

The Meaning of “*Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*” as A Method of Trauma Healing in the Context of Batak Toba Culture

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ABSTRACT: Trauma is an event that occurs suddenly and can cause excessive fear in those who experience it. Trauma can also cause deep sorrow if not treated properly. In relation to handle trauma, the author sees something interesting in the Batak Toba tradition of providing support for someone who has experienced unexpected events such as accidents. Nowadays, this tradition is still continued and practiced among the Batak Toba ethnic group. However, not everyone who practices this tradition, especially the even by younger generation, understands the implied meaning of giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* to someone. Therefore, in this paper, the author narrates in depth the meaning of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* in the Batak Toba ethnic tradition, which can be used as a method of trauma healing experienced by someone. The author uses qualitative literature study by reviewing several literatures about *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* and relating it to the traumatic conditions experienced by a person. Based on the narrative described in this paper, it can be concluded that the tradition of giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is a symbol of strengthening the soul and a method of trauma healing.

Keywords: Trauma; Healing; Tradition; *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Accidents are very common occurrence in everyday life. This can be seen from the number of accidents that occurred in Indonesia from January to September 2022, which reached 94,617 cases, a sharp increase from the previous year, which only reached 70,000 cases (Maulana 2022). On the other hand, traffic accidents are discussed almost daily on social media. Accidents are unpredictable events. According to the Indonesian Dictionary, an accident is an event that cause's harm and unintentionally involves certain people and objects, resulting losses for those affected. One of the things that is detrimental to victims is psychological distress, including trauma.

Trauma is an event that suddenly occurs in human and causes excessive and threat (Wiryasaputra 2023). This condition will become stronger in a person if they do not receive assistance. For example, someone who has witnessed death due to an accident, experienced a traffic accident that caused physical injuries, and so on. This is in line with the opinion of Anna and colleagues in their research, which states that trauma is an emotional response to bad events and unpleasant actions such as accidents, crimes, and natural disasters (Salamor, and Ubwarin 2020). This condition can also cause a person to experience grief. Furthermore, Wiryasaputra explains that traumatic events experienced by a person can cause deep grief (Wiryasaputra 2019). Grief due to traumatic experiences can disrupt a person's holistic existence (physical, psychological, social, and spiritual).

The grief experienced by a person can cause deep emotional wounds if it not seriously addressed by a companion or similar figure. As stated by Leni and colleagues in their research, emotional wounds occur as a

result of various traumatic events that have been experienced. These traumatic events can include childhood bullying, violence, the death of loved one, natural disasters, and vehicle accidents (Leni Mariana Siregar et al. 2022). These events can cause trauma to a person, resulting in physical and psychological wounds. Various treatments should be carried out for people who have experienced traumatic events so that they do not suffer deep emotional scars. This is in line with research conducted by Alfian Ramdoni and colleagues who implemented several forms of caring for those who experienced traumatic events due to natural disasters. The trauma healing process involved continuous assistance using various media, such as music, play, and storytelling (Alfian Ramdoni and Retor Aquinaldo Wirabuanaputera Kaligis 2023). In the author's opinion, several of the above narratives show that traumatic events experienced by individuals need to be handled seriously using a variety of diverse and creative techniques. In this case, one of the traumatic experiences that the author focuses on in this study is traumatic experience resulting from an accident. The accidents have an impact on the holistic condition of human beings, and to handle it various methods are using to help victims, such as providing them with caring.

Generally, the treatment for victims who have traumatic experienced events due to accidents is to provide caring for the victims. Caring is a core of counseling process in which a reciprocal relationship is created between two individuals. In this process, the counselor tries to help or to guide the person seeking assistance (Collins 2010). On the other hand, a companion or counselor often directs the counselee to accept the events that have occurred in their life. This is in line with the counseling by Totok in his book, which states that a counselor is expected to have empathy (Wiryasaputra and Handayani 2012). In addition, to have an empathy, several approaches can be used to help people experiencing trauma. An approach is a way or method used to approach, observe, overcome, and solve problems. This approach is also called the pastoral counseling approach (Totok S. Wiryasaputra 2019).

Furthermore, Wiryasaputra explains that various approaches can be taken to treat trauma experienced by a person. One appropriate approach to help someone who has experienced trauma due to an accident is the Gestalt approach. The Gestalt approach emphasizes and focuses on self-support to achieve awareness of one's experiences over time. This approach is usually aided by the use an empty chair as a means of expressing the feelings that cause trauma (Totok S. Wiryasaputra 2019).

When Wiryasaputra uses the empty chair in trauma treatment, in the Batak context is also a trauma treatment method known as the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition. The *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition is a tradition that has not disappeared, even though times have changed. The ritual of giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* has a deep meaning for the recipient. This can be seen in Batak cultural activities such as weddings, promotions, and events unrelated to sudden fatal accidents that befall someone. The custom is by placing rice on the head of the victim, namely those who have survived an accident or those who have experienced trauma. The situation or putting rice process for those who have experienced trauma is important as a first step in minimizing the trauma experienced. Even if we start from definition or meaning of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*, this tradition becomes a medium to heal someone from the trauma they have experienced. *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* means 'boras' means rice, 'sipir' means hard and strong, and *Tondi* means the spirit within a person. Thus, it can concluded that *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is rice that brings blessings (rice that strengthens the human spirit). For the Batak tribe, *Boras* (rice) is not only a physical necessity (food) but also has extraordinary meaning and significance in Batak culture (Napitupulu 2022). Therefore, the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition is usually performed at Batak Toba traditional weddings, births, baptism, when an event occurs like accident, fire, disaster, and when moving into a new house.

In this case, the author is interested in examining the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition, which is performed when someone experiences a traumatic event such as an accident. When someone has an accident and suffers injuries, their closest relatives (such as family, parents, and siblings) will take rice and sprinkle it on the victim's head while saying "*Mulak Tondi tu Badan*". This means that the person who has had an accident is strengthened by the symbol of rice, which gives strength to the victim. This tradition is a very old traditions and is still practiced today. This is one of the reasons why the author is interested in studying the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition as a method of trauma healing in the context of Batak culture.

II. METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative-literature. What has been done is collecting data on 'trauma' and Batak culture especially about *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* from various sources in literature. Lumintang said at the qualitative approach is an approach built on the philosophical foundation or phenomenological paradigm using the characteristics of natural research with the view that reality is open, contextual, multiple, comprehensive and interconnected, regarding individual and communal experiences, with social and historical meanings constructed using content analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, case studies and grounded theory (Stevry Indra Lumintang dan Danik Astuti Lumintang 2016).

The next step taken to analyze the theme "The meaning of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* as a Method of Trauma Healing in the Batak Cultural Context" was to search for data from various sources such as books and journals as previous studies related to the meaning of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*. After that, comparing the views of previous authors on the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition in Batak culture and trying to combine them in the context of general trauma treatment.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Trauma and Its Causes

The term trauma is a familiar word in society. A person will experience trauma when a certain event or incident befalls them, resulting in deep emotional wounds. More specifically, trauma comes from the Greek word *troma* (trauma) or *traumat* (traumatic) in its plural form, which means physical and psychological wounds. This wound is caused by an event that involves a shocking emotional experiences that has an impact on a person's soul or inner self (Elieser Perpulungen Gintings 2016). In the Indonesian Dictionary, trauma (n) is defined as an abnormal state of mind or behaviors as a result of psychological pressure of physical injury; severe injury. Traumatic (adv) means psychologically disturbing (about a powerful psychological experiences) (Depdiknas 2007). This condition becomes a bitter root in a person's life that unconsciously affects their behavior and psyche.

Based on this understanding, it can concluded that trauma can cause emotional wound to a person. Ev. Agnes Maria Layantara, in her book reading human as living document, explains that the factors that cause emotional wounds are traumatic events, guilt and rejection (Elieser Perpulungen Gintings 2016). In the author's opinion, emotional wounds caused by traumatic events are very common in society. For example, an accident that befalls a person can disrupt their integrity as a holistic human being. For further clarification, the author will discuss a recent case (the names of those involved have been changed).

One day, "A" and "B" planned to go to swimming at Lake Toba. "A" was a young woman, and "B" was also the same. They traveled to Lake Toba by motorcycle, and "A" was the one driving. Unexpectedly, they were involved in an accident when another motorcycle suddenly crashed into them, causing "A" and "B" to suffer injuries and requiring treatment at the nearest hospital. "A" did not suffer many injuries, so she did not need to be hospitalized. Although "A" did not suffer any physical injuries, she felt guilty because her friend "B" had to be hospitalized and one of her toes needs surgery. "A" felt that she was the reason her friend had to be hospitalized and receive treatment. "A" also felt lonely, as if no one cared about her or ask about her health, especially her parents who did not about her whereabouts at all).

The brief narrative of the accident above shows that there was a traumatic experience for "A" as she drove the motorcycle. She was a person who faced trauma. In the author's opinion, if feeling of guilty are not dealt with immediately, they will cause prolonged pain. This is in line with Ginting's opinion in his book reading humans as living document, which explains that emotional wound have an impact on human integrity. The effects of emotional wounds caused by traumatic events are as follows (Elieser Perpulungen Gintings 2016).

- a. Psychologically, people who experience trauma will divinity feel disturbed. If the trauma is caused by a traumatic condition, they will feel ashamed, inferior, and worthless. In addition, they may also harbor

anger towards the people or environment that caused in to happen, and may feel guilty about the incident.

- b. Physiologically, or often referred to as a psychophysiological reaction, psychological disorders manifest physically as bodily disorders. Physical reactions to feelings of anxiety usually take the form of digestive disorders, headaches, itchy skin, back pain, and so on.
- c. Sociologically, people who experience severe emotional trauma will find it difficult to adjust to their environment, family, church, and community. The symptoms are withdrawal from social gatherings, excessive suspicion, and abnormal secrecy. Therefore, what is most needed in such cases is healing.

Seeing the impact of emotional wounds caused by traumatic events experiences by a person can cause emotional wounds, so they need to be handled professionally. As illustrated in the case example, the victim, referred to as the counselee, certainly needs support to heal from the trauma they have experienced. Healing is a pastoral function aimed at addressing the wounds, conflict, damage, or trauma that a person experiences in their life by repairing (reparative) towards integrity and guiding them towards progress (Elieser Perpulungen Gintings 2016). The technical implementation of counseling form someone experiencing emotional wounds is to use the approach described by Totok Wiryasaputra. In his book entitled "Pastoral Counseling in the Millennial Era", he offers one approach helping those experiencing emotional wounds, namely the Gestalt approach.

The Gestalt approach was developed by Fritz Perls, who asserted that humans have the ability to understand how their past experiences influence their present behavior. This approach focuses on the "here" and "now". In this process, the counselor or companion does not make their own interpretations of the client's life. Instead, the counselor helps the client to make their own interpretations of their life. The client is expected to discover and resolve unresolved issues from the past that are disrupting their present life. This is done by reliving traumatic past experiences as if they were happening present life. This is done by reliving traumatic past experiences as if they were happening in the present.

Furthermore, Wiryasaputra explains that a person can vent their feelings expressions from the past projected into the present using the empty chair of Gestalt. The client is faced with an empty chair and the counselor asks the client to imagine the person they want to vent their feelings to sitting in the empty chair. In addition, the empty chair can be replaced with a gravestone in a cemetery, a pillow, a bolster, a photo, water in a pond/river, newspaper (to be torn up), a tennis ball to be thrown at a wall or wood, a small stone to be thrown into a river, a ball to be kicked, and so on.

This counseling is an interesting and appropriate approach for people experiencing emotional wounds. Then what about the case described by the author? Is it necessary to use an empty chair to heal the trauma experienced? Based on the case described, there was no serious treatment because what "A" experienced was guilt to accept the traumatic event. The empty chair can be replaced with a small stone given to victim to throw into Lake Toba as a symbol of discarding the bad luck experienced in the event.

In the Batak Toba tradition, when someone experiences a traumatic event, the first thing given to the victim is *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*. This is done to release the shock experienced with the expression "*mulak tondi tu ruma*". This is in line with research conducted by Carlos Juan on the Batak people's understanding of meaning of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*, namely as strengthening for the soul of someone who has experienced a traumatic event, especially those who have experienced an accident (Naibaho and Munthe 2023). A similar opinion researched by Resmi Hutasoit states that *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is a tradition and symbol of strengthening for the spirits of the Batak people so that they are free from fear and increasingly blessed in their lives. This means that someone who is free from danger or accidents is not shackled by traumatic experiences (Hutasoit, Lattu, and Timo 2020). This explanation shows that the giving of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* has a meaning that can be used as a medium for trauma healing.

The Meaning of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* as a Method of Trauma Healing.

One of the Batak tradition that is still known today is the '*mangupa*' tradition. According to Vergouwen, *mangupa* aims to strengthen the *Tondi* (spirit). This is usually performed by the *hula-hula* (brother from the

mother's side/uncle) for her daughter when she is in distress or when she is pregnant. Thus, *mangupa* is performed by symbolically giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* to strengthen his daughter to experience the life she is currently living (Vergouwen 2004). Generally, the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition is given to people who are sick, weak, in shock, or who have survived an accident. *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is with rice that has the meaning of strengthening the soul/spirit that is being strengthened. The rice usually is placed in an open container so that easy for the person who will perform *mangupa* to take it. In addition, the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition also has the meaning that person being strengthened asks for hope and prayers from God so that their life will be more blessed (Sinambela, Harahap, and Wuriyani 2022).

An interesting question to explore is why must the *Tondi* be strengthened? Why is rice used as a symbol? In Batak cultural, humans are known to have a *tondi* that accompanies them throughout their lives, but if someone is sick, it is believed that the *tondi* leaves the body until the illness is cured. Vergouwen explains that the *tondi* is described as being able to move out of the human body when experiencing shocking and dangerous events such as accidents. Accidents cause trauma of fear due to shock, so the *tondi* can move out and leave the human body (Vergouwen 2004). If such an event is experienced by someone, the appropriate action to take in Batak tradition is to calm the *tondi* and bring it into a peaceful situation so that it does not withdraw from the body.

Quoting Vergouwen, it is explained that a common practice to calm the *tondi* so that it does not leave the body is to say the phrase: *sai pir ma tondim* (may your *tondi* remain strongly attached to you) (Vergouwen 2004). By saying this, the immediate family of someone who has had an accident also takes action by taking *boras* and put it on the head while saying '*dao songgot*' (may the fear/trauma disappear) '*mulak tondi tu ruma* (return the spirit to the body and keep it away danger). This tradition is a very familiar experienced traumatic events due to accidents. Based on the author's experience and observations, some Batak communities, especially families, practice the tradition of giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* to those who have experienced traumatic events. Based on the information obtained, the author explains that their *tondi* (soul/spirit) feels calm and comfortable when one of the family members places *boras* on their head and utters words of encouragement for them. Furthermore, the feeling of *taronggot* (shock) experienced is reduced (Mr. Manatap Siahaan, Hot Tua Pardede, and Timoria Siallagan). In the author's opinion, the giving of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is the first step in healing trauma, and it is advisable to continue with ongoing support.

Based on the above explanation, it appears that the Batak people do not just say words, but also use symbols as a medium, namely rice. This term is known as the tradition of giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*. What exactly is the meaning of 'rice'? Can it be replaced with something else? Based on the author's observations and experiences, till today, when there is a shocking event that causes someone to experience trauma, rice is used as a symbol to strengthen the *tondi* or human soul. One of the reasons for using rice as a symbol in this tradition is because rice is a staple food and means of survival. The hardness of rice represents strength, which is necessary for human life, which must begin with strengthening or fortifying the soul in order to experience and to face life. The tradition of giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* to someone in Batak culture has existed since ancient times, usually performed during wedding, when a child achieves their dreams, and when someone escapes danger. The purpose is to strengthen the soul or spirit believed to be attached to the body. In this case, the author understands that *boras* in Batak culture is not just a staple food but also a spirit or soul enhancer. Therefore, everyone who gives *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* always conveys their hopes and the recipient is not allowed to shake off the rice placed on their head but must let it fall by itself.

Based on the above description, the treatment or assistance for people who have suffered injuries due to trauma, especially accidents, is through continuous support. However, before continuing with the ongoing support process, in accordance with Batak cultural context, the first step is to eliminate the shock or trauma felt. This is done by giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* to the person being supported, and then providing support as offered by Wiryasaputra. Furthermore, when the person who has experienced an accident begins to recover physically and psychologically, the next step in Batak culture is to perform *mangupa tondi*. *Mangupa* is considered an expression of gratitude to *tondi* for escaping danger, or as encouragement to fight against something dangerous that threatens, meaning that *tondi* is strengthened. This is in line with Vergouwen's explanation that *pangupaon* is a way to ward off threats faced by someone who has been in danger, and *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is a symbol and means to restore

the balance that has been disturbed (Vergouwew 2004). As a symbol of gratitude or appreciation for the healing that has been experienced, in Batak tradition a celebration is held, namely *mangontang* or inviting relatives to eat together. The author's understanding of the stages carried out in the counseling process that has been described is that they have the same goal, namely to help and bring well-being to the soul of the counselee who has experienced trauma. Therefore, providing assistance by giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is also the goal of the ministry of saved Christians, which is to bring prosperity to the soul in accordance with the context or condition of the people being served.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the above explanation of *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi*, it can be concluded that rice not only basic human need but also has a unique meaning as a strengthener of the soul or spirit of humans. On the other hand, several reviews described above show that the *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* tradition is a Batak cultural tradition that needs to be applied and taught to the younger generation. One reason why this tradition needs to be preserved is because the process of giving *Boras Sipir Ni Tondi* is the first step in healing someone who experienced trauma by accident. This can be seen from its purpose, which is to bring prosperity to a person and to calm and soothe the soul that is experiencing a traumatic event.

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