

# REPRESENTATIONS OF BEAUTY, LOVE, HOMESICK AND MEMORY TO HOMELAND EXPRESSED IN THE LYRICS OF BATAK TOBA SONGS

Pininta Veronika Silalahi  
Faculty of Cultural Science  
Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya

## ABSTRAK

Bahasa adalah bagian dari budaya sebagai sarana berkomunikasi bagi anggota komunitasnya. Setiap budaya memiliki caranya sendiri untuk mengekspresikan cinta menggunakan kata-kata, frasa atau ucapan tertentu sebagai sistem tanda. Leksikon bahasa Batak Toba bersifat spesifik, terkait dengan kebiasaan, tradisi, dan cara hidup. Apa yang mereka pikirkan dan alami dalam kehidupan sehari-hari diungkapkan melalui bahasa, seperti kebiasaan dan tradisi yang biasanya mereka lakukan yang tercermin melalui lirik lagu dalam bahasa asli Toba Batak yang menyampaikan beberapa pesan kepada para pendengar. Artikel ini membahas ungkapan representasi kebanggaan, cinta, rindu rumah, dan memori ke tanah air dalam sepuluh lagu tentang tempat-tempat yang menunjukkan tanah air di wilayah Batak Toba: Pulo Samosir, Danau Toba, Rura Silindung, Aek Sibulbulon, dll. Representasi tersebut ditemukan dalam lirik tradisional Lagu-lagu Batak. Semiotika Peirce yang dikembangkan oleh Fiske (1990) digunakan dalam penulisan artikel ini. Temuan signifikan dalam artikel ini adalah tempat-tempat yang disebut sebagai Bona-pasogit atau tanah air didasarkan pada isi yang disajikan dalam lirik dan informasi mengenai tempat-tempat yang disebutkan dalam setiap lagu.

**Keywords:** language, Toba Batak, song, lyrics, semiotics

## ABSTRACT

Language is a part of a culture as a means of communication for community members. Every culture has its way of expressing love using specific words, phrases, or utterances as a system of signs. The lexicon of Toba Batak language is specific, related to its customs, tradition, and ways of life. Through language, they express what they think and experience in daily life, like the customs and tradition they usually conduct which are reflected through the song lyrics in native Toba Batak language which delivers some messages to the listeners. This study talks about the expressions of pride, love, homesick, and memory to a homeland in ten songs about some places denoting homeland in Batak Toba regions: *Pulo Samosir, Lake Toba, Rura Silindung, Aek Sibulbulon*, etc. found in the lyrics of traditional Batak songs by applying the semiotics of Peirce developed by Fiske (1990). This article serves the significant finding of the places of Bona-pasogit or homeland is based on the content presented in the lyrics and information concerning the places mentioned in every song.

**Keywords:** language, Toba Batak, song, lyrics, semiotics

## A. INTRODUCTION

Language is known as a means of communication that is used for communicating with each other. People can also express their feelings through language. There are various ways to express the feelings through language such as by writing novels, poetry, or by composing a song. As a means of expressing feelings, a song seems important to be studied as it is a unique way of expressing one's feelings and offers a diverse combination of vocabulary and a specific collection of words that has its meaning. The vocabulary of the song is built in such a particular way that it is distinct from the ordinary language. It's interesting, and it's typically written in beautiful, lovely words to draw listeners and hold their attention. They are not just the lyrics and the melody, but also all the contexts in which the song is composed, felt, produced and consumed and the devices that generated it and preserved it for us to enjoy. To mention some of the devices in Batak Toba is *hasapi*, *taganing*, *garantung*, *tulila* (blown fluit), and *ogung*.

Besides, the song is one of the best types of entertainment to be enjoyed, it is full of rhythmic music which might bring enjoyment to the listeners. A song blends words and melody in a particular time and rhythmic form to convey emotions, ideas, desires, expectations or actions and ideally, the words sing and bring a storyline to the feeling of the melody, and the melody reflects and reinforces the meaning and sound of the words (Cox, 2005, p. 12). Most human beings beyond adolescence have undergone vivid memories evoked by the encounter with the song. The song is also highly sensitive to the mind over time. Song details and many associations encoded with it are also especially resistant in the mind of the people.

The way of expressing feelings through songs must be different from culture to

culture. The songs may lead to ethnic and cultural identity. The songs may represent the mood and various problems experienced by the ethnic society or the universe. In Batak society, there is a song entitled '*Hutongos Surathu tu ho*' (*I sent you my letter*) which tells that at the time this song created, people can communicate by sending letters, because there was no cellular phone yet at that time. This is to say that song lyric links to a particular event or memory.

The listeners may have both pleasures through the song melody and information through the song lyrics. This shows that both lyric and melody are important in the performance of the song. Music typically has the first effect as it affects emotions without first having to go through the critical brain area (Cox, 2005, p. 14).

While listening, one may interpret the words in the songs and go to their deepest meaning. According to Eckstein, the meaning of lyrics includes the verbal The signifying process is done by finding the interaction between representamen, interpretant, and object of each of the type of signs. and cultural values (Eckstein, 2005: p. 38). Contexts enable listeners to understand its meaning and its connection with the society and culture from which it originated.

Batak songs can be classified into eight forms of expressing (Ben Pasaribu (1986, 27-28) in Hugo and Ilona (2016): Mandideng (lullaby), Sipaingot (advice), Pargaulan (youngster friendship), Tumba (Tumba dance), Sibaran (Misery), Pasua-puasan (Blessing), Hata (like rhymes in a poem), and Andung (grief).

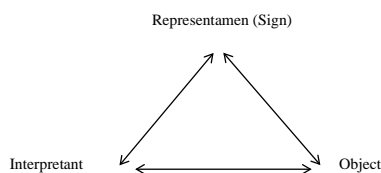
Batak Toba is the most well-known tribe outside North Sumatra. When someone says 'Batak', many people refer it to Batak Toba. This tribe inhabits around Lake Toba, Samosir Island, Toba Plateau, Silindung, the area between Barus and Sibolga, and also the mountainous regions,

Pahae and Habinsaran. The homeland mentioned in the songs being studied include Rura Silindung, Pulo Samosir (Samosir Island), Tao Toba (Lake Toba), Luat Pahae, Aek Sibundong (Dolok Sanggul), Aek Sarulla (Pahae Jaya), Aek Sigeaon (Sipoholon), Aek Sibulbulon (Parlilitan, Dolok Sanggul, Humbang Hasundutan), and two other titles without referring to a certain region, but just mention 'bonapasogit' and 'bona ni pinasa' which means homeland. All the songs to be studied are all in North Tapanuli.

**B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is descriptive qualitative. Peirce's conception of signs developed by Fiske (1990) is used as the theoretical framework. Fiske (1990, p. 162) claims that in semiotic analysis, "meanings are always in the process...are never fixed and final. The signifying process is done by finding the interaction between representamen, interpretant, and object of each of the types of signs. The representamens are the lyrics of the songs, the objects are the names of places which include: two rivers, a well, island, lake, regions, and the word homeland. The interpretant is built through the triadic relationship between object, representamen, and interpretant.

Triadic Relation



There are two questions to answer in this study: How are the song lyrics performed and what do they signify? The interpretation of these songs is based on the

situation when the songs were created, not the situation at present.

Dealt with the term 'representation', the writer refers to Stuart Hall (1997) asserting that the representation refers to a part of the process where meaning is produced and exchanged by fellow community members.

**B. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This paper is to reveal the signification of the Batak song lyrics dealt with *bonapasogit* (homeland). Many Batak people go to other far regions from the homeland for many reasons. Some go for the sake of higher education, for finding jobs, for having a better life at the other places. Many people go to Jakarta thinking that it provides many opportunities to work either formal or informal or even the non-formal one. The chance to get a job in Java is better than it is in North Tapanuli. Thus, many people struggle to go far away to change their destiny. The analysis of the lyrics is focused on beauty, love, homesickness, and memory to the homeland. The object of the representamens is homeland which includes:

The ten songs are analyzed and categorized into expressions of beauty, love, memory, and homesickness toward the homeland. The beauty can be seen in the following representation of Aek Sibundong

*O aek sibundong, aek sibundong da nauli*  
 (O river Sibundong, beautiful river)  
*Parharsap mi mancai uli, tudos hapas Palembang i*  
 (Your talk is so nice and soft like Palembang cotton)  
*Madabu tu sampuran i* (flow to the water fall)  
*O aek sibundong, aek sibundong da nauli.*  
 (river Sibundong, beautiful)

The representamens of Aek Sibundong are represented by using personification that it talks nicely and Simile, like Palembang cotton, which means that it is clear and beautiful. Palembang is a capital town of South Sumatra province.

The interpretant is that the river originates from Dolok Sanggul. This small river flows through some villages, moves from high hills, forms waterfall until at last, it ends at the Indonesian Ocean. The whirlpool is calm, People are proud of this beautiful river. Many people along its flow make use of the water river to support their daily need to support life, for irrigation, washing, and bathing. People around signify “*Sibundong*” like cool water.

The beauty is also seen in the lyrics of ‘*Aek Sarulla*’:

*Aek Sarulla tudia ho laho Tung gang-jang ma antong dalammi* (River Sarulla, where you go, how long your journey is)

*Sai paboa majolo tu ahu Niidam di tonga dalam i* (Let me know what you have seen along the way). *Boan barita sian nadao Patuduhon hinaulimi* (bring messages from far away and show your beauty) *Tung paboa husiphon tu ahu Ni idam di tonga dalam i* (please whisper to me what you have seen on the way).

The representamens are in the forms of personification by asking where it goes, how far it goes and ask the river to tell its journey, bring messages of its beauty. The following utterances express the beauty of Aek Sarulla:

*Aek Sarulla na mansai tio Tung godang mangka lu ngumi ho* (man people miss you)

*Manang ise na marnida ho So adong na mandok magopo* (whoever sees you, no one says bad thing about you) *Ai inumon pe ho tung ta bo Paradion pe ho tung ta bo* (your water is nice to drink and a place to have a rest) *Nang pe laho au tu luat na doa Tung so lupa do ahu sian ho* (even if I am far away, I can never forget you)

The personification about its beauty is also represented as follows:

*Angka tor dohot rura nadua Nunga sun dipangkulingi ho* (you have talked to

many valleys). *Ro ma ho sai husiphon tu ahu Aek Sarulla tu dia ho laho* (come and whisper where you have gone)

The interpretant is that the beauty of ‘*Aek Sarulla*’ is unforgettable. This river originates from Pahae Jaya, North Tapanuli. People can only ask the river to tell about itself. This is a beautiful river with clear and cool water. It impresses people of Pahae Jaya, North Sumatra.

The next song is ‘*Rura Silindung*’ (Silindung Valley). This is a beautiful place based on the following utterances:

*Molo maguling Si rumandang ari i, Soluk ma ro Sirumondang bulan i* (when the sun falls, the moon soon rises)

*Huhut mangkuling Sese di balian i mangendehon Rura Silindung na uli* (the cricket sounds and sings the beauty of Silindung Valley)

*Rura Silindung Rura na sun denggan i* (Silindung valley is a very beautiful valley)

The representamens are expressed in metaphorical expressions as the sun fell, the moon comes to replace, the cricket sings) to impress the beauty of the valley.

The beauty of this valley is pictured through the darkness of the night, lighted by the brightness of the moon. This bright valley is enlivened by the sounds of cricket which people interpret as singing the beauty of Silindung valley.

The beauty of ‘*Tao Toba*’ (Lake Toba), the widest in Indonesia is uttered in the following representamens:

*Angka dolok na timbo, do manghali-angi ho* (you are surrounded by high hills)

*O tao toba na ulli, Tapanmu na tio i tongtong* (beautiful lake Toba with clear water)

*Di bahen ho dalam lao tu pulomi* (you make the pathway to come to your island).

The interpretant to the representamens can be said that when people come to this lake, they can see beautiful hills

around. Samosir island is surrounded by this lake, and if one wants to the other part of the lake, he can go through the land of Samosir or go by boats or ship to come to the other part of the lake. The next representamen can be seen in the rest of the lyrics:

*O tao toba, Raja ni sude na tao, Tao na sumurung na lumobi ulimi* (you are the king of the lake, your beauty is un-comparable)

*Molo huida rupami sian na dao*

*Tudos tu intan do denggan jala uli, Barita ni hinaulim di tano on* (your beauty is like diamond, and many messages about your beauty)

*Umpama ni hinajogim di portibi on*

*Mambahen masihol saluhut ni nasa bangso*

*Mamereng ho o ta o toba na uli* (because of your beauty, many people from all over the world miss you and want to see you)

Similes are used in the representamens, like a diamond, king of lake, and personification, 'you make a pathway, the hills surround you, and good news about you'. The interpretant to the representamens can be said that when we view from above the road, the water looks blue, very large, and the beauty is very impressive. Local people of North Sumatra come and visit this lake as many times as they can because they long for the cool and clear water, calmness, and the waves of the water. People usually go to Samosir Island to continue their journey and spend their nights there. They can go by boats, ferry, or other small ships.

The lyrics of Samosir Island does not say about the beauty, but about memory toward the homeland. The next song lyrics are about love toward homeland which is portrayed in the following representamens of 'Pulo Samosir' (Samosir Island): *Pulo Samosir do, haroroanku Samosir do, Ido asalhu sai tong ingotonhu* (Samosir

Island is my homeland, I am originated there and I always remember) *Saleleng ngolungku hupuji ho* (I praise you along with my life). *Disi do pusokhi, pardengkeanhu haumangki, Gok disi hansang nang eme nang bawang, Rarak do pinahan di doloki* (My umbilical cord is planted there, my fish pool, my rice-field, onions, paddy, and cattle are there on the hills)

The interpretant to the representamens that the lyrics about life story to say that his wealth is here in the homeland although he no longer stays there, his relative, parents, his village, his house are still existing. It is seldom that people from this island sell their houses or fields to outsiders. The love to the homeland is also represented in the traditional food available in the island: naniura (fish is cooked without fire, only with a certain kind of lime and other local seasonings), natinombur (baked fish with local seasoning), namargota (meat cooked with the blood of the animal-like chicken or pork), tuak tangkasan (toddy, taken directly from a kind of palm wine tree). *Molo masihol ho, di natinombur masihol ho, Manang niura dohot na margota, Di Pulo Samosir do dapot ho* (If you long for eating these foods, go to Samosir Island to find them) and also the toddy.

If you want to calm down your life, visit the island. And once this wanderer dies, he wants to be buried on the island. *Molo marujung ma, muse ngolungku sai ingot ma, Anggo bangkeku disi tano-monmu, Disi udeanku sarihon ma* (If I die, remember, my corpse should be buried there and prepare the place). IN Batak Toba society, death is always related to customs and tradition of death ceremony (Hugo, and Ilona, 2016; Irawan and Lukuhay, 20).

The next categorization is about 'memory' that occurred in the homeland. The expressions are represented in 'Aek Sibundong' in the other parts of the lyric.

Na lao tudia na ma ho, tolong pasahat tonakkon. *Tu siboru pargaulan hi*

*Ilu maraburan da sian simalolonghi.*

*Alai beha roham di au, da hasian.*

*Hmm, da na lagu. Molo masihol ho ito.*

*Laho ma ho tu aek i, ima aek sibundong i.*

*Di dolok sanggul na uli, disi do au.*

(please convey my message to my lover that I fell so sad. My lover, if you miss me, come to aek Sibundong, I am there for you.),

These representamens contain personification to ask the river to convey his message about his sadness, and also hyperbole. The hyperbole is contained in the utterances, go to the river if you miss me because I am there.

The next memory and homesick is in 'Aek Sigeaon':

*Di rondang ni bulan rap hita mameam*

*Hu togu tangan mi hu suruk mandar mi Nang lao sikkola pe nang Tu garejai udur di dalani* (in the full moon, we play together, I pick your hands; we go to school and church together)

This homesick and memory cannot be forgotten although one of them has gone far away and lived her alone in the homeland. The memory of the youth era: playing together, going anywhere together, and going hand in hand is good memories in life.

The same homesick and memory are also represented in 'Rura Silindung' (Silindung Valley). This memory is about dating until early in the morning in the homeland. *Lambok malilung Na marbajui di si Dipukul opat Di robot ni borngin i Di si pe mulak Sidoli pangaririt i* (a man visits his lover for dating and returns home early in the morning). This portrays the situation in the village of how they date because there is no restaurant, cinema or other places to date. A place is remote from crowd and entertainment. The memory dealt with the homeland is also reflected in 'Luat Pahae', a village name in North Tapanuli. The lyrics of the songs contain a strong remem-

brance as a place of birth and grown-up before wandering to a far away place.

*Luat pahae huta hatubuan ku, Laos disi do huta hagodangan ku, Lungnga tung lelung hutinggalhon, Hutakki sai huingot doi tong tong. Tung lelung pe au diparjalangan, Tung dao pe ahu dipangarottan, Hutakki sai tong huhalungunhon, Tu pahae sai masihol do ahu tontong* (Pahae is my birth place and I was grown up there. I have left so long, but I always remember it even if I have been ver far away).

The next representamens concerning with special memory is dealt with history. This is a memory, but also a history of the death of Sisingamangaraja XII, the national hero of Indonesia (Iswara). His daughter, Lopian was shot by the Dutch army in 1907, June 17, and in the lyric, it is told that he touched the blood of his daughter which made him lose his supernatural powers. He was then shot on the same day with his daughter. He was born on the 18th of February, 1845 in Bakkara, Humbang Hasundutan. He was determined as a national hero on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1961.

The lyrics describe the location of the death of his daughter and himself at Aek Sibulbulon. Aek Sibulbulon is the well of Sisingamangaraja XII, it lies in the village of Sionom Hudon. This is a mixture of story, memory, and history.

*Di aek sibulbulon i, Huta sionom huduon i. Disi do parlao ni oppu i, Sisingamangaraja i* (Aek Sibulbulon is the location of his death);

*Dihaol do boru na i, Boru Lopian nauli. Disii tarmudar oppu i, Subang naso halaosan i* (while hugging his daughter, he touched the blood of his daughter, which is taboo to his supernatural power)

*Raja na sian Bakkara, Raja namarsahala i. Uju mangalo musu i, Mulak tu nampunasa* (A king from Bakkara, a charismatic king, died in a war, and be back to God). His advice was to ask people to accept the reality of his death.

*Poda dohot tona na i, Ikkon ingot di roha i. Hita na tinadikkon na, Taihuthon na nidok na i* (remember his suggestion and follow it, no need to revenge). Let us remember him as the protector of the people and the nation from the colonizer.

*Taingot ma raja ta i, Na humonghop di bangso na i* (remember our king, who protects his nation).

In the next two lyrics of 'Arga do bona ni pinasa' and 'Dijou Ahu Mulak'. The lyrics contain summons from the homeland to those wanderers to remember their homeland.

*sian na dao hubege do sada ende, tarsongon na mangandung-andung inang. mangandungi au parjalani borgin, nai tangis tarlungun lungun inang* (it is a sad call from the homeland to ask wanderers to return home to Rura Silindung). The summons is really disturbing and making sad the ones who hear that news. It makes the hearer want to return soon.

*nalao ma au habang inang, da tu rura silindung, asa gira huida inang, da na lambok malilung* (I would like to fly back to Rura Silindung, to see my mother). The lyrics are represented in hyperbole as if I had my wings, I would fly to see you. Grieving for sad messages which are actually created in the minds of the wanderers. They imagine that the homeland requests all wanderers to return home.

The next representamens are dealt with 'Arga Do Bona Ni Pinasa' contains a summons to remember homeland, and return to it. Come back to your old ages, you have to come back. *Arga do bona ni pinasa, Di angka halak na marroha, Nang lao hamu marhuta sada. Sai ingot bona ni pinasa* (Homeland is a precious thing to those who are wise, never forget your homeland even if you go overseas). The word 'bonapasogit' is changed to 'bona nipinasa'. Bona nipinasa means a Jackfruit tree. The philosophy behind this phrase is that when the tree is wounded, the sap comes out. This signi-

fies that all Batak descendants are always related to their homeland. Every Jack fruit contains a lot of fruit inside with borders, which means the houses in one village. The borders are the norms that should be followed by all villagers. The outer skin represents the leader of the village and the fruits are the villagers who live from generation to generation. The sap of the Jackfruit tree symbolizes the blood of the mother when delivering a baby. Thus, every descendant is grown up with the struggle of the ancestors. The hard tree of Jackfruit symbolizes the strength of the traditional customs of Batak culture society. The rest of the representamens are below.

*Ai nang dao i tu hutanta, I do na hot di rohamu, Sai ingot ari dung matua Asa mulak hamu tu huta* (although it is far from the homeland, remembers to return home at your old ages) *Nang pe sude hamu mamora, Ni ingot ma tuhuta niba, Nang pangaranto saluhutna*

*Ingkon di ingot be hutana, Ai tano hatubuan I do, I do na sai hot tongtong, Mulak ma damang dung matua, Mulak sai mulak ma tu huta* (however rich you are, remember your homeland, your place of birth, all the time, Return home)

These representamens are represented in the forms of summons with simple words and easy to understand.

### C. CONCLUSION

The answers to the first question can be concluded that some of the lyrics are represented using personification, Similes, hyperboles, metaphorical expressions, and simple words without any exaggeration. The signification of the places of Bonapasogit or homeland is based on the content presented in the lyrics and information concerning the places mentioned in every song. One of the places is related to history, and the song becomes a remem-

brance for Batak people about the death of the leader of the war against Dutch army who colonized Indonesia for around 350 years.

#### REFERENCES

- Cox, Terry. (2000). *You Can Write Song Lyrics*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Book.
- Eckstein, Lars. (2005). *Reading Song Lyrics*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi.
- Fiske, John. (1990). *Introduction to Communication Studies*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Hall, Stuart. (1997). *Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. Open University: Sage Publications.
- Hugo and Iona. 2016. Penafsiran Makna Lagu Tradisional Batak Toba Andung "Saur Matua Maho Inang" (Analisis Semiotika Ferdinand De Saussure)
- Irawan, Agusly and Marsefio S Luhukay. Representation of Living Values in Batak Traditional Songs. repository.petra.ac.id/16705/1/Publikasi\_1\_99001\_1610.pdf
- Raditya, Iswara N. 2019. *Sejarah 18 Februari 1845: Lahirnya Raja Toba Sisingamangaraja XII*. <https://tirto.id/sejarah-18-februari-1845-lahirnya-raja-toba-sisingamangaraja-xii-dhg7>
- Siregar, Frans. *Arti Bona Ni Pinasa Bagi Bangsa Batak*. <http://franzire99.blogspot.com/2011/09/arti-bona-ni-pinasa-bagi-bangsa-batak.html>