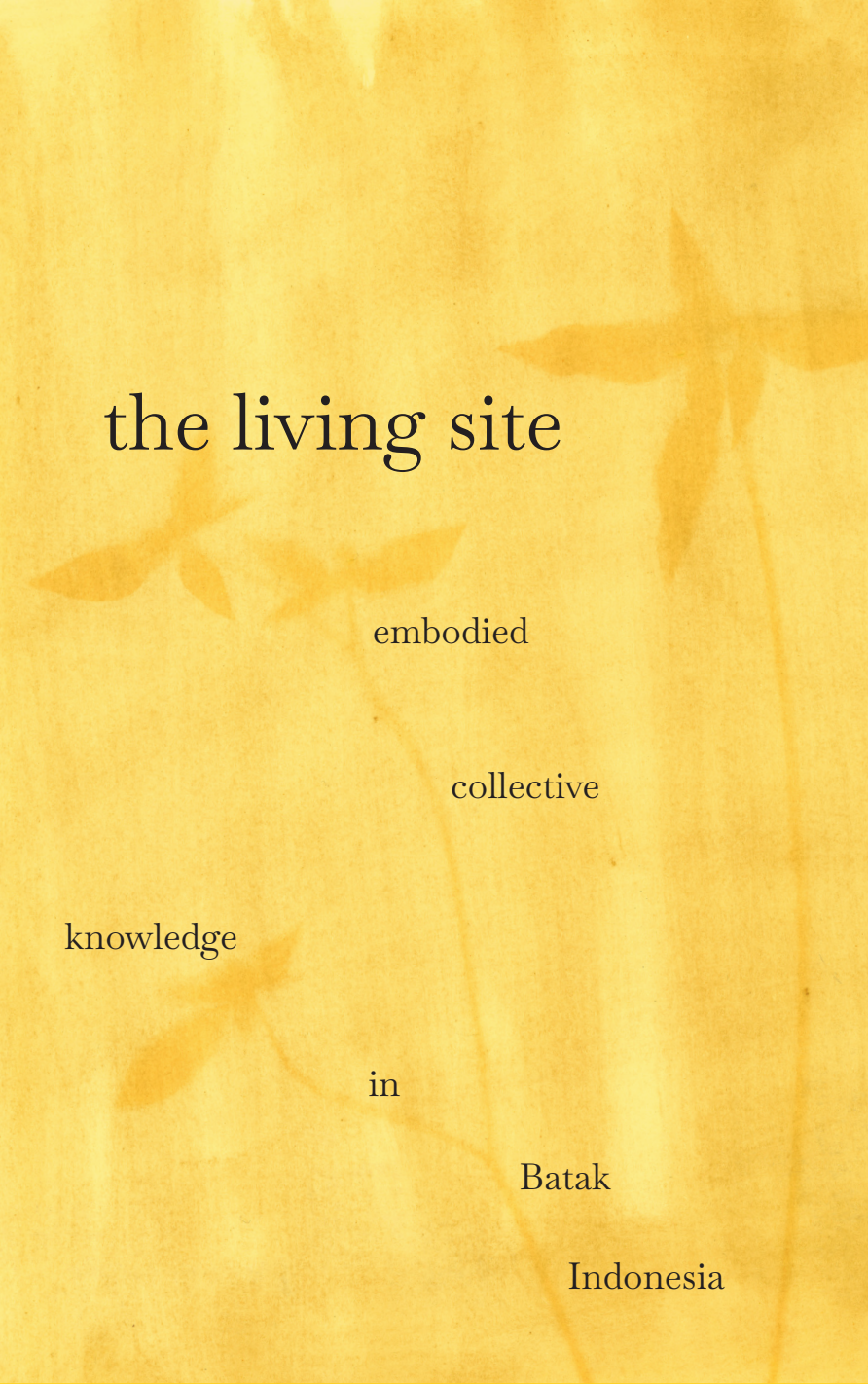




the living site

embodied

collective

knowledge

in

Batak

Indonesia

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the living site: embodied collective knowledge in Batak Indonesia

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With this foreword, I aim to introduce the guiding principles and moral framework that accompanied me in crafting this work by means of an ethical charter. I will then delve into questions of representation, methodology, and medium.

ethical charter

Discussing research methodology and indigenous peoples implicates an analysis of imperialism and an understanding of how the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of historical power structures and colonial practices.

The context from which I am writing this is within the academic setting of the Department of Architecture at the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL). In this work, I will attempt to take a side step from the prevailing Eurocentric discourse. Coming from a Western educational background, I still consider my sensibilities inherited from my mother, who is of Indonesian descent, to be precious and legitimate transmitted knowledge.¹ With this work, I wish to deconstruct my preconceived notions of what classifies as truth or proof in an occidental sense. The goal is to explore insurgent research methods, such as decolonial methodologies, and learn from indigenous knowledge production.² Considering my educational background and paternal French heritage, I recognize that preexisting biases may skew my portrayal of the Bataks. I also acknowledge the intrinsic power

¹ Various forms of prejudice, including racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and other oppressive biases rooted in a Eurocentric perspective, are ingrained within this educational system. Its implication will be explored in the section on methodology.

² These ideas have been nourished by the decolonial discourses and methodologies developed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Audre Lorde, Achille Mbembe, Anibal Quijano.

imbalance present between the researcher and the researched, especially when writing an academic paper for a European institution. To address this, I commit to practice freely what Anthropologist Anna Tsing refers to as “habits of restraint and care” – where I will not divulge things that I deem should not be shared.³

3 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton University Press, 2005): xii. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7s1xk>.

representation

As a half-Batak Indonesian half-French person, descending from two different perspectives of colonization, the question of the audience and the represented is essential in guiding this work.

Who am I speaking for?

This question is difficult to answer, as I do not want to generalize identity. Here is a non-exhaustive and non-exclusive list of potential groups of people I can speak for: I am speaking for those born in between identities, navigating hybrid identities entangled in complex power dynamics – individuals who, at times, exercise such power and, at others, bear its weight. I speak for members of the Indonesian multicultural diaspora who do not recognize themselves in prevailing European sensibilities and imposed conceptions of “rationality,” which presumes humans to be inherently superior to other emotional and sensitive beings.⁴ People who consider “sensibility” essential and necessary, as a strength and not a failure of reason. I speak for those who practice hospitality, gratitude and care towards humans and more-than-humans.⁵

- 4 The Human Exceptionalism Paradigm (HEP) is defined as: “the view (*paradigm) that humans are different from all other organisms, all human behaviour is controlled by culture and free will, and all problems can be solved by human ingenuity and technology.” Chris Park, *A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation* (OUP Oxford, 2007): 215.
- 5 For a definition of the ecofeminist term “more-than-human”: Bonner, Nicole, and Sami Abdelmalik. 2013. “Becoming (More-Than-) Human: Ecofeminism, Dualisms and the Erosion of the Colonial Human Subject & (untitled Illustrations).” *UnderCurrents: Journal of Critical Environmental*

I speak for Indonesians who have not felt comfortable bringing their “smelly” food to school. I speak for those who consider life’s mundane, collective, and necessary aspects as sacred and worth making time and space for.

What do I bring to those I represent?

An experimental approach in methodology and medium that can serve as a foundation for further exploration or adaptation.





methodology

During on-site fieldwork from July to September of 2023, I first wanted to explore alternative research methods that would center the people I interviewed through their relationship to the more-than-humans. My first experimental tool was the use of anthotypes.

This natural process involves the photo-decolorization of plant pigments — I used turmeric (*kunyit*) as it reminds me most of Toba Batak cuisine — in reaction to sunlight, leaving a trace of the object, in this instance, various plants on the paper. This approach initially enabled me to systematically record the narratives surrounding the plants that the people I met shared during our interactions. As individuals described using specific plants for medicinal, nutritional, or dyeing purposes, I would find the mentioned plants and make an anthotype out of them. The process acts as a filter, capturing the shape of the recorded plant while omitting texture, color, or fruit details. It is important to note that the anthotype does not seek to replicate the plant exactly. Therefore its information cannot be extracted from one location and then transplanted somewhere else; it stays site-specific, and person-specific, contrary to the colonial legacy carried by botanical sketches, as it has happened in Indonesia among other colonized countries.⁶

⁶ The role of botany during Dutch East India Company's search for profitable agricultural exploitation is portrayed in Eliza Gleeson's "Botany as a Colonial Discourse? The Case of Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles," and in Andrew M. Goss's "*The Floracrats: Civil Science, Bureaucracy, and Institutional Authority in the Netherlands East Indies and Indonesia*,"

agency of drawing

The anothotype still keeps the plant recognizable and transmits a story. Similarly, the drawing methodology developed in this work aims to tell the story of the people, portraying non-intrusive details from their daily rituals. Just as the anothotype applies a filter to recorded plants, the methodology used in this work organizes the stories of these encounters through distinct filters, mirroring the filtering effect of the anothotype process. The section *three cases, three filters* will explore this more thoroughly.

Drawing in the context of the architecture discipline is a complex practice. More than just a visual representation, a method of archiving, or a precursor to construction, it can be used as an experimental and revelatory tool to shape narratives, reveal unseen dimensions of space, and structure thoughts. When framing it within the Batak Toba context and the study of indigenous peoples, its entanglement with colonialism and white supremacy is inescapable. Of course, the drawings produced during the Dutch colonial rule from 1816 to 1941 first come to mind. *Figure 1* depicts men from the Dutch United East India Company (VOC) with Indonesian indigenous peoples.⁷ François Valentijn, the author of the engraving collection featuring this figure, served as a missionary sent by the VOC, traveling exclusively within territories under VOC control.⁸ When looking

at archives, it is important to consider the identity of the collector, the reason for its collection, their power relation to the observed “object,” and if the latter is able to speak for themselves. When researching traditional houses in Dutch archives, specific attention has been given to the long house, especially from Dayak peoples in Borneo (Figure 2).⁹ Forms of orientalism prevail, where historically the “other” is represented through a Eurocentric lens, “dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”¹⁰ Therefore archiving, seen as a method of creating an all-encompassing truth, becomes a “prime location for the evolution of epistemic and cultural forms of control.”¹¹ This was termed “Coloniality of power” by a foundational figure of decolonial studies, Aníbal Quijano, in which systems of power rely on the repression of indigenous modes of knowledge. It imposes “universal” European norms and truths upon colonized communities, creating a dichotomy

1840–1970” (University of Michigan, 2004).

7 Unknown, [Untitled], 1724, Copperplate engraving/etching on hand laid (verge) paper, 14,5 x 12,5 cm, 1724, <https://pictura-prints.com/product/dutch-natives-indonesia-after-valentijn-voc-1724/>.

8 François Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën, vervattende een naaukeurige en uitvoerige verhandeling van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten*. (Joannes van Braam, 1726).

9 William Temple Hornaday, *Exterior of Sea Dyak Long-House*, 1910, Wood engraving, 18 x 13 cm, 1910, <https://www.periodpaper.com/products/1910-wood-engraving-sea-dayaks-iban-indigenous-people-longhouse-home-borneo-tyji-240015-tyji-025>.

10 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 3.

11 Alice E. Finden, “Counter-Mapping the Archive: A Decolonial Feminist Research Method,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 0, no. 0 (2023): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2023.2285759>.

where the European subject embodies ‘reason’ and ‘knowledge’ while the ‘other’ is rendered absent or objectified.¹² This dynamic is reinforced through imperialist archiving practices that perpetuate the erasure of indigenous and black knowledge, shaping a Eurocentric epistemic hierarchy that devalues alternative forms of understanding.¹³ Drawing embodies power, transmits oppressive truth paradigms into the archives, and carries historical legacies. Therefore, any exploration of drawing as a practice must grapple with this entanglement.

The agency of drawing lies in its non-neutrality. It can reveal a deeper analysis of the political-economic, environmental, and social complexities ingrained within the built environment. As drawings embody arguments and power, this capacity to influence perceptions and narratives can be used as tools to amplify the stories and voices told by the marginalized. Huda Tayob, architectural historian and theorist, uses drawing as a way to give legitimacy to unconventional spaces, not “found in formal spatial archives.”¹⁴ In particular, she uses the detailed approach of mimicry in drawing, while challenging orthographic conventions “to ‘tell’ the narratives of populations and their spaces otherwise rendered invisible within academic research.”¹⁵ Finally, the everyday and

- 12 Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2007): 173, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950238060164353>.
- 13 Alice E. Finden, “Counter-Mapping the Archive: A Decolonial Feminist Research Method,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 0, no. 0 (2023): 5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095557571.2023.2285759>.
- 14 Huda Tayob, “Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing ‘Tell’ a Different Story?,” *Architecture and Culture* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2017.1417071>.
- 15 Ibid, 203.



Figure 1: unknown, [Untitled], 1724, Copperplate engraving/etching on hand laid (verge) paper, 14,5 x 12,5 cm, 1724.

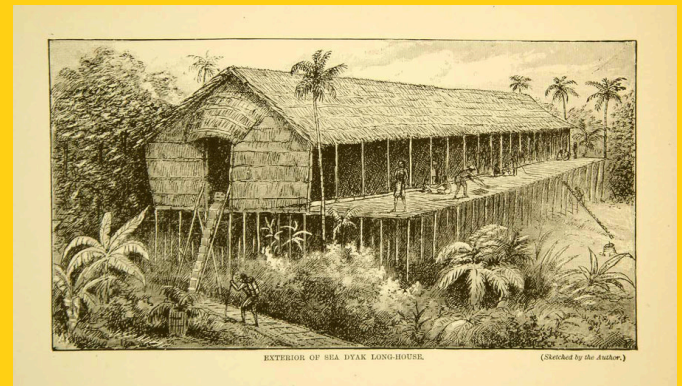


Figure 2: William Temple Hornaday, *Exterior of Sea Dyak Long-House*, 1910, Wood engraving, 18 x 13 cm, 1910.

the affective are spaces that decolonial feminists particularly focus on, and drawing them can recenter the focus on the oversight of the hidden, everyday, intimate relations that are crucial in the construction of colonial power. Simultaneously, these are the key spaces yet often neglected for decolonial resistance.¹⁶

¹⁶ María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (January 2007): 186–219, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb0156.x>.



the body*

This work begins with the body as a fundamental unit, exploring its ritualized actions and interactions with other entities, be they human or more-than-human, to understand how indigenous knowledge can be transmitted and persist. It centers the Toba Bataks, indigenous to Indonesia, as sites that embody collective memory, just as the *rumah adat* Batak is thought as a living person able to transport people to a symbolic dimension.¹⁷ Grounded in on-site research within the Toba Batak community, this work heavily relies on primary sources, mainly interviews conducted during fieldwork from mid-July to the beginning of September, supported by theoretical texts. By focusing on the body* as a site for collective memory, I aim to better understand how ritualized actions that center the body*, whether a person, a house, a kinship system, or an interdependent system of more-than-humans, produce spaces for knowledge transmission. How do rituals performed by the body*, whether a person, an extended family, a *marga*, or a community, generate spaces crucial for knowledge transmission as sites for collective memory, community building, and resistance against external influences? To address this, this work will first introduce the context and then apply three filters across three case studies: examining what the body eats, how it shares, and where it

¹⁷ Translated from Bahasa Indonesia: *rumah* means “house,” *adat* means “customs” or “custom law.” A glossary of Indonesian and Batak terms can be found on p.29.

stores. Through these perspectives, this work dissects the production of space and knowledge through ritualized social interactions. By producing social relations, humans produce social space, as theorized by philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre:

“there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before *producing effects* in the material realm (tools and objects), before *producing itself* by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing itself* by generating other bodies, each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.”¹⁸

18 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Wiley, 1992): 170.

context

The Batak, indigenous to the northern part of the Indonesian island of Sumatra, inhabit several districts such as Karo Regency, Simalungun, Dairi, North Tapanuli, and Asahan.¹⁹ With a population of 8,466,969 (2010), I chose to use the term “indigenous” instead of “ethnic group” To reinforce the legitimacy of the Batak on their lands, challenging nationalist policies that refuse basic rights to legally unrecognized indigenous people.²⁰ According to the government, since 95% of Indonesia is equally indigenous, Indonesia has no minorities and, therefore, no indigenous peoples.²¹ The refusal to use this term delegitimizes all of the indigenous peoples of Indonesia under the facade of its “Unity in diversity” motto. It is essential to refer to them as indigenous as in legal matters, their status as such is crucial to the preservation of their rights and their property.²² Their homeland, encompassing Lake Toba’s highlands, experiences abundant rain and fertile lands, with

19 “Suku Batak: Bahasa, Agama, Marga, Dan Kebudayaan,” accessed January 3, 2024, <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2021/10/20/08000879/suku-batak--bahasa-agama-marga-dan-kebudayaan>.

20 Central Bureau of Statistics report from 2010.

21 Irene I. Hadiprayitno, “The Limit of Narratives: Ethnicity and Indigenous Rights in Papua, Indonesia,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 24, no. 1 (February 28, 2017): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02401004>.

22 “The State shall recognise and respect entities of the customary law societies along with their traditional rights to the extent they still exist and are following the development of the society and the principle of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which laws shall regulate.” This extract from the Indonesian Constitution of 1945 (“UUD NRI 1945”) is an example of the very vague and dangerous legal landscape surrounding the Indigenous communities.

Samosir Island at its cultural core. Batak society is patrilineal and focused on familial lineage, passing down names, property, and status through males, fostering tight-knit extended families. Marriage customs dictate social relations among *margas*, restricting bride exchanges and ensuring continuity of patrilineal kin groups through such regulated alliances between the *marga* giving the bride (*boru*) and the *marga* receiving the bride (*hula hula*).²³

This work will explore the sacrality of the everyday domestic labor, in contrast to an episodic, extraordinary, often lavish celebration of the sacred. Rituals can be defined as culturally prefigured social acts with profound symbolic significance, are governed by formalized rules and performed both ceremonially and daily.²⁴ They can extend from simple types, such as shared meals, to so-called rites of passage (births, initiations, weddings, or funerals).

²³ Translated from the Batak language, *marga*, badly translated to “clan,” refers to a patrilineal social system based on blood ties or descent. A glossary of important, difficult to translate terms will follow.

²⁴ Thomas Fuchs, “Collective Body Memories,” in *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*, 2017, 344, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262035552.003.0018>.



glossary

Adat

Batak

Refers to a set of customs or customary laws. It can mark the transformative process applied to beings in rituals. In the legal Indonesian context, this is commonly interchangeable with the term “indigenous.”¹⁹

Bapak/Pak

Bahasa Indonesia

An honorific title meaning “Sir” or “Father.”

Huta

Batak

Refers to the political and territorial unit of the Batak people. It is a settlement that stands for the legitimacy of one *marga*.

Kak/Kakak

Bahasa Indonesia

This means “older sister.”

Manortor

Batak

Contracted from *manari tortor*. A traditional dance often expressing joy at many *adat* rituals

Marga

Batak

A kinship system determining the rights and duties of an individual to its family and society.²⁰

25 Muhammad Aiyub Kadir, “Defining ‘People’ and ‘Indigenous People’ in International Human Rights Law and Its Application in Indonesia,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 26 (January 25, 2019): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02602006>.

Rumah adat
Bahasa Indonesia

Rumah means “house.” *Adat* refers to “customs” or “custom law.”

Ruang tamu
Bahasa Indonesia

Hospitality room or guest room, also where the family eats and most indoor rituals occur.

Tulang
Batak

A name and status given to uncles or older men. As many Batak honorific titles, the name given depends on the perceived gender and position in the kinship system of the speaker.

Ulos
Batak

An intricate *adat* Batak tapestry used traditionally for rituals.

Wisata
Bahasa Indonesia

This means “tourism” and is a label that the government can apply to entities that it considers important to preserve.

three cases, three filters

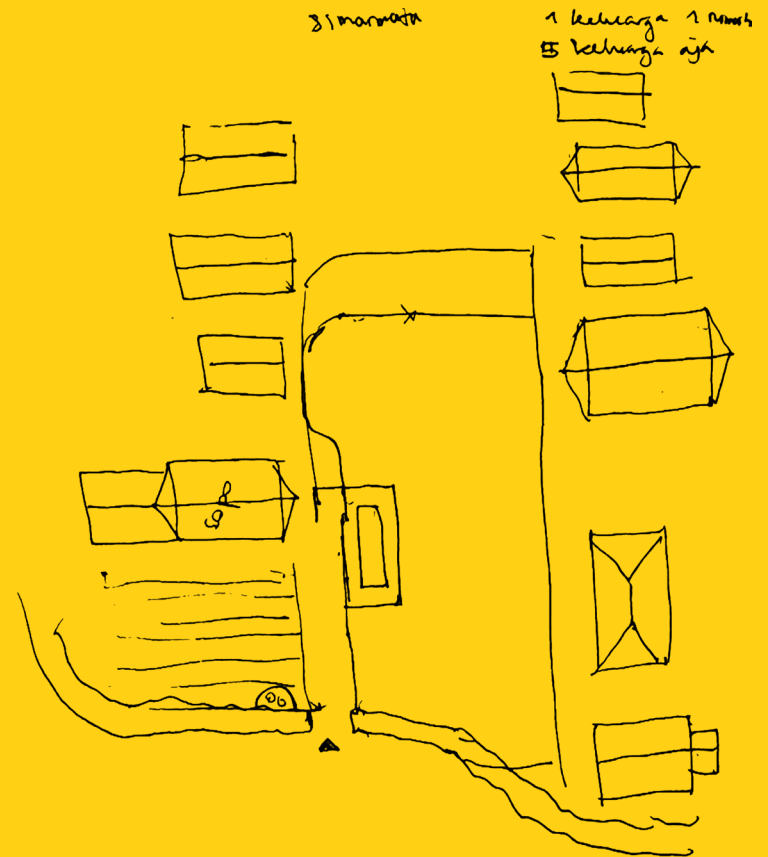
This graphical exploration positions the body* and social interactions as the main protagonists by organizing these three case studies into narrative arcs bound by specific filters. These actors help unweave the enduring traditions and their resistance or adaptation against disruptive influences like tourism. The three cases are *huta wisata* Simarmata, a *huta* that has poorly adapted to contemporary times; *Kakak Nadapdap*’s house in *desa* Siregar Aek Nalas, a *desa* whose women have relearned traditional methods of thread dyeing to generate more revenue, and *rumah Bapak Uda* in *desa* Naga Saribu I, a domestic contemporary house from my grandmother’s childhood village. These examples will each time be animated through bodies (human or more-than-human) performing in space.

These cases will be depicted through three filters: what the body* eats; how the body* shares; and where the body* stores. Each case relies on primary sources, and, except for *Kakak Nadapdap*’s house, has been redrawn from on-site measurements. The latter relies on a schematic portrayal of the space, based on traditional proportions of a *rumah adat bolon* and pictures I have captured.

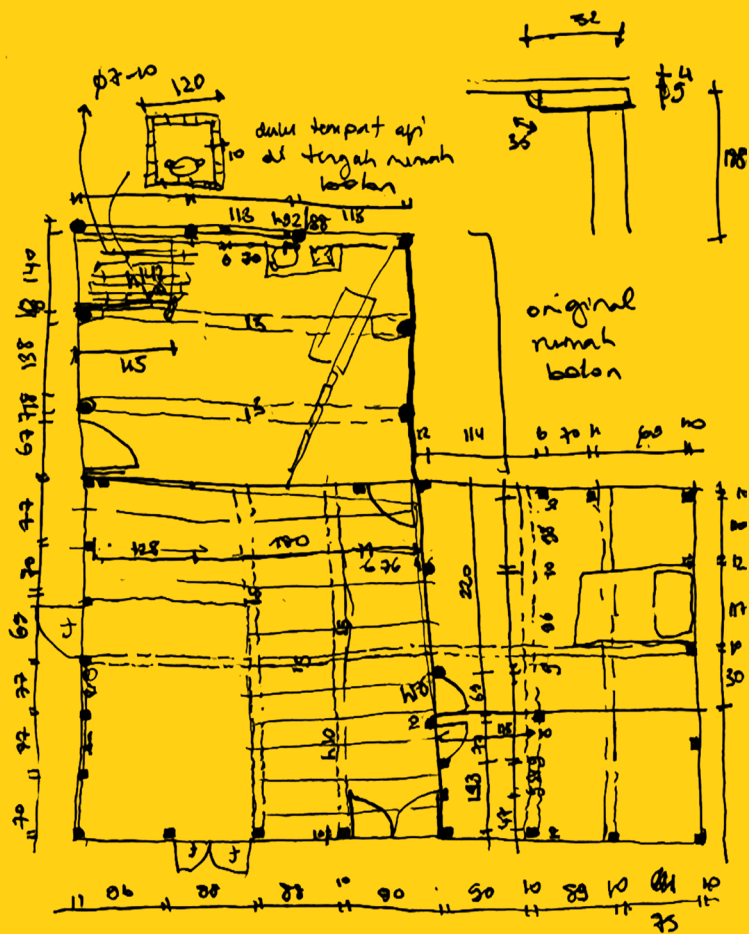
26 Himasari Hanan and Surjamanto Wonorahardjo, “The Architecture of Batak Toba: An Expression of Living Harmoniously,” *Nakhara : Journal of Environmental Design and Planning* 8 (October 31, 2012): 14.

I sincerely thank *Tulang* Simarmata, *Kakak* Nadapdap, and *Bapak* Uda, and everyone not directly mentionned in these cases, for their time, food, hospitality, and for tolerating my broken Indonesian.

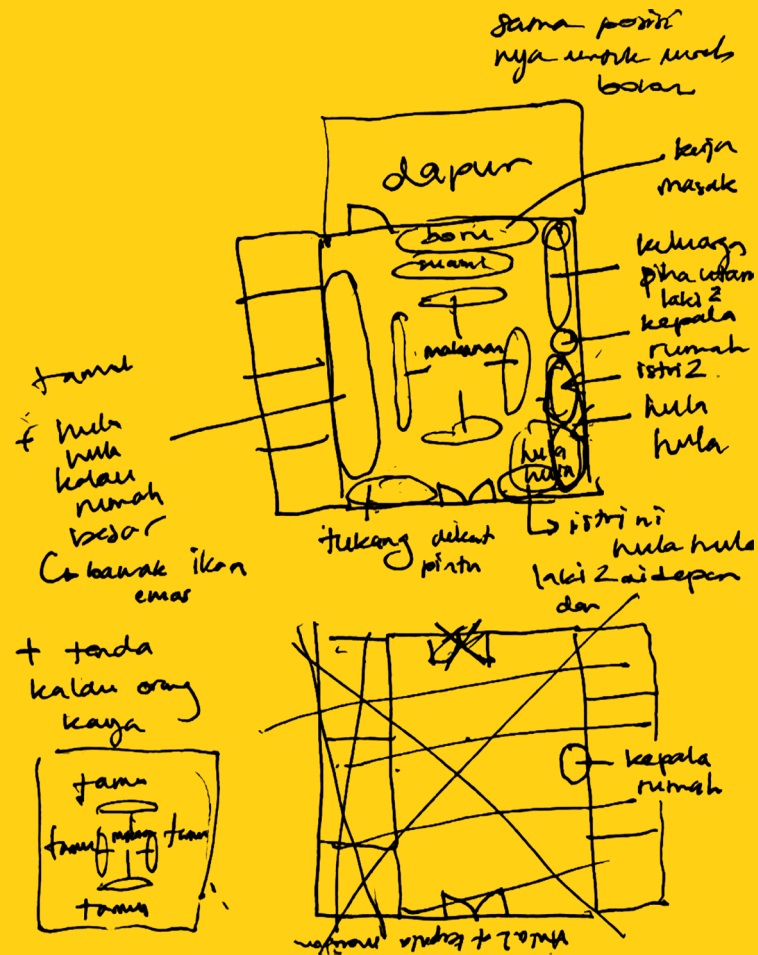
mauliate godang



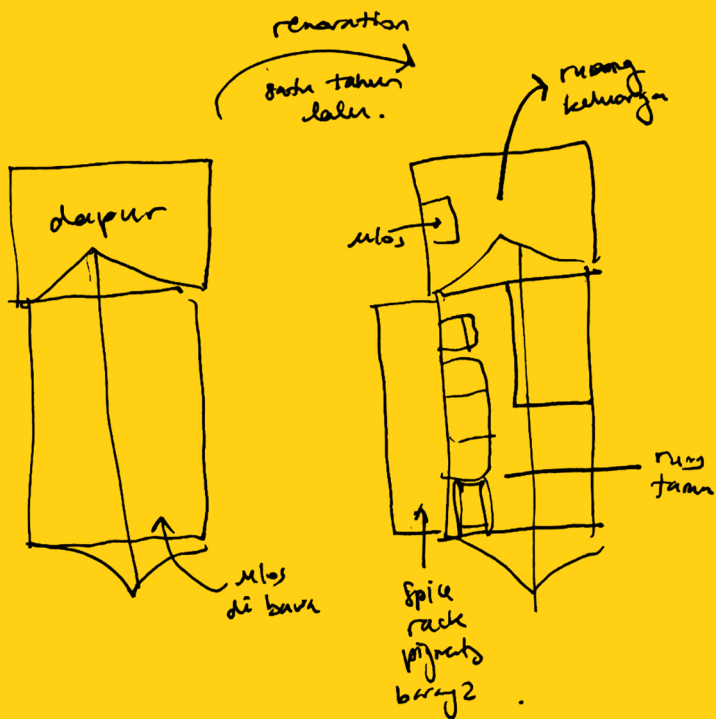
Case 1: *huta wisata* Simarmata



Case 1: Interior of Tulang Simarmata's house, huta wisata Simarmata.

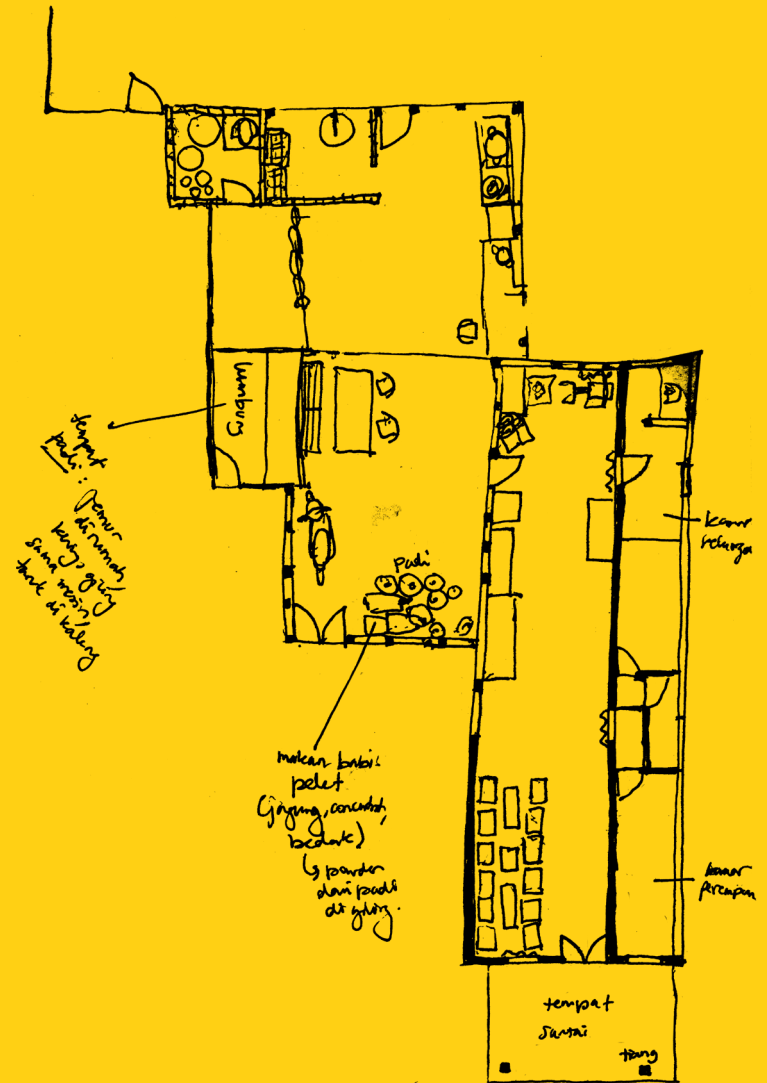


Case 2: rituals in rumah Napdapdap, desa Siregar Aek Nalas.



kampung karang maju karena cuma mlos dapur.
Tanah nya kurang subur.

Case 2: renovation of Kakak Nadapdap's house, desa Siregar Aek Nalas.



Case 3: Pak Uda's house, desa Naga Saribu I.

what the body* eats

Food holds high symbolic value in both daily and episodic rituals. It carries a heritage of knowledge, transmitted from body* to body* through the acts of preparation, meal sharing and eating. Batak Toba cuisine is prepared many hours before it is served, with the kitchen as the designated space for its preparation. This habit holds true even when the food is consumed as part of a ceremonial ritual, except for specific events where the cutting of the ingredients is part of the ritual. For big events, this labor is often gendered.

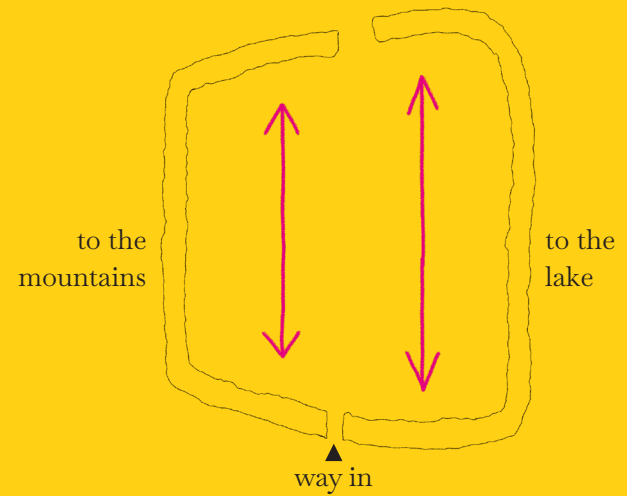
The Batak Tobas have extensive knowledge of plants, with recent studies suggesting the use and collection of over 66 species used for food, 67 for medical and 13 reserved for rituals. Batak people around the Toba lake collect and use 146 plant species from 53 families. Six species have high cultural value and are considered important economic commodities: ginger, rice, garlic, turmeric, mango, and sweet potato.²⁷

²⁷ Netty Demak H. Sitanggang et al., “Ethnobotany of the Toba Batak Ethnic Community in Samosir District, North Sumatra, Indonesia,” *Biodiversitas Journal of Biological Diversity* 23, no. 12 (December 19, 2022): 6114, <https://doi.org/10.13057/biodiv/d231204>.



Entrance of the *huta*.

The *huta* is structured along two lines, encapsulated by a stone enclosure for protection and camouflage. The buildings are aligned transversely to the two lines. Moving through the *huta* is unidirectional: the entrance and the exit are non-exchangeable.

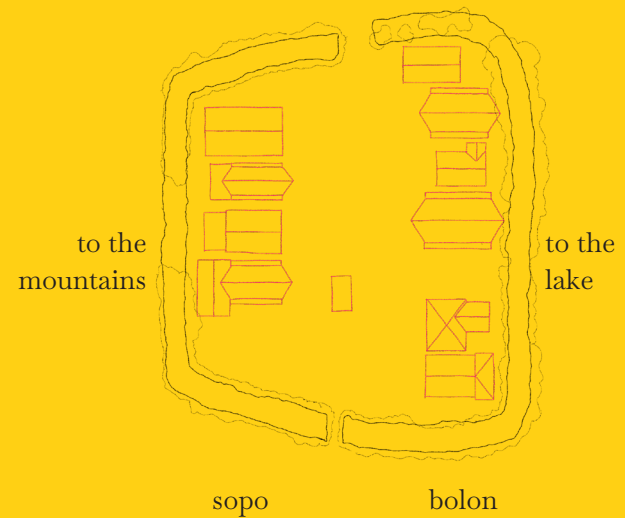




View of the row of *rumah bolon*, here only one remains in the center.



View of the row of *sopo*. Only one remains on the left, the others being replaced by domestic houses.



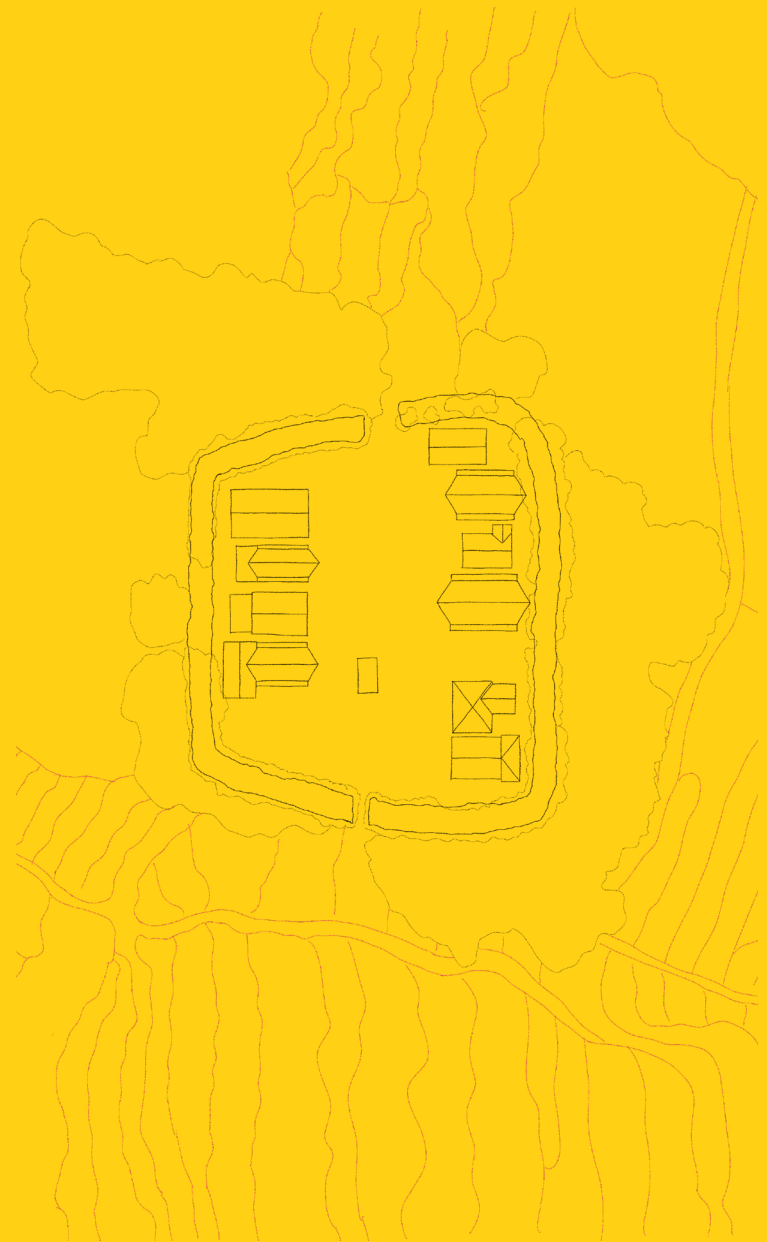
The *rumah bolon* (domestic houses) are oriented towards the mountains and the central open face. The *sopo*'s (spaces for social and material production: communal graneries and stage for gathering) are aligned on the other side.



View of the rice fields from the entrance of the *huta*.

The rice fields are next to the *huta*, as Batak peoples sedentarized due to rice plantations. The Batak Toba house was built as a permanent house when the community implemented a rice field system.²⁸ *Tulang Simarmata*, a member of the *Simarmata marga* I interviewed, has multiple rice fields inherited from his grandparents. The *huta* stands for a legitimate territoriality of the *marga*.

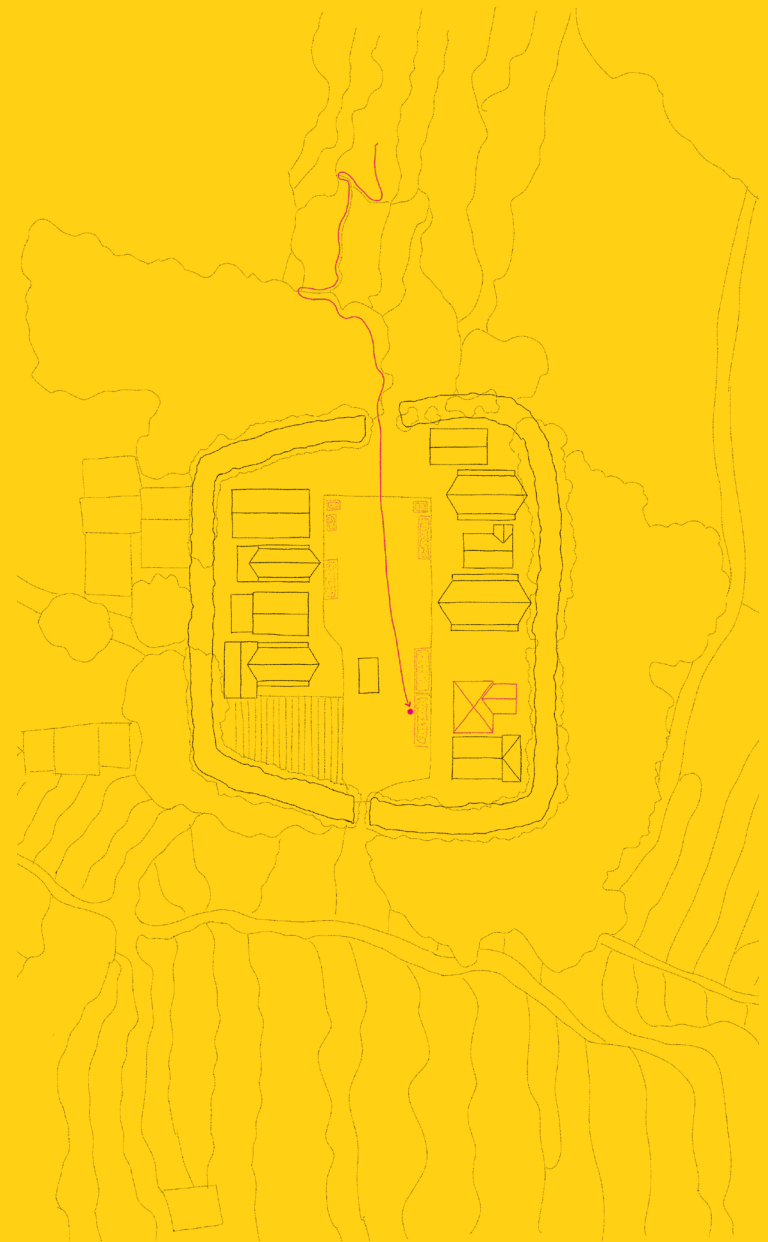
²⁸ Manurung, Sastrosasmito, and Pramitasari, "The Meanings of Architectural Spaces in Vernacular Settlements: The Batak Toba Tribe in the Meat Village, Toba, Indonesia," 2022 : 26.





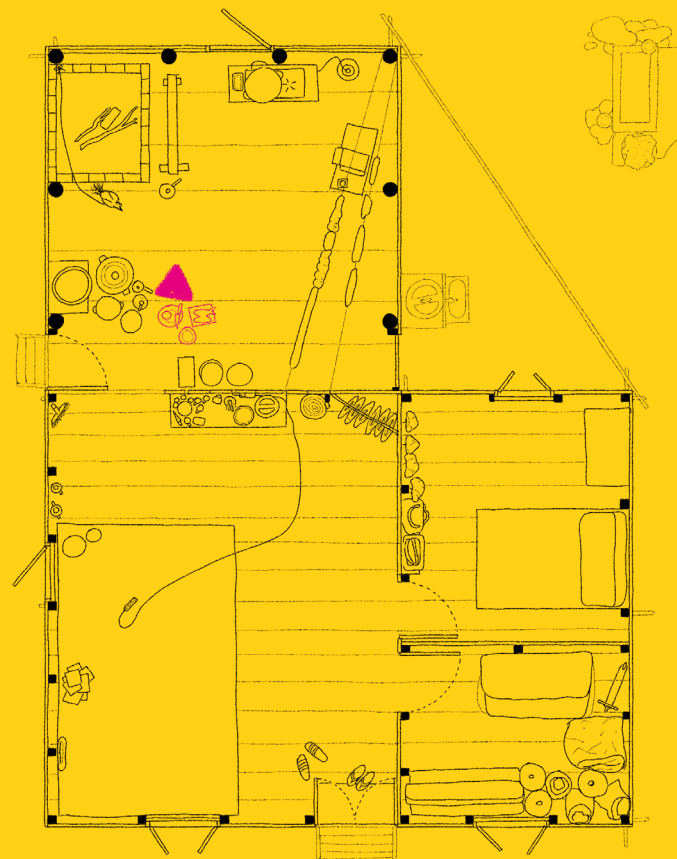
Coffee beans drying on *tikar mendong* in the open space.

Tulang Simarmata returns from working his rice fields on one of the parcels passed down to him by his father. He sets out rice to dry on a polypropylene woven surface made of a repurposed rice bag that he lays on the open space between the two rows. This space is often used for significant, ritualized events involving many guests but is also used as a social space or a surface to lay down coffee beans, rice, and various cultivated goods to dry out in the sun.



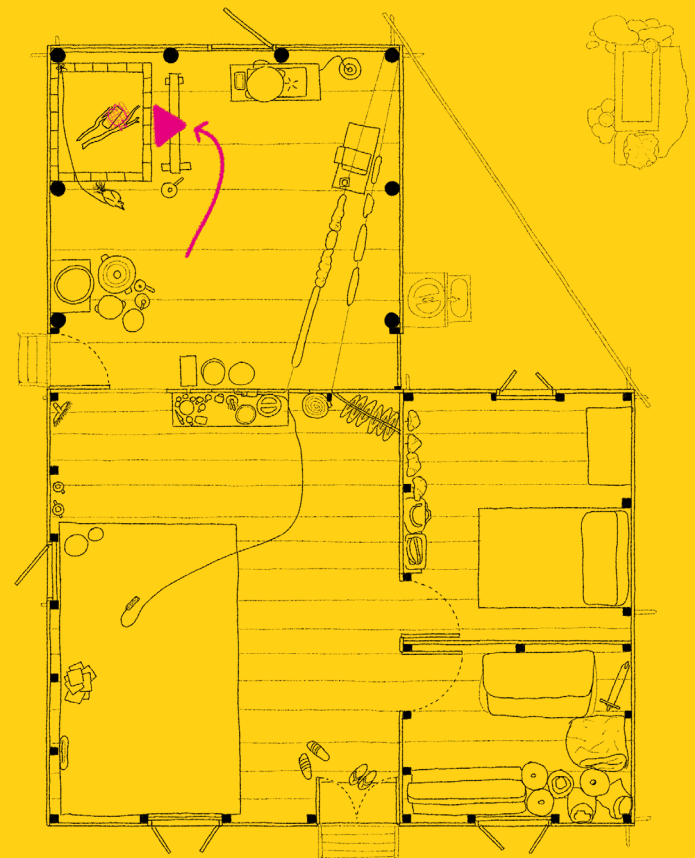
It is lunchtime, or *makan nasi* (eating cooked rice). Tulang cleans a fish he fished from the lake this morning and grinds a paste made of spices. *Nasi* is the name given to transformed rice, as the perceived transformation of the state is not only physical but also spiritual.²⁹ The finished product (*nasi*) has a different name then the one used for its raw state (*padi*). Everyday rituals, such as the preparation of food, provide more leniency for gender roles to be blurred.

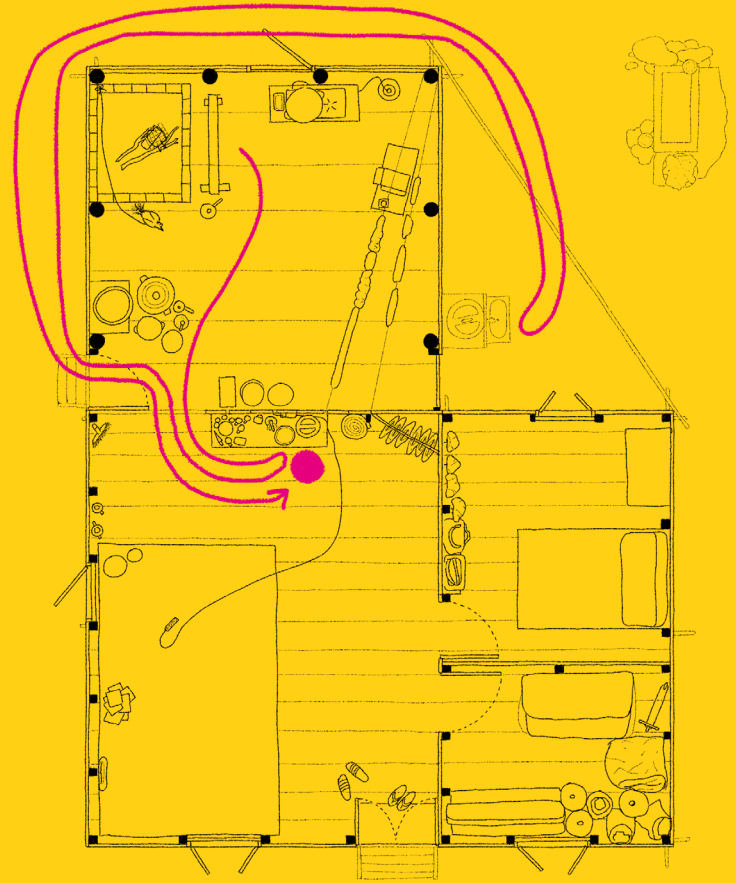
²⁹ Monica Janowski and Fiona Kerlogue, "Kinship and Food In Southeast Asia," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 24 (October 30, 2009): 290, <https://doi.org/10.1355/sj24-2h>.



He sits down by the cooking hearth and grills the fish. Cooking with fire is cheaper than gas, but he also has a modern gas-burning stove in the kitchen. Traditionally, Batak Toba cooking uses a stone stove and wood, such fundamental changes are especially visible in domestic spaces in their everyday use.³⁰

³⁰ Himasari Hanan, "Modernization and Cultural Transformation: The Expansion of Traditional Batak Toba House in Huta Siallagan," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, AcE-Bs 2012 Bangkok, Sukosol Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand, 16-18 July, 2012, 50 (January 1, 2012): 807, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.08.082>.





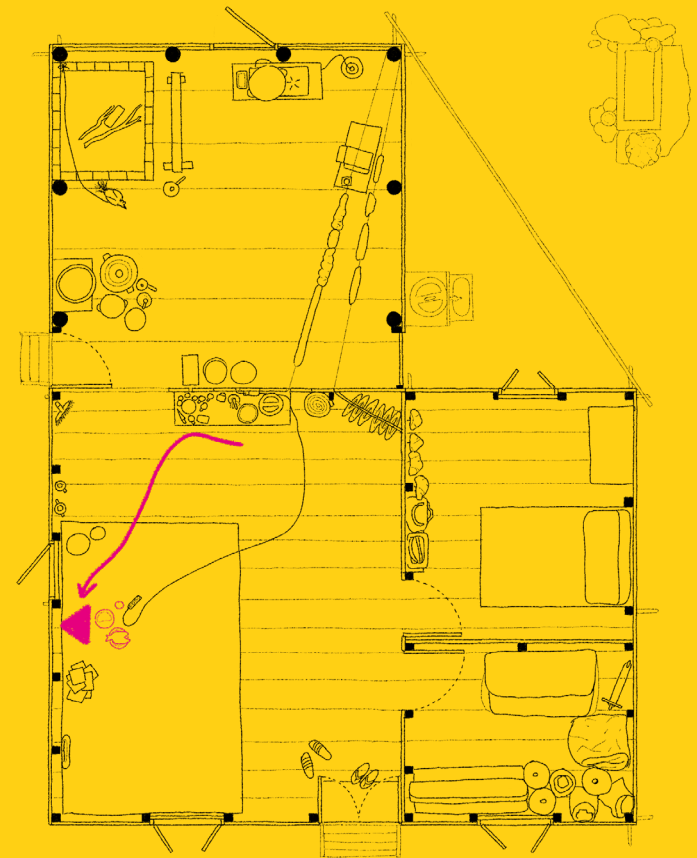
While the fish grills, *Tulang* gets up to get a serving of rice and goes outside to fetch water from the reservoir. He washes the rice, then returns, places it in the rice cooker, and sets it to cook.



Tulang's tikar mendong.

Once the rice is ready, *Tulang* sits against the wall for his meal, on a *tikar mendong* (made from the aquatic mendong plant, this mat is traditionally woven by married women, while their husband still sleeps).³¹ He eats his meal alone; his children have moved to the city and do not want to visit him, as they are not interested in living in a traditional *huta*, following *adat* customs. He is concerned about his rice fields, as he knows that his children will not care for the land that produces the rice that feeds him.

³¹ Kompasiana.com, "Benda-benda yang Hilang dari Peradaban Batak Modern," *KOMPASIANA*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.kompasiana.com/mtf3lix5tr/5ed2fe7d097f36463710dad2/inilah-benda-benda-yang-hilang-dari-peradaban-batak-modern>.







It is the morning of the event, and the *Ibu* (mother) of the household gets out of her room. The main room of the parents is always at the top-right corner, as it was traditionally in the *rumah adat* Batak. She goes into the kitchen.



Main entrance of *rumah Uda*.

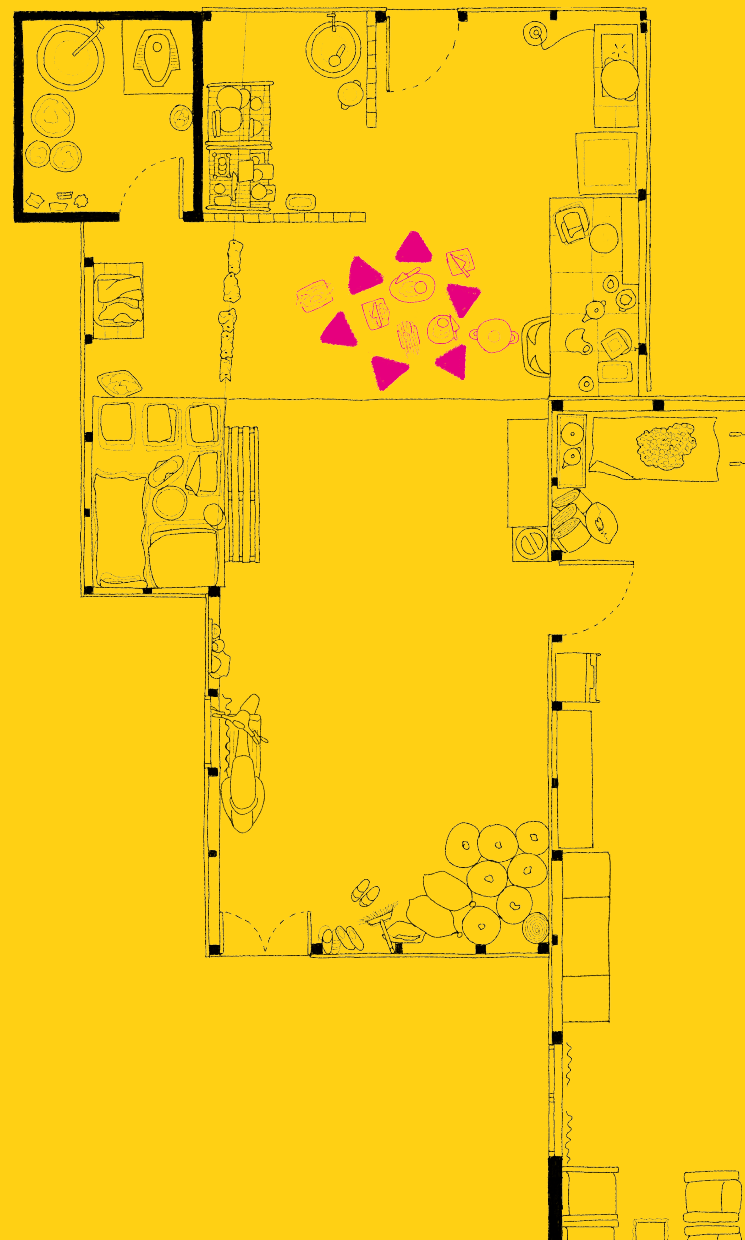
Other members of the kinship group, often women, join her in the kitchen. As in all Batak settlements, only members of the same *marga* can obtain land as it is passed down through heritage, from father to son.

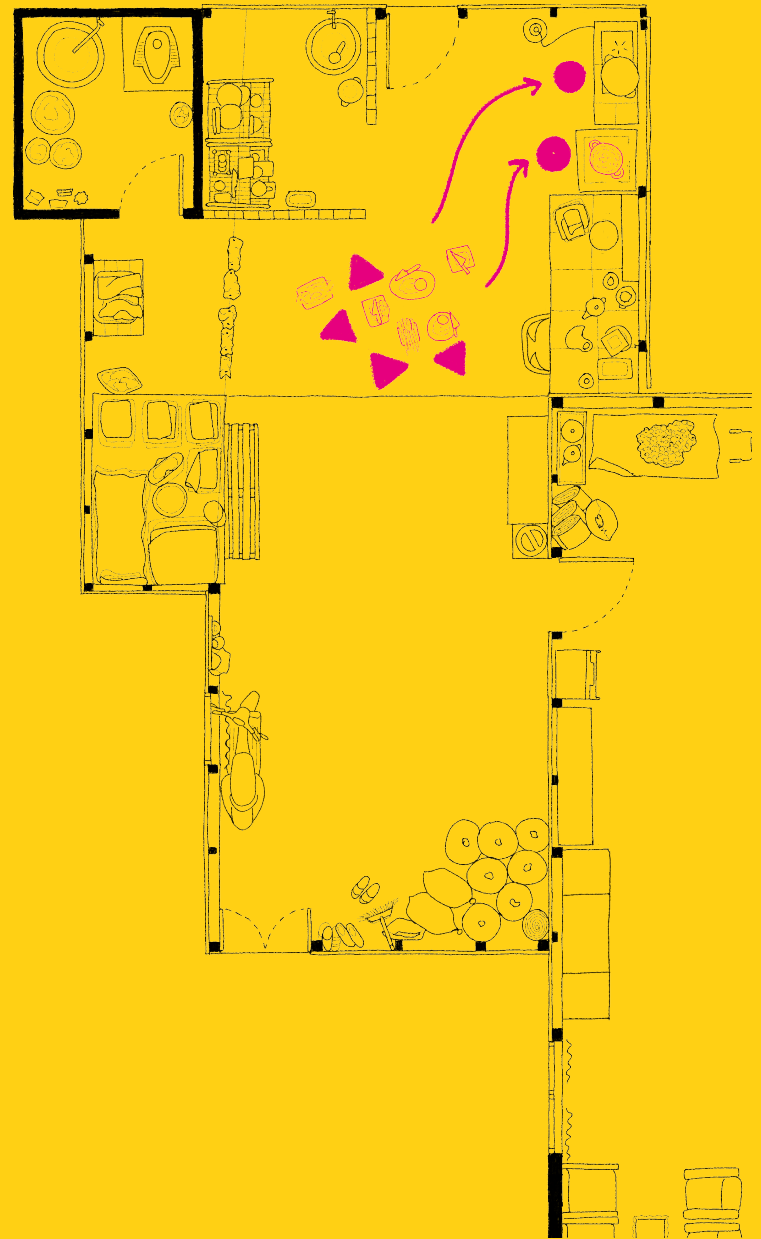




My aunt grinding ginger for lunch.

Women gather in the kitchen to cut the vegetables and grind the precious spices that are picked from the fields or bought at the nearest market into a sambal. Preparing North-Sumatran cuisine includes many curries and long-cooked stews, an influence from the Chinese and Indian traders during the spice trade era. They cut the fish, the tempeh, the tofu... as many as needed to create the various dishes.



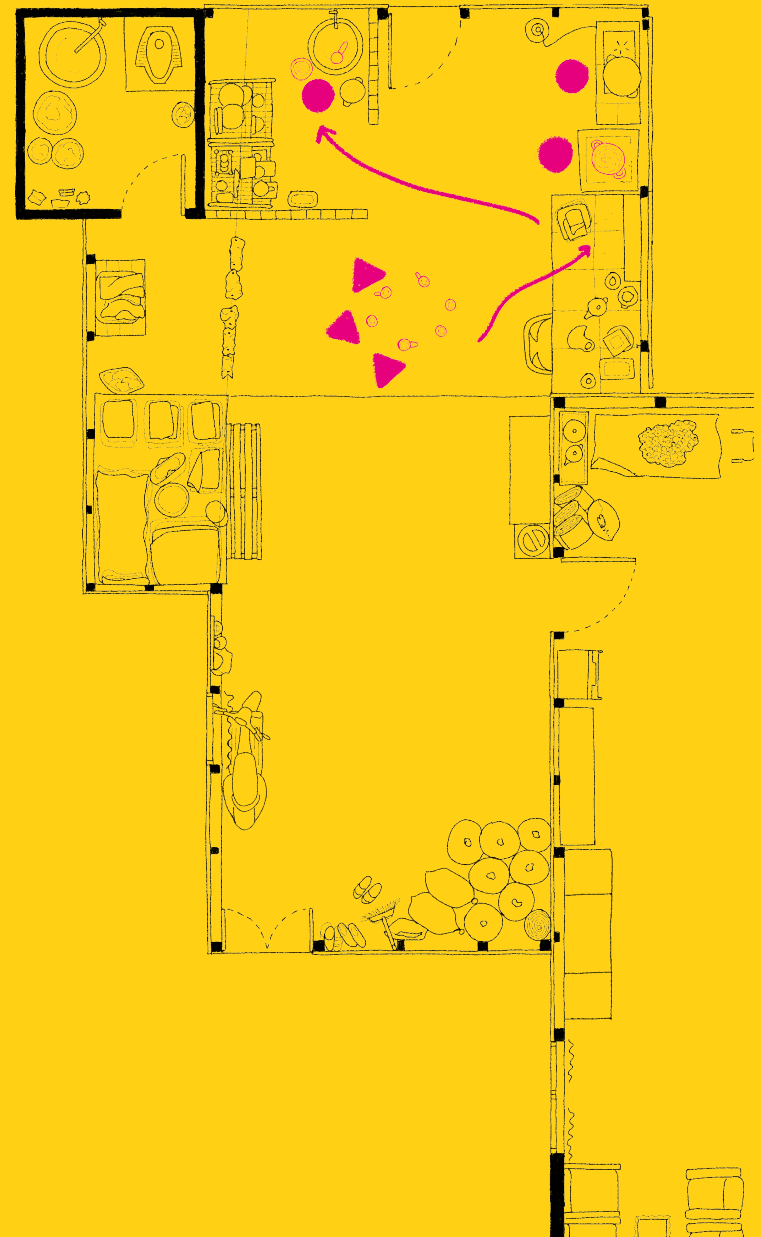


These dishes are time-consuming. Two women get up and place the pots on the gaz plates, leaving the stews to simmer for multiple hours. This leaves time for a lot of gossip, tips, and stories to be shared. Many political decisions are taken during this moment. The transmission of knowledge through the preparation of food is inter-generational and gendered.



Stored *padi* (uncooked rice).

Half an hour before the dishes are ready to serve, a woman gets up to wash the rice multiple times. The rice is, for many Batak farmers of this village, planted and cultivated by their own hands. They are commonly stored in bags in their houses. Here they are stored near the kitchen.



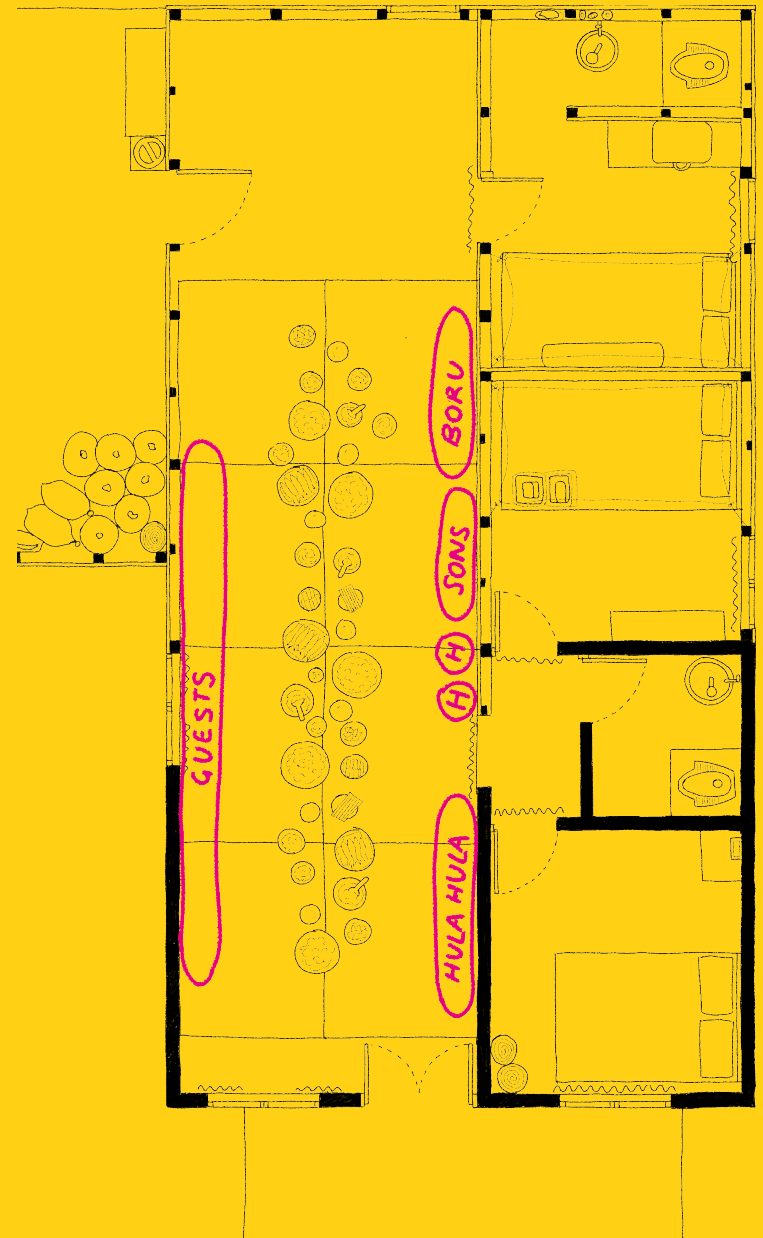
Once the rice is ready, plates, glasses, and dishes are placed in the center of the room, on mats. The *ruang tamu* has been cleaned, its furniture stored away for the formal event. This will be further explained in *how the body* shares*.



Sat with their backs against the wall, each person reaches out with their right hand to one of the plates set in front of them. This disposition of plates stems from the “*Rijstafel*”, or “rice table” in Dutch, and was introduced during their colony in Indonesia in the early 19th century, as a fantasized portrayal of eating the “[real] Indisch” way.³² It involved up to 40 different dishes, served by 40 male waiters. It has been fully adopted by many Indonesians, including the Bataks.

³² Matthijs Kuipers, “‘Makanlah Nasi! (Eat Rice!)’: Colonial Cuisine and Popular Imperialism in The Netherlands During the Twentieth Century,” *Global Food History* 3, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2017.1279515>.

When sitting down, there is a clear spatial division, a knowledge transmitted that originated from the socio-spatial organisation of *rumah adat* Batak Toba. When guests arrive they will sit down against the left wall. Family sits down against the right wall, with the husband and the wife (*H*) at the centre. The space on their right is reserved for their sons. Daughters of the kinship system (*boru*) sit against the right wall near the kitchen, so that quick access to the kitchen is ensured, and that the ritual can take place. However, sons of the *marga* (*hula hula*) however, sit near the entrance.



how the body* shares

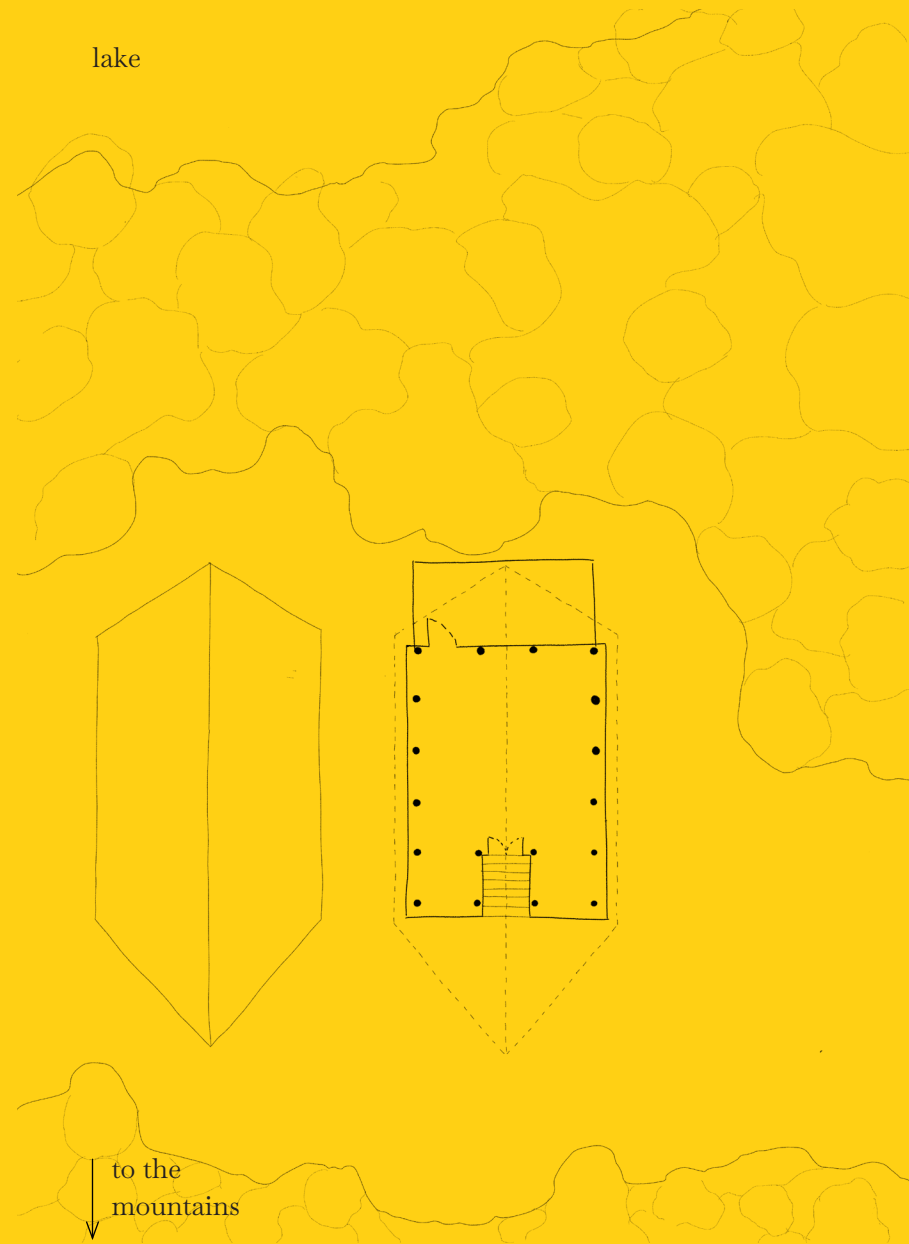
This filter explores how knowledge is transmitted through acts of hospitality and the sharing of both material and oral culture. Space is thoughtfully prepared to welcome invited guests.

lake

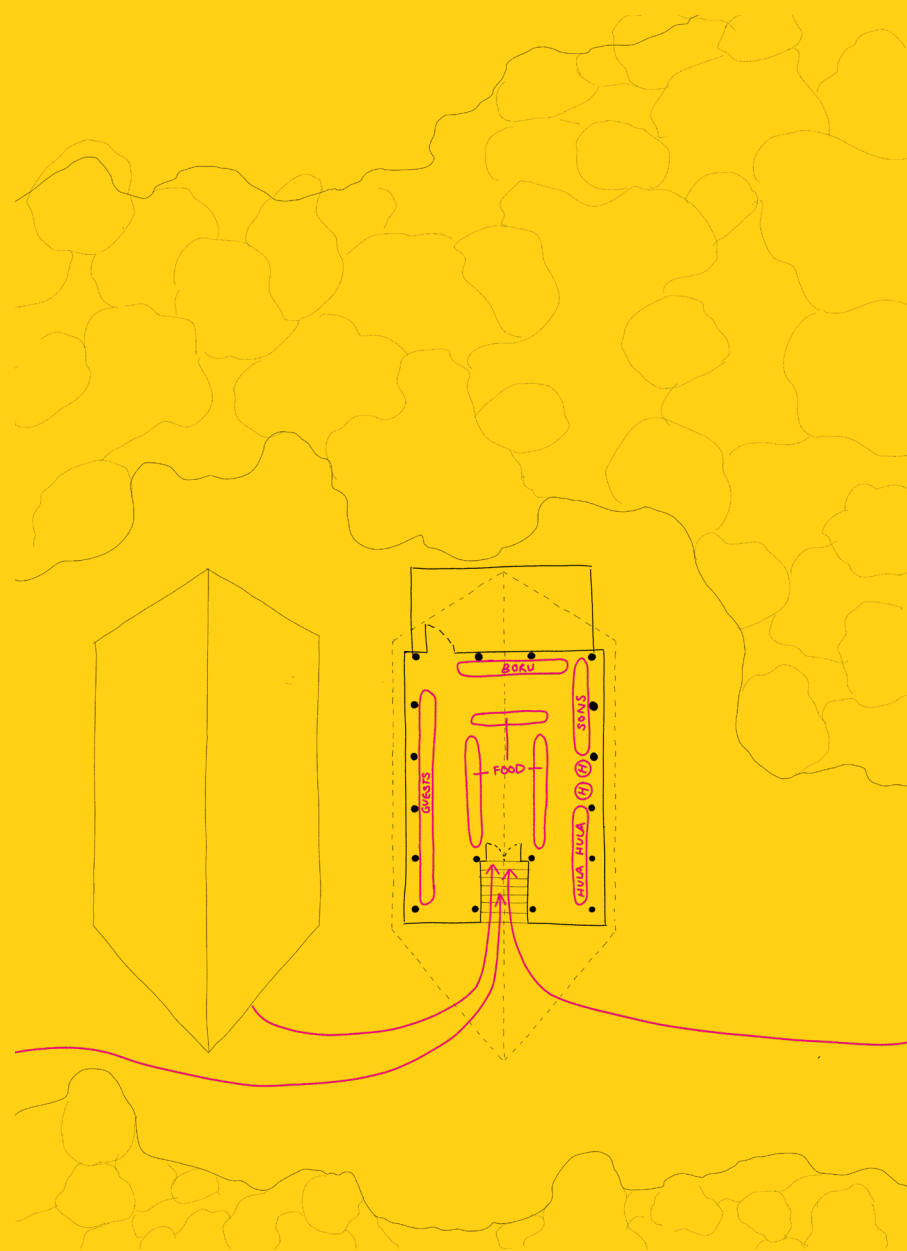
Kakak Nadapdap's house used to be a *rumah adat bolon*, oriented following *adat*, with its front facing the mountains as a sign of respect. They symbolically represent nature's power, as fertile fields are found on the mountains and the lake represents the negative power.³³ The front gable is elevated higher than the back so that metaphorically the successors of the *marga* will advance further in society than their elders.³⁴

³³ Himasari Hanan and Surjamanto Wonorahardjo, "The Architecture of Batak Toba: An Expression of Living Harmoniously," *Nakhara : Journal of Environmental Design and Planning* 8 (October 31, 2012): 14.

³⁴ Margareta Maria Sudarwani and Iwan Priyoga, "Toba Batak House Of Huta Bagasan In Jangga Dolog Village," *ARSITEKTURA* 17, no. 1 (April 30, 2019): 11, <https://doi.org/10.20961/arst.v17i1.29356>.



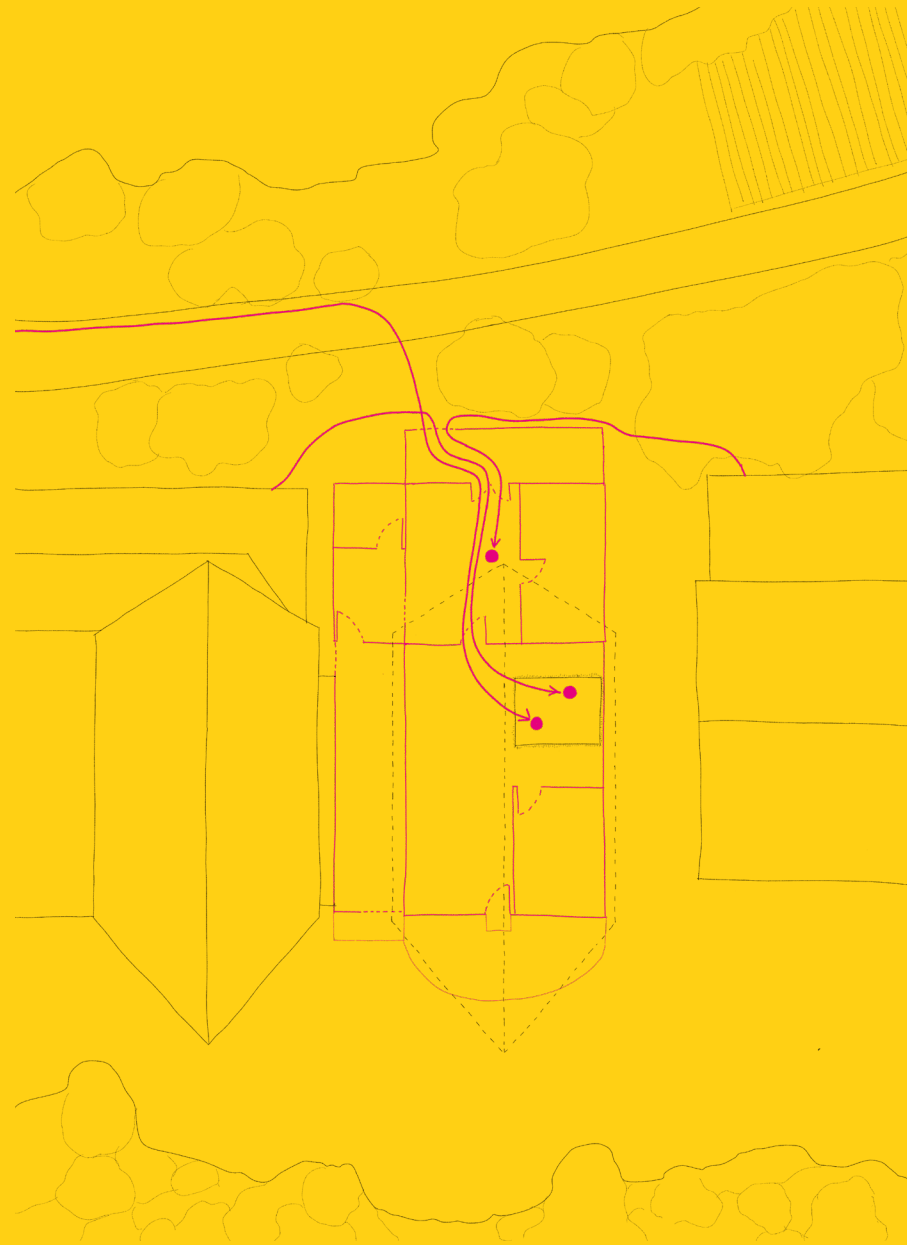
For ritualized events with guests, she and her husband would welcome guests and members of the *marga*; everyone would sit according to the *adat* socio-spatial organization, with their backs against the wall and the shared food in the center. The food is eaten with the right hand, as it is seen as impolite and “dirty” to eat with the left hand, which is reserved to clean the body. No guest is allowed to leave on an empty stomach.



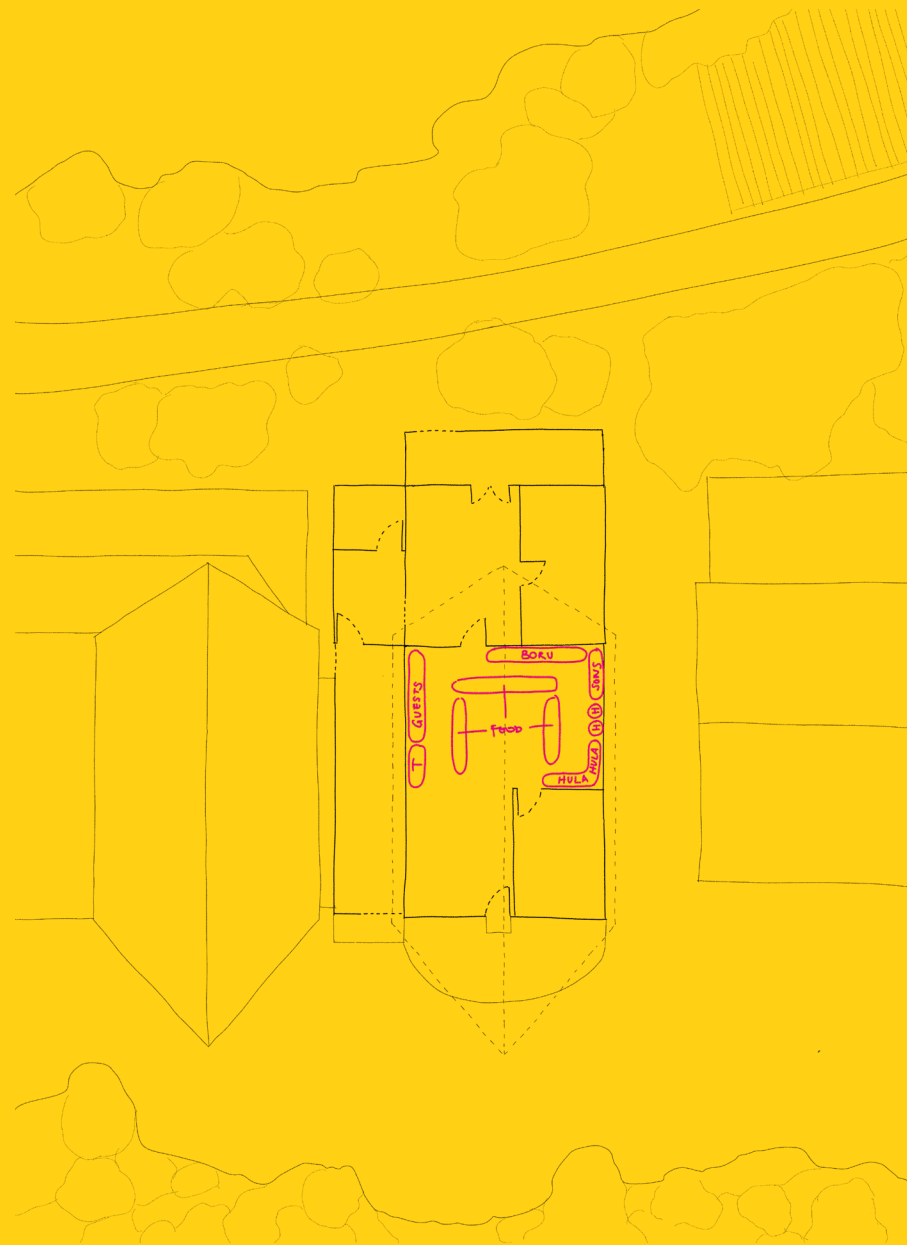


The old main entrance of the *rumah*. It now acts as a back entrance to a courtyard.

Kakak tells me that they renovated their house recently. Due to the construction of a federal route, they changed the house's orientation accordingly. Now, when guests come in, they first walk through private living quarters before reaching the *ruang tamu*. The new house keeps the original *adat* roof, as they are proud to be Batak. However, the walls have been filled in, and new cooking, washing, and sleeping rooms are added.



Before they were allowed to inhabit the renovated house, a ritual of *membukakan* (opening) must happen. In this ritual, the house's builders are thanked for their work (represented by T on the left). The ritual starts at 10 am and is very long and complicated, involving many steps of food and money exchange to express gratefulness, *manortor*, and food sharing. As building is a communal act, where artisans and future inhabitants of the house work together, such a ritual ensures that the community accepts the house and will be appropriately cared for.



The house can then be inhabited. *Kak's* primary income is as an *ulos* weaver and seller; this will be explored further in *where the body* stores*.



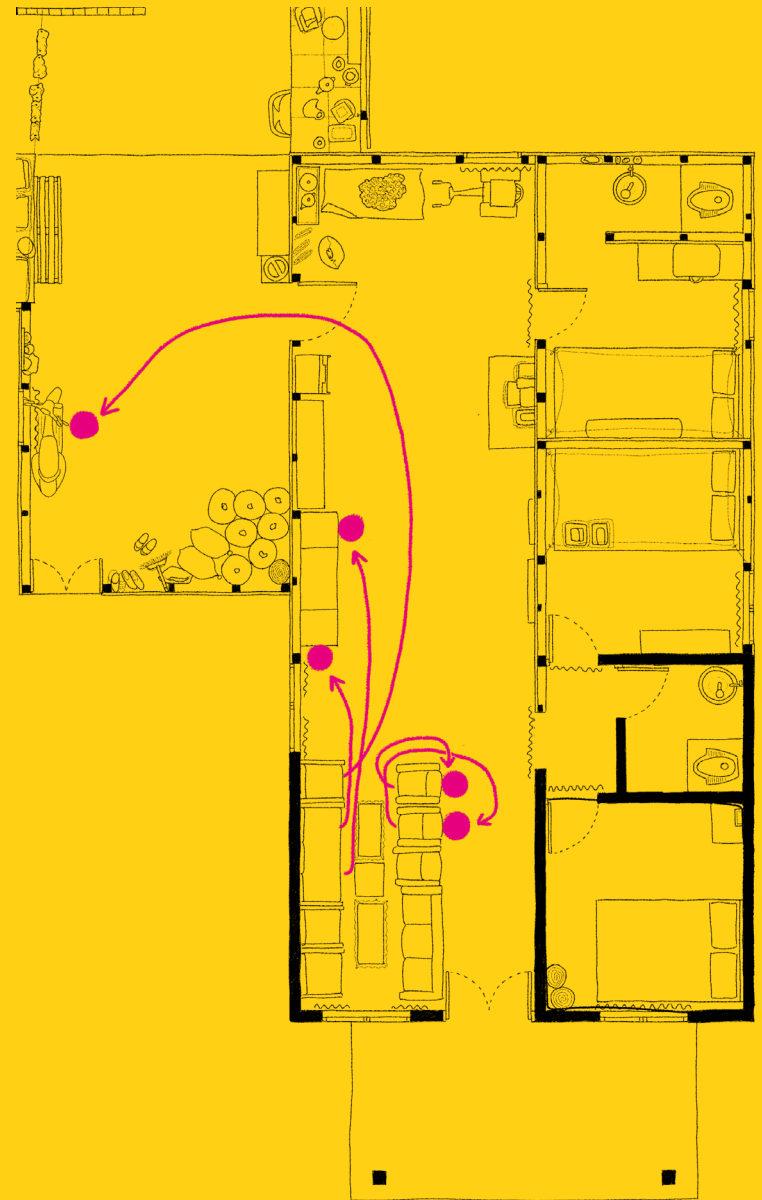




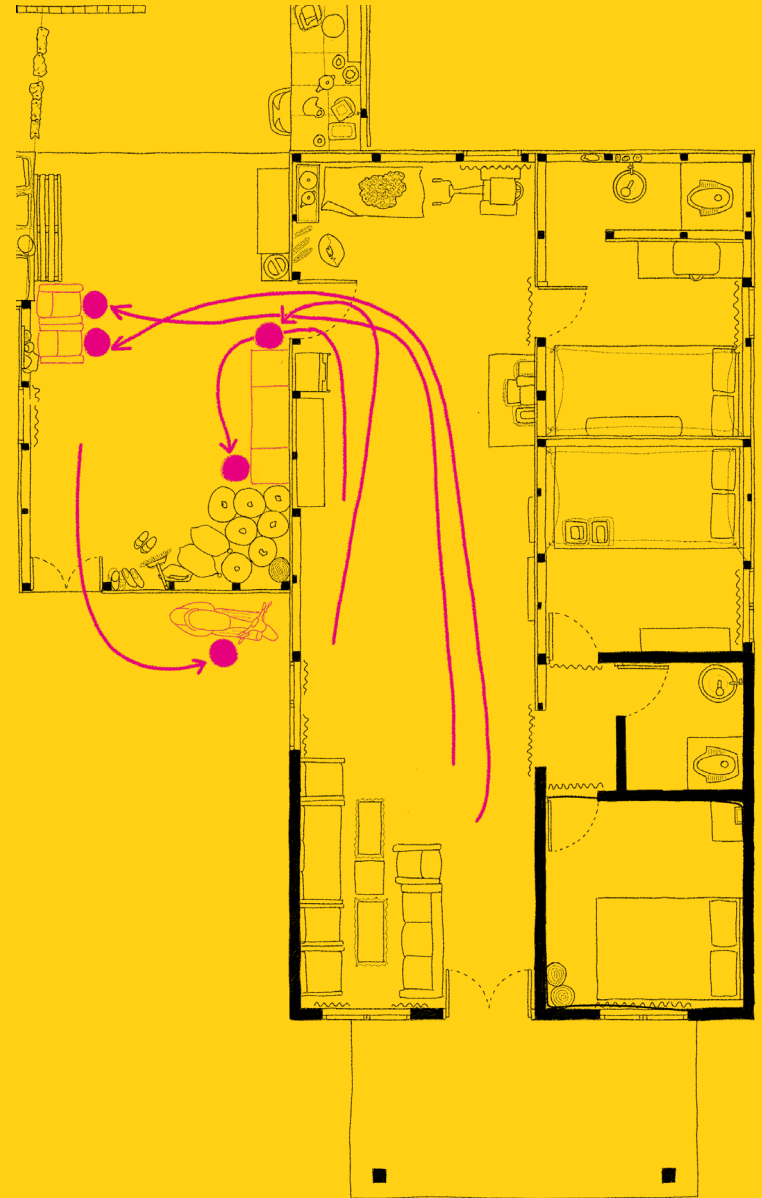
Pak Uda welcoming us in his *ruang tamu*.

For rituals, the *ruang tamu* must also be prepared. While his wife cooks in the kitchen, *Bapak Uda* waits for his neighbors and other *marga* members to arrive. He welcomes them with tea, and the guests bring food, often small cakes or fruits.

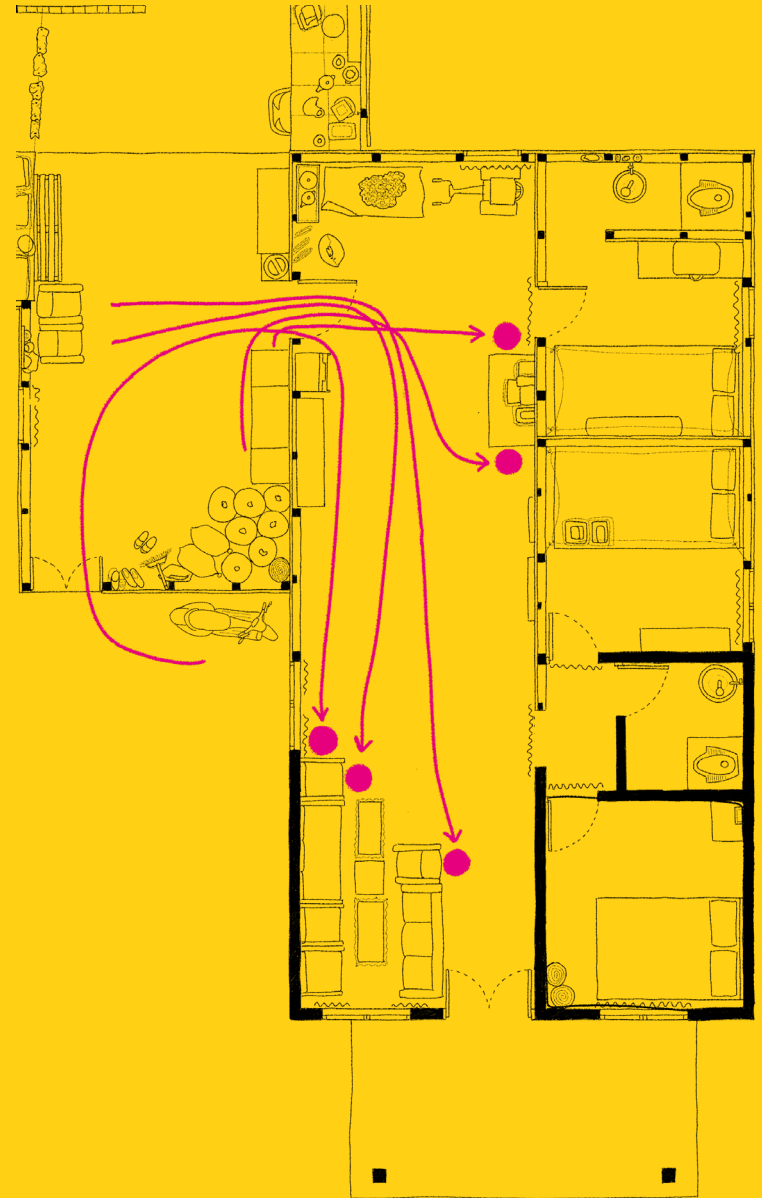




Once the tea is finished and the discussion has died down, they get up and start cleaning the *ruang tamu*. Pak Uda moves the scooter from the storage to the outside, making room for the furniture that will be temporarily stored here.



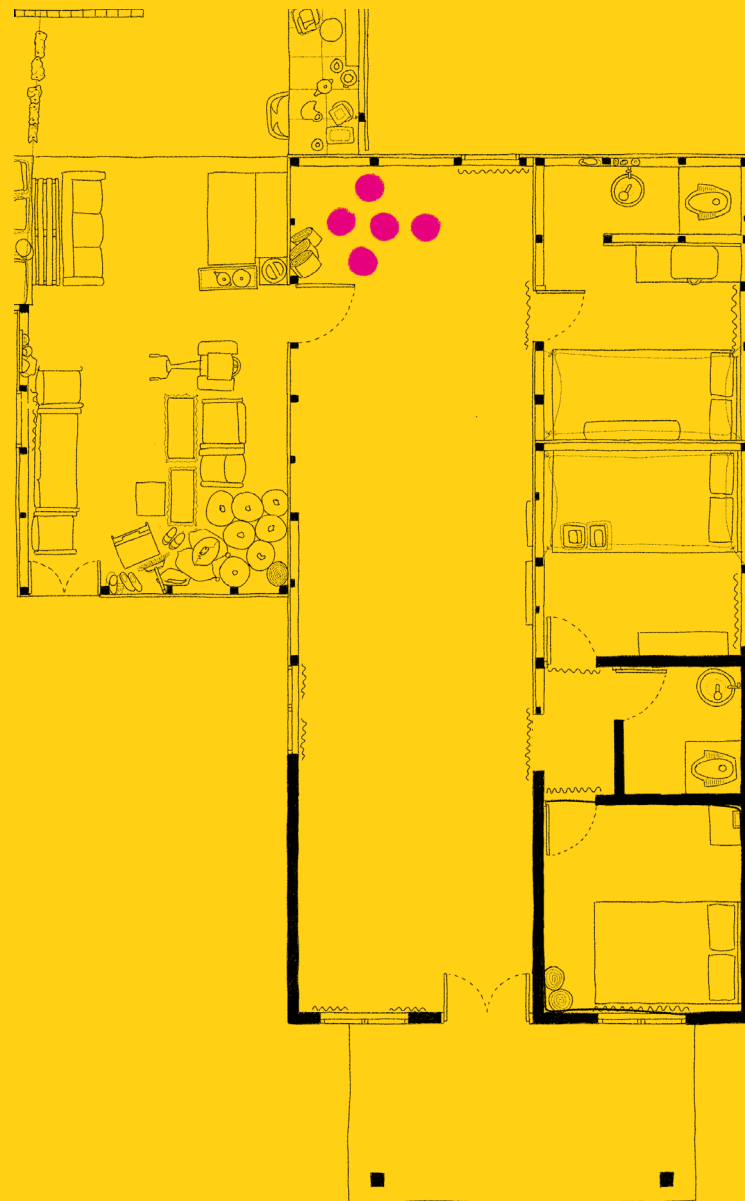
The others start moving the tables, the chairs, and the cupboards to storage room. Furniture that usually welcomes guests more informally must be put away as a “formal” room must be empty.



They go back to the *ruang tamu* and continue removing the furniture.

Once the room is cleared out, they reach for the *tikar* (mats). The introduction of nylon rope and raffia rope in the 1970s induced the traditional *mendong* mats' disappearance.³⁵

³⁵ "Benda-benda yang Hilang dari Peradaban Batak Modern," *KOMPASIANA*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.kompasiana.com/mtf3lix5tr/5ed2fe7d0g7f36463710dad2/inilah-benda-benda-yang-hilang-dari-peradaban-batak-modern>.



They roll out the *tikar* to cover as much surface area of the floor as possible, with the number of mats available, starting from the entrance.

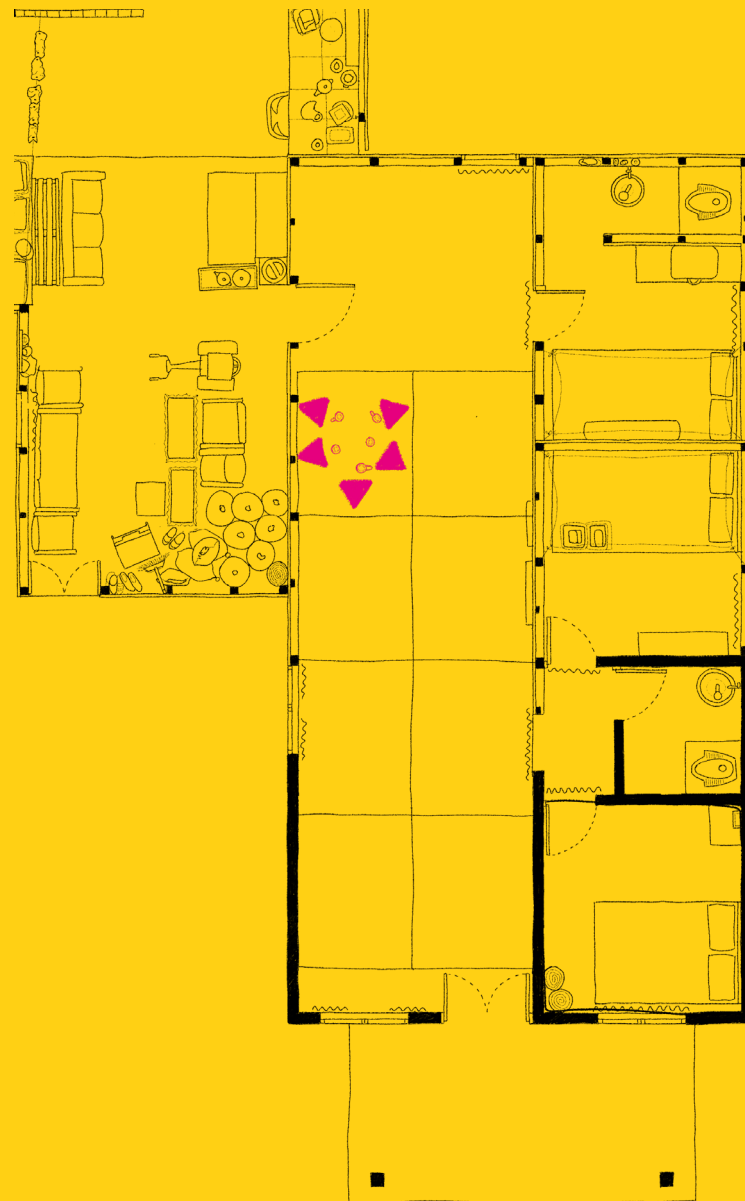




Horas, a greeting that carrying the meaning of warmth and familiarity for those who meet each other. Written in both Batak script and latin alphabet.

They drink tea and chat while waiting for the food to be ready, and for the event to start. Members of the marga are expected to participate in the event, and guests are welcome at every big ritual. When asked why he renovated his house, from a stage house on stilts to a landed house with concrete foundations, *Pak Uda* cites expectations to progress in President Joko Widodo's footsteps. However, a piece of the traditional adat roof has been glued to the front facade, as "[they] are Batak, after all!"³⁶ Symbolic Batak signage spelling out "welcome" on the front facade presents a continuous front, modified by modernity and capital economy.

36 Bapak Uda, interview by author, Naga Saribu I, August 25, 2023.



where the body* stores

“They show a variety of differences, both in architectural styles, structural and material systems, as well as house facades. The new and old houses are known as landed and stage buildings.”³⁷

The *rumah adat* Batak has storage on top of and under the realm of human domesticity, viewed as a platform to perform rituals. In Batak, this platform is called a stage. Due to its stilts resting on flat rocks, the house moves with seismic activity, instead of going against it. This is due to adaptability, but is also intrinsic to their cosmology: they are respectful of the earth, and do not dare to pierce it.

Today many of these stilts are filled up due to renovations, and these houses become landed buildings. In these next cases, the storing of memories, ancestors and crafts are explored through the lens of both formal and daily ritual matters.

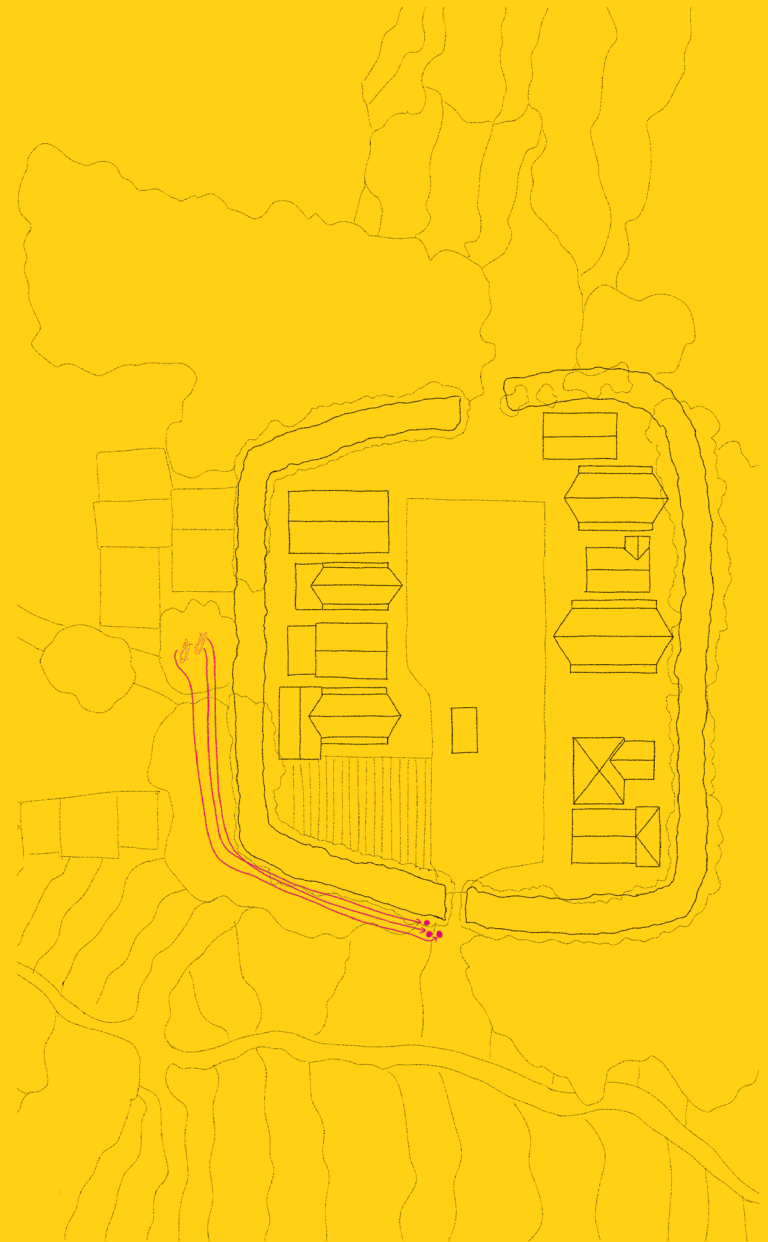
37 Parmonangan Manurung, Sudaryono Sastrosasmito, and Diananta Pramitasari, “The Meanings of Architectural Spaces in Vernacular Settlements: The Batak Toba Tribe in the Meat Village, Toba, Indonesia,” *ISVS E-Journal* 1, no. 1 (2022): 31.





Welcome panel at the entrance of the *huta wisata*, sponsored by *satu Indonesia* (“one Indonesia”).

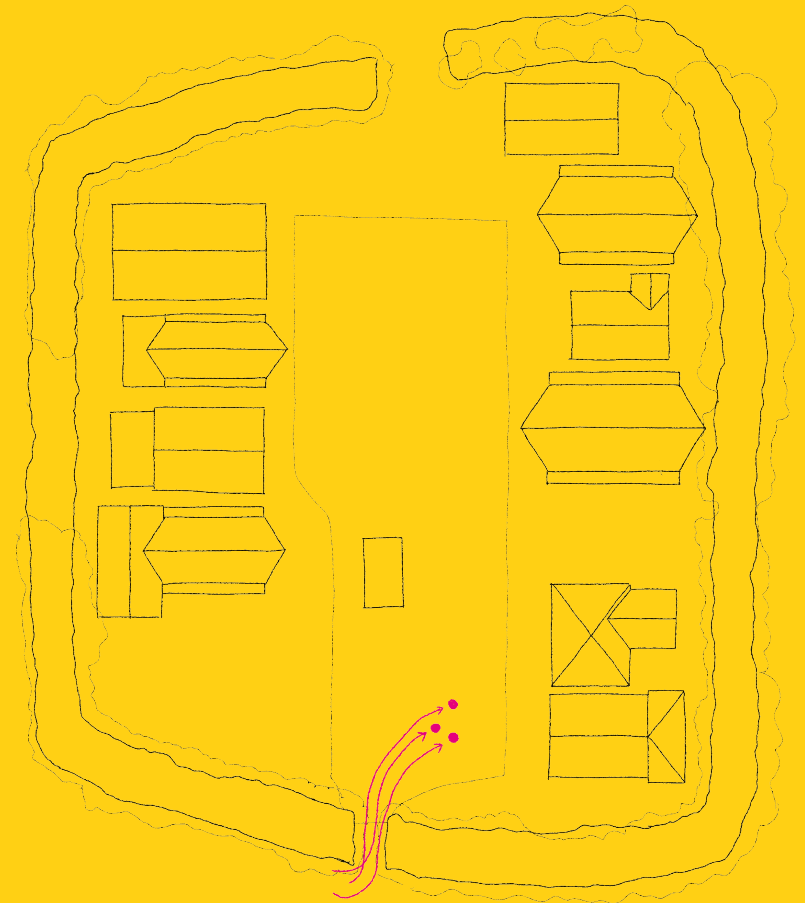
Three tourists arrive at the closest parking spot near the *huta wisata*. They park their scooters at the *warung* (small family-owned shop) next to the village. The roads here are too narrow for car transportation. The *warung*’s owners welcome them. It is customary to leave a tip for the parking before leaving – let’s hope the tourists remember to do so. They walk towards the entrance of the village and observe the welcome poster presenting the “*sejahtera*” (“prosperous”) huta of the Hariarapohan administrative district.





Original *huta* stones are not carved into rectangular blocks, they are massive and are hundreds of years old. The date of creation of this settlement is not shared.

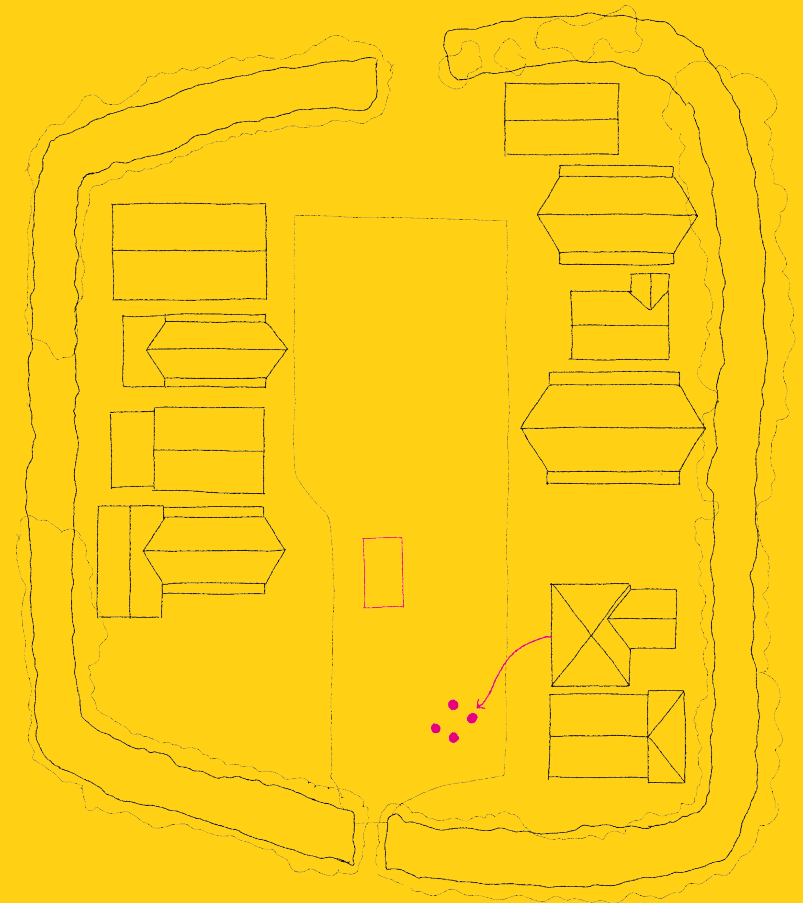
They enter. Tall trees planted on stone walls surround the *huta*.

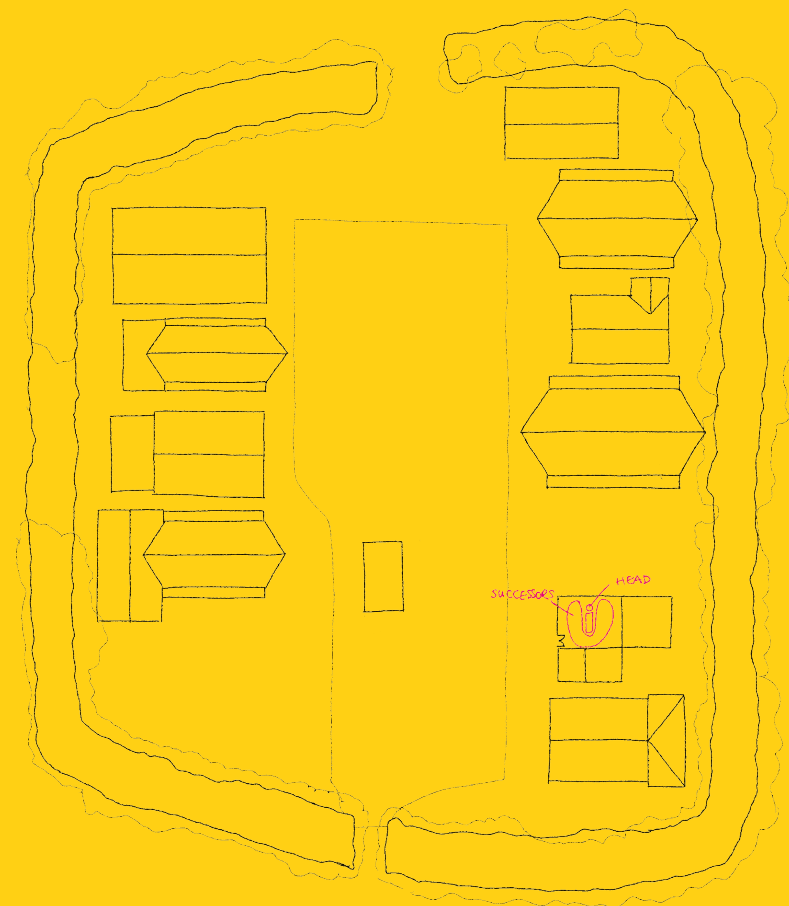




The first Simarmata's empty sarcophagus is immediately visible when entering the *huta*.

Tulang sees them and greets them. They introduce each other. He explains that this is a *huta*, a historical settlement whose main ancestor of the kinship system lies in the grave in the center. But this one is empty: the Dutch forced them to displace it, as they formally banned graves inside of villages. Their ancestral link to the land is only symbolic now.





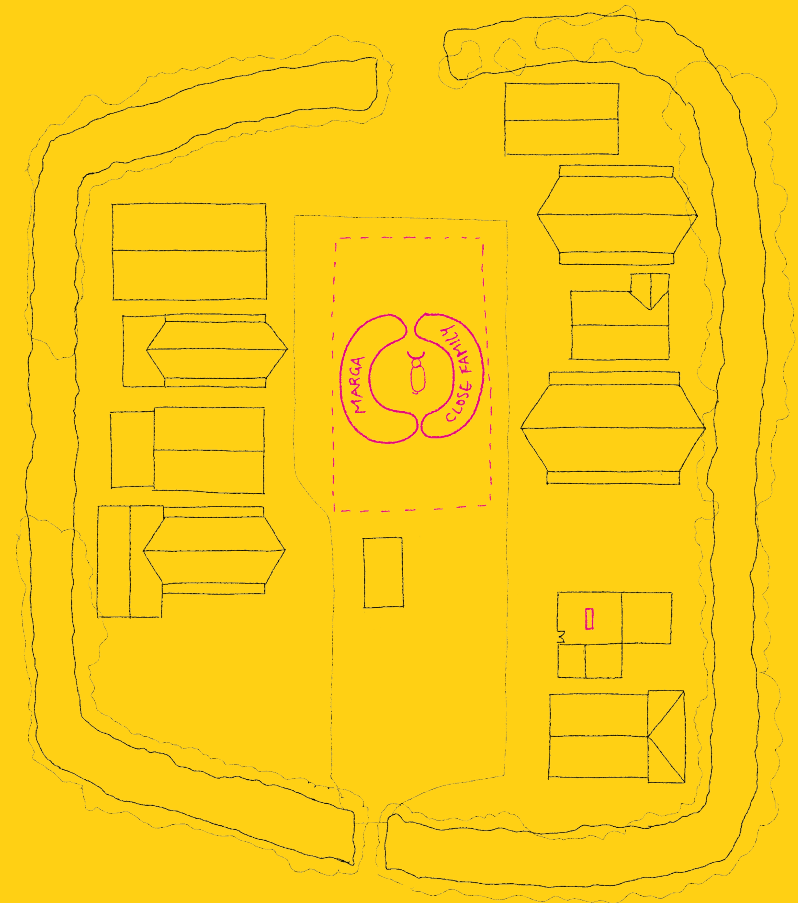
When a funeral ritual happens, it starts at 10 am. The body lays in the middle of the house, with its spouse, the head of the house, sitting at its head. The close family gather around the coffin without the *hula hula* and the *boru*.

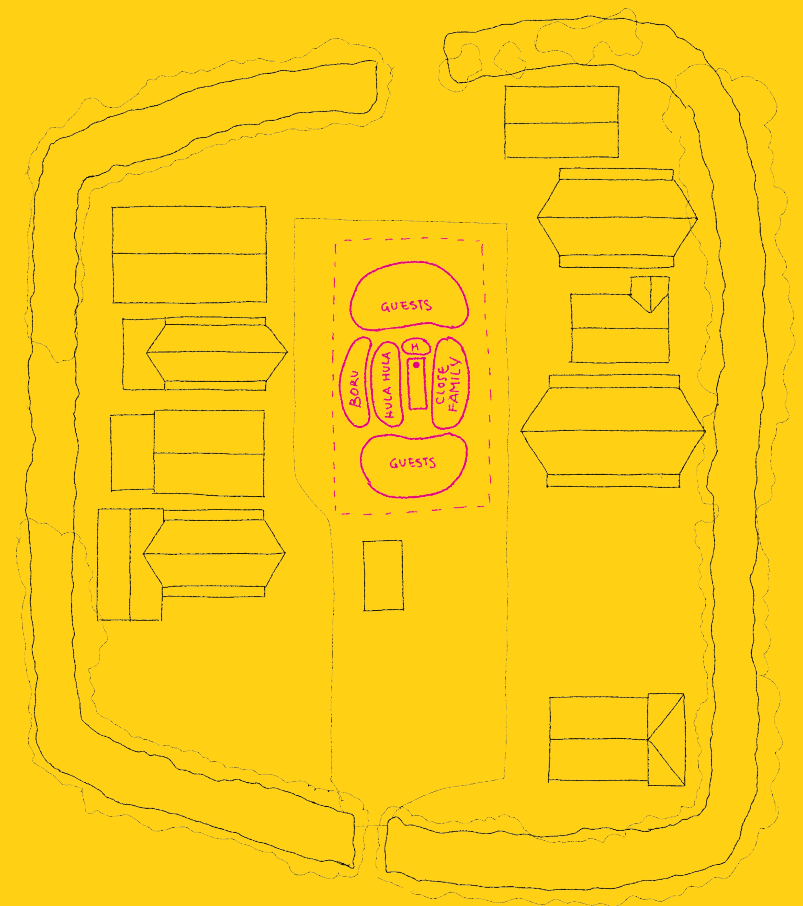


A water buffalo.

A water buffalo is attached at the center of the tent. The tent is an extension to the *ruang tamu*. It is only installed for the most important events, or if the family is rich, as it is very costly to welcome all the guests and feed them. The buffalo is deeply important to the Bataks; historically used as a medium of exchange and investment, a means of transport, and a tool to process rice fields. Considered a symbol of fertility and accompanies the dead into the afterlife, its death lifts the deceased into a high *adat* position.³⁸ The buffalo is openly sacrificed as part of the ritual in a rural village. The actual slaughter is no longer done in the open in cities but still happens in this *huta*.

³⁸ Jf Bobby Saragih, "Space and Cultural Behaviour : Deconstruction of Stage Ideas in Batak Tribal Traditional Houses," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 794, no. 1 (July 1, 2021): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/794/1/012231>.





In the tent, the same socio-spatial organisation is upheld: the close family to the deceased goes on the right, while the rest of the *marga* go on the left. The head of the family, the spouse of the deceased, sits at their head. Due to the space being more generous, the rest of the guests are dispersed around the mourning family.

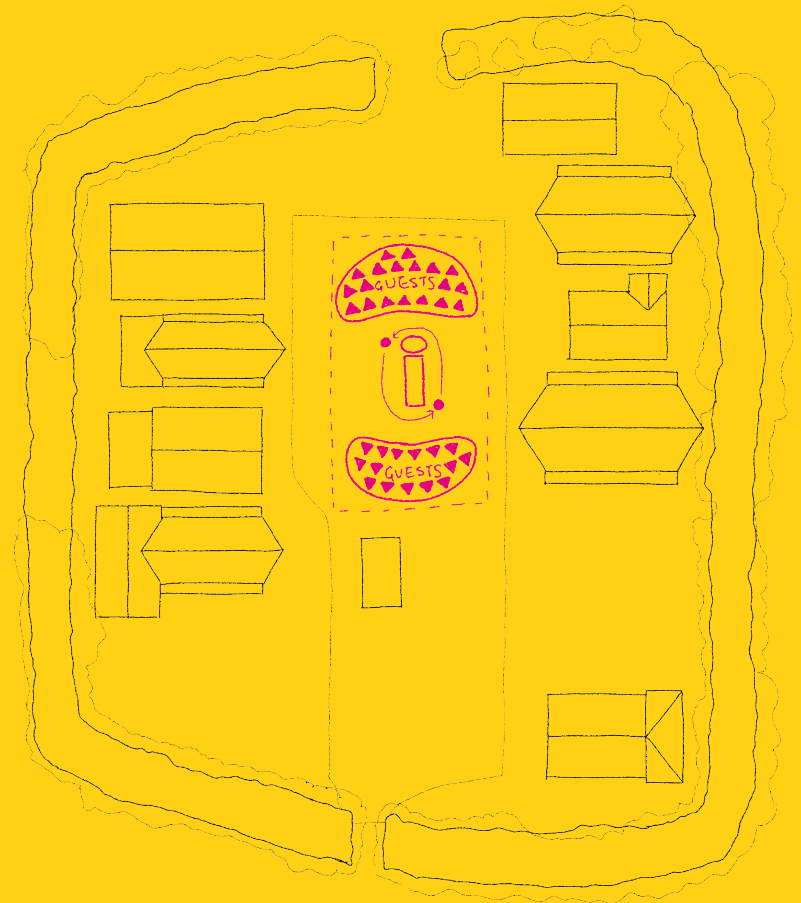
if all children
are married

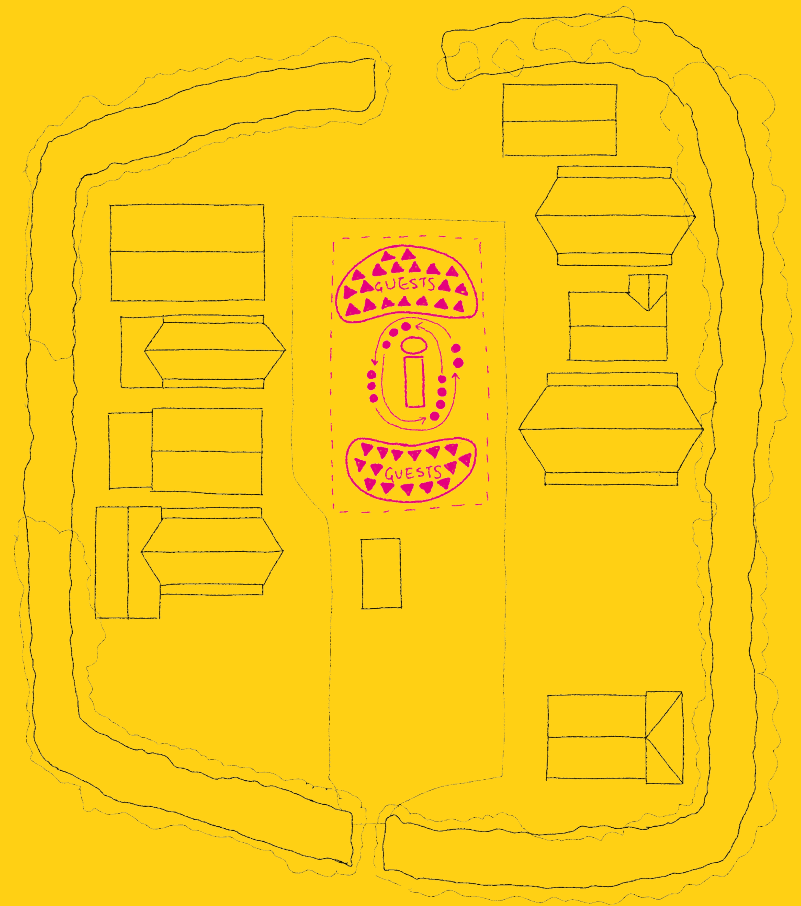


if not



The guests sit down. The close family starts to *manortor*. It is customary to go in a anti-clockwork direction if the deceased's children are all married. If this is not the case, they dance in a clockwork direction.

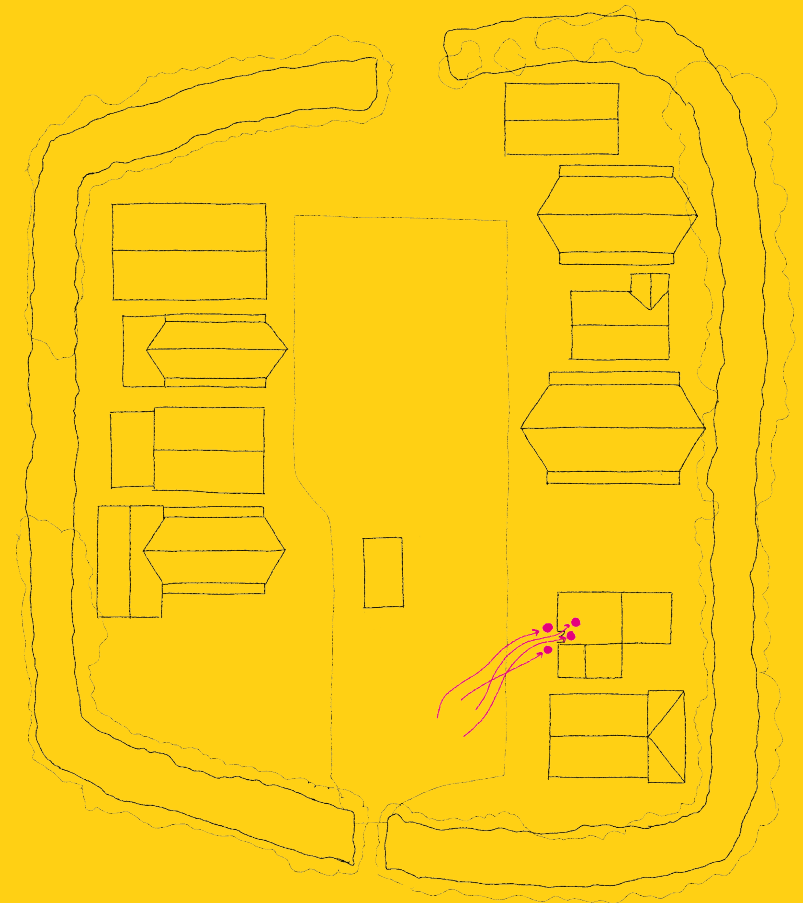




The *hula hula* and *boru* join the dance and rotate around the close family in the same direction. The head of the household still stays seated at the head of the coffin. This ritual lasts many hours and is customarily closed by a feast.



Tulang's house seen from the open space.



Once *Tulang* has finished introducing the village to the tourists, he invites them into his house.

In the *ruang tamu*, *Tulang* sells t-shirts with printed images of the *huta* on their back. He is critical of the government's initiative to label this village a "wisata" heritage. He complains that the government's intervention is superficial and lacks proper financing for infrastructure. They only paid for the reparation of roofs. How can he transmit his knowledge to interested people when he cannot welcome them with dignity? The intergenerational transmission of knowledge is hindered. Others share his criticism, as they do not see their lives substantially changed or helped in any way. However, some of them share their pride in the status the *huta* newly adopted in 2020.

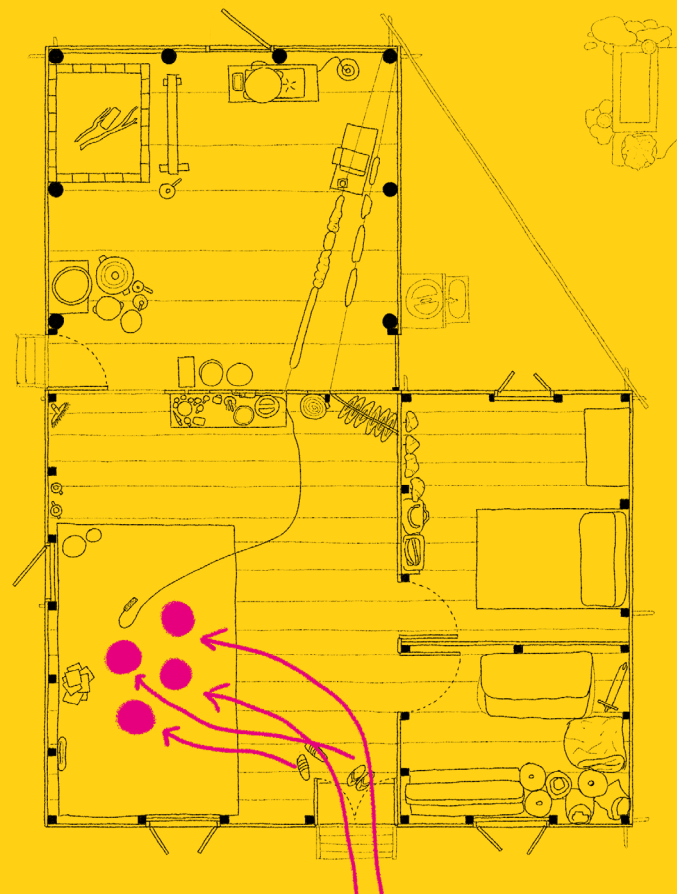
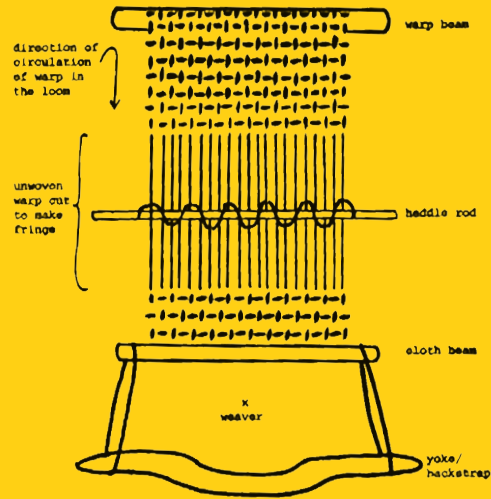




Illustration 1 Loom from above showing only the upper warp plane



Cross section of loom

a. Natural shed



b. Counter shed

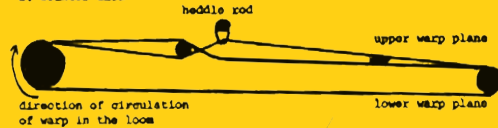
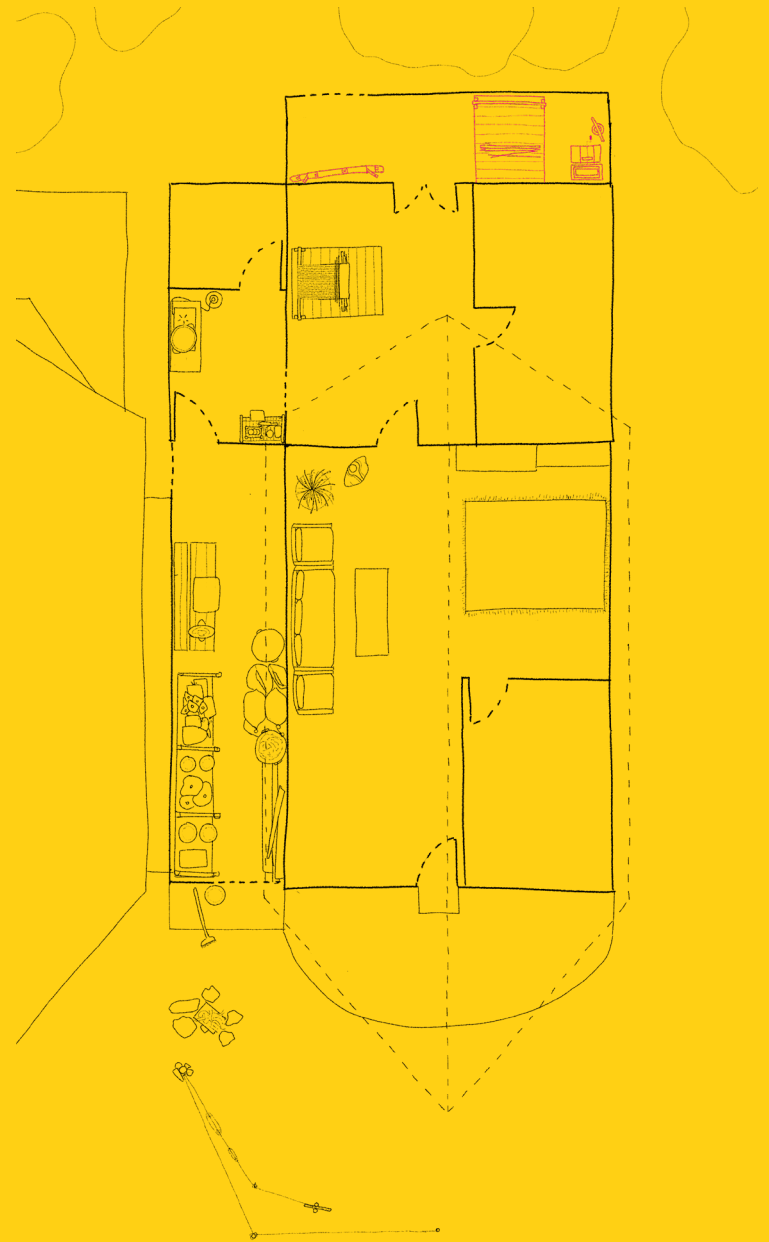
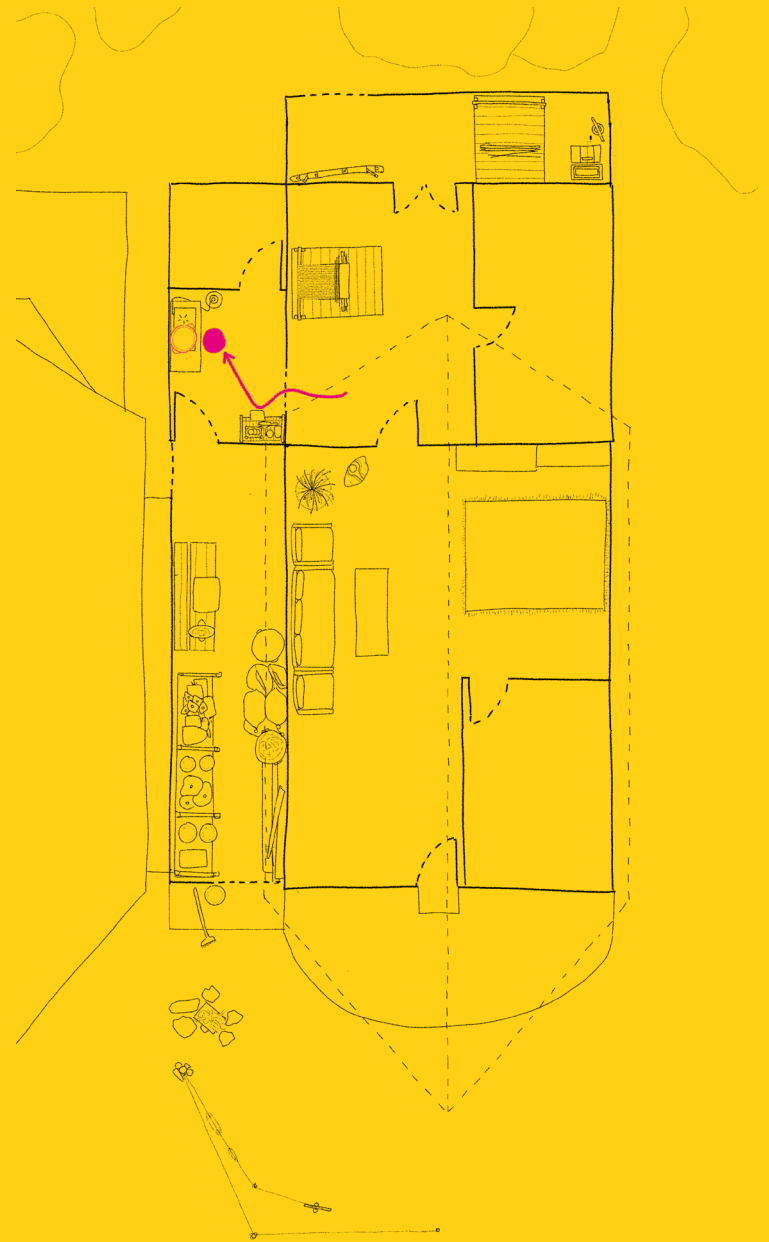


Figure 3: Image depicting how a loom machine works. Sandra Niessen, *Loom from above showing only the upper warp plane*, in "Textiles Are Female ... but What Is Femaleness? Toba Batak Textiles in the Indonesian Field of Ethnological Study," in *Unity in Diversity* (Brill, 1984), 70.

The front of *Kakak Nadapdap's* house serves as an exposition for her traditional *ulos* making, using hand woven natural dyed thread and *adat* Batak Toba objects.



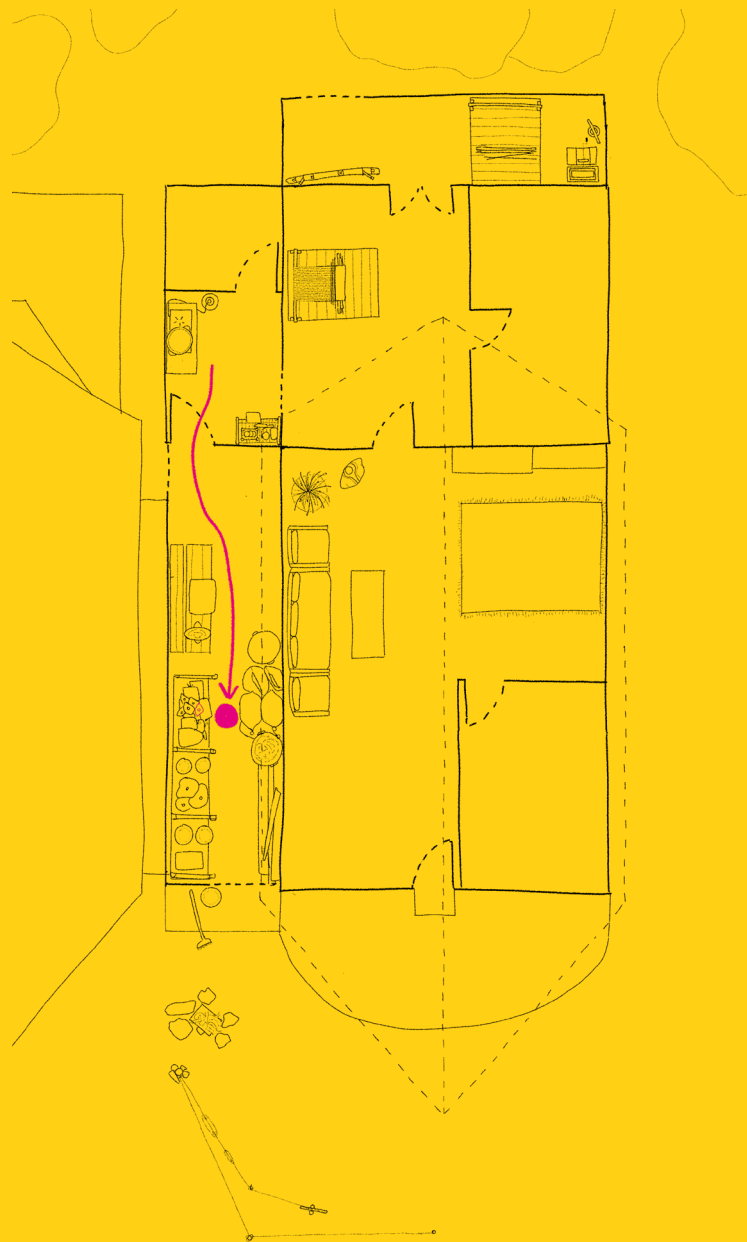


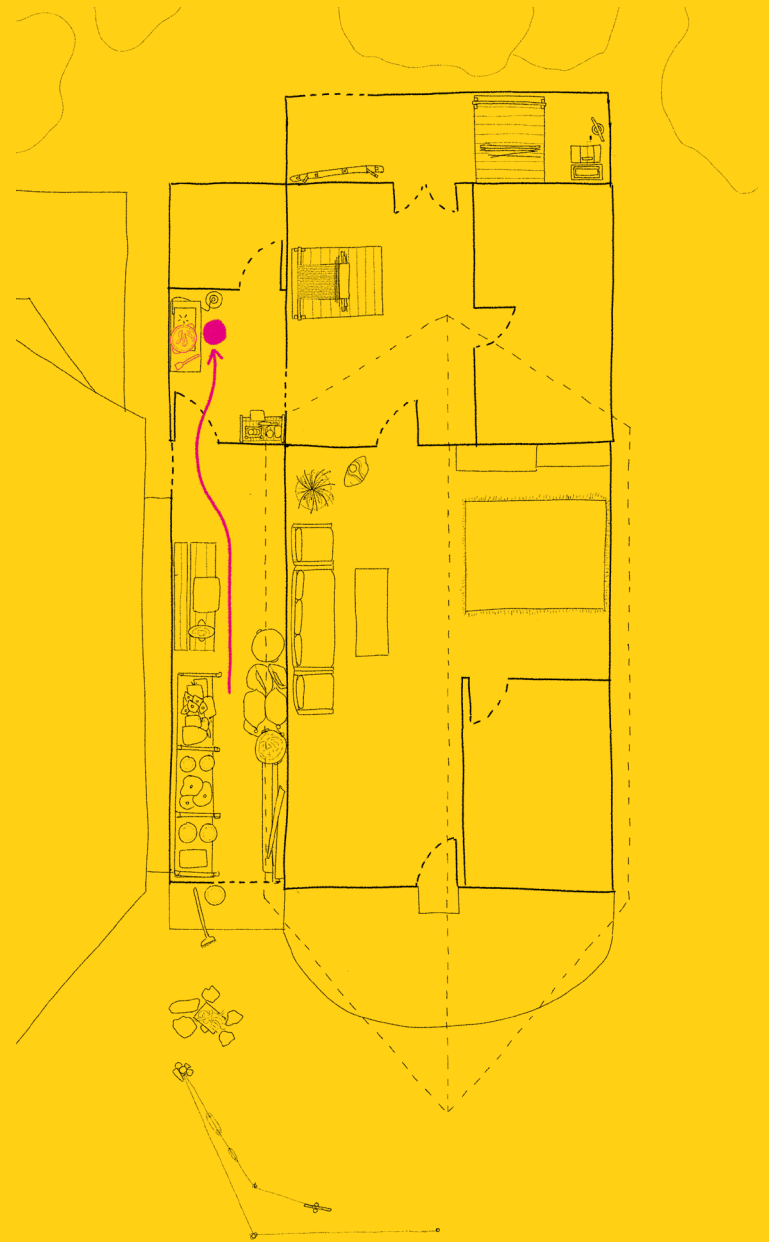
On a work day, *Kakak* starts by boiling water. For this she goes into the kitchen to heat up water in a big pot on her gas stove.



Yellow bark kept in plastic bags.

While the water heats up, she enters the storage room and chooses the plants that will pigment her thread. Today she chooses *batang kayu kuning* (yellow bark), which will dye the thread a deep indigo blue. She learned the traditional way of dyeing two years ago in a free workshop offered by the government. Being an ulos weaver for a long time, but with synthetic threads. She found the natural dyes of the threads beautiful and also more unique.



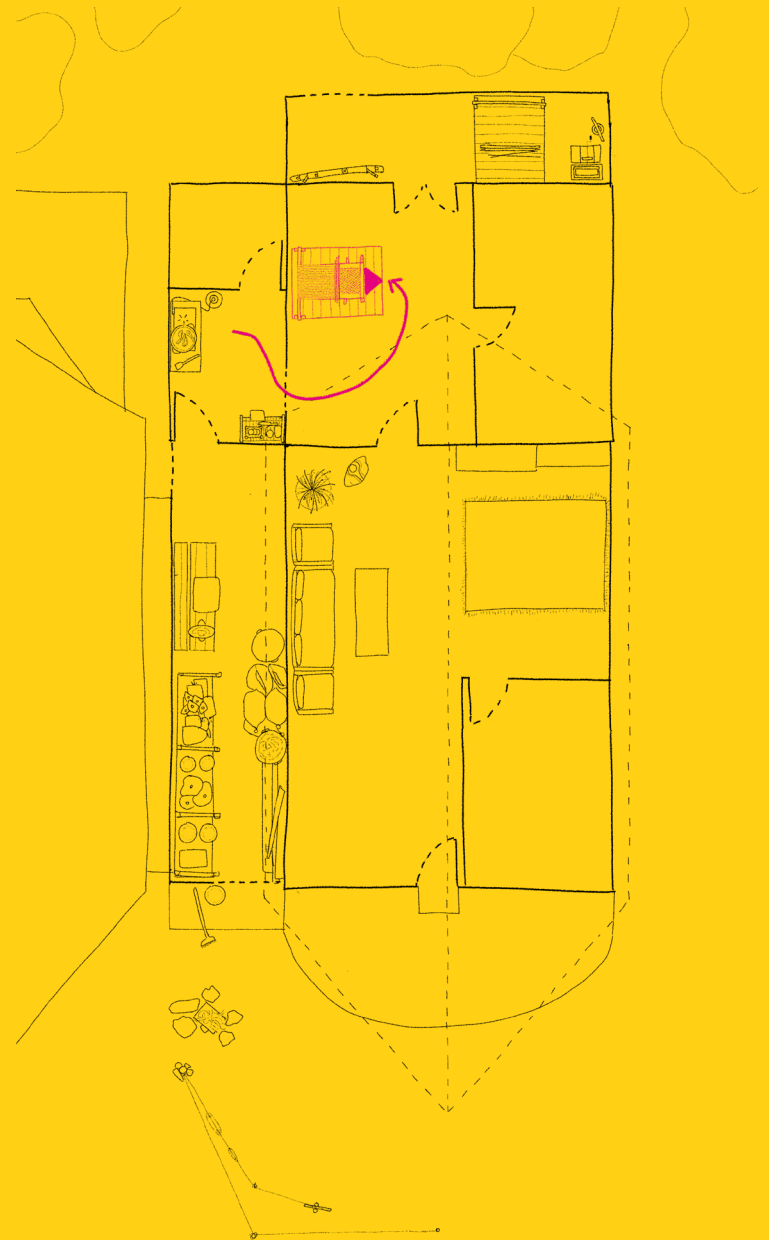


She places the yellow bark in the boiling water. Once the water is infused she turns off the stove and adds the thread in.



Kakak Nadapdap weaving an ulos.

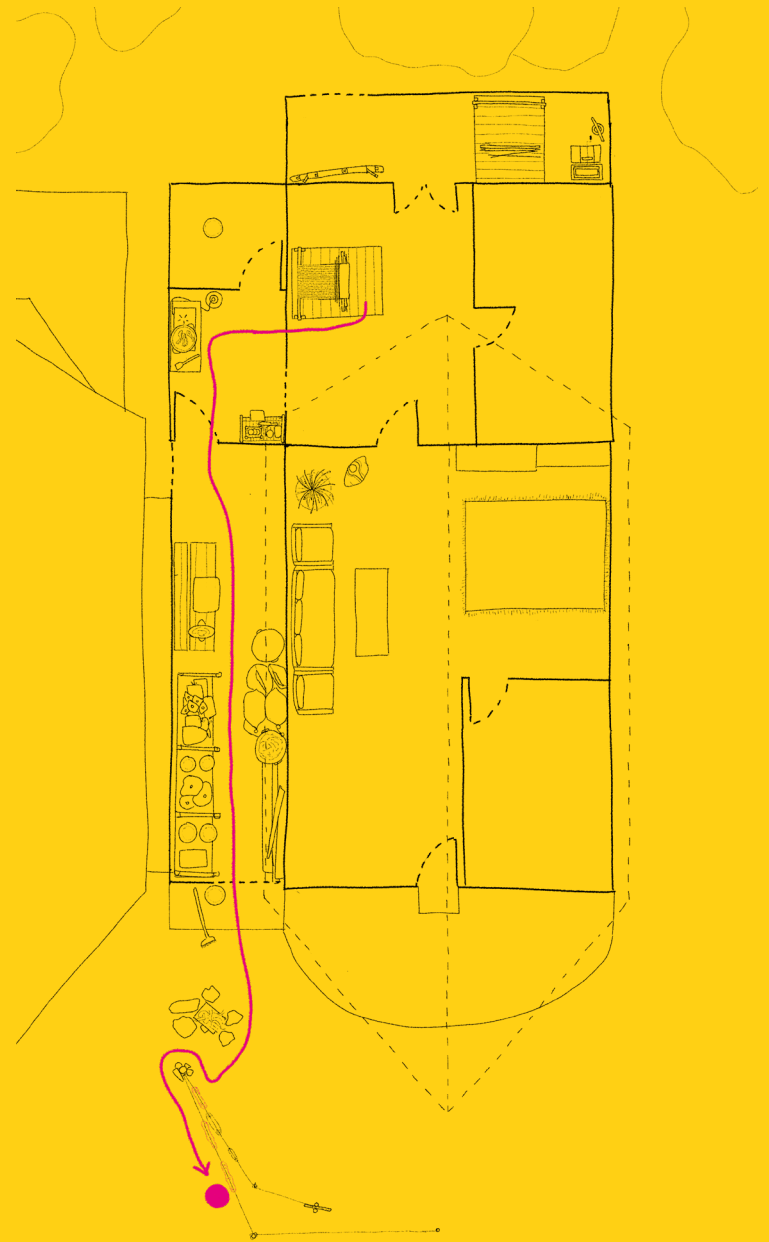
While the thread infuses, she continues weaving the ulos she currently works on. She will then send to Jogjakarta, 2'400 km from her house, to merchants who will sell her creations. Each type of *ulos* bears specific patterns with designated uses. The modern initiative to re-use *ulos* as fashion that appeared around 2012-2020 pushed for the development of new patterns for fashion, as the patterns designed for each ritual use are reserved for that purpose only. These patterns remain sacred: patterns for ritual use are not for casual wear as the symbolism remains intertwined with the underlying ideology.



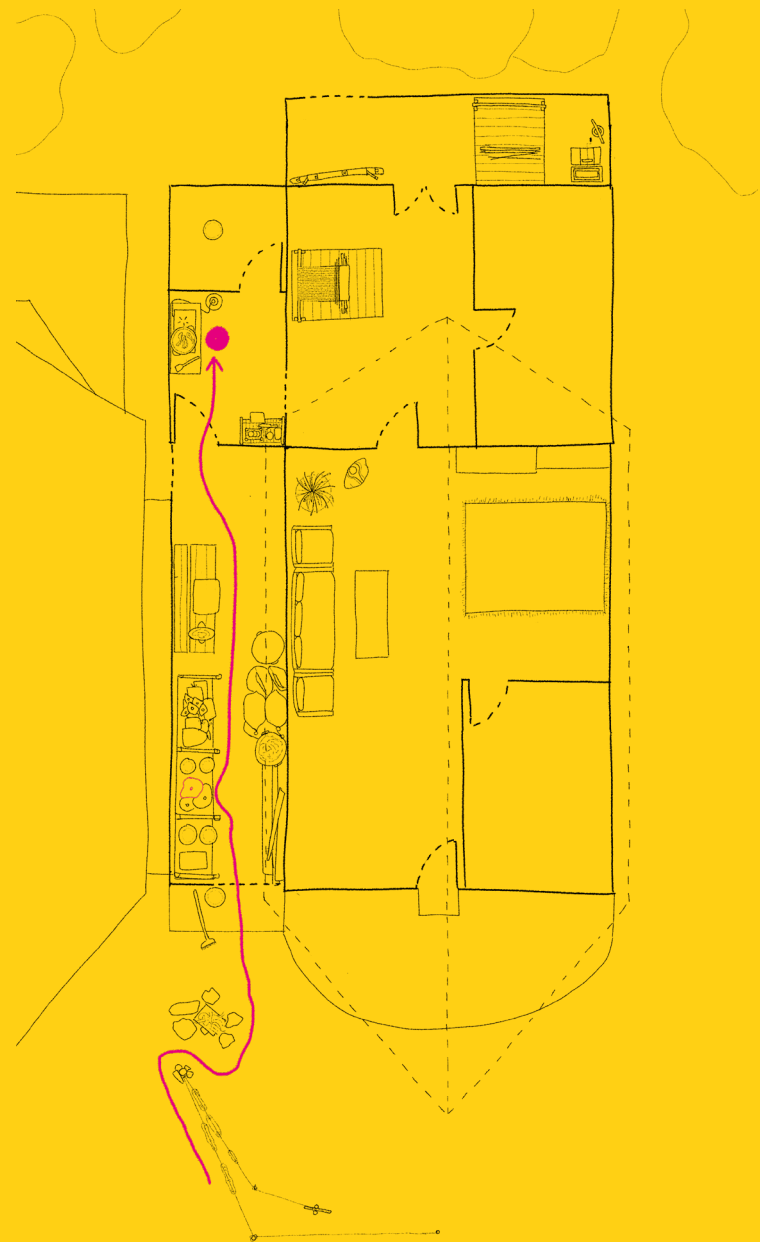


Thread soaking in dye.

A few hours later, *Kakak* retrieves the thread from the pot and hangs it up to dry. The dye process of soaking and drying is repeated up to 5 times so that the thread is dyed durably and presents an intense color. Durability is essential, as ulos are passed down from generation to generation, holding significant cultural and sentimental value as they are gifted during rituals.



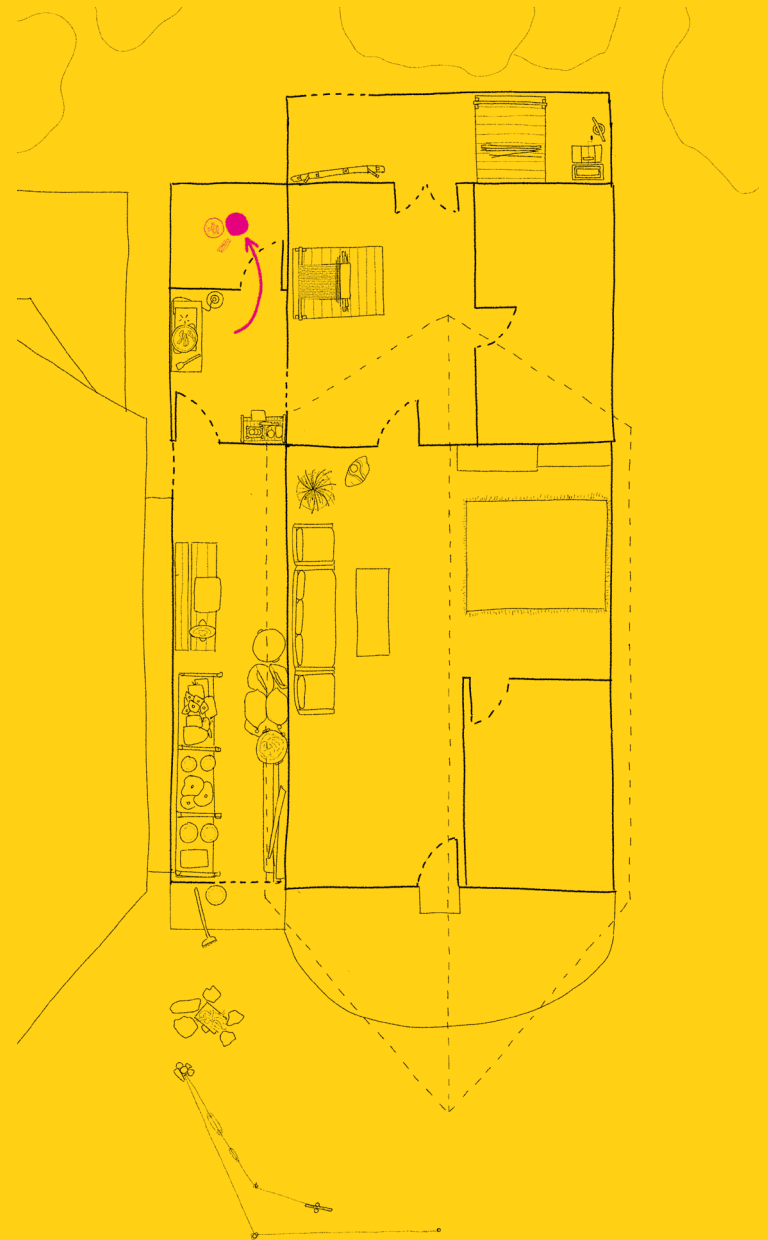
Once the thread dries after the number of dips desired, she chooses one of her three fixing solutions: two are of natural plant origin, and one is synthetic. They either darken, lighten, or maintain the same thread color. The product must be boiled in water again and left to soak overnight.





Some colors achieved through multiple combination of plants and fixing solutions.

The color is locked in. *Kakak* washes the thread in a bucket. The thread is finally ready to be used. The government's natural dye initiative was well received and adopted by many women in the village. However, *Kakak* says that the initiative was not enough to diversify village income, as in this *desa* the infertile soil hinders farming.





conclusion

Having focused on the body as a living site for collective memory, guided by an ethical charter and methodology developed, this work aimed to navigate the complexities of indigenous knowledge representation. Recognizing the inherent entanglements with historical power structures and colonial practices, I experimented with anthotypes and drawings, both mediums allowing the agency to explore how the transmission of knowledge has been ensured or forgotten through daily ritualized acts of sustenance, communal sharing, and the storage of inherited objects. These rituals center the body*, producing social spaces for knowledge transmission. This transmission of knowledge is subjective; it adapts to current realities. By describing daily acts in detail, I aimed to explore how this collective gathering ensured knowledge sharing. Sometimes, this happens through performing rituals; in others, forgotten knowledge is brought back through governmental efforts. Intergenerational transmission of knowledge has sometimes been hindered, especially in the case of the Huta Wisata Simarmata. A common thread following all three cases is the use of symbols for capital, which many agents perpetuate. Grounding this work in primary sources allowed me to ensure that their stories were handled with care and that their voices were amplified. Through these drawings, I aimed to avoid the binary opposition of a pure “adat” tradition with the evil forces of coloniality/modernity, tourism, and nationalism. Exploring what it means to

decolonize knowledge production led me to focus on the daily portrayals: these reveal the intricate dynamics of knowledge transmission, with the Bataks not being portrayed as victims but having agency in what they choose to transmit and which cultural or material traditions they choose to forget. These drawings have explored the idea that the main medium of knowledge transmission is rituals through spaces for gathering.

I still practice many of these rituals outside of Indonesia, mainly in France, whenever I am with my mother. Diaspora members continue to perform rituals despite being stripped of the material context that created them. How do these ritual traditions continue to be transmitted to members of the diaspora? A hypothesis can be emitted on the strength of communal gathering in transferring knowledge. For the *projet de master*, I am interested in finding such community spaces for the Indonesian diaspora in France or Switzerland and exploring the role of rituals in such a context. This *énoncé* was for my mother, my grandmother, and my aunts. In the *projet* I hope to find space for Indonesian diaspora members and third-culture children such as myself.

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Figure 1: unknown. [Untitled]. 1724. Copperplate engraving/etching on hand laid (verge) paper, 14,5 x 12,5 cm. <https://pictura-prints.com/product/dutch-natives-indonesia-after-valentijn-voc-1724/>.

Figure 2: Hornaday, William Temple. *Exterior of Sea Dyak Long-House*. 1910. Wood engraving, 18 x 13 cm. <https://www.periodpaper.com/products/1910-wood-engraving-sea-dayaks-iban-indigenous-people-longhouse-home-borneo-tyji-240015-tyji-025>.

Figure 3: Niessen, Sandra. *Loom from above showing only the upper warp plane*. In Sandra Niessen “Textiles Are Female ... but What Is Femaleness? Toba Batak Texiles in the Indonesian Field of Ethnological Study,” in *Unity in Diversity* (Brill, 1984), 70.

The pictures on the following pages have been taken by the author during fieldwork in Toba from July to September 2023: 46, 48, 56, 62, 64, 92, 104, 110, 112, 120, 138, 142, 144, 148.

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font

“Le Baskervvol est une reprise par BBB du Baskerville de l’Atelier national de Recherche typographique (ANRT), lui-même repris du Baskerville de Claude Jacob de 1784, dessiné par John Baskerville en 1750. John Baskerville est un cas exemplaire de l’invisibilisation des femmes dans l’histoire de la typographie. Sarah Eaves, sa compagne et associée, qui reprit l’imprimerie à la mort de Baskerville, n’a jamais été créditée pour son travail bien qu’elle ait largement participé à l’élaboration de caractères et d’imprimés commercialisés par son mari (1). En 1996, la typographe Zuzana Licko dessinera un caractère en son honneur. Depuis 2018, le Baskervvol est augmenté collectivement de glyphes inclusifs. Là où les universités exigent pour l’écriture d’articles scientifiques l’utilisation du Times New Roman, sous licence privative et aux droits réservés, l’utilisation du Baskervvol, une police de caractères présentant une autorité stylistique et historique similaire, mais libérée par sa licence, permet l’introduction de glyphes non binaires dans les lieux normatifs de diffusion des savoirs.”

Source : Bye Bye Binary. (2021). Imaginaires typographiques inclusifs, queers et non binaires, RADDAR, Design politics, vol. 3. (pp. 16-29). Lausanne: T&P Work UNit.

(1) Lorraine FURTER. Crystal Clear, 2020.

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