

Commodification of Ulos Silahisabungan in Cultural Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Ulos Silahisabungan,
Commodification,
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Ulos Silahisabungan is a form of intangible cultural heritage imbued with philosophical, symbolic, and spiritual values within the Batak community. As a medium of social communication and a marker of genealogical status, this traditional textile plays a vital role in various ritual ceremonies. However, with the development of the creative economy and tourism in the Lake Toba region, Ulos Silahisabungan has undergone a process of commodification – the transformation from a sacred cultural artifact into an economic commodity. This study aims to examine the forms, functions, and meanings of Ulos Silahisabungan, as well as the cultural impacts of its commodification. Employing a phenomenological approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that while commodification opens economic opportunities for the local community, it also risks diminishing the sacred meanings embedded in the textile. Therefore, community-based preservation strategies are essential, including cultural documentation, multicultural education, and legal protection of traditional intellectual property. This study underscores the importance of balancing economic needs with the sustainability of cultural values in indigenous communities amidst globalization.

INTRODUCTION

Ulos is one of the most prominent cultural artifacts in the lives of the Batak people in North Sumatra. This fabric not only serves as a covering for the body, but also as a symbol of identity, spirituality, and social status in various traditional ceremonies such as birth, marriage, and death (Siahaan, 2013). Among the various types of *ulos*, *Ulos Silahisabungan* has a unique cultural significance because it is closely associated with the *Silahisabungan* clan, which is considered one of the ancestors of the Toba Batak people. This *ulos* not only represents visual aesthetic richness but also preserves ancestral narratives and symbols of traditional power.

With the passage of time and the pressures of globalization, there has been a shift in the meaning and function of *ulos*. What was once used in sacred contexts is now mass-produced and sold in open markets, both locally and internationally (Simanjuntak, 2020). This phenomenon is known as commodification, the process of transforming something that was previously cultural into an economic commodity (Marx, in Harvey, 2005). The *Silahisabungan ulos*, as a sacred cultural symbol, is not exempt from this commodification trend. This shift prompts critical examination of how cultural values are reconfigured within the framework of the market.

The commodification of *ulos* has dual implications. On one hand, it opens economic opportunities for the Batak community, particularly artisans and local SMEs. *Ulos* is sold as souvenirs, modern clothing, and other creative products as part of a cultural branding strategy in the tourism industry, especially in the Toba Caldera Geopark area (Hutagalung, 2021). On the other hand, there is a reduction in symbolic meaning as *ulos* is separated from its ritual context and viewed solely as a commodity. Consequently, the philosophical meanings embedded in *Ulos Silahisabungan* risk being decontextualized.

In the context of indigenous communities, *Ulos Silahisabungan* serves not only as an aesthetic element but also as a medium of social communication and a symbol of genealogical status. When this *ulos* is commodified, there is a negotiation of meaning between traditional values and the demands of modern economics (Sibarani, 2015). This

process raises fundamental questions: can commodification coexist with the preservation of cultural values? Or will it erode the essence of the *ulos*? These questions are crucial for understanding the dynamics between local culture and the global market. A critical approach to the commodification of *ulos* requires interdisciplinary analysis, encompassing cultural studies, economics, semiotics, and anthropology. Such studies can reveal how cultural practices are re-represented within the global capitalist system (Appadurai, 1986). *Ulos Silahisabungan*, in this framework, is not merely a traditional cloth but part of a cultural representation system being negotiated through production, distribution, and consumption in the commercial sphere.

Additionally, the presence of *ulos* on social media, digital markets, and international fashion events further reinforces the commodification process. The visual representations of *ulos* displayed on fashion runways or in digital catalogs sometimes obscure their ethnographic origins. This phenomenon creates a distance between the cultural product and its original community, and can even become a form of cultural exploitation if not accompanied by community control over its narrative and distribution (Harrison, 1999). Therefore, it is important to re-examine the commodification practices of *Ulos Silahisabungan* to maintain the cultural sovereignty of the Batak community. Against this backdrop, this article aims to critically analyze the commodification process of *Ulos Silahisabungan*, examining to what extent local cultural values can endure or change in the flow of cultural capitalization. This research will be an important contribution to contemporary cultural studies, particularly in the context of cultural heritage preservation in the era of the creative industry and local-based tourism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach based on social semiotic theory, to examine *Ulos Silahisabungan* as a cultural phenomenon interpreted through signs (icons, indices, symbols) in the social context of its use (Hoed, 2008; Zoest, 1992; Eco, 2009). This approach is used because *ulos* is not only a material artifact, but also a representation of identity, social relations, and traditional values. The study focuses on 15 types of *Ulos Silahisabungan* by analyzing the form, function, and meaning based on the cultural experiences of the people in Silahisabungan District, Dairi Regency, North Sumatra.

Data collection was conducted triangulating through participant observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Observations were conducted in cultural tourism villages (Silalahi I, II, and III) to directly observe the practice of making and using *ulos*. Key informants consisted of 8 *Raja Turpuk*, 5 traditional leaders (*Guru Taon*), 2 cultural leaders (*Raja Parhata*), and 5 *ulos* weavers. Interviews were conducted in a structured and in-depth manner with the aid of a recording device, photographs, and field notes. The FGDs were conducted in five stages to agree on data on the types of *ulos*, sources, customary usage, content validation, and finalization of the publication of the research results.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis combined with elimination and elicitation techniques. Elimination techniques were used to filter out redundant data, while elicitation techniques were used to test the acceptability of the form, function, and meaning of *ulos* among informing the data produced authentically reflects the social and cultural realities of the *Silahisabungan Batak* community in the field (Creswell, 2014; ants.

Furthermore, distributional techniques were used to compile a systematic description based on semiotic and cultural aspects. This research is naturalistic, (meNeuman, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Silahisabungan District is an administrative area located in Dairi Regency, North Sumatra Province, resulting from the division of Sumbul District. Geographically, this district is located at coordinates 02°48'40.96" North Latitude and 98°31'19.28" East Longitude, with an altitude of 956 meters above sea level. Its area reaches 75.62 km², or approximately 3.92% of the total area of Dairi Regency. This area has a dominant geographical character of hills and rocks, and is complemented by the vast body of water in the form of Lake Toba on the east side.



Figure 1. Map of Dairi Regency
(Source: <https://portal.dairikab.go.id/peta/>)

Silahisabungan District consists of five villages: Silalahi, Silalahi I, Silalahi II, Paropo, and Paropo I. This area has a 28 km long shoreline of Lake Toba, making it a coastal area rich in potential water resources and natural panoramas. The local community calls this area *Silalahi Nabolak*, which means “the very wide Silalahi,” as a form of cultural expression of its vastness and natural beauty. Administratively, this district borders Karo Regency to the north, Sumbul District and other areas in Dairi to the south and west, and Lake Toba and Samosir Regency to the east.

The climate of Silahisabungan District is tropical with two main seasons: the rainy season (September–December) and the dry season (January–August). Its fertile, mountainous, and lake-rich ecological structure supports a variety of economic activities. Community livelihoods include secondary crops (rice, corn, chilies, and onions), freshwater fishing (*tilapia* and carp), trade, and *ulos* weaving, a hallmark of local culture. Silalahi I Village holds a crucial position in the context of cultural preservation, particularly in the tradition of *ulos* weaving. This village is known as *Ulos Village* because it is the center of the continuity of Silahisabungan's distinctive *ulos* production from generation to generation. *Ulos* weaving activities in this region are not only economic but also rich in cultural and symbolic values that continue to be maintained in the social life of the *Batak* people.

In addition to its cultural richness, *Silahisabungan* also holds significant tourism potential. The region boasts a variety of natural attractions, such as the Lake *Toba* harbor and the *Sigiro* and *Sitiris-tiris* waterfalls, which offer high ecological and aesthetic appeal. This potential supports the development of culturally and ecotourism-based tourism villages. Access to Silahisabungan District is relatively easy, although it requires a relatively long

journey. From Medan City, the land journey takes approximately four hours via the Pancur Batu–Berastagi– Merek–Tongging–Silalahi route. Meanwhile, from the capital of Dairi Regency, *Sidikalang*, the distance is closer and can be reached in approximately 45 minutes. This accessibility allows for economic and cultural integration with other regional centers.

Overall, Silahisabungan District is a region with high geographic, ecological, and cultural richness. The combination of the iconic Lake Toba landscape, traditional livelihoods, and ulos preservation make this area relevant for interdisciplinary studies, including in the context of developing cultural heritage, ecotourism, and a locally-based creative economy.

a. Form, Function and Meaning of Ulos Silahisabungan

Based on the results of the study, 15 types of *Silahisabungan ulos* names were found, namely *ulos* (1) *Jung-jung*, (2) *Sakkut Borna*, (3) *Gobar*, (4) *Polang-polang*, (5) *Hati Rongga*, (6) *Simakkat-akkat*, (7) *Bintang Maratur*, (8) *Siattar-attar*, (9) *Sigara Topi*, (10) *Pangiring*, (11) *Suri-suri Ganjang*, (12) *Sidos-dos*, (13) *Gipul*, (14) *Sitorop Gatip*, and (15) *Tudung Namora*. These fifteen types of *ulos* have unique origins, shapes, functions, and meanings/values, which are described as follows.

(1) *Jung-jung*

Ulos Jung-jung is characterized by its rectangular shape with (1) tassels, (2) *sirat*, and *topi* (sides) on the left and right sides of the *ulos*. Additionally, there are *gatip* (thread motifs) in the center of the *ulos* in a vertical pattern, totaling eight pieces. The *Jung-jung ulos* measures 182 cm in length, 106 cm in width, with tassels measuring 10 cm in length, estimated to have a total of 1,000 knotted tassels, positioned at the very top and bottom of the *ulos*.

The *sirat* of the *ulos Jung-jung* is located at the end of the *ulos* body and functions as a divider between the *ulos* body and the tassels. The *sirat* on the *ulos Jung-jung* serves as a cover/reinforcement for the tassels to prevent them from easily detaching from the *ulos* body. Meanwhile, the meaning of the *sirat* is as a mystical protector and to ward off others' evil intentions. The *sirat* on the *ulos jung-jung* is of the *hurung ni tondi* type (mystical protector), colored white and black. The *sirat* measures 106 cm in length, following the width of the *ulos*, which is 1 cm. Each motif on the *ulos Jung-jung* is spaced 3.5 cm apart.

The *Jung-jung ulos* uses thread in three colors: red (bravery), white (purity), and black (humility). The dominant color of the *Jung-jung ulos* is red, symbolizing bravery and spirit. The *gading-gading* of the *ulos* serves as a divider between the top section (the side of the *ulos*) and the central section, which begins with the motif pattern.

The primary function of the *ulos Jung-jung* created by *Sideang Namora* (the weaver) is (1) to protect the body of King *Silahisabungan* from cold, heat, rain, and animal disturbances, ensuring safety and comfort, (2) the *ulos Jung-jung* made by *Boru Sideang Namora* is used as a wrapper for the heirlooms and manuscripts (scripts) of King *Silahisabungan*, to protect the power of the heirlooms and manuscripts from both mystical forces and the evil intentions of others. To this day, the *ulos* is still used exclusively as a wrapper for manuscripts and heirlooms.



Figure 2. Ulos Jung-jung

The primary function of the *ulos jung-jung* is to protect the wearer from both natural and supernatural challenges, symbolizing safety and comfort. Based on the size of the *ulos jung-jung* (182 cm long and 106 cm wide), each wearer can cover their entire body, thus avoiding disturbances from hot or cold weather, rain, and animal attacks.

The *ulos jung-jung* symbolizes a barrier (protector) against evil intentions and mystical forces, as intended by King *Silahisabungan*. In this context, it is evident from the motif of the *ulos jung-jung*, which uses white and black threads known as *sirat hurung ni tondi* (a barrier against evil spirits/mystical forces). The motif of the *ulos jung-jung* has a dominant red color, signifying that the wearer is a humble person, full of spirit, brave, and responsible toward their ancestors and the divine (God). *Ulos jung-jung* as *ulos tohonan* signifies prayer and hope. In this context, *Raja Silahisabungan* and his descendants hope that the magical powers of the heirlooms and books of *Raja Silahisabungan*'s descendants will remain protected.

(2) Sakkut Borna

The *Sakkut Borna ulos* has an attractive appearance, both in terms of color combination and the delicate *ulos* pattern. The *Sakkut Borna ulos* is rectangular in shape, measuring 136 cm in length and 92 cm in width. The dominant color of the *ulos* is deep black, and it has many tassels measuring 10 cm in length, tied at both ends of the *ulos*.



Figure 3. Ulos Sakkut Borna

There are stripes (borders) on the left and right sides of the *ulos* that serve as fasteners to keep the threads in place. Both the right and left sides of the hat are bright red. In the center of the *ulos*, there are two *gatip* (thread motifs) in the form of six vertical lines.

The thread material is originally obtained from the bark of a specific type of tree, namely a tree with thick bark and fibers sourced from the *Silahisabungan* forest. Generally, the thread material is taken from the bark of the *pongki* tree, the *rami* tree, and fibers from pineapple leaves. The daughter of the King of *Silahisabungan*, named *Sideang Namora*, was a skilled weaver in *Silahisabungan* who made *ulos* thread from bark sourced from the

Silahisabungan forest.

The bark is processed by pounding it to make it soft and supple, then soaking it in water so that the wood fibers, which are the basic material for the thread, are easy to pull. The fibers are dyed with specific colors and then spun into thread as the base material for *Silahisabungan ulos*.

The primary functions of *Sakkut Borna* and *Jung-jung ulos* created by *Sideang Namora* are as follows: First, to protect the body of the *Silahisabungan* king from cold, heat, rain, and animal disturbances, ensuring safety and comfort. Second, the *Jung-jung ulos* made by *Boru Sideang Namora* is used as a wrapper for the *Silahisabungan* King's heirlooms and manuscripts (scripts) to protect their mystical powers from mystical forces or the evil intentions of others.

The *Sakkut Borna ulos*, like the *Jung-jung ulos*, serves to protect the wearer from both natural and supernatural challenges, symbolizing safety and comfort. Based on the dimensions of the *Jung-jung ulos* (182 cm in length and 106 cm in width), each wearer can fully cover their body, thereby avoiding disturbances from hot or cold weather, rain, and animal attacks.

The *Sakkut Borna ulos*, as a wrapping, serves as a barrier (ward) for the royal manuscripts and the efforts of King *Silahisabungan* to avoid the malicious intentions of others and mystical forces. In this context, the use of white and black threads, known as *sirat hurung ni tondi* (ward against evil spirits/mystical forces), is evident. The dominant black color of the *ulos* motif signifies that the royal heirlooms of *Silahisabungan* are hidden, and it also symbolizes the character of King *Silahisabungan* and his descendants, who pledge to be humble, spirited, brave, and pure-hearted toward their deity (God).

The meaning of the *Sakkut Borna ulos* is prayer and hope. In this context, King *Silahisabungan* and his descendants hope that the power of the heirlooms and manuscripts of the descendants of King *Silahisabungan* will remain officially protected. The *Sakkut Borna ulos* has a very high aesthetic value because the process of making the *ulos*, from spinning the yarn to weaving it, as well as its use in personal and traditional *Silahisabungan* customs, is full of rules, so King *Silahisabungan* and his descendants are people with a high artistic spirit and sense of beauty.

(3) *Gobar*

Ulos Gobar has an attractive appearance due to its combination of colors and delicate *ulos* patterns. *Gobar* is rectangular in shape, measuring 186 cm long and 100 cm wide. This *ulos* has many tassels, each 10 cm long, tied at both ends of the *ulos*. The *ulos* thread is made from *pokki* wood fiber, making it strong and durable.



Figure 4. The Gobar Ulos

The primary function of the *Gobar ulos*, created by *Sideang Namora* (the weaver), is to protect the body of King *Silalahisabungan* from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal disturbances, ensuring his safety and comfort. The personal function of the *Gobar ulos* is referred to as *ulos Pangidoan* (personal *ulos* request) because each male descendant of King *Silalahisabungan* is obtained based on a dream conveyed to King *Silalahisabungan* or *Sideang Namora*.

The original form of the *Gobar ulos* symbolizes safety and warmth, protecting oneself from the weather and ensuring comfort from animal attacks. Based on its characteristics (fringes, threads, motifs, and cap), the *Gobar ulos* symbolizes a barrier, protecting oneself from mystical forces and the malicious intentions of others.

As a personal *ulos*, the *Gobar ulos* carries the meaning of *poda* (advice), prayers, and personal hopes for freedom from illness and the ability to have children. In the context of customs and traditions, the *Gobar ulos* signifies: (1) the lineage of the *Silalahisabungan* King, (2) social status as a *suhut* 'organizer of celebrations', and (3) prayers and hopes, namely *las roha jala horas* 'joy of the heart and good health'.

(4) Polang-polang

The *Polang-polang ulos* is rectangular in shape, measuring 200 cm in length and 100 cm in width. The *Polang-polang ulos* is characterized by numerous tassels connected at the top and bottom of the *ulos*, with two threads positioned after the tassels that serve to bind the weave in place (fasteners).

The sides of the *ulos* have two red-hearted colors on both the right and left sides, which serve to secure the woven threads from both sides to keep them in place. The center of the *Polang-polang ulos* features 33 straight lines with a *sinaopat* pattern in white and black. The center of the *ulos* also has 17 straight lines running from top to bottom in white. The dominant color of the *Polang-polang ulos* is red on both sides and white in the center of the *ulos*.



Figur 5. Ulos Polang-Polang

The main function of the *Polang-polang ulos* was created by *Sideang Namora* (weaver) to protect the body of King *Silahisabungan* from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal disturbances so that he could remain safe and comfortable.

The *Polang-polang ulos* is personally referred to as the *ulos Pangidoan* (personal request *ulos*) or also known as the *ulos tondi* 'spirit/soul'. This is because each descendant of King *Silahisabungan*, especially males, receives this *ulos* based on a dream conveyed to King *Silahisabungan* or *Sideang Namora*.

The *Pangidoan ulos* serves as *poda* (advice/promise), prayer, and hope to be free from obstacles and challenges. The *Polang-polang ulos* as a *Pangidoan ulos* is typically used by male descendants of King *Silalahi* and worn as a left-shoulder covering, functioning as a symbol of social status as a *suhut* (event organizer). According to the belief of the descendants of King *Silahisabungan*, the *Polang-polang ulos* as *ulos Pangidoan* is a prayer and hope that people who always have problems with obstacles in their work, business, illness, or who have not had children for a long time will be *holang* 'free/liberated' from these obstacles.

The use of the *Polang-polang ulos* serves to protect the body, keeping it warm, safe, and comfortable. This is to avoid exposure to cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. The *Polang-polang ulos*, as a *Pangidoan ulos*, symbolizes prayers and hopes to avoid all obstacles in life, both personal and social. This *Polang-polang ulos* is also known as the *Tohonan ulos*, given by parents and *hula-hula* (uncle groups) to their descendants, containing *poda* (advice), prayers, and hopes for freedom from all obstacles in their lives, both personally and socially.

Users of the *ulos Polang-polang* also feel comfortable because they are protected from evil. Thus, this *ulos* also symbolizes social status. The *ulos Polang-polang* as an *ulos Tohonan* signifies social status as descendants of the King of *Silahisabungan* and holds the social status of *suhut*, or "ceremony organizer," in both joyful and sorrowful ceremonies. The *Polang-polang ulos* carries ethical significance because the process of its creation, its use, and the meanings contained within it are all governed by rules and norms. In this context, the use of the *Polang-polang ulos* must adhere to the established rules.

(5) *Hati Rongga*

The *Hati Rongga ulos* measures 191 cm in length and 113 cm in width. The *Hati Rongga ulos* features tassels, *sirat*, *topi* (sides), and *gatip* (lines in the center of the *ulos*). The tassels are located at the top and bottom of the *ulos*, measuring 10 cm in length and colored black, red, and white. The stripes of the *Hati Rongga ulos* are placed after the two fringes, which serve as borders to keep them in place. These stripes are red and white, 0.5 cm wide and 113 cm long. The *ulos* also has sides on both sides, which are black and serve as borders and fasteners for both sides of the *ulos*. The *ulos* has smooth white borders that serve as dividers between the sides and the center of the *ulos*.



Figure 6. *Ulos Hati Rongga*

The main function of the *Hati Rongga ulos* was created by *Sideang Namora* (weaver) as a waist cover by wrapping it around the waist to protect against cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. This *ulos* is also used specifically by women of the *Silalahisabungan* royal family, both at parties and when sending their children away to live elsewhere, by draping the *ulos* over their children's shoulders.

The primary purpose of wearing the *Hati Rongga ulos* is to protect against cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. In this context, the wearer feels protected, safe, and comfortable. The *Hati Rongga ulos* is exclusively worn by women descended from King *Silalahisabungan* during the *hahomion* festival to enhance their attire.

(6) *Siakkat-akkat*

The *Siakkat-akkat ulos* is rectangular in shape, measuring 190 cm long and 60 cm wide. This *ulos* has many tassels measuring 15 cm in length, positioned at the top and bottom of the *ulos*. There are two white and red stripes following the fringes, each measuring 60 cm in length, running along the width of the *ulos*. There are two side panels on the right and left sides, serving as fasteners to keep the threads in place (preventing them from unraveling). There are two central dividers with side panels on the *ulos*, each measuring 190 cm in length. The dominant color of the *ulos* is black. In the center of the *ulos*, there is a straight line pattern from top to bottom and a horizontal line pattern following the width of the *ulos*, both in black, with a width of 3 cm.



Figure 7. *Ulos Siakakat-akkat*

The main function of the *Siakkat-akkat ulos* was created by *Sideang Namora* (weaver) to protect the body of King *Silalahisabungan* from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites so that he would remain safe and comfortable. The *Siakkat-akkat ulos* is used in traditional ceremonies (*Tohonan*) for (1) moving into a new house, (2) death, (3) gifts for officials, and (4) *Bolahan ama* (*Tugu* party). The *ulos* is worn on the right shoulder, serving as a symbol of the lineage of King *Silalahisabungan* and as a marker of the "host" in traditional ceremonies.

The meaning of the *Siakkat-akkat ulos*, based on its use, is to protect the wearer, symbolizing safety and comfort. The *Siakkat-akkat ulos* as a *Pangidoan ulos* is a prayer and hope that the wearer will have abundant descendants and prosperity. The use of the *Siakkat-akkat ulos* in the context of traditional ceremonies signifies the lineage of the *Silalahi* King and the social status of the *suhut* (event organizer). The use of *Siakkat-akkat ulos* on the shoulders of the wearer signifies the etiquette of dressing appropriately according to *Silalahisabungan* customs. Based on the making of *ulos*, its characteristics, and the etiquette of wearing *ulos*, it is a sign that the descendants of the *Silalahisabungan* King have a high aesthetic value.

(7) *Bintang Maratur*

The *Bintang Maratur ulos* is rectangular in shape, measuring 183 cm in length and 66 cm in width. The *Bintang Maratur ulos* is characterized by numerous tassels connected at the top and bottom, with two sirat (strings) behind the tassels that serve to hold the weave in place. The tassels are 20 cm long and colored black and red. It has black and white straps that serve to secure the tassels so they do not easily detach from the body of the *ulos*, with a width of 1 cm and a length of 66 cm. The sides (edges) of the *ulos* have two such straps, both on the right and left sides of the *ulos*. The *ulos* side is red in color, with a width of 4 cm and a length of 183 cm. The *ulos* has two gading that serve as dividers between the *ulos* sides and the center of the *ulos*, which features numerous motifs called *Bintang Maratur*.



Figure 8. *Ulos Bintang Maratur*

The main function of the *Bintang Maratur ulos* was created by Sideang Namora (weaver) to protect the body of King Silahisabungan from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites so that he would remain safe and comfortable. The *Bintang Maratur ulos* is also personally referred to as the *pangidoan ulos*, specifically used by women descended from King Silahisabungan, as per their request. The *pangidoan ulos* serves as a prayer and hope for obtaining descendants and a prosperous life. The *ulos* is used as a right shoulder cover (*hadang-hadangan*), serving as a marker of the lineage of the Silahisabungan King and a marker of the social status of the *suhut* (event organizer). The *Bintang Maratur ulos* is used in traditional ceremonies: (1) moving into a new house, (2) marriage, and (3) *hahomion* (a religious ceremony). The use of the *Bintang Maratur ulos* in marriage is intended for daughters who are descendants of the Silalahi King and is also called *ulos ni hela* (son-in-law) so that their marriage will have offspring, harmony, peace, and prosperity.

Based on its original meaning, the *Bintang Maratur ulos* protects the wearer, providing security and comfort. Personally, the *Bintang Maratur ulos* serves as a *pangidoan ulos*, functioning as a prayer and hope with the meanings of (1) *mamora* (many descendants), (2) *hasangapon* (prosperity), and (3) *hagabeon* (honored and respected in the eyes of society). (4) the use of the *Bintang Maratur ulos* has rules that signify certain ethics/norms, both in terms of personal norms and customary norms. Based on the method of making the *ulos*, its characteristics, functions, and ethical use, the descendants of King Silahisabungan hold it to have a high artistic value. This is evidenced by the color composition and harmonious weaving of threads, motifs, and the harmonious use of the *ulos*, all of which contribute to its high aesthetic value.

(8) *Siattar-attar*

Ulos Siattar-attar has a rectangular shape with a length of 186 cm and a width of 59 cm. The characteristics of the *Siattar-attar ulos* include: (1) fringes (*rumbai*), stripes, sides (*topi*),

and the central part of the *ulos*, which typically features *gatip* with the following characteristics: 1. These fringes are a collection of threads selected together, measuring 11 cm in length, colored black and white, located at the left and right ends of the *ulos*. 2. The *sirat tagan*, colored red, white, and black, with a width of 1 cm and a length of 59 cm, is located on the left and right sides of the two fringes. 3. The *topi* (sides), two pieces on the right and left sides of the *ulos*, are black in color with a width of 4 cm and serve as a border for the *ulos* and 164 cm. 4. *Ipon-ipon*, and 5. *Tagi-tag*i, 6. Motif borders

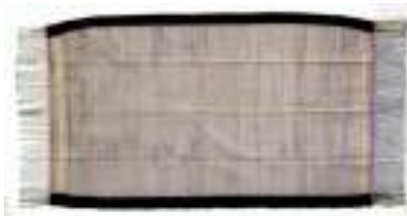


Figure 9. *Ulos Siattar-attar*

The main function of the *Siattar-attar ulos* was created by *Sideang Namora* (weaver) to protect the body of King *Silahisabungan* from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal disturbances so that he could remain safe and comfortable. The *Siattar-attar ulos* is personally referred to as the *Pangidoan ulos* because every descendant of King *Silahisabungan*, especially women, uses it according to their wishes. The *Pangidoan ulos* serves as a symbol of hope for freedom from obstacles and challenges. The *Siattar-attar ulos*, as a *Pangidoan ulos*, is typically worn by women descended from King *Silahisabungan* by being wrapped around the shoulders. Currently, the *Siattar-attar ulos* is used in traditional ceremonies (beliefs), celebrations, and in all traditional ceremonies held in *Silahisabungan* by wearing the *ulos* on the right shoulder.

The primary function of the *Siattar-attar ulos* is to protect oneself, meaning safety and comfort in wearing the *ulos*. This *ulos* also serves as an *ulos Pangidoan*, or “hope,” to achieve the aspirations desired by the wearer. The use of this *ulos* in traditional customs signifies the daughter of the King of *Silahisabungan* and the social status as a *parhobas*, or “traditional ceremony performer.”

(9) *Sigara Topi*

The *Sigara Topi ulos* has a rectangular shape with a length of 184 cm and a width of 84 cm, complete with *sirat*, *topi* (sides), and the middle part of the *ulos* generally has *gatip* (motifs). The *Sigara Topi ulos* does not have *sirat* and tassels on the left and right ends of the *ulos*.



Figure 10. *Ulos Sigara Topi*

The *Sigara Topi ulos cap* (side) is found on all four sides of the *ulos* and serves to keep the *ulos* threads in place. The *Sigara Topi ulos* has a cap (side) width of 12 cm on both sides of the *ulos*. There are two types of *Sigara Topi ulos*, namely *sinaopat* and *sinaopat motif*.

The primary function of the *Sigara Topi ulos* is to cover the body of the daughter of the *Sidebang* King by wrapping her in it to protect her from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal disturbances, ensuring her safety and comfort. The distinctive feature of the *Sigara Topi ulos* is to enhance the beauty of its use and serve as a symbolic barrier (protector) against both animal disturbances and the malicious intentions of others. The *Sigara Topi ulos* is also specifically called the *tondi* (soul) *ulos* of the *Sidebang* clan because of the clan's characteristic of always fulfilling requests. The dominant feature of this *ulos* is its red color, which symbolizes the wearer's character, spirit and courage.

The meaning of the *Sigara Topi ulos* is to protect and provide security and comfort to the wearer. Another meaning of this *ulos* is as a marker that the wearer is the daughter of the *Sidebang* clan, while in the social status of traditional ceremonies, it serves as a marker for the *parhobas* (traditional ceremony performers) in both joyful and sorrowful ceremonies. The *ulos* functions as an *abit* (*sarong*) with the meaning of ethical propriety in dressing for traditional ceremonies in *Silahisabungan*. Based on the form and characteristics of the *ulos*'s use in traditional ceremonies, it has a high aesthetic value.

(10) *Pangiring*

Ulos Pangiring is rectangular in shape, measuring 170 cm long and 74 cm wide. The characteristics of this *ulos* are (1) tassels, (2) *sirat*, (3) *topi* (sides), (4) *gading*, and (5) motifs. The following is a description of this *ulos*:

- a. The fringe consists of a collection of threads selected during the weaving process, measuring 11 cm in length and colored black and white, located at both ends of the *ulos*.
- b. The *sirat*, measuring 74 cm in length, is positioned on the left and right sides of the *ulos*, serving as a fastener to secure the fringe to the body of the *ulos*, with a width of 1 cm. The type of *sirat* on this *ulos* is called *sirat biasa* or also known as *kotang-kotang*, colored black, white, and red.
- c. *Topi* (sides) two pieces on the right and left sides of the *ulos*, each 1.5 cm wide, function as borders for the *ulos* and are 152 cm long.
- d. *Gatip*, two pieces positioned between the left and right sides, bordering the center of the *ulos*, with a length of 148 cm.
- e. The *Ulos Pangiring* motif is located in the center of the *ulos*, with the following motif names: *hauna*, *halaman*, *pangiring maranak motif*, and *pangorat motif*.



Figure 11. *Ulos Pangiring*

The main function of the *Pangiring ulos* is to protect oneself from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. This *ulos* is also a *Pangidoan ulos* (prayer and hope) to ward off illness

and the evil intentions of others and to obtain offspring. The *Pangiring ulos* is used in ceremonies of joy and sorrow, including traditional wedding ceremonies, funerals, and ceremonies to honor officials, as well as *potong rumbait* ceremonies. In wedding ceremonies, the *Pangiring ulos* is used as a *tali-tali* (hat) to signify the lineage of the King of *Silahisabungan* and as a marker of social status as a *suhut* (organizer of the ceremony) in the traditional ceremony.

Ulos Pangiring serves to protect the wearer's body, symbolizing safety and comfort for the wearer. The use of this *ulos* as *ulos Pangidoan* (prayer and hope) signifies freedom from illness and the attainment of offspring and prosperity for the wearer. The use of *ulos* in the context of traditional ceremonies signifies descent from the King of *Silahisabungan* and social status as a *suhut* (ceremony organizer).

Based on its use, the *Pangiring ulos* has rules/norms in accordance with the customs prevailing in *Silahisabungan*, which signify ethics in politeness in dressing. Based on its form, characteristics, production, and ethical use, *ulos* holds a very high aesthetic value, as evidenced by its production, color composition, and harmonious weaving of threads, resulting in a very high aesthetic value for the descendants of the *Silahisabungan* King.

(11) *Suri-suri Ganjang*

Ulos Suri-suri Ganjang has a rectangular shape with tassels (*rumbai*), *sirat*, *topi* (sides), and a central section that typically features *gatip* (thread motifs). The overall length of the *ulos* is 182 cm and the width is 70 cm, with the following characteristics:

- a. The fringe on the *Ulos Suri-suri Ganjang* has a length of 18 cm and is black in color, located at both ends of the *ulos*.
- b. The *sirat*, measuring 70 cm in length, is positioned on the left and right sides of the *ulos* and serves as a fastener to secure the fringe to the body of the *ulos*, with a width of 1 cm. The type of *sirat* used in this *ulos* is called *sirat biasa* or also known as *kotang-kotang*.
- c. There are two side panels on the right and left sides of the *ulos*, each 4 cm wide, which serve as borders for the *ulos* and are 146 cm long.
- d. There are two *gatip* panels positioned between the left and right side panels, bordering the center of the *ulos*, with a length of 146 cm.
- e. The *Ulos Pangiring* motif is located in the center of the *ulos* with the following motif names: *hauna*, *halaman*, *Pangiring maranak motif*, and *pangorat motif*.

The *Suri-suri Ganjang ulos* has many connected tassels at the top and bottom of the *ulos*, with two *sirat* positions after the tassels that serve to secure the weave in place. The sides (edges) of the *ulos* have two red-hearted colors on both the right and left sides, which serve to secure the woven threads from the sides to keep them in place. The dominant color of the *Suri-suri Ganjang ulos* is red-hearted on both sides and white in the center of the *ulos*.



Figure 12. Ulos Suri-suri Ganjang

The main function of the *Suri-suri Ganjang ulos* is to protect oneself from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. This *ulos* is also a *Pangidoan ulos* (prayer and hope) so that the wearer of the *ulos* will receive sustenance and a long life. The function of the *ulos*, as indicated by the characteristics of the *Suri-suri Ganjang ulos*, serves as both decoration and a barrier (protection) against the malicious intentions of others. The *Suri-suri Ganjang ulos* is used as a left shoulder covering in all *Silahisabungan* traditional ceremonies, serving as a marker of the lineage of the *Silahisabungan* King and a marker of the social status of the *suhut* (ceremony organizer) in a ceremony.

It signifies safety and comfort because the *ulos* protects the wearer from the weather and animal bites. The *Suri-suri Ganjang ulos* is a *Pangidoan ulos* because it contains prayers and hopes that the descendants of the King of *Silahisabungan* will receive abundant fortune. In the context of the *Silahisabungan* traditional ceremony, the *Suri-suri Ganjang ulos* is used as a *hadang-hadangan* (shoulder) to signify the descendants of the *Silahisabungan* King and the social status of the *suhut* (ceremony organizer).

(12) Sidos-dos

Ulos Sidos-dos is rectangular in shape, measuring 202 cm in length and 111 cm in width. The characteristics of the *Sidos-dos ulos* include: (1) two tassels located at the top and bottom of the *ulos*, each measuring 17 cm in length and colored black, (2) two stripes measuring 11 cm in length formed on the left and right sides of the *ulos*, each 1 cm in width. The type of stripes on this *ulos* is called "*sirat biasa*" or "*kotang-kotang*," featuring a combination of three colors: black, red, and white. (3) It has two black side panels, each 9 cm wide and 168 cm long. (4) The *gatis* on this *ulos* is located in the center of the *ulos*, which is plain blue without any motifs, with a width of 93 cm.



Figure 13. Ulos Sidos-dos

The main function of the *Sidos-dos ulos* is to protect oneself from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. The *Sidos-dos ulos* is used in all traditional ceremonies, both happy and sad, in *Silahisabungan*. The *Sidos-dos ulos* is worn by wrapping it around the body (*diabithon*) to cover the wearer's private parts. In the context of traditional ceremonies, the *Sidos-dos ulos* serves as a marker of the lineage of the King of *Silahisabungan* and as a marker of the social status of the *suhut* (ceremony organizer) in a traditional ceremony.

The function of the *ulos*, based on the characteristics of the *Sidos-dos ulos*, is to serve as decoration and a barrier (protection) against the evil intentions of others.

The *Sidos-dos ulos* serves to protect the wearer's body, symbolizing safety and comfort for the wearer. The use of the *Sidos-dos ulos* in the context of traditional ceremonies signifies the lineage of the King of *Silahisabungan* and the social status of the *suhut* (ceremony organizer). Based on its use, the *Sidos-dos ulos* has rules, namely *diabithon* (wrapped) according to the customs prevailing in *Silahisabungan*, which signifies ethics in politeness in dressing.

Based on its form, characteristics, production, and ethical use, the *ulos* possesses a very high aesthetic value, as evidenced by its production, color composition, and harmonious weaving of threads, thereby yielding a very high aesthetic value for the descendants of the King of *Silahisabungan*.

(13) *Gipul*

Ulos Gipul is dominated by golden yellow, while the *sirat* section is brown, and the *gatip* section is a combination of brown colors, while the *rumbai ulos* is brown. *Ulos Gipul* has a rectangular shape with fringes (*rumbai*), *sirat*, sides (*topi*), and a central section of the *ulos* that typically features *gatip* or patterns and lacks sides (*topi*). It measures 191 cm in total length and 121 cm in width, with the following characteristics: (1). It has fringes on both the upper and lower ends of the *ulos*, each measuring 15 cm in length and colored red and white. (2) It has two *sirat* measuring 121 cm in length, positioned on the upper and lower sides of the *ulos*, functioning as ties for the *ulos* fringes, with a width of 1 cm. The type of *sirat* on this *ulos* is called *sirat biasa* or also known as *kotang-kotang*. (3) It has two *gatip*, each located between the left and right sides, bordering the center of the *ulos*, with a length of 182 cm. (4) The center of the *ulos* is plain golden yellow without any *sinaopat* motifs and does not have *ulos gading-gading*.



Figure 14. *Ulos Gipul*

The main function of the *Gipul ulos* is to protect oneself from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. The *Gipul ulos* is used in all traditional mourning ceremonies in *Silahisabungan*. Generally, this *ulos* is used as a *saong-saong* (head covering) for women who are *mabalu* (widows).

The *Gipul ulos* serves to protect the wearer's body, symbolizing safety and comfort for the user. As a symbol of *mangalap tondi* (seeking the soul), it signifies a replacement for someone whose soul is not within them. The use of the *Gipul ulos* in traditional ceremonies signifies the lineage of the King of *Silahisabungan* and the social status of the *suhut* (event organizer).

Based on its usage, the *Ulos Gipul* has specific rules: it is worn as a shoulder wrap in accordance with the traditional customs of *Silahisabungan*, which signify ethical etiquette in dressing.

(14) *Sitorop Gatip*

Ulos Sitorop Gatip has a rectangular shape with a length of 175 cm and a width of 61 cm, featuring fringes (*rumbai*), stripes, sides (*topi*), and a central section of the *ulos* typically adorned with *gatip* (thread motifs) characterized by (1) tassels on the *Ulos Sitorop Gatip* measuring 18 cm in length, colored black, red, and white, located at both ends of the *ulos*, (2) *sirat* measuring 61 cm in length with three color combinations of yellow, green, and black on the upper and lower positions of the *ulos*, functioning as a tie to secure the tassels to the body of the *ulos* with a width of 1 cm. The type of *sirat* on this *ulos* is called *sirat biasa* or also known as *sirat tagan*, (3) two side panels (*sisi*) on the right and left sides of the *ulos*, each 3 cm wide and 61 cm long, serving as a divider between the central section and the side panels, (4) two *gatip* patterns positioned between the side panels left and right sides, bordering the central part of the *ulos*, with a length of 139 cm, (5) the *Ulos Pangiring* motif is also present in the central part of this *ulos*, described from left to right with the following motif names: *gading-gading*, *anak motif*, *ipon-ipon*, *sinawaluh*, *sinaopat*, *ipon-ipon*, *seat-seat*, *suang-suang*, *hana* in yellow. As shown in the image below.



Figure 15. *Ulos Sitorop Gatip*

The primary function of the *Sitorop Gatip ulos* is to protect oneself from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites. Based on its characteristics, the *Sitorop Gatip ulos* also serves as decoration and a barrier (ward off) against the evil intentions of others. The *Sitorop Gatip ulos* is referred to as the *Tondi ulos*, serving as a prayer and hope for *torop maranak*, *marboru*, and *torop pancarian* (success) in having male and female children and achieving success in one's endeavors. The *Sitorop Gatip ulos* is used in all traditional ceremonies of joy and sorrow in *Silahisabungan*. *Ulos Sitorop Gatip* is used as a shoulder cover for the wearer. In the context of traditional ceremonies, *ulos Sitorop Gatip* serves as a marker of the lineage of the King of *Silahisabungan* and as a marker of the social status of the *suhut* (organizer of the ceremony) in a traditional ceremony in *Silahisabungan*.

Based on its form, characteristics, production, and etiquette of use, the *ulos* holds a very high aesthetic value. This is evidenced by the production of the *Sitorop Gatip ulos*, its color composition, and the harmonization of the thread weaving, which together produce a very high aesthetic value for the descendants of the King of *Silahisabungan*.

(15) *Tudung Namora*

The *Ulos Tudung Namboru* has a rectangular shape with a length of 172 cm and a width of 60 cm, complete with tassels (*rumbai*), borders (*sirat*), sides (*topi*), and a central section of the *ulos* that typically features a thread pattern (*gatip*) with the following characteristics:

1. The fringe on the *Ulos Tudung Namboru* measures 13 cm in length, colored red, black, and blue, and is located at both ends of the *ulos*.

2. The border, measuring 60 cm in length, is positioned on the left and right sides of the *ulos*, serving as a fastener to secure the fringe to the body of the *ulos*, with a width of 1 cm. The type of *sirat* on this *ulos* is called *sirat biasa* or also known as *kotang-kotang*.
3. Two side panels (*topi*) on the right and left sides of the *ulos*, each 3 cm wide and 146 cm long, serve as borders for the *ulos*.
4. Two *gatip* are positioned between the left and right-side panels, bordering the central part of the *ulos*, each 146 cm long.
5. The *ulos* pattern is located in the center of the *ulos*, which is 63 cm wide, with the pattern names arranged as follows: *ipon-ipon*, *sinawalu*, *ipon-ipon*. Then three patterns are arranged again in smaller sizes and ended with the *sinaopat* pattern. As shown in the image below.



Figure 16. Ulos Tudung Namora

The main function of the *Tudung Namboru ulos* was created by *Sideang Namora* (weaver) for herself, namely to protect herself from cold weather, heat, rain, and animal bites so that she could remain safe and comfortable. The *Tudung Namboru ulos* is used in her daily activities as a hood (to protect her head) when searching for bark and thread dye materials in *Siattar* (hill). To this day, the *Tudung Namboru ulos* is only used by *Sideang Namora* and women descended from the King of *Silahisabungan*, worn by wrapping it around the body and draping it over the head. This *Tudung Namboru ulos* is used in traditional ceremonies, both joyful and sorrowful, in *Silahisabungan*.

Based on its form, characteristics, production, and ethical use, the *Tudung Namboru ulos* has a very high aesthetic value, as evidenced by its production, color composition, and harmonious thread weaving, which together produce a very high aesthetic value for the descendants of King *Silahisabungan*.

b. Commodification of Ulos Silahisabungan

Ulos Silahisabungan is one of the intangible cultural heritage items that holds deep significance for the *Batak* people, particularly the *Silahisabungan* subgroup. This *ulos* serves not only as a fashion accessory but also as a symbol of social status, spirituality, and genealogical continuity. Its use is highly sacred in various traditional rituals, such as weddings, funerals, and blessings. Each motif and color woven into it carries philosophical messages and local values passed down through generations. However, the dynamics of globalization and the intrusion of market logic into traditional culture have transformed the role of *ulos*, including *Ulos Silahisabungan*, from a cultural symbol into an economic commodity.



Figure 17. Ulos Silahisabungan as a traditional symbol in Batak ceremonies

Commodification, in this context, refers to the process of transforming the cultural value of *ulos* into exchange value in the free market. *Ulos Silahisabungan* is now not only produced for traditional needs but also sold as fashion items, souvenirs, and tourist merchandise. In the Lake Toba tourism industry, for example, *ulos* is featured in modern clothing, bags, wallets, and interior decorations. This creates a shift in function and meaning: from a spiritual artifact to a consumer object (Appadurai, 1986; Harvey, 2005). This phenomenon is inseparable from the development of the creative economy, which positions cultural heritage as the basis for commercial innovation.



Figure 18. Ulos Pangiring Use

The impact of this commodification is ambivalent. On one hand, it opens up economic empowerment opportunities for weavers and SMEs in Silalahi I Village, known as the "*Ulos Village*." Income increases, and the regeneration of weaving skills is better preserved due to market demand. However, on the other hand, the sacred meaning and traditional norms associated with the use of *Silahisabungan ulos* may degrade. When *ulos* is used without an understanding of the social-cultural context behind it, it loses its symbolic status as a marker of social relationships and traditional structures.

A social semiotic analysis of the commodification of *Ulos Silahisabungan* reveals that *ulos* has undergone a shift in meaning: from an icon representing *Batak* society to an economic symbol in the tourism industry and pop culture. In this process, there is also a negotiation of identity between the preservation of tradition and the demands of the global market.

Adaptation strategies, such as labeling *ulos* with cultural narratives or emphasizing ethnic origins, are often used to maintain the “symbolic authenticity” of the product so that it remains valuable in the market, even though its context of use has changed.



Figure 19. Conclusion

Therefore, the commodification of *Ulos Silahisabungan* must be critically understood within its cultural and economic context. Commercialization is inevitable in the global era, but it must be accompanied by efforts to preserve the local values inherent in *ulos*. Engaging indigenous communities, documenting *ulos* narratives, cultural education in schools, and certifying traditional intellectual property rights are strategic steps to ensure that the commodification process remains ethical and aligned with cultural preservation. Thus, *Ulos Silahisabungan* can continue to thrive, both as a cultural symbol and as a sustainable economic product.

CONCLUSION

Ulos Silahisabungan is an intangible cultural heritage that holds high symbolic, aesthetic, and spiritual value within the social structure of the *Batak* people, particularly the *Silahisabungan* sub-ethnic group. Through its various types and meanings embedded in its motifs, forms, and methods of use, this *ulos* serves not only as a medium of cultural expression but also as a marker of social status and genealogical identity. However, amid the tide of globalization and the growth of the creative economy, the function of *ulos* has undergone a transformation from a sacred artifact into an economic commodity marketed in the form of modern products such as clothing, accessories, and tourist souvenirs.

The commodification of *ulos* has complex implications. On one hand, it opens opportunities for preserving weaving skills and boosting the local economy, particularly in *Kampung Ulos (Silalahi I)*. On the other hand, if not guided ethically and culturally, this process risks reducing the meaning of *ulos* to mere merchandise, detached from its traditional and spiritual context. Therefore, it is important to design community-based preservation strategies, such as documenting *ulos* narratives, cultural education, and protecting intellectual property rights, to ensure that commodification does not erase the noble values inherited from the ancestors of the *Silahisabungan* community.

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