

**Identity Negotiation in Mixed Marriage Couples Between the Batak and
Other Ethnic Without Having to Adopt a Batak's 'Marga' (Clan)**

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, there are a variety of ethnic groups, and each one has their own traditions and cultures that they uphold. But in a rapidly increasing rate of globalization and in a densely populated country, cross-cultural marriages are bound to happen and the clash between the two cultural identities are inevitable such as the clash between the Batak tribe's ethnic's customs and other traditions in marriage. This is the reason why identity negotiations are crucial for managing the difference in traditions when a Batak person marries outside of their ethnicity to avoid conflict. This paper investigates how Batak people and other ethnicities view their 'Marga' (clan) in marriage and how negotiations are conducted for those who opt to not use a 'Marga' (clan). The research for this paper is conducted via the phenomenological approach that is conducted on mixed marriage couples where one is of Batak descent and another is of a different ethnicity living outside North Sumatra, the data collected are qualitative through in-depth interviews. The key findings and conclusion of this paper were that the Batak identity within individuals had decreased and began to fade, especially for those that lives outside of North Sumatra and hence do not uphold their traditions anymore. Because of this, an identity negotiation has to be conducted to try and find a compromise that is fair for both parties in a mixed marriage and this process will proceed smoothly if good communication and a supporting relationship pattern are present. The findings within this paper can be used a guide for those who wish to conduct a cross-cultural marriage without giving a 'Marga' (clan).

Key Words: cross-cultural, identity negotiations, traditions

INTRODUCTION

Background

Indonesia is a country that consists of various ethnic groups with different traditions. Based on the data from the last population census conducted by the Central Statistics Agency or BPS of the Republic of Indonesia, there are 1,128 ethnicities in Indonesia. (<https://www.bps.go.id>). These ethnic groups include Javanese, Batak, Sunda, Madura, Bugis, Nias, Betawi, Malay, Dayak, and many more. One of the largest ethnicities in Indonesia is the Batak—each Indonesian ethnic group has its own distinctive culture. This culture includes traditions, arts, languages, dress codes, traditional houses, and traditional marriage customs. (Wibisono, 2012:9-10)

Given the cultural diversity of the Indonesian people and the cultural mixing that occurs. There have been many cross-cultural marriages, including marriages between the Batak and other ethnicities, due to the Batak people who migrate to other cities. Cross-cultural marriage becomes inevitable because of the people's diverse life and dynamics. One of the cross-cultural marriages that are easy to find is between someone from the Batak ethnic group and their marriages with other ethnicities.

Cross-cultural marriages between the Batak and other ethnicities are an interesting phenomenon that is different from the marriages of other ethnic groups, such as the Javanese—which are more fluid in determining potential partners from other ethnic groups; however, with the Batak, there are more complicated traditions. This is also reinforced by research conducted by Yudista Meli Henani

(2016). The research entitled "Persepsi Masyarakat Batak Toba Tentang Pernikahan Mangain (Mengangkat) Marga Dalam Pernikahan Adat Batak Di Mesuji." suggests that, in the implementation of marriage based on Batak traditions, there are many conditions and rules that must be fulfilled. For the Batak people, traditions are of great importance and have become their outlook in life and are their goal in everyday life that have been passed down for generations. The Batak ethnic group tends to require marriage with members of the Batak ethnic group as well; they are directed to marry the *Pariban*. *Pariban* is the mother's brother's daughter, the older brother or younger brother, or the aunt's son, from the father's sister.

Pariban is closely related to the ownership of the Marga (clan) In the context of marriage, the Marga (clan) becomes essential. The Batak ethnic uses *Marga* (clan) to show that they are of one heritage originating from one ancestor. So, the Batak people conceptualize the *Marga* (clan) as heredity. According to the Batak people, the kinship is known as *Dalihan Na Tolu*. *Dalihan Na Tolu* is the closest kinship. This kinship term is called *Sombah Marhula-hula* (Respect to the wife's family), *Manat Mardongan Tubu* (Be careful to your fellow mates with the same clan mates), and *Elek Marboru* (Be gentle to your daughter or women). The Batak people keep this motto firmly, even more so in ceremonial traditions. Therefore, all Batak people must understand and know their rules, *partuturannya* (the

kinship system in social interactions in the Batak ethnic group. Hence, *partuturan* is the basis of life for how Batak people should act and what they should do and say according to the traditions and how they will implement them.

In everyday life, the *Marga* (clan) determines a person's position in an orderly society. *Marga* (clan) determines their social standing and the social standing of others in the relationship network. *Marga* (clan) is the basis for determining the *partuturan*, brotherly relations, between people who had the same *Marga* (clan) and with people with a different *Marga* (clan) (Simanjuntak, 2006: 80). With the existence of the *Marga* (clan), then the forbidden marriages can be avoided, like marrying someone of the same bloodline from the same ancestor. Moreover, the *Marga* (clan) is considered an essential cultural identity for the Batak people. The principle of *Marga* (clan) relations makes social interactions among Batak people more immediately intimate and more familial even though they have never been acquainted beforehand

Problem Statement

The traditions of the Batak ethnicity can not be separated from marriage. For the Batak ethnicity, marriage is a sacred thing. Because marriage is sacred, marriage must be done as tradition dictates. But in its development, when there have been many cross-cultural marriages, Batak ethnic marry with other ethnicities due to the Batak people's activities that tend to migrate to other cities. Marriage is a form of culture that is bound by traditions. Every ethnicity for sure

has its wedding customs and traditions. In the Batak ethnicity, giving the *Marga* (clan) is very important, especially in marriage.

Over time, the Batak people experienced changes. This change is influenced by science, technology, communication, foreign politics, economics, and culture. The Batak people cannot avoid it because they interact with various cultures, nations, and the progress of the times. At this time, many Batak people don't care and don't think of culture as necessary, just like the Batak *Marga* (clan). Most of them believe that the *Marga* (clan) is not something important; they consider the *Marga* (clan) to have no function in each other's lives—they think that the *Marga* (clan) is a formality and only a symbol.

The change in how the Batak people views giving *Marga* (clan) in marriages are fascinating to study. The researcher wants to know how the identity negotiation of the mixed marriage couples between the Batak and other ethnicities that marry without giving a Batak's *Marga* (clan) who live outside North Sumatra.

Research Objective

This research describes how mixed marriage couples between the Batak and other ethnicities interpret the Batak's *Marga* (clan) itself in their marriage and how the identity negotiations are carried out with couples who are married without giving a Batak's *Marga* (clan).

Research Significance

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to communication science research in studying theories regarding the process of

intercultural negotiations, especially in cultural communication.

Practically, this research can be an additional reference to understanding the knowledge about the meaning of giving a Marga (clan) at Batak and another ethnicity on cross-cultural marriage and how identity negotiations in marriages are without giving a Marga (clan). Socially, this research is expected to benefit the community and readers to understand more about identity negotiation, specifically for cross-cultural marriage partners.

Theoretical Framework

This research uses an interpretive paradigm because the researcher wanted to study humans' experiences relating to each other. Turnomo Rahardjo (2005:41) stated that the interpretive paradigm is theoretical thoughts (communication) that seek to find the meaning of an action and text. The emphasized aspect in the interpretive paradigm is subjectivism, or the excellence of an individual's experience. Interpretive theories describe the active thought process to recall an individual's experience or any event that had previously happened to them (Littlejohn, 2017:29).

Communication in the tradition of phenomenological thinking is understood as an exchange of personal experiences through dialogue activities. Phenomenology looks much more at the individual as the critical component in the communication process; in phenomenology—interpretation forms what is fundamental for the person. (Craig in Littlejohn, 2017:40-41).

The phenomenological approach aims to understand the phenomena regarding what is understood by the research's subject. Such as perception, motivation, behavior, action, and other things holistically, and by describing in the form of words and language in a particular natural context by utilizing natural methods (Moleong, 2018:6).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Type

Research with a phenomenological approach is defined as subjective experience or a study of consciousness from the principal perspective of a person. This approach is often used as a presumption to refer to subjective experiences from various kinds and types of subjects.

Research Subjects

The subjects of this research are couples living outside North Sumatra who has engaged in a mixed marriage. One is from the Batak ethnic group, and the other is from a different ethnic group that married without giving a Marga (clan).

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique used in this research is the in-depth interview. In-depth interviews were conducted with several mixed marriage couples from Batak and other ethnicities who live outside North Sumatra and married without giving a Marga (clan).

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this

research is a data analysis technique referred to as the Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 2013:100).

THE TEXTURAL AND STRUCTURAL MEANING IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN MIXED MARRIAGE COUPLES BETWEEN THE BATAK AND OTHER ETHNIC WITHOUT HAVING TO ADOPT A BATAK'S 'MARGA' CLAN

Batak Identity Negotiation of the Informant

An identity is a self-concept that reflects who we are. Identity forms an image regarding the culture that an individual has. Through identity, individuals can be identified by other individuals based on the image that reflects said individual, some of which are regarding culture, ethnicities, and socialization that has been done (Nakayama, 2018: 170-171). Through identity that gives information about who we are as an individual, that identity will determine values or habits attached to an individual.

The Batak identity they had started to fade, and being left behind by the younger generation of the Batak ethnic that lives outside of North Sumatra. The effects of globalization and individualism are reasons for the low appreciation of said culture. From the three informants, they felt that their care for cultivating the Batak culture was not instilled in them, and their interest in learning it was scant. The informants are more interested in studying foreign culture that has been exposed to them. One of the factors is the lack of information

regarding the richness of the Batak culture.

The Acceptance of Marriage Without a Marga (clan)

The acceptance of marriage without a Marga (clan) is not easy to achieve. The culture is rooted deeply within the Batak ethnic, and it is mandatory for them. It is seen as taboo not to follow these traditions as it can be considered an insult to the ancestors of the Batak ethnicity who had created and upheld these traditions for generations. There is quite an enormous stigma and negative perception of people who do not follow these traditions so a successful negotiation is hard to achieve and requires a lot of aspects playing in their favor. Before understanding how they came to an agreement, we must first understand the basics of human and intercultural communication, as the desired outcome can only be achieved through mutual understanding in a well-conducted negotiation process that requires all parties involved to have an open mindset and a supportive attitude.

The acceptance of marriage without a Marga (clan) in a mix marriage of the Batak ethnic and another ethnic, this type of marriage within the Batak ethnic has a substantial stigma attached to it and it is seen as taboo and people can even be shunned for conducting this type of marriage. Hence why it is crucial that an identity negotiation is held to talk about all the different cultures and traditions that are in play for both parties.

In conducting the negotiation, a direct approach is taken where the two parties engage in a face to face verbal communication. In this negotiation, it is imperative that both parties are open minded in entering the negotiation to

ensure a more smooth discussion. A supportive attitude is also needed from the families of the two parties to show support on what is truly important which in this case is the marriage itself instead of the traditions. In the negotiation both parties must make clear their own individual culture identities in an attempt to try and make each other understand the importance of each of their own culture and traditions, when this has been established, it will ensure a more smooth swapping of ideas as they now have a better understanding of each of their cultural backgrounds. This negotiation is a form of intercultural interaction in which they must decide if culture is more important than the happiness of their children.

Batak Identity Negotiation of the Informant regarding Marriage Without a Marga (clan)

Generally Batak people are guided to marry with another Batak person so as to not have a difference in culture. But, if there is a case where Batak people decide to marry someone from outside their ethnic, then that person should follow the process of giving a Marga (clan). In a mix marriage of a Batak person and another ethnic, the process of giving a Marga (clan) is a traditional process that is mandatory to follow so that the husband or wife that originates from another ethnic can have a position in Batak tradition (Nainggolan, 2012:60)

Aside from that, communicating is the only way of conducting an identity negotiation, this is due to identity negotiation belonging to an activity of communication. We can infer from the results that all informants and their

identities that have formed originating from the activities of communication that they had conducted. The limited information that was shared with them made their inner identity start to fade. The outcome of the research pointed out that all the informants had experienced a more comfortable identity when within cultural environments that feel familiar to them, such as communicating with people of the same origin. Apart from that, the outcome of the research revealed that the smooth process of identity negotiation can only happen if there is a circular communication pattern, and a supportive pattern within their relations that gives positive responses.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

The Batak identity inside the individuals of the Batak ethnic has started to fade, especially for those who live outside of North Sumatra. This is because Batak people that live outside of North Sumatra no longer firmly uphold the Batak culture. The Batak identity fades because of the lack of information exposure regarding the Batak culture. Batak people that live outside of North Sumatra try to conduct an identity negotiation by opposing the identity that is present and trying to redefine the current identity.

Recommendations

1. This research regarding the experience of marriage without giving a Marga

(clan) for mixed couples that live outside of North Sumatra and have a different cultural background uses the interpretive paradigm and phenomenology that explains how individuals actively remember and understand the experience that they had. The following research looks at how identity negotiation is done by the people still living in the North Sumatra area, where the exposure to Batak culture is very thick in the Sumatra region.

2. Couples that want to get married without giving a Marga (clan), especially between the Batak and a different ethnicity group, can conduct a direct negotiation, so there is a mutual agreement. Negotiations can go smoothly if a relationship within a family is harmonic and close because a bond in a family can affect the openness of someone in a family.
3. This research aims to open the people's outlook to be more open and accepting to intercultural marriages.

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