

## Njuah-Njuah Cultural Festival as a Counter-Hegemonic Space for Sustaining Pakpak Traditional Music in Dairi Regency

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the shrinking cultural space of Pakpak traditional music in Dairi Regency, North Sumatra, where Batak Toba musical aesthetics increasingly dominate ritual, religious, and public cultural events. Although the Pakpak community possesses a rich musical tradition, particularly the *Genderang Sisibah* ensemble, these forms are gradually displaced within everyday communal practices. This research aims to analyze how the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival functions as a cultural arena that supports the sustainability and visibility of Pakpak traditional music. The study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach involving participant observation, in-depth interviews with cultural actors and musicians, and analysis of institutional and cultural documents. Fieldwork was conducted across several communal contexts, including family rituals, church activities, school events, entertainment markets, and the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival. The findings reveal that the dominance of Batak Toba music is not merely a matter of aesthetic preference but is closely tied to structural factors such as institutional influence, symbolic legitimacy, and the broader availability of Batak Toba musicians in the local entertainment economy. Despite these pressures, the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival provides an important public platform where Pakpak musical traditions regain visibility and cultural authority. The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating how cultural festivals can serve as counter-hegemonic arenas that facilitate the transmission, negotiation, and continuity of indigenous musical traditions in contemporary socio-cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** *Cultural hegemony, Njuah-Njuah Cultural Festival, Pakpak traditional music, Indigenous music sustainability, Cultural transmission*



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## 1. Introduction

Traditional music plays a crucial role in the construction, transmission, and representation of cultural identity within many indigenous communities. Musical practices do not merely function as aesthetic expressions but also operate as symbolic systems through which historical memory, social values, and collective identities are communicated across generations. In multicultural societies, however, traditional musical forms often encounter pressures from dominant cultural traditions, institutional structures, and market dynamics that shape the visibility of cultural expressions in public spaces.

The Pakpak community in Dairi Regency, North Sumatra, represents one such context where musical traditions intersect with broader socio-cultural transformations. Historically, Dairi forms part of the traditional homeland of the Pakpak people, whose cultural identity has long been expressed through customary institutions, ritual practices, and musical traditions such as the *Genderang Sisibah* ensemble. This ensemble traditionally accompanies ceremonies related to kinship, agriculture, and communal celebrations and functions as an important marker of Pakpak cultural identity. However, demographic changes and socio-political transformations in the region have gradually altered the cultural landscape in which these traditions operate.

One of the most visible cultural shifts is the growing presence of Batak Toba musical traditions at communal events in Pakpak. Batak Toba musical ensembles are now frequently used at weddings, religious celebrations,

public performances, and entertainment venues, including ceremonies organized by members of the Pakpak community. This phenomenon suggests that Pakpak musical traditions are not disappearing entirely but are increasingly positioned at the margins of everyday cultural practices. In contrast, Batak Toba musical aesthetics gain stronger symbolic legitimacy within public cultural arenas. Such dynamics raise important questions about how cultural dominance operates in plural societies and how minority cultural traditions negotiate their visibility in shared cultural spaces.

Theoretical discussions on cultural power have long emphasized that cultural dominance frequently emerges through subtle social processes rather than direct coercion. Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony explains how dominant cultural forms become normalized through institutions, public representation, and everyday practices. Through processes that Gramsci described as a war of position, dominant groups gradually establish ideological influence within civil society, shaping common perceptions of cultural legitimacy and aesthetic value. In such contexts, minority cultural traditions may experience a gradual narrowing of representational space without necessarily disappearing from social life.

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined cultural festivals as arenas where identity politics, cultural representation, and symbolic power relations are negotiated. Festivals are not merely celebratory events but can function as platforms through which communities articulate cultural identity and challenge dominant cultural narratives (Quinn, 2005; Picard & Robinson, 2006). In many contexts, festivals provide opportunities for marginalized groups to reclaim visibility and reinforce collective identity in response to processes of cultural marginalization and globalization.

Studies in ethnomusicology further demonstrate that musical traditions often become sites of cultural contestation within ethnically diverse societies. Dominant ethnic groups frequently shape public cultural expression through institutional influence, economic networks, and symbolic prestige, thereby gradually marginalizing minority musical traditions (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008). In such contexts, music functions not only as artistic expression but also as a marker of social power and identity negotiation within culturally plural environments.

Research in cultural sociology also highlights how cultural dominance in multicultural societies often operates through everyday practices and public representation rather than through direct political coercion (Hall, 1997; Connell & Gibson, 2003). Through these processes, dominant cultural forms gain symbolic legitimacy and visibility, while minority cultural traditions may experience reduced representation in public cultural spaces. As a result, minority communities often seek alternative arenas where their cultural traditions can be sustained and publicly recognized.

Despite the growing body of literature on festivals and cultural representation, several limitations remain in existing research. First, most studies on cultural festivals focus on tourism development, urban cultural economies, or large-scale international events. Relatively little attention has been given to community-based cultural festivals as mechanisms for sustaining indigenous musical traditions within ethnically plural local societies. Second, while ethnomusicological studies have examined music and identity, fewer have explored how musical traditions interact with local power relations and cultural dominance in specific regional contexts. Finally, limited research has examined how local cultural festivals may function as counter-hegemonic spaces that enable marginalized cultural traditions to regain symbolic visibility in everyday cultural life.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival in Dairi Regency as a cultural arena where Pakpak musical traditions are publicly re-articulated and symbolically reaffirmed. Specifically, the research investigates how the festival operates as a cultural platform that supports the sustainability and visibility of Pakpak traditional music amid the dominance of Batak Toba musical aesthetics in everyday communal settings.

By analyzing musical practices across multiple social arenas—including ritual ceremonies, institutional events, entertainment markets, and festival performances—this study contributes to broader discussions on cultural hegemony, minority cultural resilience, and the role of cultural festivals in sustaining indigenous musical traditions. The findings offer empirical insight into how community-based festivals may function as counter-hegemonic spaces that enable marginalized cultural traditions to negotiate visibility and continuity within contemporary multicultural societies.

## 2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach framed within an ethnographic research design to examine how Pakpak traditional music is practiced, negotiated, and represented within the socio-cultural landscape of Dairi Regency. Ethnography enables the researcher to explore lived experiences, symbolic meanings, and cultural practices embedded in ritual events, communal gatherings, and cultural festivals. Rather than interpreting musical practices merely as aesthetic expressions, this approach situates them within broader processes of

cultural hegemony, identity negotiation, and cultural transmission.

Fieldwork was conducted in several cultural arenas where musical decisions commonly occur in Pakpak communities. These included family rituals, church activities, school performances, entertainment markets organized by event providers, and the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival. These sites were purposively selected because they represent key social contexts where the choice between Pakpak traditional music and Batak Toba musical traditions is evident in everyday communal practices.

Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to capture the perspectives of key cultural actors involved in musical practices in Dairi Regency. In total, approximately twenty informants participated in the study. These participants included Pakpak customary leaders, traditional musicians of the *Genderang Sisibah* ensemble, Batak Toba gondang musicians, cultural practitioners from local art studios, government officials responsible for cultural programs, and community members who regularly participate in ritual and festival activities. All participants had direct experience organizing, performing, or observing communal events in which musical ensembles were selected.

Data collection involved participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted during ritual ceremonies, community events, and festival activities to understand how musical ensembles were selected, how performances unfolded, and how audiences responded to different musical traditions. Interviews explored participants' perceptions regarding musical preference, cultural identity, and the changing role of traditional music in communal life. Documentary materials such as festival programs, cultural policy documents, and institutional records were also analyzed to understand broader structural influences shaping musical practices.

Because this study employs an ethnographic approach, the researcher's positionality was also considered throughout the research process. The researcher maintains close cultural familiarity with the Pakpak community in Dairi Regency, which facilitated access to ritual events and helped build trust with participants. At the same time, reflexive awareness was maintained to minimize potential interpretive bias arising from cultural proximity. Field observations, interview narratives, and documentary sources were continuously compared through data triangulation to balance cultural familiarity with analytical distance.

Data analysis followed a thematic coding process comprising open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding identified recurring themes related to musical preference, cultural authority, and symbolic representation. Axial coding connected these themes to broader structural factors, including institutional influence, musician availability, economic considerations, and perceptions of cultural prestige. Selective coding then integrated these categories to explain how Batak Toba musical dominance becomes normalized in everyday communal life. At the same time, the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival provides a cultural arena that re-expands the performance space of Pakpak traditional music.

To ensure methodological rigor, triangulation was applied across observation, interviews, and documentary sources. Member checking with selected informants was also conducted to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, particularly when documenting ritual practices and traditional performances.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1. The Dominance of Batak Toba Musical Aesthetics in Pakpak Ritual Spaces

Field observations indicate that Batak Toba musical aesthetics have increasingly become dominant within many Pakpak communal rituals in Dairi Regency. This dominance is particularly visible in wedding ceremonies, church celebrations, and community festivals, where Batak Toba musical ensembles are frequently selected even when Pakpak families organize the events. While Pakpak musical traditions, such as the *Genderang Sisibah* ensemble, historically accompanied ritual events related to kinship and communal gatherings, these traditions now appear less frequently in everyday ceremonial practices.



Figure 1. The left image shows the Pakpak lobat instrument, which is only a symbol, and the right image shows the lobat being replaced directly by the flute of the Toba ethnic group.

A wedding ceremony observed in Sidikalang in October 2025 illustrates this dynamic. Although a Pakpak family organized the event, the musical accompaniment was performed entirely by a Batak Toba gondang ensemble. The traditional Pakpak instrument, lobat, which historically functioned as part of Pakpak ritual music, was present only as a symbolic element near the ceremonial area rather than being actively performed. Instead, the melodic structure of the performance was carried by the Batak Toba flute, accompanied by percussion patterns characteristic of the gondang ensemble.

Interviews with community members reveal that the choice of musical ensemble often involves both practical and symbolic considerations. One Pakpak musician explained:

“Nowadays, for large ceremonial events, people often invite Batak Toba gondang ensembles because they are considered more festive and the musicians are easier to find. Pakpak music still exists, but it is rarely used for large celebrations.” (Interview with Pakpak traditional musician, Sidikalang, 2025)

A similar perspective was expressed by a community organizer who regularly coordinates ceremonial events:

“Sometimes Pakpak families themselves choose Batak Toba gondang ensembles because they are seen as more complete for large events, especially when many guests are invited.” (Interview with local event organizer, Dairi, 2025)

These decisions are typically negotiated among family members, customary leaders, and event organizers. In many cases, the final decision reflects considerations such as the availability of musicians, audience expectations, and the perceived prestige associated with certain musical ensembles.

Structurally, Pakpak and Batak Toba musical ensembles differ both musically and symbolically. The *Genderang Sisibah* ensemble is traditionally associated with Pakpak ritual authority and kinship structures, emphasizing rhythmic coordination among drums and ceremonial instruments. In contrast, Batak Toba gondang ensembles feature a more elaborate musical structure involving melodic instruments such as flutes and coordinated percussion patterns designed to accompany large communal celebrations. These structural differences also carry symbolic meanings: Pakpak music is historically embedded in localized ritual contexts, while Batak Toba musical forms have gained broader visibility through institutional support, church networks, and the entertainment industry.

The increasing use of Batak Toba musical forms within Pakpak ceremonies, therefore, reflects not only musical preference but also broader dynamics of cultural power. As Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony suggests, dominant cultural forms often gain legitimacy through repeated social practices that gradually shape communal perceptions of what is considered appropriate or prestigious. In multicultural societies, cultural dominance frequently operates through everyday practices, institutional structures, and symbolic representation rather than through direct coercion.

Recent scholarship in ethnomusicology and cultural studies similarly demonstrates that musical traditions often become arenas where cultural power relations are negotiated (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008; Connell & Gibson, 2003). Within such contexts, dominant cultural forms gain visibility and legitimacy through institutional networks, media representation, and economic accessibility, while minority musical traditions may experience reduced representation in public cultural spaces. The case of Pakpak musical traditions in Dairi illustrates how these broader dynamics unfold in local ritual contexts, where Batak Toba musical aesthetics increasingly shape the soundscape of communal celebrations.

### 3.2. Visual Identity Shifts

In addition to musical substitution, field observations also reveal significant shifts in the visual elements of Pakpak ritual ceremonies, particularly in wedding events. Visual identity in Pakpak rituals traditionally includes distinctive clothing, ornaments, and symbolic attributes that reflect kinship relations and cultural hierarchy. However, in many contemporary ceremonies in Dairi Regency, these visual markers increasingly incorporate elements associated with Batak Toba ceremonial traditions.

During several wedding ceremonies observed between 2024 and 2025 in Sidikalang and surrounding areas, Pakpak brides and grooms were seen wearing ceremonial ornaments commonly associated with Batak Toba ritual attire, such as the *sortali* (ceremonial headband) and *gotong* (shoulder cloth). These elements appeared alongside Pakpak ceremonial clothing, creating hybrid visual representations within the ritual setting. While the core ritual structure remained Pakpak in form, the visual symbolism reflected a blending of cultural attributes.



Figure 2. The use of Toba ornaments in traditional Pakpak wedding rituals

One customary leader explained this phenomenon during an interview:

“Many families now adopt certain Batak Toba ceremonial ornaments because they are seen as more prestigious or more recognizable in large celebrations. Sometimes people feel that using these symbols makes the ceremony look more complete.” (*Interview with Pakpak customary leader, Dairi, 2025*)

Another cultural practitioner noted that broader social expectations and exposure to dominant cultural representations in public ceremonies and media often influence these visual adaptations:

“People are influenced by what they see in other ceremonies. Batak Toba wedding symbols are widely recognized, so some families adopt them even when the ceremony is essentially Pakpak.” (*Interview with cultural practitioner, Sidikalang, 2025*)

These observations suggest that visual transformations in ritual ceremonies are not merely aesthetic modifications but also reflect shifting perceptions of cultural legitimacy and symbolic prestige. In multicultural contexts, visual elements such as clothing, ornaments, and ritual staging play an important role in communicating identity and social status within public ceremonies.

Anthropological studies of ritual performance emphasize that visual symbols, including costumes, ornaments, and staging, function as powerful markers of cultural identity and social authority (Turner, 1987; Schechner, 2002). In plural societies, the adoption of visual symbols from dominant cultural groups may signal broader processes of symbolic negotiation and cultural adaptation. Similar dynamics have been observed in several Southeast Asian contexts where minority cultural groups incorporate elements of dominant cultural aesthetics within ritual performances to align with broader social expectations.

Within the context of Dairi Regency, the incorporation of Batak Toba ceremonial attributes into Pakpak rituals can therefore be interpreted as a form of symbolic displacement, in which dominant cultural symbols gradually acquire greater legitimacy in public ritual settings. Rather than replacing Pakpak traditions entirely, these visual adaptations create hybrid ceremonial forms that reflect ongoing negotiations of identity and cultural representation.

From the perspective of cultural hegemony, such symbolic shifts demonstrate how dominant cultural forms gain authority through repeated public representation and social recognition. Only after considering these empirical dynamics can the philosophical notion of cultural authenticity be meaningfully addressed. In this sense, Heidegger’s concept of authenticity may help illuminate how communities navigate tensions between inherited cultural traditions and evolving social realities. However, in the case of Pakpak ritual practices, the observed visual transformations appear less as a simple loss of authenticity than as a complex process of cultural negotiation within a plural socio-cultural environment.

### 3.3. Structural Access and Culture Reproduction

Interviews with musicians, event organizers, and community leaders indicate that the growing presence of Batak Toba musical ensembles at Pakpak communal events is closely tied to structural and economic factors shaping the local musical landscape. In Dairi Regency, Batak Toba ensembles are generally organized in well-established performance groups that operate within broader networks of musicians, event organizers, and church communities. These networks allow Batak Toba ensembles to maintain a steady presence in ceremonial events, public performances, and entertainment markets.

In contrast, traditional Pakpak musicians tend to operate in smaller, less formalized groups. The *Genderang Sisibah* ensemble is traditionally associated with ritual contexts and is performed primarily during specific customary ceremonies. As a result, opportunities for regular public performances are relatively limited compared with those for Batak Toba ensembles, which frequently perform at weddings, church celebrations, and commercial entertainment events.

Several musicians explained that economic considerations often influence the choice of musical ensemble in ceremonial events. One event organizer noted:

“Batak Toba gondang groups are easier to organize because they have more musicians available and they regularly perform in different events. If a family needs a group for a wedding, it is usually easier to contact a gondang ensemble.” (*Interview with event organizer, Dairi, 2025*)

Similarly, a Pakpak traditional musician explained that the limited number of trained Pakpak musicians affects the availability of traditional ensembles:

“Fewer young musicians are learning Pakpak traditional instruments today. Many young people are more interested in modern music or join other ensembles that provide more performance opportunities.” (*Interview with Pakpak musician, Sidikalang, 2025*)

These structural differences are also linked to patterns of musical training and generational transmission. Batak Toba musical traditions are often taught through church-based music groups, family musical lineages, and informal training within established ensembles. Such networks provide younger musicians with opportunities to develop performance skills while simultaneously integrating them into active performance circuits.

In contrast, opportunities for learning Pakpak traditional music are more limited and are often restricted to specific cultural institutions or family-based transmission. As a result, younger generations may have fewer opportunities to engage with Pakpak musical traditions in everyday social environments.

From the perspective of cultural transmission theory, repeated exposure to particular cultural practices across multiple social contexts significantly influences the formation of collective cultural memory. When Batak Toba music is consistently present in weddings, church activities, schools, and entertainment venues, it becomes increasingly embedded in the cultural experience of younger generations.

Recent studies on cultural reproduction and media exposure further suggest that cultural practices are sustained not only through direct teaching but also through everyday visibility in public and mediated spaces (Bourdieu, 1986; Turino, 2008). Within such contexts, cultural traditions that receive greater institutional support, economic opportunities, and media exposure are more likely to be reproduced across generations.

The situation in Dairi Regency illustrates how structural access and economic organization shape the reproduction of musical traditions. Batak Toba musical ensembles benefit from broader institutional networks, more frequent performance opportunities, and stronger intergenerational transmission systems. In contrast, Pakpak traditional music faces structural constraints that limit its visibility in everyday communal life. These dynamics demonstrate that cultural dominance is not solely a matter of aesthetic preference but is deeply connected to the political economy of cultural production and access to performance networks.

### 3.4 Musical Hybridization

Although Batak Toba musical dominance is visible in many public rituals, the findings also reveal the emergence of hybrid musical practices within contemporary Pakpak cultural events. Hybridization occurs particularly in entertainment contexts such as community celebrations, festival performances, and stage events where musicians combine traditional Pakpak musical elements with modern musical arrangements.

Several local performance groups, including bands that regularly perform during public events and cultural festivals, incorporate Pakpak songs into modern instrumental formats. In these performances, traditional Pakpak melodies are often adapted into arrangements that include keyboard, electric guitar, bass, and drum sets. While the melodic structure may originate from traditional Pakpak musical repertoire, the rhythmic patterns and harmonic accompaniment often follow popular music conventions found in contemporary Indonesian entertainment music.

One musician explained this approach during an interview:

“If we perform traditional Pakpak songs exactly as they were played before, many young people might find them less interesting. By combining them with modern instruments, the songs become more familiar and appealing to younger audiences.” (*Interview with local musician, Dairi, 2025*)

From a musical perspective, these hybrid forms typically retain recognizable melodic fragments associated with Pakpak traditional songs while introducing modern rhythmic patterns and harmonic progressions. This blending of traditional and modern musical structures creates a hybrid soundscape that allows traditional repertoire to circulate within contemporary entertainment environments.

Audience reception also plays an important role in sustaining these hybrid forms. Younger audiences, in particular, often express greater enthusiasm for performances that combine traditional musical themes with modern arrangements. During several festivals and public stage performances observed in Dairi Regency, younger audience members were more visibly engaged with hybrid musical performances than with strictly traditional instrumental performances. Such responses suggest that hybrid musical practices may function as a

bridge between inherited cultural traditions and contemporary musical tastes.

Scholarly discussions of cultural hybridity emphasize that hybrid cultural forms frequently emerge in contexts where communities negotiate between tradition and modernity. Postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1994) describe hybridity as a space of cultural negotiation where new cultural expressions emerge through the interaction of different cultural influences. In ethnomusicological contexts, hybrid musical practices are often understood as adaptive strategies that help traditional repertoires remain relevant in changing cultural environments (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008).

Within the Pakpak context, musical hybridization may therefore be interpreted both as a cultural adaptation strategy and as a hegemonic compromise. On the one hand, hybrid forms enable Pakpak musical elements to remain present within contemporary public culture by adapting to modern musical tastes. On the other hand, these adaptations often occur within musical structures that are already shaped by dominant cultural and commercial aesthetics.

In this sense, hybridization sustains the symbolic presence of Pakpak musical traditions while simultaneously reflecting broader cultural power relations within the regional musical landscape. Rather than restoring the central role of Pakpak traditional ensembles in ritual contexts, hybrid musical practices create alternative spaces where elements of Pakpak musical identity continue to circulate within contemporary cultural life.

### 3.5 Njuah-Njuah Festival as War of Position

In contrast to everyday communal contexts where Batak Toba musical aesthetics frequently dominate, the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival represents one of the most visible public arenas in which Pakpak cultural identity is actively re-articulated. The festival is held annually as part of Dairi Regency's anniversary celebration and is organized by the regional government in collaboration with local cultural institutions, community organizations, and traditional leaders. Through this event, various forms of Pakpak cultural expression, including music, dance, ritual performances, traditional games, and artistic exhibitions, are presented in a large public setting.

The festival typically unfolds over several stages of activities. It begins with a ceremonial procession involving traditional leaders, cultural performers, and representatives from local communities. Participants wear traditional Pakpak clothing while performing cultural displays that symbolize the region's historical identity. The procession is followed by stage performances featuring traditional music ensembles such as *Genderang Sisibah*, dance performances, and artistic presentations by cultural groups and local schools. Traditional games, agricultural exhibitions, and cultural competitions are also organized to encourage broader community participation.



Figure 3. Njuah Njuah cultural festival as a counter-hegemonic space

Field observations during the festival indicate that the event attracts a diverse audience composed of residents, cultural practitioners, government officials, students, and visitors from neighboring regions. The presence of school groups and youth organizations is particularly notable, as many younger participants take part in performances or attend the festival as spectators. This generational involvement is important for the transmission of Pakpak cultural knowledge, as the festival provides younger audiences with opportunities to encounter traditional music and performance practices that may be less visible in everyday social contexts.

One cultural organizer described the significance of the festival in an interview:

“The *Njuah-Njuah* Festival is an opportunity for the Pakpak community to show our cultural identity publicly. Many traditional performances that are rarely seen in everyday events are presented here so that younger generations can recognize them.” (Interview with festival organizer, Dairi, 2025)

Another participant emphasized the symbolic importance of the festival as a space for cultural recognition:

“During the festival, Pakpak traditions become the main focus. People can see our music, our clothing, and our cultural symbols presented together in one place.” (*Interview with cultural practitioner, Dairi, 2025*)

From a cultural perspective, the festival functions not only as entertainment but also as a platform for cultural representation and identity affirmation. Studies in festival scholarship have highlighted that cultural festivals frequently serve as arenas where communities negotiate identity, heritage, and political recognition within broader social contexts (Picard & Robinson, 2006; Quinn, 2005). In many cases, state-supported cultural festivals serve as mechanisms for publicly reviving and symbolically legitimizing local traditions within regional cultural policy.

In Dairi Regency, the Njuah-Njuah Cultural Festival can be understood as a strategic cultural arena where Pakpak traditions regain visibility in the public sphere. Through repeated performances, public displays, and collective participation, the festival temporarily reorganizes the cultural hierarchy that often characterizes everyday communal events. Pakpak musical traditions that may appear marginal in routine ceremonies become central cultural symbols within the festival setting.

From the perspective of Gramsci’s concept of **war of position**, such cultural initiatives may be understood as gradual strategies through which communities expand the representational space of their cultural traditions within civil society. Rather than confronting dominant cultural forms directly, the festival creates alternative cultural platforms where Pakpak identity can be publicly articulated and symbolically reinforced.

At the same time, the festival reflects broader dynamics of heritage politics and cultural revival commonly observed in contemporary cultural policy. State-supported cultural festivals often function as performative spaces where local identity is staged, negotiated, and communicated to wider audiences. In this sense, the *Njuah-Njuah* Festival represents both a celebration of cultural heritage and a strategic effort to sustain Pakpak cultural traditions within a plural and evolving socio-cultural environment.

### 3.6. Confirmation of Hypotheses

The findings of this study provide further insight into how cultural hegemony operates within everyday musical practices in plural societies. Rather than functioning solely through political or institutional authority, cultural dominance often unfolds through routine cultural choices in ritual events, entertainment practices, and public celebrations. The increasing presence of Batak Toba musical aesthetics in Pakpak communal ceremonies demonstrates how dominant cultural forms may gradually reshape local cultural soundscapes through repeated social use and symbolic legitimacy.

At the same time, the case of Pakpak musical traditions illustrates that hegemonic processes are not static. Cultural practices continue to be negotiated and reinterpreted through various social arenas, including hybrid musical performances and cultural festivals. These practices reveal how communities respond creatively to cultural pressures while attempting to maintain elements of their cultural identity.

From a theoretical perspective, this case contributes to broader discussions on cultural hegemony by demonstrating how musical practices function as everyday sites of cultural negotiation. While Gramsci’s framework highlights the gradual normalization of dominant cultural forms, the Pakpak case also shows that cultural resistance may emerge through alternative cultural platforms such as festivals and hybrid artistic expressions. These spaces allow marginalized cultural traditions to maintain visibility and symbolic relevance within evolving socio-cultural environments.

In this sense, musical practices can be understood not only as artistic expressions but also as arenas where cultural power, identity, and social memory are continuously negotiated.

## 4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the transformation of musical practices within the Pakpak community in Dairi Regency cannot be understood merely as a shift in aesthetic preference but must be interpreted within broader dynamics of cultural power, institutional influence, and cultural transmission. The increasing dominance of Batak Toba musical aesthetics in ritual and public cultural events reflects how cultural hegemony operates through everyday social practices, symbolic legitimacy, and structural access to performance networks. At the same time, the findings reveal that Pakpak musical traditions have not disappeared but continue to be negotiated through hybrid musical forms and public cultural events such as the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to broader discussions in ethnomusicology, cultural studies, and festival studies by demonstrating how musical practices serve as arenas for cultural negotiation in plural societies. The case of Pakpak traditional music illustrates how cultural hegemony unfolds not only through ideological influence but also through everyday ritual choices, institutional cultural programming, and economic structures within local entertainment systems. At the same time, the *Njuah-Njuah* Cultural Festival illustrates how cultural festivals can function as **counter-hegemonic spaces** that temporarily reconfigure

cultural hierarchies and expand the visibility of marginalized cultural traditions. These findings contribute to ongoing scholarly debates on the relationship between music, cultural identity, and power in multicultural societies.

The study also carries several practical implications for cultural policy and heritage sustainability. First, cultural festivals such as the *Njuah-Njuah* Festival play an important role in maintaining the visibility of local cultural traditions and should be supported as strategic platforms for cultural transmission. Second, greater institutional support is needed for the training and regeneration of Pakpak traditional musicians, particularly through community-based music education programs and collaboration with schools and cultural institutions. Strengthening these institutional frameworks could help ensure that Pakpak musical traditions remain accessible to younger generations.

Several limitations should also be acknowledged. This research focuses primarily on cultural dynamics within Dairi Regency, and therefore, the findings may not fully represent the broader diversity of Pakpak cultural practices in other regions. In addition, the study focuses primarily on ritual events and festival contexts, which may not capture the full range of musical practices in informal or digital cultural environments. The generational sample of participants is also limited, and future research could further explore differences in musical perception and cultural identity among younger audiences.

Future research could expand this discussion by examining how digital media platforms, online music circulation, and social media influence the transmission of Pakpak musical traditions. Comparative studies across other regions in North Sumatra or Southeast Asia would also provide valuable insights into how indigenous musical traditions negotiate cultural dominance in plural societies. Longitudinal research exploring the long-term impact of cultural festivals and cultural policy initiatives on the sustainability of traditional music would further deepen understanding of cultural revitalization processes.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of viewing traditional music not only as a cultural heritage artifact but also as a dynamic social practice shaped by ongoing negotiations of identity, power, and cultural continuity within contemporary societies.

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