is an effect of globalization that accelerates access to knowledge from modern society. In fact, since ancient times, the Batak people have acknowledged and respected the *Nantinho* identity; however, this shift in values has led to the marginalization of identities that do not meet the standards of the majority society.

The Paradox of Multiculturalism in Batak Society

If we trace a common thread through the historical shifts of *Namboru Nantinho*, a sharp paradox emerges in the current multicultural landscape of Toba Batak society. On one hand, the epistemological roots of Batak culture inherently recognize a sacred space for gender diversity through the concept of *si dua jambar*. This aligns with a statement from one

informant who noted that “such practices are unacceptable because they contradict custom and religious teachings.” Furthermore, the informant emphasized that the progression of time demands selectivity in determining acceptable practices, so this rejection is understood as an effort to preserve values deemed correct. The paradox lies in the fact that modern society today rejects and stigmatizes an entity that was born and once revered from the very womb of their own culture. In sociological discourse, true multiculturalism is not merely about tolerance for coexistence among different ethnicities or religions, but rather a practice of inclusivity that actively provides a safe space and equality of rights for all marginalized identities, including gender minorities.

While the Batak people today claim to uphold communal and kinship values (*daliha na tolu*), their failure to embrace individuals outside the binary spectrum indicates. In sociological discourse, true multiculturalism is not merely about tolerance and coexistence among different ethnic groups or religions, but rather a practice of inclusivity that actively provides a safe space and equal rights for all marginalized identities, including gender minorities. While the Batak community today claims to uphold communal and kinship values (*daliha na tolu*), their failure to embrace individuals outside the binary spectrum indicates that such multiculturalism remains selective and artificial. Inclusivity applies only to those who conform to the colonial legacy of binary gender constructs and the doctrines of the majority religion, while those who inherit the condition of *si dua jambar* are excluded from the social sphere.

As the main conclusion of this phenomenon, it can be asserted that the contemporary Batak community’s rejection of gender diversity is not merely a form of cultural preservation but rather reflects “historical amnesia.” Historical amnesia reflects a tendency among communities to begin forgetting significant events from the past. This condition is often exacerbated by the overwhelming flow of information in the digital age and high dependence on social media. Consequently, historical understanding or literacy may decline, and historical narratives become susceptible to distortion (Wineburg 2001; Jenkins et al. 2016, in Wijayanti et al. 2025), influenced by the dominance of colonial religious ideologies and evolving social norms. Therefore, reviving the values of multiculturalism in Batak land does not require the imposition of progressive ideologies from outside. The Batak people simply need to revive their collective memory of the existence of *Namboru Nantinho*. The rediscovery of the meaning of the two symbols is the key to resolving this cultural confusion. Ultimately, this reminds us that the true essence of the traditional Batak people lies in their open-mindedness toward all forms of diversity, exactly as the wisdom passed down by their ancestors of old.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the existence of *Namboru Nantinho* as a symbol of a second gender role serves as evidence that the Batak Toba community has long recognized and acknowledged gender diversity. From a historical perspective, *Nantinho* is not only regarded as a significant figure in the field of research but is also revered as a sacred figure and plays a vital role in the spiritual life of the community. However, over time, there has been a significant shift in how this is perceived. The identity of the “two-gendered” figure, which was once well-accepted and respected, is now increasingly viewed as taboo and even a source of shame. This shift is inseparable from the influence of religious teachings, the evolution of social norms, and the impact of globalization, which has further reinforced a binary understanding of gender.

This situation has created a paradox within Batak Toba society, where there is respect for ancestral figures like *Nantinho*, yet at the same time, there is a rejection of the identity represented by such figures. This phenomenon indicates that society tends to overlook the inclusive values that have been part of their own culture. Therefore, it is important for the community to reflect once again on its cultural values, particularly in

understanding the diversity of identities, so that the meaning of multiculturalism does not remain merely an abstract concept but is truly realized in daily social life.

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