

## Mandailing Islam Across Borders\*

---

Abdur-Razzaq Lubis\*\*

### Abstract

The Mandailing people originate from north-western part of the province of North Sumatra, Indonesia, today. They are relatively late comers to the Islamic faith, having entered the fold of Islam only during the Padri War (1821-38), some at the point of the sword. The Padri War paved the way to Dutch intervention in the Mandailing homeland and triggered the mass migration of the Mandailing into peninsular West Malaysia. By 1870s, the British had intervened in the peninsular states. On both sides of the Straits of Malacca, the Mandailings negotiated their identity in terms of their political and economic roles vis-à-vis the colonial powers. Possibly influenced by Hambali and Maliki *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence), the Mandailing practice of Islam gives prominence to *adat* (customary law) and *'urf* (common practice) as a form of public good, hence the saying *ombar do adat dohot ugamo* (custom alongside religion). In their enthusiasm to learn about their new found religion, Mandailing participated in the knowledge networks of Minangkabau (province of West Sumatra, Indonesia), Kedah in the Malaysian peninsula, and the Middle-East especially Makkah (Mecca) and Cairo. This eventually brought indigenized 'Mandailing-Islam' closer in line with mainstream Islam, entailing their absorption into the dominant *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence) in Southeast Asia, that of the Shafie. Growing participation in the Hajj transported the Mandailing from the margin to the 'centre' of the *ummah* and exposed them to pan-Islamism as well as the idea of national liberation. Central to this movement is the idea of modernity and standardization; the Mandailing response to the

---

\* This revised paper was first presented at the 18<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia at Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, December 6-10, 2004.

\*\* The author is an independent scholar, environmentalist and social activist. The author would like to thank his wife, Khoo Salma Nasution for her constructive comments and editing.

Received: May 10, 2005; Accepted: September 18, 2005

demands of modernizing Islam necessitated the abandonment or suppression of traditional Islam. Subjected to both Dutch colonial rule in the Netherlands East Indies and British colonial rule in Malaya, the Mandailings experienced and negotiated within the framework of two different sets of state sponsored Islam. With *merdeka* (national independence), state sponsored Islam is brought to its logical conclusion by enshrining Islam as the state or official religion in both Malaysian and Indonesian constitutions. Muslim conformity to statist Islam is regulated through social-engineering, Islamic policing and national consciousness construction. Disenchantment with nationalism and modernist-reformist Islam has resurrected.

‘Islamic fundamentalism’ as well as revived ‘traditionalist Islam’. Mandailing finds themselves on both sides of the spectrum. By contrast, an indigenized Mandailing-Islam still lingers especially in the homeland. This takes on a number of manifestations such as the kinship and clan-based social structure, *tarombo* (genealogies), reverence for pre-Islamic ancestors and progenitors without differentiation, and the playing of the mystical *Gordang Sambilan* music.

This paper is in four parts, and discusses the practice of ‘Mandailing Islam’ in their homeland in Sumatra as well as in British Malaya (Peninsula West Malaysia today); Christian missionary activities in the homeland contributing to the consolidation of Mandailing cultural and religious identity in Sumatra and Peninsular Malaya. It also looks at Mandailing religious attitude in the East Coast of Sumatra, where significant numbers of Mandailings are concentrated. The period covered range from pre-Islamic to the present time and deals with the question of Mandailing cultural and Islamic identity.

**Keywords:** Mandailing, Malaysia, Indonesia, Islam, migration

## 中文摘要

曼特寧民族源自今天印尼北蘇門達臘省的西北部，他們是在相當晚近的 Padri 戰役時期(1821-38)才改宗伊斯蘭教者，有些更是在生命脅迫下就範的。Padri 戰役鋪陳了荷蘭人干預曼特寧地域之道，並造成大量的曼特寧移民湧入西馬來西亞半島。到了 1870 年代，英國人介入馬來半島的政治事務，使得馬六甲海峽兩岸的曼特寧人，根據他們跟個別殖民政權的政治與經濟角色來協商他們的認同。可能是受到 Hambali 和 Maliki 的法學傳統(*madhhab*)之影響，曼特寧人所奉行的伊斯蘭教非常強調作為一種公共利益形式之習俗法(*adat*)以及習慣('urf)，因此在當地有所謂風俗習慣與宗教並存(*ombar do adat dohot ugamo*)的說法。在他們熱衷學習新的宗教中，曼特寧人參與了米蘭加保(印尼西蘇門達臘省)、馬來西亞半島的吉打，以及中東；特別是麥加和開羅的知識網絡。這最終引入了與主流伊斯蘭教相符的土著化「曼特寧伊斯蘭教」，使他們融入支配東南亞的 Shafie 法學傳統。參與朝聖的增加也使得曼特寧人從邊緣進入教徒信眾(*ummah*)的「中心」，並讓他們暴露在泛伊斯蘭主義以及國家解放的觀念中。這運動中心的觀念就是現代性和標準化；曼特寧人有必要放棄或壓制傳統伊斯蘭教，以回應現代化伊斯蘭教的要求。隸屬於荷蘭殖民統治的荷屬東印度與英國統治的馬來亞，曼特寧人經驗了在兩套不同國家支持之伊斯蘭教框架內做協商。隨著獨立(*merdeka*)的到來，透過把伊斯蘭教奉為馬來西亞和印度尼西亞憲法內規定的國家或官方宗教，國家支持的伊斯蘭教正式進入體制內。透過社會工程、伊斯蘭教政策以及國家意識建構，使得穆斯林與國家伊斯蘭教相一致。但是對國族主義以及現代主義的幻滅-使得改革主義伊斯蘭教開始復甦起來。

曼特寧人發現他們處於「伊斯蘭基本教義派」與復甦的「傳統伊斯蘭教」光譜的兩端，對比之下，一種土著化的曼特寧伊斯蘭教還繼續滯留在他們的家鄉，這有多種的表現形式，譬如透過親屬和氏族為基礎的社會結構、系譜(*tarombo*)、毫無區辨地崇敬前伊斯蘭時期的祖先和創始者，以及演奏神秘的 *Gordang Sambilan* 音樂等。

**關鍵字：**曼特寧、馬來西亞、印度尼西亞、伊斯蘭、移民。

# Mandailing in Sumatra

## Introduction

Mandailing is located in the southernmost part of the *Propinsi Sumatera Utara* (Province of North Sumatra). The Mandailing people refer to the northernmost part of their homeland as *Mandailing Jai* (Lower Mandailing); the middle portion as *Mandailing Godang* (Greater Mandailing) and the southernmost part as *Mandailing Julu* (Upper Mandailing). In general Greater and Lower Mandailing, the *Raja* (the chiefs) from the Nasution clan rules whereas the *Raja* from the Lubis clans rules Upper Mandailing, although there are exceptions to the rule especially in the border areas between Greater Mandailing and Lower Mandailing.

Today, Mandailing forms part of the *kabupaten* (regency) of Mandailing-Natal, abbreviated as Madina. The Madina regency borders with the regency of South Tapanuli to the north, and with the province of West Sumatra to the east and south; and with the Indian Ocean to the west. Natal, the Portuguese name for the port on the west coast, which forms part of the Madina regency today, was never an integral part of the Mandailing homeland.

*Nagarakretagama*, a chronicle of Majapahit expansion into Sumatra in the fourteenth century, first mentioned the name Mandailing, but the name slipped into oblivion for the next few centuries until the rise of Islamic revivalism and European expansionism in the nineteenth century. Both developments left a lasting impact on Mandailing on both sides of the Straits of Malacca. Many Mandailing tree bark books (*pustaha*) survived the ravages of times, and are kept in the museums and institutions of higher learning in the industrialized world; many of these are about magic and healing sciences. Hardly anything is written in the *pustaha* about history in the sense that we know it today.

Mandailing society is characterized by the presence of patricians inhabiting their own territories, small self-governing communities – sometimes single villages, sometimes a group of villages. The dominant clan in the community provides the community head (*Raja*), with the migrant clans having representatives on the village council. Cross cousin marriage are preferred, the clans being asymmetrically organized so that each clan is related to a wife-giving clan on one hand and a wife-receiving clan

on the other. There used to be a division of society into nobles (*Namora-mora*), commoners and slaves.

Even though there were no reports of conquest and plunder before the mess wrought by the puritanical Padris, warfare was probably endemic in a clannish society, but not very destructive of persons or property. Competing chieftains exerted strong territorial ownership leading to village rivalries. Scholars have commented on the diversity of Mandailing society consisting, as it were, of autonomous 'village republics'.

The majority of Mandailing today are Muslims although a Christian minority can be found in Pakantan, Upper Mandailing; Medan and other Indonesian cities. Before they became Muslim, the Mandailing belief was focused on ancestral spirits or *si pele begu*, while incorporating Hindu and Buddhist elements. In a recent expedition to Mandailing, the author found both Hindu and Buddhist relics around Panyabungan in Greater Mandailing. This period before the advent of Islam is known as *na itom na robi* or the 'dark ancient' times.

As far as population goes, the Mandailing are in the majority in their homeland, but they are a minority in Indonesia and Malaysia. According to the 2003 census, the population of the regency of Madina stands at 369,691 the majority of which are Mandailing (Harahap 2004: 20). In 1982, the Mandailing Welfare Association of Malaysia (IMAN) estimated that there were about 30,000 Mandailing in Malaysia. This figure, however, includes the Angkolan, the northern neighbours of the Mandailing, since many people of Angkolan descent in Malaysia, consider themselves Mandailing (Harahap and Siahaan, 1987: 193). The IMAN constitution admits persons who claim to be Mandailing, and who can name as Mandailing one or both parents.<sup>1</sup> The author estimates that there are about 50,000 people of Mandailing and Angkolan descent in Malaysia today and comparable numbers in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago, especially in Medan, East Sumatra and Jakarta.

## **Padri War (1821-38)<sup>2</sup>**

A number of Mandailing chiefs were already converted to Islam before the Padri War which is considered a watershed in the Islamization of Mandailing society

---

<sup>1</sup> *Undang-Undang Tubuh*, Ikatan Kebajikan Mandailing Malaysia, undated: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Some dates the Padri War from 1816-33.

(Schnitger 1983: 20, 35). Ten of thousands of Mandailings were forcibly converted to Islam as a result of a military invasion by the Padri of Minangkabau about 1820. The southern neighbors of the Mandailing, the Minang of present-day West Sumatra Province had been encroaching into Mandailing for some centuries, but the Padri invasion accelerated the transformation of Mandailing society.

The Padris which originated from the Portuguese word, *Padre* meaning father, were also known as ‘Orang Poetih’ (White People) as the Padris donned the white robes of their Arabian counterparts (Moeda 1903: 56).<sup>3</sup> In turn, the *pro-adat* faction was called the Black Party after the color of indigo-dyed native textiles which they wore.

With regard to the religious practices of the Padri, Dja Endar Moeda wrote, *Adapoen Orang Poetih itoe tiada boleh merokok, makan sirih, menjaboeng. Segala perampoean bertoetoe moeka. Segala orang jang melanggar peratoeran ini, dihoekoemnja dengan hoekoeman seksa jang amat berat (Moeda, 1903: 56). (Concerning the White People, they are prohibited from smoking, eating the sirih leaf and cock-fighting. All their women cover their faces. Whosoever transgresses the regulations, were meted with severe punishments.)*

Wahhabism is a reform ideology arising from the theological foundations of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reformer Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). Their teachings are characterized by uncompromising adherence to the letter of the Qur’an and the hadith of the Prophet, with violence an integral part of the Wahhabi struggle (jihad).<sup>4</sup> Influenced by this ideology when they were in Makkah, three Minangkabau pilgrims brought it to Sumatran soil upon their return some time in 1803 (Dobbin 1983; Radjab 1954).<sup>5</sup>

The Padris, the Sumatran counterpart of the Arabian Wahhabis, were equally violent in suppressing what they perceived as un-Islamic practices of the Agam (Minangkabau people) and *adat*, a term denoting indigenous law, custom, usage, rule and so on. They were driven by the sole fanatical desire to establish a unitary realm

---

<sup>3</sup> For a detail study on the etymology of the Padri, see J. Karthirithamby-Wells, 1986: 41

<sup>4</sup> In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Wahhabi doctrine mobilized the political and military might of the al-Saud in the Arabian Peninsula to challenge Ottoman hegemony in the region, but was crushed by Egyptian forces. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Wahhabi ideology was resuscitated by ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Sa’ud, who having marshalled the political and military prowess of his and neighbouring tribes, planted the seeds of what is today called the Saudi Arabia. The nationalist ideology of the Wahhabi is now very much a global player in ‘Islamic’ politics worldwide.

<sup>5</sup> For an exhaustive account of the episode see Dobbin 1983. See also Radjab 1954.

with fire and sword. They embarked on a mission to eradicate the different customs of the various tribes and ‘substituting their yoke [i.e., that of the Padris] for that of the adat chiefs’ (Boland and Farjon 1983: 6). Ironically in the nationalist revisionist history, the Padris are now seen as national liberators and anti-colonialists.

During the Padri War, Mandailing served as commanders and troops on both sides of the civil war. Tuanku Tambusai and Tuanku Rao were two famous Padri of Mandailing origins. From Padri-dominated and non-Mandailing territory, they launched their campaign of terror and destruction into the land of their patrimony. They saw themselves as Padri first and Mandailing second. They regarded their countrymen as uncivilized pagans to be Islamized.

Tuanku Tambusai, whose fierce reputation earned him the nickname, Si Harimau Paderi (The Padri Tiger), is claimed by both Malays and Mandailings as one of their own. Tuanku Tambusai took his grandfather's name of Hamonangan Harahap upon his installation according to *adat*. The clan name Harahap is found in both Mandailing and Angkolan societies. In negotiations to have Tuanku Tambusai recognized as *Pahlawan Nasional* (National Hero) by the Indonesian government, he was made a member of the Harahap clan (Barnard 1997: 524).

Tuanku Tambusai's Muslim name was Pakih Saleh and upon his return from Makkah in the Arabian Peninsula he became known as Hadji Muhammad Saleh.<sup>6</sup> A common practice amongst Mandailing pilgrims was the adoption of Arabic names upon the completion of Hajj rites. It was in Makkah that Pakih Saleh was exposed to the Wahhabi teachings. He is credited to have spread the teachings of Islam in Padang Lawas, Padang Bolak, Sipirok and Mandailing itself in present day province of North Sumatra, during the Padri Wars.

Tuanku Rao was described as a ‘shadowy figure’ and ‘one of ‘two important Padri leaders’, the other important Padri leader being Imam Bonjol himself, the supremo of the Padri movement (Dobbin 1983: 177). Tuanku Rao hailed from Huta na Godang or Huta Godang, otherwise known as Tano Godang in Upper Mandailing. His father was a member of the Lubis clan and his mother was a Rao woman. Before he was made Imam Besar in Rao, with the title Tuanku Rao, he was known as Pakih Muhammad

---

<sup>6</sup> Pakih is a corruption of Faqih, a juris-consult. In Minangkabau language, a pakih is a wandering derwish, Schnitger 1983: 20, 35.

(Muhammad 1992: 16-18). Tuanku Rao died in 1833, shortly after the Dutch entered Rao.

Tuanku Tambusai's fort in Dalu-Dalu fell to a combined Dutch onslaught consisting of Mandailing, Bugis and Madura troops in 1835. Some believed he escaped and fled to Melaka when his fort fell. F.M. Schnitger, the author of the *Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra*, discounted the possibility of Tuanku Tambusai's flight and subsequent death in Melaka.

It was said that at the last assault, he had fled in a proa (perahu). They never heard of him again, so that it is supposed he died during his escape.

Others maintain that he fled to Melaka and died there. There is no reason for accepting this as the truth (Schnitger 1989 (1939): 63)

Up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term 'Melaka' was in usage by people from the Indonesian archipelago refers to the Malay Peninsula as well as the port Melaka. Before the opening of the port of Penang in 1786, many a Mandailing migrant came to the Peninsula via the port of Melaka (Malacca), before making their way to Sungei Ujong, Kuala Lumpur and Pahang in the interior.

Many a Padri had escaped to the Peninsula as there were several Islamic polities not under any European rule. In the case of Tuanku Tambusai, he relocated to Sungai Ujong (now known as Seremban, the capital of the state of Negeri Sembilan), where his grave is to be found. His descendants still retain his regalia which included a sword, his *rompi* (vest) with Arabic inscriptions and a copy of the Qur'an. Tuanku Tambusai's pedigree is very much contested as he is claimed by Mandailing, Angkolan and Malay to be one of them.<sup>7</sup>

Indonesian Mandailing and Angkolan were successful in their bid to obtain recognition for Tuanku Tambusai to be declared a '*Pahlawan Nasional*' (National Hero) by way of an Indonesian Presidential decree in August 1995 (Pahlawan Nasional Tuanku Tambusai, 1996: 4). Malaysian Mandailing are quite indifferent to this strategic manoeuvre as they are rather removed from the motives and intentions of their Indonesian Mandailing and Angkolan counterparts.

Both Tuanku Tambusai and Tuanku Rao came from the ranks of the *Namora-Natoras* (Nobles and Elders), the traditional leaders of the Angkolan and

---

<sup>7</sup> Postings on the website, by those claiming descent from him, declares that he is Mandailing, although historically the Tambusai are seen as a distinct group from the Mandailing and Angkolan.

Mandailing. As Padri leaders, they were regarded as generals and *ulama*. The title *Tuanku* itself, of Minang origin, means religious leaders.

The anti-Padri and pro-*adat* faction was led by Patuan Naga and Raja Gadombang. Patuan Naga, the *Raja Panusunan* of Panyabungan in Greater Mandailing rallied the Mandailing, ‘new Muslims, old Muslims, pagans and Lubus’ (an indigenous people in Mandailing), against the Padri, but even this force did not succeed in holding back the advance of the zealous Islamists.

In order to stem the Padri tide, Raja Gadombang, the *Raja* of Huta na Godang, invited Dutch intervention into his realm in 1832. He was the son-in-law of Tuanku Rao, who fell out with his father-in-law and became the chief confederate of the Dutch in their pincer movement through Mandailing against the Padri (Moeda 1903: 66; Castles 1975: 71).

For a decade, Mandailing was under Padri domination. Governance was exercised by Padri-appointed *kali* (originally *qadi*, Arabic for judge), many of whom were originally Minangkabau before Mandailing *kali* took over. Through these *kali*, some of whom were members of the *Namora-Natoras* themselves, Islamic values were incorporated into Mandailing society. Padri rule, though strict and unpopular, was nevertheless effective in introducing a vigorous and crude form of Islamic governance. The incorporation of Padri titles such as Tuanku, Imam Prang, Kali, Pakih, and Peto into Mandailing society indicated that Padri officials exercised military, political and religious authority.

The Padri episode threw the Mandailing homeland into a state of socio-economic, political, environmental and spiritual disruption, with serious repercussions on both sides of the Straits of Malacca. After the Dutch defeated the Padri, the ex-Padris then turned to spreading Islam through teaching supported by wealthy merchant *hajis*. Having performed the Hajj successfully, these *hajis* were seen as religious figures with Islamic knowledge and trading networks spanning all the way to the Arab world. They played a critical role both in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula in integrating the Mandailings into the Islamic *ummah* (brotherhood).

Dja Endar Moeda, a famous Mandailing journalist from the early twentieth century, put the date of the spread of Islam in Mandailing as late as 1859, implying that Islamic conversions took place during peace times and under Dutch rule rather than during the turbulent Padri period. It was remarked in 1889 that the Mandailing ‘have

mostly become nominal Mohammedans, but not as yet fanatical ones' (Enfield 1899: 24, 96-97). By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century virtually the whole of Mandailing population had been converted to Islam, giving rise to the establishment of Islamic schools and colleges in the homeland.

The Padri brought in its aftermath many values of the universal religion and global culture of Islam. Mandailing society was historically transformed by a radical brand of Islam – Wahhabi Islam, influenced to a lesser extent by the Hambali *madhhab* (school of thought) and to a greater extent moulded by Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the movement. Orthodox jurists at the time, and even today branded the Wahhabis heretics and condemned their fanaticism and intolerance.

As it turned out, the interpretation and application of Islam in Mandailing is very different from that of the Minangkabau, their converter. The Minangs are matrilineal and adopt a position of custom based on Islamic law (*adat basandi syarak*), whereas the Mandailings are patrilineal and adopt a position of *adat* on par with Islamic law. This is reflected in the Mandailing maxim *ombar do adat dohot ugamo*, that is, *adat* in close proximity with Islamic law. This was the basis for the evolution of indigenized Mandailing Islam.

### ***Silom Bonjol (Bonjol Islam)***

Despite the forced conversion in the first instance, Islam quickly took firm root in Mandailing as it offered local chiefs access to an enlarged economic and political world, and opportunities for considerable power and wealth through alliance with the apparently powerful Islamic communities on the west and east coast of Sumatra as well as the Malay Peninsula. Islam offered the promise of education and entrance into modern society associated with the coastal cities. Coastal trade was for the most part in the hands of Muslims.

in the aftermath of the Padri war, Islam spread through South Tapanuli under the patronage of this chiefly hierarchy [the kepala kuria and other *adat* chiefs], who in turn were deeply beholden to the colonial regime. The local religious teachers were hand in glove with the chiefs. The level of Islamic scholarship was low and popular religion was largely magic (Castles, 1972: 116).

Islam brought major changes to the social structure of Mandailing and Angkolan society. After 1820,

a significantly different social organization emerged without abandoning the basic system of patrilineal clans and autonomous villages. ... The higher chief ships tended to become more strictly hereditary and social classes became differentiated (Castles, 1972: 20).

Islam contributed greatly to the development of a much more distinct pattern of social stratification in both Mandailing and Angkolan society, then in, say, Simalungun and Karo society further north. Islamization set in motion a gradual reduction in the importance of *marga* loyalties. As a result, many Angkolan and more of the Mandailing, eventually dropped their *marga* names in favour of Arabic/Islamic ones.

But the impact of Islamization was by no means uniform throughout Mandailing and Angkolan societies. Important differences separated the central Angkola region from Mandailing to the south. The people of Angkola, Sipirok and Padang Lawas tended to identify with the Toba north so far as ethnic and *marga* loyalties were concerned, but with the Mandailing on the basis of religion. On one hand, ethnicity plus religion worked to separate North Tapanuli from south Tapanuli. On the other, ethnicity alone separated the northern from the southern homeland of South Tapanuli.<sup>8</sup>

The Islamization of the Mandailing prior to the Padri episode was considered inadequate as this phase is called by the Mandailing as *masa silom na itom* (black Islam period) (Schnitger 1983: 35). At this point, the Islam professed by the Mandailing was believed to be adulterated with the religion of their forefather (*pele begu*). The coming of the Padri known as *silom Bonjol* (Bonjol Islam) transformed the *silom na lom-lom* (Black Islam) into *silom na bontar* (White Islam). The reference to white here refers to the white robed Padri. The Mandailing also called the Padri period *maso di na rinca* (Period of Tuanku Nan Renceh) after one of the founders of the Padri movement (Zainuddin Lubis 1987: 163-4).

---

<sup>8</sup> Mandailing was once part of the Tapanuli residency organized in 1843. North Tapanuli was viewed as Batak 'proper' and predominantly Christian; South Tapanuli constituted the districts of Angkola, Padang Lawas and Mandailing, frequently regarded as two subgroups, Angkola and Mandailing, and predominantly Muslim.

## Mandailing Islam in the homeland

In addition to the *Namora-Natoras* and the *ulama*, two spiritual functionaries found at the village level were the *Sibaso* and *Datu*, figures surviving from the pre-Islamic period. Their proper role is in the spiritual realm of Mandailing indigenous religion. Both the *Sibaso* and *Datu* are essential adjunct to the *Raja*, the head of the polity. The *Sibaso* or shaman played out the role of the medium communicator between the spirit world of the ancestors, and the living community.

The *Datu* in turn was the ‘storehouse of traditional wisdom’ whose intimacy with the unseen world and whose knowledge of herbs forms the basis of the indigenous healing sciences, critical to the community’s healthy existence. Many aspects of the community life were regulated by the *Datu*’s specialized knowledge. For example in agriculture, the *Datu* decides when to plant paddy and when to harvest. He forecasts the auspicious day for a wedding and for a house warming; wards off evil and impending dangers, and secures propitious gains.

In the past, the *Datu* would preside over ceremonies. With the Islamization and modernization of the Mandailing, the once highly regarded position of *Datu* is reduced to traditional healer and medicine man. In Mandailing folklore, the Rangkuti clan descended is from a *Datu* by the name of *Datu Janggut* (The Bearded *Datu*) (Pandapotan 1983).

Up to the early twentieth century, remnants from the Mandailing indigenous religion survived in the form of *pasusur begu* or *marsibaso*, a ritualistic ceremony invoking the spirit of the ancestors to come to the aid of the community faced with natural calamity, for example, draught. People who have witnessed such acts would vouch that rain did come down after the rituals were performed. As recently as in 1998, a ceremony was ‘performed’ for the author and urban anthropologist, Dr. Peter Zabielski in Huta na Godang, Upper Mandailing. Over time these rituals were put in check by the *ulama* (religious clergy) who deemed these rituals an aberration in Islam and therefore not in keeping with the Mandailing Muslim identity.

## Indigenised Islam?

The premise of ‘Mandailing-Islam’ is the practice of *ombar do adat dohot ugamo* which places Islamic law on the same level as Mandailing *adat* unlike the practice of

the Minangs, which subjects *adat* to Islamic law therefore making it subservient rather than on par with divine law. Presumably during and after the Padri period, the pro-*adat* and Islamic reformists settled on the middle ground by reconciling their traditional customs with their new found religion. In Mandailing, the *adat* is embodied in the concept of *biaso* (literally ‘usual’ indicating normality).

The *biaso* is a general guide to conduct but is not as rigid as a rule and allows for a certain amount of compromise with circumstances and constant redefinition of what is regarded as normal conduct. ...Hence the *biaso*, what is usual conduct, is redefined separately in each village community and social practices so redefined are valid solely within the community concerned. Thus small changes in social practices are constantly occurring, and since such changes are not necessarily in the same direction in each village, there is constant accumulation of differences in social practices between one village and another (Tugby, 1960: 19).

*Biaso*, the common norm or customary practice, corresponds to the Islamic concept of local custom (*urf*). In the Shaf’ie madhhab (school of thought) dominant today in Malaysia and the Indonesian archipelago, *urf* is tolerated so far as it does not go against Islamic law; but in the Maliki school of law *urf* is elevated as one of the fundamental legal principles as it promotes public good.

The preservation of customs through legal judgment affirms familiarity, leading to general acceptance whereas divergence from it may cause distress, which is disliked in the passing of judgment in Islam as it amounts to hardship in the practice of religion. This principle appears to be the guiding principle in the act of passing of judgment by the *Namora-Natoras*, though it is doubtful that they were inspired by Maliki jurisprudence.

The *Namora-Natoras*, who acted as the governing council, the political and jural authority, were themselves considered Islamic experts at the local level. Therefore, local traditions of Islamic jurisprudence evolved through judgments passed by the *Namora-Natoras*. In fact, due to the localized nature of governance in the ‘village republics’, judgments could vary from village to village, although judgments from other villages were also referred to. There was no overarching Mandailing monarch or authority to insist on a standardized Islam.

The diversity of Islamic practices in the Mandailing homeland, which was observed right up till the Japanese Occupation, can be explained according to its local dynamics. Each village has a unique character but there are elements common to all villages – Islamic institutions, the general form of kinship, the system of economic ethics and the formal characteristics of the political and administrative structure in conformity to a single legal order embracing a wider area.

The village community is coincident with the Islamic congregation (*kariah* in Malaysia and *kuria* in Indonesia); it is the unit in which redefinition of social practices takes place. *Adat*, canon law and modernism provide different models of behavior. The problem of how they can be rationalized must be solved in the village.

Eventually, the legal importance of *adat* was virtually reduced to the distribution of privileges in favour of *raja* families, but *adat* principles still permeate social organisation in the villages. The strongly held concept of *biaso*, emphasizes the acceptance of practices which are part of the body of what constitutes normality in Mandailing society. The ‘usual’ is redefined in each village; consequently different social practices developed in the many villages all over Mandailing.

Through the *adat* courts, the Mandailing found a practical, flexible and dynamic solution to forge an indigenized Islam based on their pre-Islamic heritage. The cases brought before the village complex councils from 1923-36 illustrates the competence of the *adat* court: ceremonial rights and precedence (11); divorce and marriage (14); inheritance and succession (23); land rights (12); delicts such as unlawful courtship, extra-marital intercourse and incest (10).<sup>9</sup>

The *adat* courts nevertheless came under question increasingly from a class of Islamic scholars, most of whom received their education either directly, or else second-hand or third-hand at the hands of Middle Eastern scholars. In the Malay States of Sumatra and British Malaya (West Malaysia today), many of the *ulama* class made their living as religious teachers and religious professionals, and the most esteemed amongst them became advisors to Sultans and other patrons. The *ulama* pointed out many contradictions between the accepted Islamic practice in Mandailing and Islamic law.

---

<sup>9</sup> Reported in *Adatrechtbundel* 43, 1949: 8-334. The basis upon which these cases were selected for inclusion in *Adatrechtbundels* is unknown, and the number of cases of each kind may not, therefore, be a reliable statement of the number of such cases which actually came before the court.

The prohibition of marrying members of the same clans under the Mandailing *adat* of *Dalihan na Tolu* is given as an example of the contradiction between Islamic law and customary law. Marriage between the same clan is punishable by banishment but can be circumvented by throwing a feast whereby buffaloes are sacrificed. This is an effective deterrent as most ordinary Mandailings cannot afford the cost of holding such a feast. Although marriage between the same clan members are becoming quite common and are condoned and legitimized in the name of Islam, nevertheless marriage between different clans is still very much the preferred norm. Mixed-marriages between Mandailing and other *pribumis* in Indonesia or *bumiputera* in Malaysia as well as the non-*pribumi/bumiputera* ethnic groups are also becoming commonplace.

The institution of hereditary leadership of the *Raja* was also put into question though Islam does not in principle go against this form of leadership (Al-Wawardi 1966: 144-9).<sup>10</sup> The custom of special privilege of the nobles (*namora-mora*) from the Lubis and the Nasution clans to claims of *Rajaship* in Upper and Lower Mandailing respectively, were also criticized. According to extant literature only nobles from the two mentioned clans are entitled to rule over both halves of Mandailing; albeit this may have been the principle but there were many exceptions that disprove the rule. For example in the Maga area, Upper Mandailing, nobles from the Nasution, Lubis and Rangkuti clans are installed as *Raja*.

In the zest for further Islamization, which doubles for modernization, the nobility and the special privileges of the descendants of the founding clans in their claims to *Rajaship* has been cast as ‘ancestor worship’ arising from *pele begu* (spirit worship), the traditional religion of the Mandailing. This sinister inquisition undermines the importance of ‘myth’ as an instructive educational tool on the origin of the clans, *tarombo* genealogies, ancestor reverence and by extension the very basis of territoriality (the *banua* and *huta*), and of governance (*Namora-Natoras*) itself. In the conventional view of the Islamist, the *pele begu* heritage is in direct conflict, and opposed to and irreconcilable with Islam.

In explaining the Mandailing shortcomings as Muslims, the latter-day *ulama* class and the Islamists are quick to blame the *Namora-Natoras* singling them as the obstacle and stumbling block towards reform and conformity to standard Islam with the rest of

---

<sup>10</sup> The laws of Islamic governance recognized noble lineage, Al-Wawardi, 1966: 144-9.

the *ummah*. The *Namora-Natoras* are charged for obstructing the flow of progressive Islam as it was in their interest that the *adat* is kept alive and in place. It can equally be said that the *ulama* class wants to usurp and prop themselves as leaders of the community in preference to the traditional leadership. It has been pointed out that an anomaly of 'Mandailing-Islam' is the separation of the *ulama* class from its social-political structure. Allegedly the *ulama* class was not integrated into the structure of Mandailing governance within the institution of *Namora-Natoras*. Instead, the two groups competed for authority in Mandailing society.<sup>11</sup>

Forced cultivation (*cultuurstelsel*) of cash crops such as coffee coupled with *belasting* (corvee labor) had a great impact on Mandailing society. In essence the *cultuurstelsel* is founded on a simple general principle, initially implemented in Java before being extended to the 'outer islands'. The idea was for each village to set aside part of its land to produce export crops especially coffee, sugar and indigo, for sale at fixed prices to the colonial government to offset land tax ('land rent') owed to the government. 'In theory, everyone was to benefit from this system...In practice, there was hardly a 'system' at all. There were wide variations in the application...from one area to another... (Ricklefs 2001: 156-161)'<sup>12</sup>

The Dutch colonial period also opened the way for state-sponsored secular education, missionary-sponsored Christian education and community-based Islamic education. However, Dutch colonial rule for slightly over a century did little to change 'Mandailing-Islam'; but it did erode the jurisdiction and powers of the *Namora-Natoras*. This instance runs counter to argument proffered by some quarters that the Dutch colonial powers tacitly promoted indigenous culture in order to reverse the progress of Islam by promoting indigenous cultures. The Japanese entered Mandailing in 1942, occupied the country with a small military force until 1945. They recruited labour but interfered little with religious affairs or village government. Since World War II, the pace of Islamization has increased, in part due to the activities of Islamic political parties to combat secular modernism.

---

<sup>11</sup> This argument was put forth by Zainuddin Lubis in his MA thesis *Na Mora Na Toras: Pemimpin Tradisional Mandailing*, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Fakultas Sastra, Jurusan Antropologi, Medan, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> For the origin of the corvee system, M.C. Ricklefs 2001 (1981,1993): 156-61.

## The wedge policy and Mandailing identity in Sumatra

Stamford Raffles the architect of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, arbitrarily carved out the British and Dutch spheres of influence in the Straits of Malacca, dividing Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. The boundary between Malaysia and Indonesia today is a direct legacy of that treaty. Raffles also promoted the geopolitical manoeuvre of separating the Muslim heartlands of Aceh and Minangkabau by strongly encouraging Christian missionary work among the 'Bataks' so as to create a Christian buffer block between the two (Parlindungan 1962: 628; Aljunied 2004)<sup>13</sup>

The Dutch authorities who subsequently gained full sovereignty over the island of Sumatra, maintained a 'wedge policy', a strategy of keeping the two Islamic bulwarks separated by a non-Muslim belt of which they called Bataklanden. (Bataklands) (Castles 1972: 2). A consequence of this divides and rule policy was the typecasting of the Mandailing as a sub-category of the Batak people. In the words of the American anthropologist, Susan Rodgers,

In the early decades of this century Mandailing migrants found themselves stereotyped as 'Batak', which in the migrant areas meant either heathen, or Christian. ...Most Mandailing were in fact Muslim by this time (Rodgers, 1993: 156).

Islam was particularly active along the coastal borders of the 'Batakland' when Christian missionaries first showed their presence in the area. In fact, as the Padri invaded the 'Batakland', missionaries began to concentrate on the 'Bataks'. At this point, the soul of the Mandailing became a point of contestation between the two world religions. In order to check the advance of Islam in that part of north Sumatra, the Mandailing became the first target of zending (Christian missionary). The Baptist, Rheinische Missionary Society from Bremen, Germany and Singapore-based Methodist Episcopal Mission, carried out work in Mandailing but were not successful (Enfield 1899: 8, 89, 92; Thiessen 1974).

---

<sup>13</sup> This was first suggested by Mangaradja Onggang Parlindungan, the Angkolan writer in his controversial work, *Parlindungan 1962: 628*. Since then Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied has confirmed this in a serious study of Raffles attitudes towards Islam, *Aljunied 2004*.

When the Dutch resumed control, they assigned an army chaplain, Colonel Elout and Verhoeven, to evangelize the 'Bataks'. Verhoeven had already started work in Mandailing.

Verhoeven began meeting with groups of Bataks at Pakantan [in Upper Mandailing] and studied the Batak language. Verhoeven may have baptized the first Bataks, Padri soldiers returned from Toba, in 1834, although HKBP [Huria Kristen Batak Protestant/Batak Protestant Christian Church] claims the first two Bataks to be baptized were Jacobus Tampubolon and Simon Siregar on March 31, 1861 (Pedersen, 1970: 49).

This shows that the Mandailing of Pakantan were among the first Christians in North Sumatra. However, this conversion has conveniently been included as early Batak conversions, to reinforce the association of Christianity with Bataks and Islam with the Mandailings. The identification of religion with ethnicity has been part of the language of missionary literature. A church, a Christian burial ground and the presence of a tiny Christian community in the midst of a majority Muslim Mandailing community is all that remains of the missionaries' small but significant achievement.

Four years after the initial conversion, a Mennonite community was established at Pakantan in 1838, where they erected a Byzantine-style church.<sup>14</sup> Several Mennonite missionaries from the Russian Ukraine arrived at Pakantan between 1869 and 1918. The last Mennonite missionary, Iwan Tissanove, moved from Mandailing to Bandung, Java, in 1918 (Pedersen 1970: 56; Elkhart 2001).<sup>15</sup>

In 1849, Neubronner van der Tuuk or Pondortuk (Big Nose) as he became known was sent by the Dutch Bible Society to Barus on the west coast of Sumatra to advise missionaries. He concluded that

There is no hope to be successful among the people of Angkola and Mandailing. The largest portion of them have already entered Islam, as have most of the Batak people under governmental control of the Dutch. To spread Christianity, therefore, it will be necessary to take resolute action. All of the missionaries will have to be directed to other places. If we do not follow this plan, it is my opinion that the whole society will become Islamized before we realize it. Usually the

---

<sup>14</sup> The old church is no more; demolished only a few years ago, and in its place a new church has been set up.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.goshen-edu/mqr/pastissues/jan04bookreviews.html>

Malayan language enters alongside governmental control, bringing many people from Malaya [*sic*] with the intention of converting these people to Islam (Pedersen 1970: 54; Muller-Kruger 1959: 181-182).

The Dutch government inadvertently supported the advance of Islam. The government severely restricted the progress of the missions fearing 'that the spread of Christianity might arouse the fanaticism of the Mohammedan and, thereby, make difficulties for the Government' (de Klerck 1938: 390). Later these restrictions were modified and the government sought the help from the missionaries as allies. Even so, many of the government institutions and staff were associated with Islam, for example, the official language of office and school was Malay, often written in 'Arabic script' and civil servants were Malay Muslims.

Missionaries commented on the underlying assumption by the indigenous people that Islam was the dominant growing religion in Sumatra, the religion of the future. 'The association between civilization and Islam was so strong that even Christian missionaries were obliged to assure Bataks that they were not Muslims in disguise' (Pedersen, 1970: 45-46).

Once it was clear that the Mandailing people were highly resistant to Christian conversion, the Dutch authorities goaded the Christian missions to go north of the Mandailing country, where they were more successful among the Toba. The Mandailings continue to attract the interest of Christian missions to this day, who describe them in the negative as 'the unreachable people'.<sup>16</sup>

The failure of the Christian missionary in making the Mandailings Christian has been explained in a historical-theological study. According to Jan Sihar Aritonang,

'The missionaries' negative evaluation and attitude toward Islam, its teaching and sometimes towards Muslims themselves, gave rise to a violent reaction on the part of the Batak Islamic community. Not only that, but it stimulated among them a determination and enthusiasm to counterbalance mission activities by carrying out their own dakwah (missionary obligation to non-Muslims) to the heart of the Batak area in Silindung and Toba, an initiative which had been undertaken by the

---

<sup>16</sup> [www.ad2000.org/people/jpl2035.htm](http://www.ad2000.org/people/jpl2035.htm)

Paderi movement before. From the period of the movement's fading and the coming of the missionaries about 1840-1860, the desire to fulfil the *dakwah* was not particularly evident since there was no competition with other religions. But as soon as mission personnel became aggressive, there arose a consciousness among Muslims to defend themselves and also to deepen their faith. This resurgence of commitment to the *dakwah* gave rise to anxiety on the part of the Batakmission. In fact, the latter accused the Indies government of supporting the Islamic side through state schools, through the appointment of Muslim employees and their placement in regional offices.

In addition to the religious factor why the southern Bataks rejected the presence of the missionaries, we may assume a sociological factor as well. In comparison with the North, the South was more solidified with its social stratification composed of nobility, ordinary people and slaves. At the same time, the Batakmission endeavoured to wipe out the practice of slavery by redeeming and educating the slaves, and through asking the government to promulgate regulations forbidding the practice of slavery, an effort which was bound to invite an unfavourable reaction from the nobility (Aritonang 2000).<sup>17</sup>

Indeed the failure of the Christian Batta Mission (Batak Mission), by their own review, has, partly, as, if not largely, due to their insistence on calling the Mandailings – 'Batak', thereby associating the Mandailing with the Tobas. The Mandailings found this term objectionable as they had in the past, viewed the Tobas as slaves. This process of 'leveling' was seen and interpreted by the Mandailings as an attempt to overpower and humiliate them. Seen from the Mandailing perspective, the Christian Batakmission was in league with the colonial agenda. The historian Lance Castles pointed out that

...those who converted to Islam, especially Mandailings have sought to repudiate any association with the non-Muslims Tobas by rejecting

---

<sup>17</sup> Aritonang, 2000, unpagged. This Ph.D thesis has been published under the title, *Mission Schools in Batakland (Indonesia), 1861-1940* by E.J. Brill, Leiden, but it is not available to the author. It has also been noted that 'About Islam and the person of Mohammed [and his followers] the missionaries initially held the usual views of their times. Their prejudices were generally no bigger and no smaller than those of other colonial westerners'. (B. J. Boland and I. Farjan, *Islam in Indonesia, A Biographical Survey*, Foris Publications Holland/U.S.A., 1983: 37).

the Batak label altogether. This tendency has been strongest among Mandailing migrants to the East Coast of Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia (Castles 1977: 67).

As Keuning points out, the social organizations of the Toba Batak and of the Mandailing were, 100 year or so ago, very similar to that of the Mandailing. Yet, the societies in this part of Sumatra became more sharply divided first when the majority of Mandailings became Muslim, then when the Tobas became Christians, and further when the Mandailing reacted to Christian missionaries by intensifying their identification with Islam (Keuning 1954: 281-283).

Thus the Mandailing Muslims do not regard themselves as Bataks. As they initially equated the Toba with slaves and then 'Batak' with 'Christians', they came to define Mandailing as the antithesis of Batak. The antagonism became so strong especially with the majority of Mandailing Muslims that they initiated a campaign for separate recognition that they might no longer be regarded as Batak.

Ironically, linguists and ethnologists persist in the use of the Batak label to ascribe the Mandailing justifying it as 'necessary' because of the strong common elements found in these societies, but at the same time, ignoring their subjects' historicity. This in spite their acknowledgement that 'Although all are Batak [Toba, Karo, Simelungun, Pakpak, Angkola and Mandailing], each subgroup has its own dialect or language, thinks itself as a separate ethnic unit, and has its own customs and traditions (Brune 1972: 221).' Two American anthropologists acknowledge the relativism of these anthropological categories.

As Indonesians and anthropologists, we too find the category Batak and its subcategories useful, even necessary; they define a niche, label our expertise, and are thus embedded in the social forms of our profession. ...We give substance to these categories, and in so many ways, we create the Batak (Kipp and Kipp 1983: 5).

## **The Mandailing in East Sumatra**

The Mandailing people being originally orientated more to Sumatra's west coast, did not identify with the 'Malay' of the Sumatran East Coast and Straits of Malacca. They had an early model for maintaining their identity, for Marsden the author of

*History of Sumatra* fame, described them as Muslim but not Malay. In the aftermath of the Padri War, some Mandailings migrated to the east coast of Sumatra, though according to Mandailing sources substantial Mandailing migration to that part of Sumatra only occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century (Anderson 1971 (1824): 306).<sup>18</sup>

Kira-kira dalam tahoen 1875, disitoelah terboeka tanah Deli, sebagai tanah perantauan bagi bangsa Mandailing, karena waktoe-itoelah orang-orang Mandailing datang satoe datang doea ke-Deli, merantau mentjahari kehidoepan (Ihoetan 1926: 5; Pelly 1983: 70). (Around the year 1875, the land of Deli was opened as the place for sojourning for the Mandailing people, (and) from that time on the Mandailings came to Deli in search of a livelihood.)

The Mandailing migrants who spoke Malay dropped their clan names and acknowledged themselves as Malay remained on the fringe of the Malay-Muslim culture. This blending in and association with Malay Muslim society, be it in East Sumatra or in the Malay Peninsula amounts to cultural shift resulting in cultural loss to the Mandailing identity. In the Mandailing homeland, Islamic conversion entailed a movement away from the Batak label, but in East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, it was taken to mean the adoption of Malay identity instead.

As to how the Mandailing saw themselves in this period, we refer to the landmark court case in the 1920s, whereby the Mandailing went to court to fight for public recognition of their identity as distinct from that of the Batak.

In 1922, a dispute between the Batak and the Mandailing broke out in Sungei Mati, Medan, over rights to be buried in religious endowment land (*tanah wakaf*), irrespective of ethnicity. The curator of the burial ground had refused permission to Bataks, including Mandailings claiming to be Batak, to be buried there, on the grounds that the deed specified that the cemetery was for Mandailings only. This was a dispute *not* between Christians and Muslims, but between people of North and South Tapanuli origin.

The following year (1923), a commission, Madjelis Sjara'iah (Commissie van Advies), was formed with the agreement of the Dutch Governor, to settle the dispute

---

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, 1971 (1824): 306. Anderson identifies the 'Kataran' found in the east coast of Sumatra in the 1820s as being Mandailing. The 'Kataran' or 'Ketaren' has been identified as a clan of the Karo. (Parkin, 1977: 4)

according to Islamic law. The matter was even raised in the Diwan Raiat (Volksradd). When the Governor-General decided in favour of the Batak, the Mandailing community appealed to the highest court in the land, the Rad van Justitie, which reversed the Governor-General's decision.

The affair was documented in a work aptly entitled *Asal-Oesoelnja Bangsa Mandailing* (The Origin of the Mandailing People), with the subtitle *Berhoeboeng dengan Perkara Tanah Wakaf Bangsa Mandailing, di Soengei Mati, Medan*, (concerning the endowment land of the Mandailing People at Sungei Mati, Medan). The work was published in 1926 in celebration of the Mandailing's victory over the Batak.

Mangaradja Ihoetan, who compiled the book emphasized three times in his preface that the purpose of the Sungei Mati case was to remind future Mandailing generations, especially those outside the homeland, not to give up or 'sell' their identity:

Riwajat tanah wakaf ini dikarangkan dan dihimpoenkan, goenaja teroetama ialah sebagai peringatan kepada sekalian bangsa Mandailing jang mentjintai kebangsaannja, terlebih-lebih bagi mereka itoe jang berdiam dipertantauan.

...riwajat ini djadi peringatan kepada bangsa Mandailing...hanjalah kadar djadi peringatan dibelakang hari kepada toeroen-toeroenan bangsa Mandailing itoe, soepaja mereka tahoe bagaimana djerih pajah bapa-bapa serta nenek mojangnja mempertahankan atas berdirinja kebangsaan Mandailing itoe. Dengan djalan begitoe diharap tiadalah kiranja mereka itoe akan sia-siakan lagi kebangsaannja dengan moeda maoe mehapoeskannja dengan djalan memasoekkan diri pada bangsa lain jang tidak melebihi martabatnja (Ihoetan, 1926: 4). (This account of the endowment land is written and compiled particularly for the use as a reminder to all the Mandailing people who love their nationhood especially for those who live outside the homeland.

...this account is a reminder to the Mandailing people...merely as a future reminder to the descendants of the Mandailing people so that they know the struggle of their ancestors in preserving the standing of Mandailing nationhood. In this way, it is hoped that they will not again

carelessly waste their nationhood, easily erasing it by entering into another nation that will not raise its status.)

Still, this court victory did not translate into long-term political recognition. When the 1930 census approached, the *Comite Kebangsaan Mandailing* (Mandailing National Committee) in Panyabungan, currently the capital of the regency of Mandailing-Natal, petitioned with only partial success, not to be listed as Mandailing-Batak in the census. The Mandailing were still listed under Batak in the census, but as a concession, the term 'Mandailing-Batak' was not applied (Castles, 1972: 188).

In the 1950s, when the power of the Malay Sultanate in East Sumatra had been completely eroded, the Mandailings began to distance themselves from Malay culture and reassert their ethnic identity, for instance, by using their clan names. They argued that if you can '*masuk Melayu*' (enter the Malay fold), you can also '*keluar Melayu*' (exit the Malay fold) (Omar, 1993: 82).

## **Mandailing in Peninsular Malaya<sup>19</sup>**

The aftermath of the Padri War, Islamic conversion, corvee labors and modern education provided new motives for trade and travel, marked the Mandailing migration to the Malay Peninsula in the nineteenth century.

In terms of the scale of migration, the exodus that took place during and after the Padri War was the most significant, when hundreds if not thousands left the homeland. Many came as political and economic refugees escaping the hardship of their homeland. They were led by their *Namora-Natoras*, and as such migrated in the traditional fashion, whereby several clans migrated at the same time under 'united command.'

By the 1860s, through a process of chain migration, the Mandailings became a recognizable social group in the Malay Peninsula engaging in mining, trading, mercenary activities, and economic and political mediation. Their presence in large numbers and with strong leadership caused shock waves and changed the political and economic landscape of the peninsula, the effects of which can still be felt to this day.

Economic opportunities attracted Mandailing migrants to open settlements (*mamungkas huta*) in the states of Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan on the west coast, and Pahang on the east coast, where they had already established a network of

---

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent history of Malaysia, Andaya, 2001 (1982).

migration, kinship, trade, industry and leadership. Many Mandailing settlements are still extant today but in a state of *hidup segan mati tak mau* (benign neglect). A significant settlement was Kuala Lumpur, founded by Sutan Puasa of the Lubis clan, which eventually became the federal capital of Malaysia upon independence.

On their arrival to the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, the Mandailing migrants found that it was already settled by the indigenous people (*orang asli*), Malays, Bugis and other Sumatrans. As a militant force competing with the locals and other *orang dagang* (literally foreign traders) for control of natural resources such as mines and water ways, the Mandailing were implicated in at least four civil wars in the peninsula – the Rawa War (1848) in Sungei Ujong in present day Negeri Sembilan, the Pahang War (1857-1863), the Selangor War (1867-1873), known as ‘Porang Kolang’ to the Mandailing, and the Perak War (1875).

The distribution of the Mandailing people in the west coast states of the Malay Peninsula today can be traced back to their dispersion as a result of these wars. A direct consequent of their involvement in the protracted wars, the Mandailing in the Malay Peninsula acquired an unfair reputation; they were feared and regarded with suspicion, and gained a notorious reputation as trouble makers, rebels and insurgents, a stigma inherited by their descendants to this day.

Having undergone thirty years of war in the Malay Peninsula, the Mandailing chose to collaborate with the winning side. They accepted Malay sovereignty and British rule, and were rewarded with mines, lands and positions in the new British influenced administration. Favourable Mandailing *rajas* were installed as British appointed *Penghulu*, sometimes in place of native Malay *penghulus*. They were even installed as *Kathi* (from the Arabic Qadi), Imam and other religious appointments. In contrast to their previous unsettled existence, they now became agriculturalists planting padi, rubber and coffee. They were also incorporated into the British civil service as administrators, policemen, foresters, etc.. They assimilated into Malayan society, going along with colonial policies regarding the political-economic functions of the various ethnic migrant groups. They also accepted the reconstituted official Malay-Islam.

## **‘Mendeling Malay’**

From the social and economic point of view, the dominant event of nineteenth and early twentieth century Malaya was the development of large-scale tin mining first dominated by immigrant Chinese and subsequently by European mining companies. With the further expansion of Chinese tin mining, the Mandailing immigrants were pushed out of the tin industry to become agriculturalists. The entry of the European enterprise into the tin industry, in turn forced the Chinese into other economic activities which sequentially threatened Mandailing entrepreneurs.

The Chinese tin miners were backed by big financiers, and had a large supply of cheap indentured labor and good technological know-how. The Mandailing migrants had less technical knowledge, an uncertain labor supply, and less financial backing. In short, economic opportunities in tin mining disappeared because of heavy competition from Chinese miners and civil strife. Pressure from the Chinese in the rural towns of Selangor and Perak forced the Mandailing traders out.

Plantation rubber began in the 1890s, and in 1897 special land regulations were introduced in the Federated Malay States (FMS) to encourage rubber cultivation by Europeans. At the time, there was little pressure from Chinese immigrants who were still largely engaged in the tin industry. During the second rubber boom of 1909-12, Mandailings turned rice land into rubber gardens and the liberal land policy made land readily available to them. Some Mandailing immigrants produced food for the non-agriculturalists.

Chinese, Indian, and Indonesian migrants poured into Malaya as the tin and rubber industries expanded and the total population increased from 2.6 million in 1911 to 5.5 million in 1941. Most of the newcomers produced tin and rubber in the west coast states and consumed rice. From 1920 to 1940 Malaya produced only about one third of its rice requirements. The rice producers in Malaya were the ‘Malays’.

In order to protect their traditional way of life which was orientated around the rice cycle the British administration enclosed the rice-producing lands in Malay reservations, the first of which was promulgated in the Federated Malay States (FMS) in 1913. Non-Malays could not obtain grants or buy land in the reservations. A ‘Malay’ was defined as a ‘person belonging to any Malayan race who habitually speaks the Malay language or any Malayan language and professes the Moslem religion’. This

definition allowed immigrant Muslim Indonesians to own land in the reservations, and at the same time define Islam as a 'race-religion'.

During the period of resettlement, many of the Mandailing communities outside the Malay Reservations tended to lose their economic grip on their environment. In the foothill zone of Perak and Selangor the pioneers on the fringe of settlement had to move again and again as the mines advanced or adjust to an ecosystem which could no longer support wet-rice cultivation. As a result many Mandailing communities declined or became extinct.

The proliferation of Chinese and Chettiar economic activities from 1900s was checked wherever it threatened to undermine the economic security of the 'Malay' farmers, for example by the purchase of land. The protectionist policy of the British to some extent assured their land but at the same time, place them in a limited role as agriculturalists. Some analysts are of the view that the role of Malays as rice grower may have been responsible for the decline of Malay entrepreneurship which was small-scale and dependent on individual initiative. The Chinese on the other hand, were economically dynamic because they were marginal to the Anglo-Malay ruling cliques and survived by intensifying their social cohesion.

As the indigenous positions of power in Malaya were ascribed, the best course then for Indonesian immigrants including Mandailings was to identify themselves as Malays and seek the favour of a local leader. For the Mandailing this meant the loss of their collective ethnic identity. With back migration, the numerical inferiority of the Mandailing community in British Malaya, further eroded whatever remained of their distinctiveness and differentiation.

## **Mandailing Islam in Malaysia**

The Mandailing were culturally divided from the Malays until their conversion to Islam in the early nineteenth century, but this did not in anyway guarantee their full and unconditional entry into the Islamic brotherhood. The following observation was made in nineteenth century,

‘...they [the Mandailing] live apart [from the Malays]..., and they have few dealings with the Malays of the country by whom they are

regarded as foreigners of a somewhat uncivilized type (Swettenham 1899: 182-183).’

The Malays, see themselves as superior by virtue of them being Muslim much earlier as well as becoming civilised thereof; in their eyes, the Mandailngs were formerly Bataks: but became Muslim and therefore ‘raised their standards’. A more pejorative view is encapsulated in the description of the Mandailing as ‘Bataks disguised as Muslims (Tugby 1977: 110).’

Mandailing-Islam was imported into peninsular West Malaysia by Mandailing migrants in the nineteenth century. In zones where they were dominant or influential, for example in the tin rich Kinta valley in the state of Perak, Mandailings had their own Kathi (Qadi), mosques, burial grounds, madrasahs, and practiced their own brand of Islam which caused some friction with the local Malay community (Lubis & Khoo 2003: 71-84).<sup>20</sup> They celebrated their Id on a different day from the Malay Muslims, their wedding customs and funeral rites were distinctive and conspicuously different from those of the Malay Muslims.

As the British reformed and transformed the entire culture of governance in the FMS, they found it impossible to draw the line on matters of religious administration. Notwithstanding the Pangkor Treaty of 1874 which specified that the British Advisor to the Sultan was not to interfere in matters of ‘Malay Religion and Custom’, the British were instrumental in modernizing Islamic administration and reconstituting Islamic laws in Perak. The general administration of Islamic law was referred to the Sultan as a matter of course, but he occasionally referred them back to the State Council and in that way to the British Resident.

In line with increasing standardization of the Islamic religion throughout the FMS, the dating of the *Idulfitri* (celebrations at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan) would no longer be left to the ‘sighting of the moon’ and calculations by independent Muslim astronomer (*ahli falak*). Instead, they would be centrally calculated and publicly declared by state-appointed religious officials, and communicated to the community of believers through the *Penghulus*.

Prior to World War II there was little pressure on the Mandailing to Malayanize. They were treated by the administration as ‘Malays’ along with the culturally very

---

<sup>20</sup> Lubis & Khoo 2003: 71-84. See chapter, Papan Mosque and Islamic Administration.

different Javanese and Banjarese from Borneo (Kalimantan); access to land and to education was open to them as it was to the indigenous Malays; socially they were classified as '*orang dagang*' or 'foreign Malays'.

Religion was the vehicle through which the Mandailing gained acceptance, first as Malays albeit with some reservations and then as Muslims, for becoming Muslim in both East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula entailed becoming Malay or '*masuk Melayu*' in the local parlance. Islam is said to be the most definitive Malay marker, and by extension Malays are Muslim and Muslim are Malays; in other words Malay equals Islam and vice versa. This perception has been carried to its logical conclusion in the Malay Reservation Enactment of 1913, and enshrined in the Malaysian constitution in which the Malay is, in addition to language and custom, also defined by the Islamic religion. While admitted to the fold of the Malays, the Mandailing lost their communal identity, found their practice of Mandailing-Islam devalued, and were forced to conform to state-sponsored Islam, which upon *Merdeka* (independence) became state Islam.

The most sacred pre-Islamic ceremonies of the *Namora-Natoras* which have survived Islamization and modernization, is the dirge with the passing of a *Raja*. When a *Raja* passes away, a grand funeral is organized to honor him. The *Namora-Natoras* are summoned, and a caretaker *Raja* is elected to preside over the funeral rites. Hence the saying, 'A *Raja* dies, a *Raja* lives'. The entire community is mobilized to carry out this elaborate funeral. The deceased *Raja* is laid in coffin, which is then put on a stretcher (*roto*). The *roto* is carried in a solemn procession, with standard-bearers, to the burial site, accompanied by a dirge (*bombat*) solemnly played on the ensemble of the nine great drums (*Gordang Sambilan*), and the firing of guns and cannons. The mourning period (*mardangol*) lasts for at least one month and ten days, at the end of which a ceremony to 'remove sand from one's eyes' (*patar-tar rihit tingon mata*) is conducted to signify the end of the mourning period. After this, a ceremony is held to install the *Raja*'s successor (Zainuddin Lubis 1987: 108-109; Abu Bakar circa 1930s: 36-38).

The most vivid account of the dirge is one that took place in nineteenth century Malaya as part of the funeral ceremony upon the death of *Raja Pinayongan* at Bukit Nanas, the Mandailing fortification in Kuala Lumpur. The account was written circa

1930s by the Raja's son Abu Bakar alias Lebai Ahmad. A follower of the Naqshabandi *tariqa* (spiritual path), Abu Bakar disapproved retrospectively of the way his father's burial was carried out, pointing out that the beating of drums and the firing of canons had nothing to do with the 'religion of Muhammad' and that all these stem from 'ignorance' a term used to describe un-Islamic practices or conduct. This very same sentiment is echoed today by Mandailings and Angkolan who perceived *adat* ceremonies including funeral rites as having animistic and feudalities elements (Harahap 1987: 235). Abu Bakar lamented that the Islamic religious functionaries could only recite the rites of passage after the performance of Mandailing *adat*, that is, after his father was laid to rest.

We are reproducing the account in full in view of its historical, ethno-musicological and anthropological value as well as Abu Bakar's view of the practice as a Mandailing Muslim.

Bermula adapun peraturannya hendak mengangkat jenazah itu dua orang di atas usungan itu, ia berdiri dan di sebelah depan berdiri memegang To'... Bandarang namanya berbulu2 di pangkal tombak, bulu kuda, dan seorang berdiri di sebelah belakang memegang pedang tercabut dan disiapkan pula gendan (gerdang) sembilan namanya. Adapun sebab dinamakan gendang kerana ia 9 benar2, ada rupa2 seperti sebuah mesjid Juma'at masa ini juga dan bila dipukul jadi bersatu...bertengah-tengah. Tetapi orang yang memukul itu tak berdiri; yang pertama pada seorang tinggi gendang padanya dinamakan itu Manjapati, dan yang kedua ada gendang kepadanya dinamakan gudung2 dan kecil hinang2 namanya, dua gendang padanya itulah yang kecil sekali dan dua gendang lagi, dua itu seorang memukulnya. Jadi semuanya sembilan gendang besar dan panjangnya nanti disebutkan serta kambu2 di belakang ini. Maka adalah pula disiapkan beberapa meriam besar di situ atas kubu (kota) di bukit itu sudah diisi dengan ubatnya (mesiu) dan apabila siap sekaliannya tempillah orang mengangkat....

Dan seketika itu berbunyiilah senapang berpuluh2 dipasang oranglah meriam kubu (kota) telah meriam di buku bukit tiada berhenti dan dan

selagi belum sampai ke kubur bapaku itu, meriam senapang tiadalah berhenti berbunyinya seperti bunyi guruh di langit gelap gempita bunyinya apatah riuh tangan orang<sup>2</sup> dan apalagi bunyi gendang sembilan itu, haraplah aku kepada Tuhan Allah swt akan mengampuni seksa bapaku itu di dalam kubu, kerana semuanya itu perbuatan jahiliah jua yang tiada masuk dalam bicara ugama Muhammad. Allahu Akbar. Dan bila sudah siapkan masuk kubur baharulah datang duduk qadi dan imam khatib bilal membaca talqin dan serta tahlil dan bila sudah membaca talqin baharulah pula membaca du'a bagi mayat bapaku itu dan telah selesai berdirilah balik orang semuanya (Abu Bakar 1930s: 36-8). (To begin with, concerning the regulations for carrying the dead, two persons stand at the head of the stretcher in front someone holds a To'...Bandarang by name, a fluffy lance of horse hair; someone behind holds a naked sword and the drums are prepared, the nine drums they are called. The reason why they are so named is because there are really nine drums, like each similar to the drum used in a Friday mosque today...bertengah-tengah. But the drummers do not stand; the drum of first drummer which is the longest is called Manjapati; and the drum of the second drummer is called gudung-gudung and the smaller ones are called hinang, the two drums of the drummer is the smallest and two other drums, the last two are beaten by one drummer. So there are nine big and long drums in all, of which more will be mentioned later as well as the sticks. Then a few huge cannons were placed on the fort on top of the hill and fill with gun-powder and when everything was ready.

At that moment, the guns were fired, scores of them, and the cannons from the fortification were fired ceaselessly and before the body of my late father reached the graveyard, the sounds of guns and cannons were unending like thunder in the dark sky what with the din of human clapping and what more with the pounding of the nine drums: I pray to God Allah, the Most High, to absolve His punishment upon my father in his grave as all these are ignorant acts, which is not excluded from the precepts of the religion of Muhammad. Allah is Great! And only

after my father was interned in his grave, did the Qadi and Imam, Khatib, Bilal come to sit and recite the talqin as well as the tahlil, and when they finished reading the talqin, they recited the prayer for my father's corpse; when that was done everyone got up and went home.)

In spite of disapproval from certain religious quarters, the *roto* music or dirge (*bombat*) is well and alive in the Mandailing homeland. Indeed, there has been a revival of the Mandailing ceremonial drums, the *Gordang Sambilan*, in the past few decades. The revival of the *Gordang Sambilan*, once availed as war drums, is symbolically important for the revival of Mandailing identity on both sides of the Straits of Malacca.

With the loss of status and authority of the *Namora-Natoras*, the *Gordang Sambilan* was silent for a long time, until it was revived in Mandailing by the present-day descendants of the *Namora-Natoras*, including the writer's uncle, Raja Syahbudin. Once considered a sacred drum that cannot be played without the permission of the *Namora-Natoras* and in compliance with the *adat*, the *Gordang Sambilan* began to be promoted as a performing art. The *Gordang Sambilan* festival in the form of inter-settlement competition is held annually. In Malaysia, the Mandailing Welfare Association (IMAN) has been successful in promoting the *Gordang Sambilan* and getting it recognized as the official musical ensemble in the state of Selangor. It is performed at the Selangor Art Festival under the Malayized name *Gendang Sembilan* (Lubis, 2003: 74). The performance of the *Gordang Sambilan*, which epitomizes Mandailing *adat* and spirituality, is looked upon with disdain by the Malay Muslims, because some of the drummers typically enter into trance.

## **The *Namora-Natoras* and the Ulama**

After the Padri War, the charismatic Jang Dipertuan of Huta Siantar, the Raja Ulama (the doyen of the ulama), described by the Dutch as *primus inter pares*, sent a messenger to Syekh Abdul Fattah (1803-1863), the Islamic cleric of Minang origin based in Natal, inviting the latter to become the religious teacher at Huta Siantar in Greater Mandailing (Sejarah Ulama-Ulama 1983: 16; Harahap, 1997: 2). Syekh Abdul Fattah sent his disciple instead – Syekh Abd. Malik, nicknamed Baleo Natal (1825-1910).<sup>21</sup> Syekh Abd. Malik's teaching was well received by the *Namora-Natoras*;

---

<sup>21</sup> Syekh Abd. Malik's father was from Muara Mais near Kota Nopan in Upper Mandailing.

in fact people from as far as Padang Sidempuan, Padang Lawas, Sipirok and Dalu-Dalu came to learn from him. The Namora-Natoras found it tough fasting during the month of Ramadan, so Syekh Abd. Malik got them to fast one day each at the beginning, the middle and the end of the month. In doing so, Syekh Abd. Malik was adopting the gradual (*tadrij*) method of teaching the foundations of Islam (Schnitger 1983: 20, 35-36)<sup>22</sup>.

At the point when Islam was taking hold in Mandailing society, the ‘Natal school’ seems to have been very influential in reconciling the practice of Islam and *adat*, for about the same time, two other Islamic clerics from Natal were teaching Islam in Huta Siantar; they were Abd. Fattah of Pagaran Sigatal (1809-1900) and Syekh Abd. Syukur, a son of Syekh Abd. Malik.<sup>23</sup> Abd. Fattah taught the Sufic *tariqa* (spiritual path) of *khalwah* and *suluk* (*Sejarah Ulama-Ulama* 1983: 19-23). From the presence of *suluk* practice, it can be concluded the Sufi *tariqa* was Naqshabandiah. It is well-known that the Naqshabandiah had a strong presence in Mandailing, and evidence of this can still be seen today in Islamic institutions at village level. The only indication that the ‘Natal school’ was influenced by the Maliki school of thought is the suggestion that Islam was brought to it shores by one Tuan Sjech Maghribi (Maulana Malik Ibrahim). Pressed by the Shia presence there, the school did not spread – or so it seems. Maulana Malik eventually fled to Gersik, Java (Parlindungan, 1962: 117).

In another instance, Syekh H. Muhammad Yunus (1834-1909), an Islamic cleric was invited to settle in Huraba in Angkola. Syekh H. Muhammad Yunus of the Nasution clan received his Islamic education in Rao, West Sumatra, a stronghold of the Padri, the state of Perak in Peninsula West Malaysia and Makkah in the Hijaz (Saudi Arabia today). When Sipirok was under Dutch rule, he was made a *Kadhi* and his works used for the propagation of Islam (Schnitger 1983: 45-48). Like many others, he was an aspiring student from the Dutch East Indies who studied in the Malay Peninsula as a stepping stone to further his studies in the Middle East.

In some cases, the ulama became so powerful that they challenged the *adat*, and in doing so, posed a direct challenge to the *Namora-Natoras* as upholders of the *adat*. This is illustrated in a celebrated clash between the *Namora-Natoras* and the ulama

<sup>22</sup> Schnitger 1983: 20, 35-6. The five foundations of Islam are the *Shahada* (The Dual Declaration of Fatih), *Salaat* (The Prayer), *Sawm* (The Fast), *Zakat* (The Wealth-Tax) and the *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to the holy lands).

<sup>23</sup> Both Huta Siantar and Pagaran Sigatal are close to Panyabungan, the current capital of the Natal regency.

class which took place in Maga, Upper Mandailing. Syekh Juneid Thola (1886-1948) whose real name was Simanonga, of the Rangkuti clan, hailed from Maga.<sup>24</sup> He received his early Islamic instruction in Basalam in Sumatra, before furthering his education to Peninsula West Malaysia in the state of Kedah, Bukit Mertajam in Penang and Padang Rengas in Perak, and from there to al-Azhar University in Cairo (Egypt) (*Sejarah Ulama-Ulama* 1983: 155-164). Syekh Juneid was very much inspired by his alma mater, Al-Azhar University, in setting up the most extensive Islamic endowment in all of Mandailing. Upon his return to Perak, Syekh Juneid first revitalised a *madrassa* (Islamic school) in Padang Rengas, which is still extant today. In 1927 he returned to his native village in Hutanamale, where he founded a large endowment, a *madrassa* complex with houses, shops, hostels for students and a market on *waqf* (Islamic endowment) with padi fields, rubber and mandarin oranges. Hutanamale is famous for this *waqf* even today.

On account of his marriage, Syekh Juneid angered the *Namora-Natoras* and was eventually evicted from Hutanamale. Firstly, Syekh Juneid broke the laws of *adat* by marrying a woman from the same clan, who was furthermore the daughter of his uncle. (Mandailing *adat* favour a man marrying a woman from a different clan, ideally the daughter of the mother's brother, but not from the father's brother). Secondly, the wedding was conducted with disregard to Mandailing *adat*, and without slaughtering the compulsory buffalo. Instead people complained that he only served *air stroop* (a syrup drink), followed by a supplication. By not giving face to the *Namora-Natoras*, and was accused of inciting fellow Mandailings to oppose the *adat*.

According to the *Sejarah Ulama-Ulama Terkemuka di Sumatera Utara* (The History of Famous Clerics in North Sumatra), Syekh Juneid was strenuously opposed to *adat* that was *jahiliah* (stemming from ignorance). Although the *Sejarah* is silent about who was behind Syekh Juneid's eviction and the *kadhi*'s dismissal, it is obvious that the prime mover was Mangaraja Gunung Sorik Marapi, *kepala kuria* (headman of the parish) as well as *adat* chief of Maga. According the older generation, Mangaraja Gunung Sorik Marapi took Syekh Juneid's conduct as a personal affront.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Mangaraja Gunung Sorik Marapi was also a *khalifa* (a spiritual leader) of

---

<sup>24</sup> Pembaharuan Islam di Perak, [www.lib.usm.my/Moro/GPI/bab10.html](http://www.lib.usm.my/Moro/GPI/bab10.html).

<sup>25</sup> When the author was doing his research in Maga under the Nippon Foundation API Fellowship in 2000, the subject came up for discussion.

the Naqshahabandiah *tariqa*. As *kepala kuria*, he also created endowments, perhaps in competition with the Syekh.

In contrast to the Mandailing homeland, there was no open conflict between the *Namora-Natoras* and the ulama in Malaya, where the *adat* had become weak and seemingly irrelevant. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Malaya saw the emergence of the Mandailing ulama class as court advisors and the adoption of Malay *adat* in marriage by the small migrant Mandailing communities. Probably the first Mandailing to get close to the Malay royal circles in Kuala Kangsar, the seat of the Perak Sultan, was Haji Muhammad Nur. He was apparently brought to Pusing in the state of Perak as a child from Mandailing, and became a Qur'an teacher there. He eventually became an outstanding Qari (Qur'an Reader), and caught the ear of the Perak Sultan, who handpicked him to become the Imam of the Kuala Kangsar Mosque.

After his appointment, he was known as 'Imam Sultan' (The Sultan's Prayer Leader). Haji Muhammad Nur was also the leader of the organizer of the Qur'an reading party held during the fasting month of Ramadan. Sultan Idris was the patron of the reading party, where Qaris (reciters) from all over Malaya converge at Kuala Kangsar. A contemporary of Haji Muhammad Nur described him as 'a great Qari with a sweet voice and a favourite of H.H. Sultan Idris of Perak' (Roff 1978: 5-7; Lubis and Khoo 2003: 215, 218). He was also the Qur'an teacher to Sultan Idris's children at the Bukit Chandan palace and also at the Malay College, billed the Eton or Harrow of Malaya, set up for Malay nobility.

Raja Bilah (1834-1911), the *penghulu* (headman) of Papan and the doyen of the Mandailings in Perak, himself regarded as an *alim* (singular for ulama), founded mosque and endowed burial grounds for Muslims. He facilitated the appointment of his clansman, Haji Abdul Kadir Mandailing as the Assistant Kathi of Kinta, the highest religious post for the district, and even put right the Mufti of Perak, the highest Islamic legal authority in the state, over his authorisation to zakat collectors from Krian and Larut districts to collect zakat in the Kinta district, in which Papan is located (Lubis and Khoo, 2003: 71-84). When it came to marriage custom, Raja Bilah gave way to the Malay *adat Temenggong* but entertained the less controversial practices of Mandailing *adat* such as displaying oratory skills by the *Namora-Natoras* during Mandailing weddings (Lubis and Khoo 2003: 169). However, in his will, he divided his property, Mandailing style, evenly among his sons and daughters.

## Adat versus Islam

The march of global Islam promotes Arabized Islam as the mainstream religious outlook of the Middle-Eastern religion. Going by the symbolism, logic and language employed, it is the Wahhabi ideology, intolerant to difference of opinion and juristic diversity that is in ascendance. To the proponents of ‘universalistic’ Islam, *adat* that derives from local custom is seen to be irreconcilably opposed to Islam and therefore ought to be purged. This only goes to show that the Islamic religion has been homogenized in conformity to a constructed standard in the service of the state which keeps its Muslim subjects in check.

A study of ‘Islam and Adat Among South Tapanuli Migrants in Three Indonesian Cities’ by Basyral Hamidy Harahap found that both *adat* and Islamic principles are utilized in ‘solving problems of everyday life’. Harahap notes that the institution of *dalihan na tolu* is still the most central feature of traditional social life and remains of ‘contemporary importance’. In some ways it is weakened, as ‘Islam strongly sculpts this centerpiece of *adat*’. Harahap concludes that ‘Islam does not simply adjust to local *adat* – Islam defines *adat*’, while pointing out that the relationship between *adat* and Islam are antagonistic (Harahap 1987: 222).

Indeed the significance of the *adat* ceremonies have diminished in Mandailing, partly due to the influence of Islam as well as to economic difficulties. Religious loyalties, locally conceptualized as somewhat antagonistic to local ethnic customs, are stronger than *adat* conscience. All the same, there are areas where ‘avowed Muslims’ are ‘still strongly influenced by animism and the traditional culture (Harahap, 1987: 223, 236).’

In Malaya, in stark contrast to conventional Islamic disbursement of inheritance, Mandailing parents have been known to have divided their properties equally amongst sons and daughters. In apportioning the properties equally among their children, parents were following a strong Mandailing tradition, which was practiced not only in Mandailing homeland, but also by Mandailings in Malaya (Lubis and Khoo 2003: 223; Tugby 1977: 65-66).

The fact of the matter is that both Islam and *adat* regulate social life of the Mandailings whether in the homeland or in the *rantau* (outside of the homeland); more so in Indonesia than in Malaysia. ‘Migrants use *marga* clan identities and *dalihan na*

*tolu* relationships as a partial basis for structuring social life in the cities, but as followers of Islam, they also see religion as a source of brotherhood and commonality' (Harahap, 1987: 232). This applied flexibility resonates with the idea of the compatibility of *adat* with Islam, instead of the view that the former and the latter are compartmentalized into two distinct spheres of influence.

To begin with, the Islamic religion was heterogenous with its many school of thoughts. Differences within the *ummah* (Islamic community) were seen as a blessing rather than a division. Historically, Islamic precepts have been creatively reconciled with local cultures through a delicate adjustive mechanism that conserves uniqueness and endorses harmonious fusion. Acceptable *adat* is given fresh legitimacy and further advanced, consolidating the believers' heritage with their new found faith. This reconciliation of *adat* and Islam into an integral and compatible whole is best described in the words of Muhammad Abu Zahrah, a famous Maliki scholar

So when a custom is not a vice and is respected by people, honouring it will strengthen the bond which draws people together because it is connected to their traditions and social transactions where opposition to it will destroy that cohesion and bring about disunity.<sup>26</sup>

This position promotes a peaceful coexistence between *adat* and Islam, and even encourages the continuation of the *adat* as a means of bonding and common identity, instead of creating cleavages within the community. In spite of the fact that such a dynamic approach has been formulated within the Islamic mainstream, *adat* is often conceptualized today, throughout the Muslim world, as a system opposed to, and in retreat from, Islam. Assaulted by the ulama class, Mandailing *adat* has, by and large, been reduced to a ceremonial status.

All Malaysians and Indonesians have to subscribe to authorised scriptural religion as they are required to identify themselves on documents such as birth and death certificates, citizen identity cards and school registration forms. In the case of Indonesia after 1945 the government's official category of 'religion' (*agama*) is reduced to five – Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hindusim or Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> Not much difference in the case of Malaysia. In opposition to these religions are 'superstitions' or 'beliefs' (*kepercayaan*), a category used by both governments to describe almost all indigenous

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Abu Zahrah, at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/ABewley/usul12.html>

<sup>27</sup> There are a few exceptions to the rule, where indigenous religions have been classified under the rubric of a world religion.

religions in the archipelago. In that straight jacket, religion is put in opposition to indigenous tradition, and nowhere is the tension between modernity (of which universal religion is a representation) and tradition more acute than in the Muslim world. The pressure to conform to a 'standard' is enormous.

## Conclusion

In Indonesia today, the Mandailings are subsumed under the official Batak category. This category is in reality dominated by the Toba Batak Christians, while the Mandailing Muslims remain a distinct sub-group within this category; acceptance of the Batak category varies in degrees among Mandailings themselves. In the Mandailing homeland, some Mandailings have acquiesced to the Batak label, while others proudly assert their Mandailing ethnicity. In Malaysia today, the Mandailings have by and large assimilated and submitted to the Malay hegemony.

The Mandailings who accept the Batak label are more likely to accept the primacy of *adat*, just like their Batak Christian counterparts. The Mandailings who see themselves as Mandailings largely want to keep the *adat*, although they feel pressured to re-examine and rationalize the Mandailing *adat* in Islamic terms. The Mandailings who see themselves as Malay, range from those who retain vestigial *adat* practices, to those who, wanting to be more Malay than Malay, totally abandon the Mandailing *adat* for the Malay *adat Temenggong*. In the light of this, the discourse of indigenized Islam is further undermined and confused by the politics of fragmented identity.

The *Namora-Natoras*, who largely became Muslims during the Padri War were the custodians of Mandailing *adat* as well as practitioners of Islamic governance, albeit in an indigenised form. During colonial rule, their powers were circumscribed, but nevertheless, the Mandailing *kepala kuria* in Dutch Sumatra and the Mandailing *penghulu* in British Malaya retained their functions as *adat* chiefs. But as their authority had been compromised through colonial co-optation, so the emerging class of Arabized *ulama* castigated the *Namora-Natoras* for collaborating with the *kafir* (infidels/unbelievers) colonialists, condoning un-Islamic practices and impeding the society's Islamic progress. The *ulama*'s allies, the nationalists, in turn cast the *Namora-Natoras* as feudal lords collaborating with the imperialist order and detracting from the higher goals of an independent nation-state. With the end of colonial rule, the

nationalists and *ulama* succeeded in creating nation-states that were religious in image and secular in function. Traditional chiefs drew their legitimacy from *adat*, just as elected officials draw their legitimacy from the newly constituted national power structure. However the *Namora Natoras*' significance as leaders diminished relative to religious leaders and secular leadership propped up by the emerging state.

The centralization of state religion in the form of official Islam directly corresponded to the marginalization of indigenized Islam. In the process, local authority which holistically incorporated political, religious, moral and legal functions, and understood these functions in the light of indigenous knowledge and its own social evolution was eroded. By discrediting indigenized Islam as promoted by the *Namora-Natoras*, the *ulama* destroyed part of the basis of Mandailing identity. By undermining Mandailing ethnicity through census constructs in the name of nationalism, traditional religious authority was also displaced. Politicians and religious functionaries thus acted to destroy local diversity paving the way for the nation-state's authority, social engineering, and homogenized statistic Islam.

## References

- Abu Bakar anak Raja Pinayongan Lubis (circa 1930s) *Riwayat Tuan Abu Bakar*.  
Unpublished Jawi manuscript.
- Aljunied, Syed Muhd Khairudin (2004) *Raffles and Religion, A Study of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles' Discourse on Religions amongst Malays*, Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press.
- Al-Wawardi, Abu'l-Hasan (1966) *al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah, The Laws of Islamic Governance*, London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd.
- Anderson, John. (1971 [1824] ) *Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra in 1823*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Andaya, Barbara Watson and Leonard Y. Andaya (1982) *A History of Malaysia*, Hampshire: Pelgrave, 2001 (1st).
- Aritonang, Jan Sihar (2000) *The Encounter of the Batak People with Rheinische Missions-Gesellschaft in the Field of Education (1816-1940), a historical-theological inquiry*, Ph.D thesis, Universiteit Utrecht. Published as *Mission Schools in Batakland (Indonesia), 1861-1940*, (1994), Leiden, E.J. Brill.
- Barnard, Timothy P. (1997) "Local Heroes and National Consciousness, The Politics of Historiography" in Riau, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* (BKI) 153(4): 509-26.
- Boland, B. J. and I. Farjon (1983) *Islam in Indonesia, A Biographical Survey*, Holand: Foris Publications.
- Brune, Edward M. (1972) "Batak Ethnic Associations in Three Indonesian Cities" . *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 28(3), pp. 207-229.
- Castles, Lance (1972) *The Political Life of a Sumatran Residency: Tapanuli 1915-1940*, Ph.D. thesis, Yale University.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1977) "Stateless and Stateforming Tendencies among the Batak before Colonial Rule" in *Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia, The Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Bali-Lombok, South Celebes*, Anthony Reid and Lance Castles (eds.) Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (MBRAS), pp. 67-76.

- Dobbin, Christine (1983) *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy, Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, London: Curzon Press.
- Elkhart, Allen Hoekema(2001) *Dutch Mennonite Mission in Indonesia: Historical Essays* by, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies.
- Enfield, Mary (compiler)(1899) *God First or Hester Needham's Work in Sumatra*, 56 Paternoster Row and 65 St. Paul's Churchyard: The Religious Tract Society.
- Harahap, Basyral Hamidy and Hotman M. Siahaan(1987) *Orientasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Batak: Suatu Pendekatan Terhadap Perilaku Batak Toba dan Angkola Mandailing*, Jakarta: Sanggar Willem Iskander.
- Harahap, Basyral Hamidy (1987) "Islam and Adat Among South Tapanuli Migrants in Three Indonesian Cities in Rita Smith Kipp" *Indonesian Religions in Transition*, University of Arizona Press, pp. 221-237.
- Harahap, Basyral Hamidy(1997) "Orientasi Pembangunan Mandailing: Pelajaran Dari Sejarah" in *Derap Langkah Mandailing-Natal*, Jakarta: Himpunan Keluarga Mandailing (HIKMA), pp.1-59.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2004) *Madina Yang Madani*, Penyabungan: Pemerintah Daerah Kabupaten Madina .
- Ihoetan, Mangaradja(1926) *Asal-Oesoelnja Bangsa Mandailing, berhoeboeng dengan perkara tanah Wakaf bangsa Mandailing, di Soengei Mati – Medan*, Medan: Perwarta Deli .
- Karthirithamby-Wells, J. (1986) "The Origin of the Term Padri: Some Historical Evidence", *Indonesia Circle*, No. 41, pp. 3-9.
- Keuning, J. (1998) "Batak-Toba dan Batak-Mandailing, Hubungan kebudayaan dan pertentangan yang mendasar" in *Sejarah Lokal di Indonesia*, Jakarta: KITLV & LIPI., pp. 278-307.
- Kipp, Rita Smith and Richard D. Kipp(1983) *Beyond Samosir: Recent Studies of the Batak People of Sumatra*, Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies.
- Klerck, de-, E.S.(1938)*Hisotry of the Netherlands East Indies*, Rotterdam,: W. L. & J. Brusse .
- Lubis, Abdur-Razzaq and Khoo Salma Nasution(2003) *Raja Bilah and the Mandailings in Perak, 1875-1911*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (MBRAS).

- Lubis, Zainuddin(1987) *Na Mora Na Toras: Pemimpin Tradisional Mandailing*, MA thesis, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Fakultas Sastra, Jurusan Antropologi, Medan.
- Moeda, Dja Endar(1903)*Riwajat Poelau Sumatra*, Padang: N. Venn Snelpersdrukkerij 'Indulinde'.
- Muhammad, H. Karseno; H. Rajuddin Noeh; H. Armyn An; Sjafnir Aboe Naim; and Djurip(1992), *Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol*, Sumatera Barat: Pemerintah Daerah Tingkat I.
- Muller-Kruger, Th. (1959) *Sedjarah Geredja di Indonesia*. Djakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, pp.181-2
- Omar, Ariffin(1993) *Bangsa Melayu, Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community 1945-1950*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Pahlawan Nasional Tuanku Tambusai (Hamonangan Harahap/Muhammad Salleh), *Sejarah Ringkas Kehidupan dan Perjuangannya* (1996) Medan: Tim Pengumpulan, Penyusun dan Penulisan Sejarah Perjuangan Tuanku Tambusai di Propinsi Sumatera Utara.
- Pandapotan, Haji Sutan(1983) *Sejarah Ringkas Datu Janggut Marpayung Ali dan Harajaon Rangkuti di Mandailing*, Medan. No name of publisher.
- Parlindungan, Mangaradja Onggang(1962)*Pongkinangolngolan Sinambela gelar Tuanku Rao, Terror Agama Islam Mazhab Hambali di Tanah Batak, 1816-1833*, Jakarta: Penerbit Tandjung Pengharapan.
- Parkin, Harry (1977) *Batak Fruit of Hindu Thought*, The Christian Literature Society. No place of publication.
- Pedersen, Paul Bodholdt(1970) *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul: The Development of National Batak Churches in North Sumatra*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co.
- Pelly, Usman(1983) *Urban Migration and Adaptation in Indonesia: A Case Study of Minangkabau and Mandailing Batak Migrants in Medan, North Sumatra*, Ph.D \ thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Radjab, Muhamad(1954) *Perang Paderi di Sumatera Barat (1803-1838)*, Kementerian P. P dan K. No place of publication. Of course, the ministry of PP and K is in Jakarta, but that is not stated.
- Rodgers, Susan (1993) "Batak Heritage and the Indonesian State: Print Literacy and the Construction of Ethnic Cultures in Indonesia", *Ethnicity and the State*, J. Toland (ed.), New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

- Ricklefs, M.C. (2001 [1981] ) *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, Palgrave: Hampshire,.
- Roff, William R. (1989 [1939] ) *The Wandering Thoughts of a Dying Man, The Life and Times of Haji Abdul Majid bin Zainuddin*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Schmitger, F.M. (1989 [1939] ) *Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra*, Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1983) *Sejarah Ulama-Ulama Terkemuka di Sumatera Utara*, Medan: Institut Agama Islam Negeri Al Jamiah.
- Sejarah Ringkas Kehidupan dan Perjuangannya* (1996) Medan: Tim Pengumpulan, Penyusun dan Penulisan Sejarah Perjuangan Tuanku Tambusai di Propinsi Sumatera Utara.
- Sejarah Ulama-Ulama Terkemuka di Sumatera Utara* (1983) Medan: Institut Agama Islam Negeri Al Jamiah.
- Swettenham, Frank (1899 (3rd)) *The Real Malay: pen-pictures*, London: John Lane
- Pahlawan Nasional Tuanku Tambusai (Hamonangan Harahap/Muhammad Salleh)*, *Sejarah Ringkas Kehidupan dan Perjuangannya* (1996) Medan: Tim Pengumpulan, Penyusun dan Penulisan Sejarah Perjuangan Tuanku Tambusai di Propinsi Sumatera Utara.
- Thiessen, Joh (1974) *Pakanten Ein Merkwurdiger teil Sumatra's*, Verlag zum Vorteil der Missions-Arbeit
- Tugby, Donald J.(1960) “*Modern Social Structure and Social Organization in Upper Mandailing, Sumatra*”, Ph.D thesis, Australian National University.

### Websites

《AD2000 and Beyond》

<http://www.ad2000.org/people/jpl2035.htm>

Pembaharuan Islam di Perak

<http://www.lib.usm.my/Moro/GPI/bab10.html>

Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *The Fundamental Principles of Imam Malik's Fiqh*, see Chapter 12, ‘Adat (Customs and ‘Urf (Customary Usage)

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/ABewley/usul12.html>

