

# THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRADITIONAL MANDAILING LEADERSHIP IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY

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## THE NOTION OF JUSTICE IN THE ORIGIN OF THE MANDAILING PEOPLE

The Mandailing people, an ethnic group from the south-west corner of the province of North Sumatra today, went through a process of cultural hybridization and creolization centuries ago by incorporating into its gene pool the diverse people from the archipelago and beyond; adopting as well as adapting cultures from across the continents. The many clans of the Mandailing people have both indigenous as well as foreign infusions. The *saro cino* or Chinese-style curved roof, indicates Chinese influence in Mandailing architecture. (Drs. Z. Pangaduan Lubis, 1999: 8). The legacy of Indian influences, either direct or via other peoples, include key political terms such as *huta* (village, generally fortified), *raja* (chief) and *marga* (partilineal exogamous clan). (J. Gonda, 1952)

There are several hypotheses about the origin of the Mandailing people, mainly based on the proximity and similarity of sounds. One theory closely associated with the idea of governance is that the name Mandailing originated from *Mandala Holing*. (Mangaraja Lelo Lubis, : 3,13 & 19) Current in Mandailing society is the usage '*Surat Tumbaga H(K)oling na so ra sasa*' which means that the 'Copper H(K)oling cannot be erased'. What is meant is that the *adat* cannot be wiped out; in other words, the *adat* is everlasting.

Both examples emphasises that justice has a central role in Mandailing civilization, which is upheld by its judicial assembly, called *Na Mora Na Toras*, the traditional institution of

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Mandailing governance.<sup>2</sup>

The institution of *Namora Natoras* has two meanings. In the first instance it refers to the traditional leaders themselves, all males, who are nobles (*namora*) and elders (*natoras*), and secondly the institution, the parliament, governing council and judicial assembly, itself made up of these leaders.

The *namora-mora* represents the nobility or land-owning clan (*marga tanah*) of a fortified village (*huta*) or district (*banua*).<sup>3</sup> A *huta* is a village republic, a self-governing unit with a parliament headed by the traditional chief (*raja*). The *huta* set up by the land-owning clan (*marga tanah*), has a defined territory and a given number of citizen-residents. The *huta* chief or *raja* comes from the land-owning clan.

In the case of *Mandailing Julu* (Upper Mandailing), the land owning clan is the Lubis clan, In *Mandailing Godang* (Lower Mandailing), they are from the Nasution clan. The other clans are led by *kapala ripe*. The *natoras* represent the non-nobility clan, whose participation in the judicial assembly is essential for the proper functioning of governance and the *adat*.

The dynamics of the *namora natoras* is governed by *adat*, a body of customs and customary law known as *Dalian Na Tolu*. In short, the nobles and elders can only act according to the prescriptions and within the constraints of the *adat*.

The *Namora-Natoras* exercised control over land, the administration of justice, the regulations of markets (*onan*) and workings of the Mandailing social order.

At the centre of each *huta*, stand the ruler's dwelling called the *bagas godang* and a council hall called the *sopo godang*. The governing councils of the *namora-natoras* are held in the *sopo*

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, this part is based on the indispensable work of Zainuddin Lubis, *Na Mora Na Toras: Pemimpin Tradisional Mandailing*, Universitas Sumatera Utara, 1987, as well as Lance Castles's 'Statelessness and Stateforming Tendencies Among The Batak Before Colonial Rule' in Anthony Reid and Lance Castles (eds.), *Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia, The Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Bali-Lombok, South Celebes*, MBRAS, Kuala Lumpur, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> A federation of a few *banjar*, *pagaran* and *lumban* make up a *huta* (fortification or settlement) or *banua* (country).

*godang*. The *sopo godang* and *bagas godang*, are still to be found in Mandailing, Sumatra and in Perak, Malaysia reminders of the seat of the *namora-mora*.

## HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP: ISLAMIZATION, MIGRATION AND COLONIALISM

The coming of Islam to Mandailing brought with it many values of the universal religion and global culture. More significantly however, Mandailing society was historically transformed by a radical brand of Islam – Wahabbite Islam brought by the Padris.

In 1820, the Padris invaded the Mandailing homeland. The socio-economic, political, ecological, environmental and spiritual disruption caused by the war triggered movements of people within and around Mandailing. Indeed, the most important exodus of Mandailing migration from the Mandailing homeland in Sumatra to the west coast of the Peninsula was during and after the Padri War (1816-1833).<sup>4</sup>

The Mandailings served as commanders and troops on both sides of the war. Two famous Padri of Mandailing origin were Tuanku Rao and Tuanku Tambusai.<sup>5</sup> The anti-Padri and pro-*adat* faction was led by Patuan Naga<sup>6</sup> dan Raja Gadombang.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> One of the most vivid account of this migration is found Pande Maradjar, '*Perpindahan Orang Mandailing*' in the magazine Mandailing, No 11, Tahoen ke 2, Chamis 29 Maart 1923, pp. 2-3. Account of Mandailing migration is also found in *Tarikh Raja Asal dan Keluarganya* and *Riwayat Hidup Tuan Abu Bakar*. The *Tarikh* was written by Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub bin Raja Bilah, a penghulu of the tin-rin Blanja district in Kinta, in 1934. The *Riwayat* was written by Abu Bakar anak Raja Pinayungan Lubis circa 1930s. See also Donald Tugby, *Cultural Change and Identity: Mandailing Immigrants in West Malaysia*, University of Queensland Press, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Tuanku Tambusai or Tambuse was made a 'Pahlawan Nasional' (National Warrior) by the Indonesian government in 1993. Pahlawan Nasional Tuanku Tambusai (Hamonangan Harahap/Muhammad Salleh) Sejarah Ringkas Kehidupan dan Perjuangannya, Tim Pengumpulan, Penyusunan dan Penulisan Sejarah Perjuangan Tuanku Tambusai di Propinsi Sumatera Utara, Medan, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Patuan Naga, the raja *panusunan* of Panyabungan in Mandailing Godang (Lower/Greater Mandailing), rallied both Mandailing Godang and Mandailing Julu (Upper/Lesser Mandailing), 'new Muslims, old Muslims, pagans and Lubus' (an indigenous people/*rakyat terasing* in Mandailing) against the Padris, but even this tour de force did not succeed in holding back the Padris. Lance Castles, *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Raja Gadombang, the raja of Huta Godang invited Dutch intervention into Mandailing in 1832 to push back the Padris. He became the son-in-law of Tuanku Rao, but later broke with his father-in-law and became the chief confederate of the Dutch in their pincer movement through Mandailing against the Padris. See Dja Endar Moeda, *op. cit.*, p. 66 and Lance Castle, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

For about a decade the Mandailing homeland was under Padri domination. Governance was exercised by a Padri appointed *kali* (originally *Qadi*, Arabic for 'judge') (Lance Castles, 1975: 71) Through these *kalis* (= *ulama*) some of whom were the *namora-mora* (plural for *rajas*) themselves, Islamic values were incorporated into the institution of *Namora Natoras*.

While Padri domination had 'greatly modified the power structure...', there was no tendency for states to consolidate. In many territories power seemed to be almost equally divided between several branches of the ruling lineage'. (Lance Castles, 1975: 71) Many of the *namora-mora* weathered the storm and when peace was restored, the established clans reassert their rights and some of the *rajas* were reinstated.

The Padri episode was yet another historical incursions by Minangkabau into the Mandailing homeland, and it was during this time that many Mandailings came to Islam at the point of the sword.<sup>8</sup> As it turn out the interpretation and application of Islam in Mandailing is very different from that of the Minangkabau. The Minangs are matrilineal and adopt a position of custom based on Islamic law (*adat basandi syarak*), the Mandailings are partilineal and adopt a position of *adat* on par with Islamic law. This is reflected in the maxim *ombar do adat ugamo*.

The latter understanding is closer to the Madinan tradition (*amal* of Madina)<sup>9</sup> than to the Shafie *madhhab* (school of thought) dominant today in the Peninsula and the Indonesia archipelago. The challenge of traditional Mandailing leadership is to retain this historically unique way of maintaining and reconciling their traditional customs with their new found religion in the face of globalized modernist Wahhabite (Arab)-Islam and regional Malay Islam.

The Mandailings have been going to Klang (*pai Kolang*) in the west coast of the Peninsula 'for centuries'.<sup>10</sup> The mass migration of Mandailings to Klang and other parts of the peninsula

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<sup>8</sup> Dja Endar Moeda, however, put the date of the spread of Islam in Mandailing as late as 1859. Dja Endar Moeda, *op. cit.*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> For a critical discussion favouring the Madinan school over the other *madhhabs* within the Sunni school of thought, see Syakh Abdalqadir al-Murabit, *Root Islamic Education*, Madinah Press, 1993 (second edition). The first edition was published in 1982. On the Madinan amal, see Yasin Dutton, *The Origins of Islamic Law, The Qur'an, the Muwata and Madinan Amal*, especially the chapter on 'The 'Amal of the People of Madina' (pp. 32-41), Curzon, Surrey, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Pai Kolang is the term used to refer to Mandailing migration to peninsula (West Malaysia today), see Mangaradja Onggang Parlindungan, *Pongkinangolngolan Sinambela gelar Tuanku Rao, Terror Agama Islam Mazhab Hambali di Tanah Batak, 1816-1833*, Tandjung Pengharapan, Jakarta, 1964?, p. 369.

preceded any substantial migration of Mandailings to the east coast of Sumatra. (Mangaradja Ihoetan, 1926: 5)

In keeping with the tradition in Sumatra, the *Namora Natoras* have been know to 'merantau whole clans at the same time under united command', leading a band of followers to a new site. (Mangaradja Onggang Parlindungan, 1964: 27) Mandailings migrate together with the *mora* (wife-giving) and *anak-boru* (wife-taking) clans, and *kahangi* (relations) including women and children.

Through chain migration, the Mandailing became a recognizable group in the Peninsula by 1840s, engaging in mining, trading, mercenary activities, and economic and political mediation. The arrival of the Mandailings of large groups of Mandailing caused shock waves and changed the political and socio-economic landscape of the peninsular, the effects of which can be felt to this day.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Peninsula, the Mandailings were embroiled in the Rawa War of 1848; the Pahang War (1857-63); the Selangor War (1867-73) and the Perak War (1875-6). Inadvertently, the Mandailings in the Peninsula, gained a notorious reputation as trouble makers, rebels and insurgents, a stigma inherited by the Mandailings to this day. The distribution of the Mandailing community in the west coast states of the Peninsula can be traced back to their dispersion as a result of these wars.

In the Pahang and Selangor wars, the Mandailings found themselves fighting against the proxies of the British. In Perak, the Mandailings made a strategic decision to change sides and became allies of the British and served as storm troopers and bounty hunters of the British.

They accepted British sovereignty and were rewarded with mines, lands and positions as tax-collectors. In contrast to their previous unsettled existence, they now founded settlements (*buka negeri*) and became rubber and coffee cultivators. From then on, the Mandailings were incorporated into the British civil service as administrators, policemen, foresters, etc.. They assimilated into Malayan society, going along with colonial social-engineering with regard to the

political-economic functions of the various ethnic migrant groups.

What is most striking about the Mandailing migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the fact that they were, by and large led by the *Namora Natoras*. Many of the Mandailings in Malaysia today are descended from these earlier migrants; the author being one of them.

Adapting to new conditions, the *Namora Natoras* continued but innovated upon the institution of Mandailing governance as a form of self-governance in the new land, making collective decisions through traditional modes of consultation. The Mandailing migrants continued to practice their own political systems in 19<sup>th</sup> century Peninsula, in contrast to the Malay political systems.

The Mandailings perpetuated their genealogical (*tarombo*) knowledge based on the clan system. Their social structure and customary law (*Dalian Na Tolu*) tied the new settlements symbolically, politically and by kinship to the old. This created the mother-child village complexes. Due to this strong connection, many 'Malaysian' Mandailings retain the memory of their ancestral villages in Sumatra, and are known to make cultural pilgrimage to Sumatra from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today. These visits were only interrupted by WWII, the Independence Revolution, the Communist Insurgency, the Social Revolution and *Konfrantasi*.

Before the Dutch made feudal chiefs of the *Namora-Natoras*, it was difficult to tell them and their sons from the rest of the population except on ceremonial occasions. (Lance Castles, 1972: 118)

Things begin to change when the Padris started to push into Mandailing from Minangkabau. In retaliation against the Padris, Raja Gadombang, the raja of Huta Godang went to Rao and asked the Dutch to put his realm under Dutch rule in 1832. The following year, the Dutch made Raja Gadombang the Regent of Mandailing. (Dja Endar Moeda, 1903: 66) Upon the death of Raja Gadombang in 1835, (Dja Endar Moeda, 1903: 66) the 'Jang dipertoen kota Siantar, who has shown his loyalty to the Dutch, was appointed as Regent'.(Dja Endar Moeda, 1903: 69)

The Dutch introduced the office of *Jang Dipertuan* upon their occupation of Mandailing, but it is not clear whether it existed before Padri times. The title itself is of Minang origin. It appears that the office of 'Yang di Pertuan of Lower Mandailing' was discontinued thereafter. Furthermore, 'there never seems to have been a chief with jurisdiction over a whole 'tribe'; not (sic) whole 'tribes' go to war with one another, though they did attempt to unite against non-Batak invaders'. (Lance Castels, 1975: 69)

Disenfranchised by Dutch colonial rule, Sutan Mangkurat, the brother of Raja Gadombang, rose against the Dutch in 1839 - 1840. The rebellion was put down and the leaders exiled. (Dja Endar Moeda, 1903: 69) Another rebellion broke out in Mandailing against the Dutch in 1842. (Dja Endar Moeda, 1903: 69) From 1865 to 1874, there were two uprisings in Mandailing against the Dutch led by Raja di Baringin and a group of '*malim*', respectively. (Dja Endar Moeda, 1903: 70)

A principal cause of dissatisfaction was against the Dutch Controller (Gouv. Rechtspraak) attempts to take over the administration of justice from the *namora-mora* (Inheemscherech spraak). The appropriation of the status and powers of the *namora-mora* amounted to ruling over the *namora-mora* and real colonization. Sutan Mangkurat's resistance to this usurpation eventually led to an armed insurrection.

The Dutch took away from the *Namora-Natoras* their major judicial powers (1875), departed in a few cases from the hereditary principle (after 1890), abolished their legal immunities (forum privilegiatum, about 1900), and introduced direct taxation (1908) which lowered their prestige and made them subject to financial and administrative penalties if arrears developed. (Lance Castels, 1972: 117)

The high-handedness of some colonial Dutch officials in exacting taxes on the Mandailing people and their treatment of the *namora-mora* is well documented.<sup>11</sup> Some of the *namora-mora* were imprisoned without trial or sacked for no apparent reason. (H. Muhammad Said, : 53)

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<sup>11</sup> H. Muhammad Said, *Soetan Koemala Boelan (Flora), Raja, pemimpin rakyat, Penentang kezaliman Belanda masa 1912-1932*, UI-Press, undated.

In order to check on Dutch abuses, the *namora-natoras* now reduced to provincial parish head (*kepala kuria*), formed the Kuria Association (Koeribond). Two of their leading spokesmen were Sutan Kumala Bulan (Lubis),<sup>12</sup> kepala kuria of Tamiang, and Baginda Kalidjungjung (Daulay), kepala kuria of Pintupadang. Both were frowned on in administrative circles as "politicians", and were not typical of their class. (Lance Castles, 1972: 119)

In contrast, British intervention into the states of Perak and Selangor in 19<sup>th</sup> century, saw the appointment of *Namora-Natoras* as British-appointed *penghulu*.<sup>13</sup> During and after the war, all the Perak Malay chiefs, who were inimical to British rule had been forcibly removed or pensioned off. Those who remained were co-opted, together with Mandailing in-comers like Raja Bilah and Imam Perang Jabarumun. (Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub, 1934: 7)

The *penghulu*, were in charge of a *mukim* (parish), the equivalent of a *kepala kuria*<sup>14</sup> in Mandailing. The leading *Namora-Natoras* in Perak not only enforced British laws and regulations, for example *kerah* tax or corvee labour, but helped the British put down several insurrection and disturbances of peace. (Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub, 1934: 20-22 & 32)

In the state of Pahang, changes introduced by the British met with opposition from the native chiefs. The help of the Mandailings was again enlisted to put down the *Pemberontakan Tok Bahaman* in 1891. (Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub, 1934: 23-26; Mohd. Hashim, 1980: 12)

The leading *Namora-Natoras* in Perak fared well under the British and they took pains to prove their loyalty. (Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub, 1934: 16) Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub, the last of the great leader of the Mandalings in Perak, was awarded the 'Justice of Peace' in 1920 and the 'Malayan Certificate of Honour' in 1931 for his 'kebaktian'. (Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub,

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<sup>12</sup> Soetan Koemala Bulan was born in 1888, and is the son of Patuan Dolok. His mother was Siti Aminah, who in turn was the daughter of Patuan Naga, the same *raja panusunan* of Panyabungan, who rallied the Mandailings against the Padris. (H. Muhammad Said, : 4)

<sup>13</sup> The *penghulu* or 'village-headman' was the lowest level office and the only position perpetuated by the British from the pre-colonial system of government. The *penghulu* was responsible for a '*mukim*' (parish) traditionally the area served by a single mosque but now a division of local government consisting of a chief village or township, and a number of subsidiary villages or hamlets. The crucial innovation was that the British-appointed *penghulu* was no longer answerable to traditional Malay authority but to a British district officer. (Emily Sadka, 1968: 113 & 286)

<sup>14</sup> Originally Arabic *Qariah*, (parish) introduced by Tuanku Rao.

1934: 36-7) The investiture was reported by the English press of the day. (Times of Malaya, 27 July 1931)

## THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY FROM THE AGE OF COLONIALISM TO POST-MERDEKA

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Stamford Raffles proposed a policy that the Islamic lands of Aceh and Minangkabau should be kept apart by making the Batak lands a Christian block.<sup>15</sup> Raffles was also the architect of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 that irrevocably and arbitrarily divided the cultural unity of Sumatra and the peninsula. (John Bastin, 1953: 81-5)

The Dutch authorities also maintained a 'wedge policy' - the strategy of keeping the two Islamic bulwarks of Aceh and Minangkabau separated by a belt of non-Muslims in the Bataklanden. (Lance Castles, 1972: 26)

In the pre-colonial period, the origins of the term 'Batak' as a form of self-ascription is elusive.<sup>16</sup> The Malay (Muslim) and Batak identities were once mutually exclusive, at least on the east coast of Sumatra. The Batak/Malay distinction was not racial but cultural. If a Batak converted to Islam, he ceased to be Batak and became Malay.

‘In the early decades of this century Mandailing migrants found themselves stereotyped as "Batak," which in the migrant areas meant either heathen, or Christian. In heavily Muslim East Sumatra, the association with pork consumption was a distinct disadvantage. Most Mandailing were in fact Muslim by this time. Large numbers of them simply dropped their diagnostically Batak clan names in the 1900-1930s period and blended in with Malay Muslim society in East Sumatra. They "became Malay," or "masuk Melayu" (entered Malay), as the local phrase has it’.

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<sup>15</sup> Raffles' statement was reflected upon by an indigenous Angkolan amateur historian, Mangaradja Onggang Parlindungan, 1964: 628.

<sup>16</sup> Anthropologists have by far ignored their subjects' historicity. 'The use of 'Batak' as a common label for these groups as well as Karo and Dairi has had a chequered career. Linguists and ethnologists have always found the term necessary because of the strong common elements in all these societies. At some periods, however, those who were converted to Islam, especially Mandailings, have sought to repudiate any association with the non-Muslim Tobas by rejecting the Batak label altogether. This tendency has been strongest among Mandailing migrants to the East Coast of Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia'. 'These groups' refer to Toba, Angkola, Mandailing and Simalungun. (Edward M. Brune, 1972: 221)

(Susan Rodgers, 1993: 156)

This was not the case for the west coast Mandailing. Islamic conversion entailed movement away from the Batak label, but did not mean adopting the Malay ethnic identity. The Mandailing people, originally oriented more to Sumatra's west coast than east coast, may have had an early model for maintaining their cultural identity in the Rejang, who Marsden described as Muslim but not Malay. (Rita Smith Kipp, 1993: 39, n. 18)

The continuing saga to define Mandailing identity came to the fore in a landmark court case in urban Medan.<sup>17</sup> A dispute between the Batak and the Mandailings in Sungai Mati, Medan, in 1922, over rights to be buried in a *tanah wakaf* (religious endowment land), irrespective of ethnicity accentuates this. The curator of the burial ground had refused permission to Bataks including Mandailings claiming to be Batak, to be buried there, on the ground that the deed specified that the cemetery was for Mandailings only. The dispute was *not* between Christians and Muslims, but between people of north and south Tapanuli origin.

A 'majelis Sjara'iah (Commissie van Advies)' was formed in 1923, to settle the dispute according to Islamic law. When the Governor-General intervened and 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 fight was led by the *namora-natoras* such as Mangaradja Ihoetan, Sjech Moehammad Jacob, Abdoellah Loebis and others.

The struggle for identity in the age of colonialism did not challenge colonial hegemony, but was an attempt at self-determination within the colonial order. It was however tied to urban land entitlements, in this case, that of the right of burial.

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<sup>17</sup> The affair was documented in a work aptly entitled, *Asal-Oesoelnja Bangsa Mandailing*, with a subtitle, *Berhoeboeng dengan perkara tanah Wakaf bangsa Mandailing, di Soengei Mati - Medan*, published in 1926 as a 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

When the 1930 census approached, the 'Comite Kebangsaan Mandailing' (Mandailing National Committee) in Panyabungan, petitioned, with some success, not to be listed as Mandailing-Batak in the census. The 'Mandailingers' were still listed under 'Bataks' in the census, though the term 'Mandailing-Batak' was not used. (Lance Castles, 1972: 188 & n. 42)

Compare this with British Malaya. The Mandailing were labelled 'foreign Malays' and then simply as 'Malays' in the name of 'administrative convenience'. (Arnold Wright & H.A. Cartwright, 1908: 222) In the Federated Malay States (FMS) census of 1911, 'Mendeling' was 'Malay Population by Race', like wise in the British Malaya census of 1921. By 1931, 'Mendeling' was altogether removed from the census. (Charles Hirschman, 1987: 574-5; Charles Hirschman, 1986) Although the definition of race remained uncertain, the term itself persist in the administrative and academic language to this day. But unlike in Sumatra, the *Namora-Natoras* in British Malaya did not object to the re-categorization of the Mandailings under 'Malay Population by Race', reducing their ethnicity to a sub-group of the Malays. Being Malay was perhaps more acceptable than being Batak.

In Mandailing, the institution of *Namora Natoras* was further undermined by nationalist movement in the 1920s onwards. (Lance Castles, 1972: 117) The nationalists found the *adat* and the now feudalized *Namora Natoras* increasingly irrelevant in the struggle for independence. The anti-Dutch movement was spearheaded by leaders such as Buyung Siregar, Mahindin Nasution and Abu Kasim Dalimunte, (Basyral Hamidy Harahap, 1987: 7)<sup>18</sup> The *Namora-Natoras* were not altogether indifferent to the new movement, Sutan Kumala Bulan for example, allowed the use of the *bagas godang* and *sopo godang* in Tamiang to conduct 'kursus-kursus politik' and 'kaderisasi politik' for Mandailing nationalists. He even provided protection to the nationalist, Adam Malik from the Dutch. (H. Mohammad Said, : 58).

During the Japanese Occupation, the institution of traditional governance met its demise in both Dutch East Indies and British Malaya. In Mandailing, the Japanese military abolished the

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the Sungai Mati case was to remind future generations, especially those outside the homeland, not to give up or sell out their identity.

<sup>18</sup> For an account of the 'kebangkitan nasional di Mandailing', see Jeneral A.H. Nasution, autobiographical, *Memenuhi Panggilan Tugas*.

*Namora-Natoras* in 1942. (Zainuddin Lubis, 1987: 17-8) The role and functions of the *Namora-Natoras* was never reinstated by the post-*merdeka* Indonesian republican government, who perceived traditional institution of governance as a feudalistic and a colonial legacy. In Perak, the institution of *Namora Natoras* died with the death of Raja Haji Muhammad Ya'qub during the Japanese Occupation.

The waning of the *Namora-Natoras* and the emergence of the ideology of nationalism, paved the way for a new generation of Mandailing leaders whose preoccupation was no longer their own people but the liberation of Indonesians and Malayans from colonial rule. Ironically, the Mandailing members of the nationalist movement found inspiration in the poetry of Willem Iskander, a pro-Dutch *namora*, and were said to have 'unearthed the ideas of national independence/liberation' from his work. (Basyral Hamidy Harahap, 1987: 7) So strongly connected was the nationalist movement amongst the Mandailings with the works of Willem Iskander that, in the archives of the Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst, the colonial secret police, the movement was labelled *Groep Si Roemboek-Roemboek*. (Basyral Hamidy Harahap, 1987: 7)

Kamaluddin Nasution, one of the Mandailing leaders of the nationalist movement escaped the Dutch net and fled to Perak in 1932, where he changed his name to Abdul Rahman Abdul Rahim and became a political analyst in the Malay nationalist daily, *Utusan Melayu*. (Basyral Hamidy Harahap, 1987: 7 see footnote) Another Mandailing political refugee was the journalist Halalloedin Hamzah @ Ahmad Nor Abdul Shukor, who edited '*Suara Islam Sa-Malaya*', a publication that was very much against the British proposal of a Malayan Union. (William R. Roff, 1972: 57)

Aminuddin Baki, a Malayan-born Mandailing who became the foremost educationist in the Malayan nationalist movement also hailed from Chemor. He was directly responsible for getting *Bahasa Melayu* recognized as the national language and as the medium of instruction in schools in the post-*Merdeka* Malaya. (Mohd. Tajuddin, 1987)

For the sake of nationalism, the minority Mandailing took up a larger political cause. In Malaya, it was Malay nationalism and in Indonesia, Indonesian nationalism. Traditional institutions of

governance no longer seemed relevant and were anyway undermined by political mobility determined by ideological prowess and party politics, rather than traditional status and *adat*. Nationalism was taken to its logical conclusion in the new nation-states. The concern of the post-Merdeka national leadership was to put into place a complete state hegemony, one which had no genuine sympathy for provincial ethnic and cultural identity.

In the Peninsula, the Mandailings not only identified with Malayan (and subsequently Malaysian) nationalism but were also compelled to identify with the constructed 'Malay' identity, to the extent of compromising and suppressing their own identity and culture. The process of acculturation and assimilation was assisted by a measure of colonial and post-colonial social engineering.

In order to protect their traditional way of life of the Malays, which was oriented around the rice cycle, as well as to ensure steady food production for a growing population, the British administration enclosed the rice-producing lands in Malay reservations. Non-Malays could not obtain grants or buy land in the reservation. 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". (Malay Reservation Enactment, 1933)<sup>19</sup> This definition entitled immigrant from the Dutch East Indies to own land in Malay reservations.

Once the Mandailing in Malaya found themselves redefined as Malays by the colonial authorities, it was only a matter of time before their political-economic functions were prescribed accordingly. Finding themselves in a common predicament, they closed ranks with other 'Malays', during the course of the nationalist movement, the Japanese Occupation, during the 'Emergency' period and the post-Merdeka scenario of communal politics. Subject to the same state conditioning, the identification of latter-day Malaysian Mandailings with Malays is almost complete in the Peninsula.

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<sup>19</sup> This definition of Malay was enshrined in the Federal Constitution upon independence.

With the loss of identity, the Malaysian Mandailings neglected their language and culture and also lost connection with their Indonesian counterparts. The creation of Indonesia ensued by social upheaval and the Indonesian *Konfrantasi* against the formation of Malaysia further distanced the Mandailings from their homeland.

The Mandailings in Malaya played a key role in the 1969 racial riots between the 'Malays' and the 'Chinese', which was to change the course of Malaysian political economy. (Anthony Reid, 1969: 258-278) Datuk Harun Idris blamed by some writers as directly responsible for the riots were in fact not Malay but Malay of Mandailing descent. After the riot, the national ideology of *Rukun Negara* was proclaimed and the New Economic Policy (NEP) was formulated to address the economic imbalances between the major ethnic groups. (Just Faaland, J.R. Parkinson and Rais Saniman, 1990: 23-5)

'For 60 years (from 1922 to 1985) the Mandailing nation has been buried, two generations have passed, until our children no longer know that we are Mandailing'. (Mangaraja Lelo Lubis, : 262) Mangaraja Lelo Lubis, one of the first to document the Mandailing *adat* during the post-*Merdeka* period, was saddened by the fact that 'many sons and daughters of Mandailing claim to be Batak-Mandailing, Batak Islam and Southern Batak.' (Mangaraja Lelo Lubis, : 262) He called the Mandailings to 'raise the Mandailing nation from the depths, and to establish it again by forming an association of Mandailing people'. (Mangaraja Lelo Lubis, : 262-3) Attempts were then made to set up Yayasan Parluhutan Mandailing in 1984. Two years, later the Himpunan Keluarga Besar Mandailing (HIKMA) (Mangaraja Lelo Lubis, : 263) and Yayasan Pengkajian Budaya Mandailing (Yapebuma) were established in the same year in Medan.

In terms of forming Mandailing-based organizations, the Malaysian Mandailings beat their Indonesian counterparts with the setting up of Ikatan Kebajikan Mandailing Malaysia (IMAN) in 1979. (Basyral Hamidy Harahap & Hotman M. Siahaan, 1987: 193) IMAN admits persons who claims to be Mandailing and who can name as Mandailing one or both parents. (Undang-Undang Tubuh, Ikatan Kebajikan Mandailing Malaysia: 1) However, as many Angkolans in Malaysia see themselves as Mandailing, the IMAN membership includes many Angkolans as well as Mandailings. IMAN succeeded in registering 1,500 members by 1982. It was estimated at the

time that there were 30,000 Angkolan and Mandailings in Malaysia. (Basyral Hamidy Harahap & Hotman M. Siahaan, 1987: 193)

The IMAN constitution states that the organization's objectives are to conduct research, studies, preservation, as well as the advancement and promotion of the Mandailing ethnic language, culture and arts 'with the purpose of enriching the culture and arts of the Malays from many descents'. (Undang-Undang Tubuh, Ikatan Kebajikan Mandailing Malaysia: 2) Implicit in this declaration is IMAN's acceptance of the label 'Malay-Mandailing'.

In 2000, the Malaysian National Archives and IMAN organized the *Majlis Pengkisahan Sejarah Masyarakat Mandailing di Malaysia*.<sup>20</sup> In conjunction with this, the two organizations released a book entitled, *Mengenal Kaum Angkola-Mandailing* by Basyral Hamidy Harahap.<sup>21</sup> The book outrage the Malaysian Mandailing community. The two organizations were accused of being of being 'Buta sejarah Mandailing' and scorned for allowing the Mandailings to be called Batak. (Berita Harian, August 24, 2000)

As a result a splinter group calling itself LAMA (Lembaga Adat Mandailing Malaysia), was formed. A competitor to IMAN, this group were quick to criticize IMAN for embracing the Batak label, but is silent about Malay-Mandailing identity.

Throughout the history of IMAN, the inconsistencies between Mandailing, Melayu and Batak labels have never been resolved. Therefore, IMAN has used the terms Mandailing, or Mandailing-Angkola, Mandailing-Batak and Mandailing-Melayu at various times, without questioning the ontological differences between the terms.

## THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY

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<sup>20</sup> The oral history session was held jointly by IMAN and the National Archives on 13 May 2000, Kuala Lumpur. The author in a phone conversation with the editor had advice against its publication for obvious reasons. In the Malaysian edition the name of the second author of the original Indonesian version was edited out.

<sup>21</sup> The book is based on *Orientasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Batak, Suatu Pendekatan Terhadap Perilaku Batak Toba dan Angkola Mandailing* by Basyral Hamidy Harahap & Hotman M. Siahaan, first published by Sanggar Willem Iskander, Jakarta, 1987.

In 1992, the people's representative assembly (DPR) of North Sumatra incorporated Mandailing and Natal into a new district (kabupaten) called MADINA (short for Mandailing-Natal). In 1995, the Home Ministry announced that its priority in the province of North Sumatra was the formation of this kabupaten in view of its population, economic potential, geographical size and maintenance of peace in the context of regional autonomy. (Basyral Hamidy Harahap & H. Pandapotan Nasution, 1997: 12)

In response to this, a *Lembaga Adat Budaya* for the district of MADINA was formed in Panyabungan in 2000. The council is made up of customary leaders (*tokoh adat*), with the avowed objectives of fostering and supporting the organisation and social unity. They also aimed to preserve traditional culture, to create a just and prosperous society, to promote community participation and development through the traditional culture of Mandailing Natal, as well as to give constructive ideas to the Bupati.

Despite its powers and functions being circumspect in the governance of Mandailing society, the *Namora-Natoras* continue to exercise observance of the *adat* to this day. However the *adat* has been reduced to ceremonial aspects of weddings, funeral and other rites of passage. The historical evolution of Mandailing society has structurally diminished the power base of the traditional leadership. (Zainuddin Lubis, 1987: 18-9) One of the consequences is that ancestral land (*tanah pusaka*) is now easily sold.

Secession is the language of nationalists, whereas globalization can bring about a convergence of values with an emphasis more on interrelationships and less on autonomy. With the current revival of Mandailing cultural identity in West Malaysia, the cultural ties that were interrupted by the trauma of independence and nation-building are being re-established.

The revival of the Mandailing ceremonial drums, the *Gordang Sambilan*, has been symbolically important for the revival of Mandailing identity on both sides of the Straits. The *Gordang Sambilan* was revived in Mandailing by the present day *Namora-Natoras*. The *Gordang Sambilan* festival is now held annually, in the form of a inter-village competition. In Malaysia, IMAN has been successful in promoting the *Gordang Sambilan*, and getting it recognized as the

official musical ensemble in the state of Selangor.

(<http://www.selangor.gov.my/muzium/MuBlaiBudayaE.htm>) It is performed at the Selangor Arts Festival under the Malaynized name '*Gendang Sembilan*'. (<http://www.tourism-malaysia.ca/colormalaysia/Selangor.htm>)

Globalization brings with it a certain degree of secularization, increased consumerism, growing lack of respect for nature, democratization of the media and a general weakening of 'traditional' values. In Indonesia and Malaysia alike, some obvious elements of global culture are couched as Indonesian or Malaysian culture. In response to these, Mandailing activists are seeking to revitalize their endangered cultural heritage and contribute to endangered human diversity.

Some of the very qualities that were suppressed, sacrificed, ignored or forgotten during the age of nationalism and Islamization, will contribute to the survival and success of the Mandailings in the age of globalization. Ties between Malaysian and Indonesian Mandailings broken by colonialism, nationalism and regionalism is being mended.

The urgent issues in Mandailing are environmental, in particular, illegal logging, forest burning and water management. The struggle for identity is critical to the struggle for regional and local autonomy since identity implies political representation and economic entitlements which are key to self-determination. In order for indigenous peoples to recover control over their own habitats, traditional governance has to be integrated with existing political structures.

Mandailings can be empowered through a process of recovering their tradition of consultative governance, and learning to engage with the newly constituted *Pemda* (district authority) in promoting participatory planning and decision-making. Ultimately, the strengthening of the Mandailing people as a stakeholder in national and regional development will allow them to better realize their options in the face of globalization.

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