

Aporia as a Space for Critical Reflection in the Study of Taboo among High School Students in Bantaeng Regency

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Abstract

Pamali, as an oral tradition of the Bugis-Makassar community, functions as a social norm passed down from generation to generation to regulate behaviours and maintain harmony in life. However, in the modern context, the younger generation tends to question the rationality of *pamali*, thus giving rise to doubt or aporia. This study aims to describe the form, meaning, function, and value of aporia in high school students in Bantaeng Regency in dealing with *pamali* through an ethnodeconstruction approach. The research method used is qualitative with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) with triangulation of sources and methods to ensure validity. The results show that students' aporia appears in four forms: feigned doubt, real doubt, argumentative aporia, and tonal aporia, which produce meanings of emptiness, ignorance, wisdom, and uncertainty. Aporia functions as a diagnosis of generational differences, a means of reflection on understanding, and an educational intervention that can be utilized by teachers and parents. Furthermore, aporia also embodies the value of justice, expressed through openness to various interpretations, as well as virtue and the courage to think critically while maintaining politeness. This study concludes that aporia is not a sign of weakening tradition, but rather a space for critical reflection that enriches the younger generation's understanding of local wisdom. The practical implication of this research is the integration of taboos into local wisdom-based learning as a means of character education and critical literacy.

Keywords: Aporia, Taboo, High School Students, Ethnodeconstruction, Local Wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

Pamali is a form of local wisdom that lives in the Bugis-Makassar community and is passed down through oral tradition. The main function of *pamali* is to regulate social behaviours to create order, harmony, and control in daily life. In traditional societies, *pamali* is considered to have normative power and is believed to bring bad luck or disaster if violated. This belief leads to obedience to *pamali*, often without rational explanation. This situation shows that *pamali* plays an important role not only as a rule but also as a cultural identity. However, changing times have raised doubts about the validity of *pamali*, especially among the younger generation who are accustomed to thinking logically. This situation illustrates the tension between tradition and modernity in the lives of today's generation (Dini, Rohmadi, & Setyawati, 2024).

The younger generation, particularly high school students, is in a phase of cognitive development that enables them to think abstractly, critically, and reflectively. At this stage, they no longer passively accept traditions but begin to question the rationality behind cultural rules such as taboos. Some students tend to adhere to taboos to maintain good relationships

with their families, while others reject them as unreasonable. This phenomenon indicates that taboos are no longer universally understood but are instead debated and questioned. This is in line with research by Sriwati et al. (2022), who found that Banjarese adolescents who think logically are better able to filter the impact of taboos, while those who are less critical are more easily overcome by fear. Thus, taboos become a dialectical space that brings together cultural values and modern logic. This dialectic is important to examine more deeply to gain a more contextual understanding of taboos.

The confusion or doubt experienced by students when facing taboos can be understood through the concept of *aporia*. Derrida (1993) describes *aporia* as a "dead end" that is actually productive because it forces the subject to explore contradictions in meaning. In this context, students are not only confused but also encouraged to seek alternative explanations for the prohibitions they face. For example, the prohibition against sitting on cushions is reinterpreted as a teaching of politeness and cleanliness, rather than a threat of bad luck. This shows that *aporia* can open up space for critical reflection on tradition. Norris (2006) adds that *aporia* is a crisis of meaning that triggers creative thinking, so that tradition is not simply accepted but is critically digested. Therefore, the concept of *aporia* is relevant to use as a lens in understanding students' responses to taboos.

The phenomenon of *aporia* in facing taboos indicates a cultural identity dilemma among high school students. On the one hand, they live in a family and community environment that still adheres to taboo traditions. On the other hand, they also interact with formal education that encourages rationality, logic, and critical thinking. This condition often causes students to experience ambivalence in their attitudes, between obeying and doubting taboos. The problem that arises is how the younger generation negotiates their position between these two streams of thought. This issue is important because it reflects the dynamics of the relationship between tradition and modernity in a changing society. Therefore, this study focuses on the form, meaning, function, and value of *aporia* in high school students in Bantaeng Regency in facing taboos. This study is relevant to understanding the cultural dynamics that occur at the youth level (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Previous research has largely discussed taboos within the framework of ethnography, folklore, or character education. For example, Widiastuti, Dewi, and Mutiara (2024) emphasize taboos as an effective means of moral education in instilling social values. However, these studies have not focused much on the experiences of *aporia* experienced by the younger generation in confronting taboos. However, a deconstructive perspective suggests that doubt can actually be a gateway to a more critical understanding of the dynamics of tradition. Derrida (1995) asserts that *aporia* has an ethical dimension because it encourages openness to diverse meanings. Thus, a research gap remains, namely how *aporia* functions as a space for critical reflection for the younger generation. This gap is what this research aims to bridge through an ethnodeconstructive approach.

Based on the above description, this study aims to describe and analyze the form, meaning, function, and value of *aporia* among high school students in Bantaeng Regency in facing taboos. An ethnodeconstruction approach is used to reveal how *aporia* not only reflects confusion but also opens up space for critical reflection on tradition. This article is structured into several main sections to provide readers with a clear picture of the research direction. The first section is an introduction explaining the background, problem, gaps, and objectives of the study. The second section is a theoretical review outlining the concepts of taboos, *aporia*, and ethnodeconstruction. The third section is the research method, outlining the qualitative

approach used. The fourth section presents the research results regarding the form, meaning, function, and value of student aporia. The fifth section is a discussion that connects the findings with theory. The final section is a conclusion that summarizes the main findings and their implications (Creswell, 2018).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Taboos as Local Wisdom

Pamali are prohibitions or taboos passed down orally in Bugis-Makassar society, serving as social control to maintain harmony and order. They serve not only as norms but also as a means of transmitting moral values and cultural identity. *Pamali* are believed to have dire consequences if violated, thus becoming an important part of daily life. From a cultural anthropology perspective, *pamali* falls into the category of *oral tradition*, which is both normative and educational (Goody, 2010). However, in the modern context, *pamali* are often viewed ambivalently: on the one hand, they are considered important for preserving culture, but on the other hand, they are considered irrational by the younger generation (Widiastuti, Dewi, & Mutiara, 2024).

Aporia in Deconstruction Philosophy

The concept of aporia originates from the thinking of Jacques Derrida, who defined it as a state of "impasse" or "necessary impossibility" in a text. Aporia is not a passive impasse, but rather a productive situation that forces the subject to confront contradictions and open up new interpretative spaces (Derrida, 1993). In the context of education and culture, aporia can be understood as a state of doubt experienced by individuals when confronted with rules or traditions that appear inconsistent. Norris (2006) states that aporia is a crisis of meaning that encourages the subject to think critically and reflectively. Thus, aporia is relevant to understanding how students face taboos with an ambivalent attitude between acceptance and questioning.

Ethnodeconstruction as an Analytical Approach

Ethnodeconstruction is an approach that combines ethnography with deconstruction to analyze cultural phenomena. From an ethnographic perspective, this approach emphasizes a deep understanding of cultural practices within the social context of society. From a deconstructive perspective, this approach seeks to uncover internal contradictions, ambivalence, and doubt within traditions. According to Sari (2020), ethnodeconstruction allows traditions to be understood not merely as static legacies but as open texts constantly renegotiated by future generations.

This approach is suitable for studying taboos because it opens up new interpretations beyond the literal meanings passed down through generations.

Aporia as a Space for Critical Reflection for the Young Generation

This theoretical framework culminates in the understanding that the aporia experienced by high school students in confronting taboos constitutes a space for critical reflection. Aporia allows students to reinterpret taboos, whether as moral rules, health messages, or symbols of politeness.

This condition aligns with Derrida's (1995) notion of justice as openness to infinite meaning. In other words, students' doubts are not a sign of the loss of tradition, but rather a form of critical engagement in understanding tradition. Research by Jannah, Saputro, and

Sholihah (2025) also shows that reinterpreting taboos can function as a medium for preserving the values of social justice. Therefore, aporia is positioned not as a problem, but rather as an opportunity to strengthen the relevance of taboos in the context of modern education.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach with a deconstructive ethnographic design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to understand the phenomenon of students' aporia in facing taboos in depth through experiences, narratives, and social interactions. The ethnographic design is used to explore the cultural meaning of taboos as an oral tradition in Bugis-Makassar society, while a deconstructive perspective is used to uncover the contradictions, ambivalence, and doubts that arise in students' interpretations. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is suitable for exploring complex human experiences in specific social contexts. Thus, this method is relevant for critically examining students' aporia towards taboos.

Research Location and Subjects

The research was conducted in several high schools in Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi, an area with Bugis-Makassar communities that still practice taboo traditions in their daily lives. The research subjects were high school students, selected based on the consideration that this age group is in a critical and reflective cognitive development phase. A purposive sampling technique was used to select informants deemed capable of providing rich information related to the phenomenon under study. The number of informants consisted of 20 students, with diverse gender backgrounds, majors, and family environments, to obtain a more comprehensive perspective (Patton, 2015).

Data collection technique

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences when dealing with taboos, both within the family and school. Observations were conducted by following students' interactions within the school and community to see how they express aporia in their daily practices. Documentation in the form of local tradition notes, taboo texts, and cultural archives was used to strengthen the primary data. According to Yin (2018), the use of multiple data sources (triangulation) is important to increase the credibility of qualitative research.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. Data reduction was carried out by sorting information relevant to the theme of aporia. Data presentation was carried out in the form of a thematic narrative that describes the form, meaning, function, and value of students' aporia. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting the data through an ethnodeconstruction perspective, to see how students' doubts about taboos open up space for critical reflection. The analysis process was carried out iteratively to ensure valid and in-depth findings.

Data Validity

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from students with information from teachers and parents. Method triangulation was conducted by combining the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by requesting confirmation from informants regarding the researcher's interpretations to ensure they align with their experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that this strategy is essential for increasing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative research. Thus, research results can be scientifically accounted for.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Forms and Meanings of Student Aporia

The research findings show that high school students in Bantaeng Regency exhibit four main forms of aporia when confronted with *taboos*. First, the aporia of feigned doubt, which is an expression of apparent doubt used to test the authority of parents or teachers. For example, one student said: *"I asked my mother, is it true that sitting on a pillow will hurt? I asked because I didn't really believe it, but I wanted to know my parents' answer."* This statement demonstrates the students' strategy of rhetorically challenging authority. Second, the aporia of real doubt, which arises from students' ignorance of the reasons for a prohibition, such as the prohibition against sweeping the house at night. One student admitted: *"I'm often told not to sweep at night, but I don't know why. When asked why, my parents just say it's taboo, so I'm confused about whether to believe it or not."*

Third, argumentative aporia, which is doubt expressed through modern logic. For example, one student explained: *"They say eating while talking can bring bad luck. But I don't think it's about bad luck, maybe it's to prevent choking. So I believe it's more for health reasons."* This demonstrates that students are trying to replace myths with rational reasoning. Fourth, tonal aporia, which is doubt expressed in a cautious tone to maintain politeness. One student said: *"When I'm with a teacher or a parent, I don't immediately say I don't believe it. I usually say 'oh yeah,' but deep down I still have doubts."* This form shows that aporia is also a communication strategy for maintaining social relationships (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

In addition to form, this study also revealed four main meanings of students' aporia in facing *taboos*. First, the meaning of emptiness, where the taboo is considered to have no logical basis and is therefore only obeyed because of hereditary habits. One student said: *"I just follow it, because it's normal. But actually I don't know what it means, so it's empty for me."* Second, the meaning of ignorance, because many students don't receive adequate explanations. One said: *"When asked why, usually just the answer is 'you'll get hurt if you break it.' So until now I don't know what it means."*

Based on the description of the meaning of wisdom, when students try to reinterpret *taboos* reflectively. One student said: *"If the prohibition on sitting on a pillow, maybe the intention is to be more polite. So I think it's a teaching of politeness, not about illness or bad luck."* Fourth, the meaning of uncertainty, namely the dilemma between respecting tradition and following modern logic. One student admitted: *"I believe because my parents said so, but*

at school I was taught to think logically. So sometimes I'm confused, which one to follow." This condition illustrates the ambivalence of identity experienced by students when faced with tradition. In line with Norris's (2006) view, this aporia can be understood as a crisis of meaning that is actually productive because it encourages the subject to think critically and find alternative meanings.

Functions and Values of Student Aporia

The aporia experienced by high school students in Bantaeng Regency serves several important functions in the thinking process and social interactions. First, it serves a diagnostic function, revealing differences in perspective between the older and younger generations. One student stated: *"When my parents say something is taboo, I usually ask why. The answers are often unsatisfactory, so I feel there is a gap between what they believe and how I think."* This demonstrates how aporia is a sign of generational differences in the interpretation of taboos. Second, it serves an understanding function, namely doubt that encourages students to reflect. One student stated: *"I'm trying to think again, maybe there's a purpose to the taboo. If it's forbidden to go out after sunset, it could be to prevent us from playing too late."* This statement demonstrates that aporia encourages students to seek the rational meaning behind traditions. Third, it serves an intervention function, where teachers and parents can utilize taboos as educational material. One student stated: *"When the teacher talked about taboos in class, I realized that it could be used to teach us about good manners."* This function is in line with the findings of Widiastuti, Dewi, and Mutiara (2024) that taboos can be used as a medium for value education.

In addition to its function, aporia also fosters important values in students' lives. First, the value of justice as limitlessness, which is the willingness of students to accept that taboos can be interpreted in various ways. One student stated: *"I personally don't believe it, but if my friends believe it, I respect it. Everyone can have their own interpretation."* This attitude demonstrates an openness to the plurality of meanings as explained by Derrida (1995). Second, the value of virtue and courage, which is the students' courage in expressing doubts while maintaining politeness. One student stated: *"I dare to say I have doubts, but I don't want to hurt my parents' feelings. So I usually speak politely."* This statement shows that aporia trains the younger generation to be critical and ethical. This is in line with the findings of Jannah, Saputro, and Sholihah (2025) that the reinterpretation of taboos by the younger generation can strengthen social values relevant to modern life.

Discussion

Aporia as a Mirror of Generational Dialectics

Research findings indicate that high school students in Bantaeng Regency experience aporia in the form of feigned doubt, real doubt, argumentativeness, and tonalism. This reflects the dialectic between tradition and modernity. The older generation still firmly adheres to taboos as norms that must be obeyed, while the younger generation is beginning to question their rationality. As one student expressed: *"When my parents say something is taboo, I usually ask why. The answers are often unsatisfactory, so I feel there is a gap between what they believe and how I think."* This statement indicates that aporia becomes a space for both encounter and distance between generations. This finding aligns with research by Sriwati et al. (2022), which found that Banjarese adolescents who think logically are more critical in responding to taboos.

Aporia as a Space for Critical Reflection

The confusion experienced by students is not only a sign of cognitive confusion, but also a gateway to critical reflection. As Derrida (1993) explains, aporia is a "dead end" that is actually productive because it forces the subject to seek new meaning. This is evident in one student's statement: *"I'm trying to think again, maybe there's a purpose to the taboo. If it's forbidden to go out after sunset, it could be to prevent us from playing too late."* Thus, taboo is no longer understood as a mystical prohibition, but rather as an invitation to live an orderly life. Norris (2006) emphasizes that aporia is a crisis of meaning that triggers creative thinking. In this context, aporia forces students to reinterpret taboos in a more rational and relevant way.

Aporia's Educational Function

The function of aporia is clearly visible in how students respond to taboos. The diagnostic function is evident in students' awareness of differing views from their parents. The understanding function is present when students try to find a rational interpretation of traditional prohibitions. The intervention function is evident in the potential of taboos to be used as material for moral learning in schools. One student said: *"When the teacher talked about taboos in class, I realized that they could be used to teach us about good manners."* This supports research by Widiastuti, Dewi, and Mutiara (2024), which states that taboos can be a means of character education when positioned as critical reflection. Thus, aporia is not merely confusion, but also a strategic educational tool.

Ethical Values in Aporia

The research findings also indicate the existence of ethical values within students' aporia, namely justice and courage. The value of justice as infinite is reflected in students' attitudes that respect differences in interpretation. For example, one student stated: *"I personally don't believe, but if my friends believe, then I respect that. Everyone can have their own interpretation."* This statement aligns with Derrida's (1995) concept of justice as openness to alterity. The value of courage is evident in students' attitudes of daring to express doubts, while maintaining politeness. One student said: *"I dare to say that I have doubts, but I don't want to hurt my parents' feelings. So I usually speak politely."* This value shows that aporia trains both moral courage and ethical awareness in the younger generation. This finding supports the research of Jannah, Saputro, and Sholihah (2025) on the role of taboos in preserving the value of social justice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the aporia of high school students in Bantaeng Regency in facing *taboos* appears in the form of feigned doubt, real doubt, argumentative aporia, and tonal aporia, each of which gives rise to the meaning of emptiness, ignorance, wisdom, and uncertainty. Aporia functions as a means of diagnosing generational differences, reflecting on understanding, and educative intervention that can be utilized by teachers and parents, while also containing the value of justice as openness to various interpretations and the value of courage to think critically while maintaining politeness. This finding confirms that aporia is not a sign of fading tradition, but rather a space for critical reflection that strengthens the relevance of taboos in modern life and opens up opportunities for the integration of taboos into character education and critical literacy of the younger generation through an ethnodeconstruction approach.

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