

# Landscapes and Conversions during the Padri Wars in Sumatra (1803-1840)

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\*This paper is an abbreviated version of a chapter in my dissertation tentatively titled ‘Sacral Ecologies of the North Sumatran Highlands, 1800 to 1928.’ The larger dissertation project uses family histories to examine how the intertwining processes of imperialist warfare, religious conversion and migration transformed the ecology in the highland territories of the Batak peoples across four generations. Here, I lay out the key findings in the chapter, while omitting much of the literature review.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"...the entire people of the Batak, had shortly before that time been converted to the true faith by the Padris and new converts usually show a lot of fanaticism..."*<sup>1</sup>

The fanatical convert is a convenient trope in both historical and fictional literature. When violence accompanies the actions of a convert, fanaticism becomes an explanation by and of itself. Douwes Dekker's semi-autobiographical account of his time as civil servant in the Dutch East Indies captures the glibness of this reasoning when his alter ego Havelaar explains away, in this one sentence, an attempted uprising by Batak Mandailing leaders against the Dutch from 1838 to 1840 as a product of inherent Muslim fanaticism against Christians.<sup>2</sup> If we eschew such easy characterizations, however, what is the relationship between conversion and violence? And given that the option of fleeing acts a hedged alternative against coerced conversions, what do migration patterns during this period indicate about the agency of converts? This chapter probes into these questions about the interlocking processes of conversion, migration and violence. The argument here is three-fold. First, I argue against a reductionist characterization of the Muslim revivalism in early nineteenth century Sumatra as peripheral neo-Wahabbi movement that was scripted on intellectual reform of Islam emanating from

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<sup>1</sup> Multatuli, Alphonso Nahuys (trans.) *Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of a Dutch Trading Company*. New York: Penguin (1987) p. 164. The semi-autobiographical novel was first published in 1863.

<sup>2</sup> *Max Havelaar* is better known for its trenchant criticism of colonialism in Java but it was in Sumatra that Havelaar in the novel and Douwes Dekker in real life first clashed with his superiors over their tolerance of elite native corruption. For his account of his time in Mandailing, South Tapanuli, see pp. 163-204.

Mecca. Second, I propose that violence is a blunt instrument for converting peoples which might impel nominal and temporary allegiance but ultimately unleashes unpredictable waves of aggression on the part of convert collaborators who have the agency to switch back and forth in their loyalty. I show instead that the key to the relationship between conversions and violence lies in understanding the changes to the landscape striated by fights and flights and how this impacted the sacred ecologies of the population.

This failed uprising in Mandailing occurred as a last violent spasm in a period of civil strife in West Sumatra and adjoining Batak Tapanuli that is popularly known the Padri Wars, spanning almost 40 years. In many paradigmatic accounts, the conflict started when three *Hajjis* (pilgrims from Mecca) returned to West Sumatra inspired by the Wahabbi movement in the Hijaz to force social change in their home region. Clashes ensued between traditional (*adat*) chiefs resisting the changes propagated by their more fanatical Padri co-religionists bent on imposing a neo-Wahabbi state. At the same time, in search of slaves and territory, the Padris had poured out of their strongholds in Bonjol, Rao and Daludalu to invade and capture first the South Tapanuli regions of Angkola and Mandailing before moving north towards Toba Batak territory. The chaos forced Dutch intervention to pacify the region.<sup>3</sup> The Padri incursions, epidemics and subsequent Dutch intervention decimated the population of Tapanuli and split it into two: a largely independent animist North and a Muslim South under Dutch control. Histories of the conflict from both within and outside Indonesia have largely marginalized

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<sup>3</sup> Early Dutch accounts that characterize the conflict as religion against tradition include H.A Steijn Parve. 1854. “De Secte Der Padaries (Padries) in De Bovenlanden Van Sumatra. [The Padri Sect in the highlands of Sumatra]. *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. 2:3, 249-78; H.J.L.L Ridder de Stuers. 1849-8150. *De Vestiging en Uitbreiding Der Nederlanders Ter Westkust van Sumatra*. [The establishment and spread of the Dutch on the west coast of Sumatra]. Ed. P.J Veth. Amsterdam: P.N van Kampen and H. v. D. 1836. “Oorsprong Der Padaris (Een Secte Op de Westkust van Sumatra)” [Origins of the Padris (A sect in the West coast of Sumatra)]. *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indie* 1 (1): 113-32. As these early accounts are also important primary sources for the period, later scholarship in English and Indonesian such as Radjab (1964), Dobbin (1983), Hadler (2008) and Harahap (2009) also used them extensively, though they engaged more critically with this view.

the Batak front and relegated the Bataks to the position of unfortunate collateral damage of an aggressive Padri movement that had spilled over into their homeland.

To recover the absent Batak perspective, one must pay attention to their own stories about the conflict; their recurring themes, distortions and embellishments. In this chapter I show that these stories are significant in revealing how the Padri Wars represent the first stage of the transformation of the stateless, isolated and inaccessible Batak highlands into a node in global religious and economic networks. Such a transformation was only made possible by the conversion of not just of the people, but their environment. There was a dynamic interplay between changing landscapes and changing faiths, with early converts as power brokers needed to maintain the tenuous grip of the Padris in the parts of Tapanuli that they had controlled. Conversion was a rational, instrumental decision to find a new footing in a context of an unstable environment and shaken inner faith. The Padri Wars was not simply or even primarily, the first Southeast Asian *jihad*. Looked at from the perspective of the Bataks, the conflict was the first stage in an inevitable flattening of the maritime Southeast Asian highlands; a process that involves but ultimately transcends the globalization of the Muslim world.

## **ISLAM IN TWO ECOLOGIES**

In order to understand why religious reform spilling from long peaceful neighbor, Minangkabau, so badly devastated the Batak Highlands of remote Tapanuli, it is first necessary to examine the global peregrination of Islamic ideas in the long 19th century. Ideas for a movement to reform Islam seeped into West Sumatra by way of the coast, much as the religion itself did two centuries earlier. Sumatra had largely been Muslim since the end of the 16th century, making waves in coastal trading settlements and gradually sweeping inland where traders as well as Sufi itinerant teachers helped to bring the religion to centers of political power. Minangkabau, in West Sumatra was one such highland inland region. The Sufi Shattariyah, Qadiriya and Naqsyabandiya *tarekats* (school) were instrumental in this conversion and Islam became closely backed by Minangkabau royal court in

Pagarryung as it was in other centers of royal authority in Sumatra.<sup>4</sup> Religious and political authority intertwined symbiotically in these courts without necessarily seeking to exert that power over the moral lives of their subjects. Pagarryung itself did not maintain a military or economic presence in much of the territories that it nominally ruled; instead its authority was based on reputed prestige, exercised through authoritative correspondence.<sup>5</sup> *Adat* (tradition/custom), manifested in West Sumatra in the form of matrilineal inheritance as well as separation of religious and village customary chiefs, jostled with religion in shaping the daily lives of villagers without undue friction.

It was not in the highlands but in a coastal *surau* (religious school) of Ulakan that Tuanku nan Tuo, who was to become one of the progenitors of the Padri movement, studied and developed his ideas for Islamic reform. Tuanku nan Tuo was born in 1723 in the Minangkabau region of Ampat Angkat, twenty years after the birth of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the remote desert region of Nejd in central Arabia. Both these men were to become instrumental in bringing about an Islamic reform movement in their respective homelands, which were so idiomatically similar that a British East India Company official travelling through the West Sumatran Highlands immediately remarked on the resemblance of the "Padries" to "the Wahabees of the desert."<sup>6</sup> This characterization has stuck in subsequent analyses of the conflict by Dutch, British and most postcolonial scholars.<sup>7</sup> However,

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<sup>4</sup> C. Snouck Hurgronje (1924). "Een en ander over het inlandsch onderwijs in de Padangsche Bovenlanden" in Hurgronje, *Verspreide Geschriften*, Bonn and Leipzig, 43-4. There is also much recent literature about Sufism in the Minangkabau region. See among others, Laffan (2011) *The Making of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*. N.J.: Princeton University Press ; Suryadi (2001). "Shaikh Daud of Sunur: Conflict between Reformists and the Shattariyah Sufi Order in Rantau Pariaman in the first half of the nineteenth century." *Studia Islamika*, 8:3, 59-94 and Martin van Bruinessen, "Controversies and Polemics involving the Sufi Orders in Twentieth Century Indonesia" in F. de Jong and B. Radke (1999) *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Polemics and Controversies*. Leiden: Brill, 705-28.

<sup>5</sup> For more about the fabled prestige of the Minangkabau in the Malay World, see Jane Drakard (1999) *A Kingdom of Words: Language and Power in Sumatra*, New York: Oxford University Press and Leonard Andaya, (2008) *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Malacca*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 82-108. An example of Minangkabau's indirect rule was indicated by the way in which it mediated in conflict. When Malay chiefs in Negri Sembilan in the Malay archipelago could not agree on a leader, they appealed to Pagarryung for aid, and all these chiefs agreed to submit to the authority of a prince of Minangkabau sent from Sumatra, bestowing on him the title of "Yam di Pertuan" (High Chief).

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Raffles to Marsden in Thomas S. Raffles (1830). *Memoir of the Life and Public Service of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles F.R.S & Co.* London: John Murray, p. 429-30.

<sup>7</sup> For such Dutch accounts, see for example H.J.L.L. Ridder de Stuers. 1849-1850. *De Vestiging en Uitbreiding Der Nederlanders Ter Westkust van Sumatra*. [The establishment and spread of the Dutch on the west coast of Sumatra]. Ed. P.J. Veth.

was the Padri movement in Sumatra truly a neo-Wahabbi one? To follow the vexed and complicated trail of ideas from the center to periphery of the Muslim world, it is instructive to compare these two progenitors of reform: Muhammad Ibn Abd Wahhab and Tuanku nan Tuo, their environments and their ideas.

Muhammad Ibn Abd Wahhab came from the Arab clan of Banu Tamim, born to a family of religious teachers who were settled in a remote area that was generally bypassed by rich pilgrim caravans and thus, arid in terms of climate, riches and religious scholastic learning.<sup>8</sup> Society in this desert was organized around tribal identity although nominally under the control of emirs in the city of Mecca, appointed by the Ottoman Empire. His father and grandfather were trained in institutions in Cairo and Damascus but returned to teach in Najd. Ibn Abd Wahhab followed suit, moving from Najd to Medina to study before returning to attract followers through his reformist ideas.<sup>9</sup> He was particularly interested in the study of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and initially followed the Hanbali school of jurisprudence although he grew to increasingly utilize *ijtihad* (informed individual analysis) heavily in his interpretation of Islamic law.<sup>10</sup> His interpretation places emphasis on eliminating practices such as grave worship that, to him, denigrates the unity of God's power. This hardline stance and ensuing actions in curbing these customary practices led to friction with tribes in his home region. Ibn Abd Wahhab was invited to preach but later expelled from the village of Uyayna and after three subsequent expulsions, he settled into the neighbouring village of Dir'iyah in 1744 from which he propagated his ideas.<sup>11</sup> That he was able to do so was due to a pact that Ibn Abd Wahhab made with

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Amsterdam: P.N van Kampen. Verkerk Pistorius (1871) disagreed with this label and called the movement instead a Hanafi-inspired one. Dobbins (1983) and Hadler (2008) who, between them provide the best window into this conflict in modern scholarship largely accept the neo-Wahabbi label while Laffan (2014) contests it.

<sup>8</sup> D. Commins (2009). *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B Tauris, 3-7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>10</sup> About the use of *ijtihad* in Ibn Abd Wahhab's interpretation and his initial Hanbali roots, see John Voll (1975). "Muhammad Hayya al-Sindi and Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab," *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, 38, pp. 32-39.

<sup>11</sup> Commins (2009). *The Wahhabi Mission*. 26.

the emir of Dir'iyah, Muhammad ibn As-Saud, who sheltered the reformist on two conditions: a promise of Ibn Abd Wahhab's political support and his sanction of taxation on harvests.<sup>12</sup> The tax on harvests was an unpopular new idea in a region that had been lightly taxed by Ottomans who instead, infused grain payments for services that desert nomads rendered to pilgrims.<sup>13</sup> Rather than acceding to the second condition, Ibn Abd Wahhab responded with the suggestion that God would compensate Ibn As-Saud with war treasure and other taxes that will bring in much more than the proposed harvest tax.<sup>14</sup> With this counter-proposal, Ibn Abd Wahhab at a stroke defined his partnership with Ibn As-Saud as compact between the religious and the profane where a commitment to righteousness was merged with a commitment to expansionist economics.

Over in West Sumatra, we find remarkable parallels between the experience of Ibn Abd Wahhab and early Minangkabau reformist Tuanku nan Tuo. The fertile valleys and plateaus of the Minangkabau highlands could not be more environmentally different than the deserts of Central Arabia but the position of Tuanku nan Tuo with respect to the Muslim centers of learning socially resonated with that of Ibn Abd Wahhab. Although climates of the two regions clearly differed, their social ecologies were structurally similar. Like the latter, Tuanku nan Tuo was situated in region with few *ulama* (men learned in religion) and where certain lineages specialized in maintaining and transmitting scholastic tradition. While Arabia emphasized family or tribal lineage, Minangkabau fashioned a system of scholastic lineage through *suraus*, a pre-Islamic institution of houses where young Minangkabau men lived and trained in customary lore as well as religion. Sufi *tarekats* clustered around these *suraus* and thus blended in seamlessly into village life, providing little pockets of religious authority simultaneously embedded in local villages and in a chain of learning that stretched back to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>13</sup> See W. Ochsenwald (1984). *Religion, Society and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz Under Ottoman Control, 1840-1908*. Columbus: Ohio University Press, 30-34 for Ottoman relationship with various Arab tribes.

<sup>14</sup> Commins, *The Wahabbi Mission*, 19.

the Arab world. Also, like Ibn Abd Wahhab, Tuanku nan Tuo's particular interest was in the area of *fiqh* although the *surau* that he eventually set up gathered local scholars interested in other branches of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Tuanku nan Tuo was a merchant, actively involved in a burgeoning trade in coffee and coffee that connected the Minangkabau highlands to port city Padang on the West Sumatra coast and Siak in the southeast.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, his initial attempts at reform appeared to be motivated from these mercantile interests when he observed that banditry threatened the safety of trade routes to the coast. His *surau* included lessons in pugilistic skills on top of religious instruction and from the 1790s, his preaching against highway robbery was coupled with active policing and rescue of waylaid merchants.<sup>17</sup>

This stricter enforcement of Islamic law served to protect economic interests and sanctioned it with divine righteousness in a way that the royal court in Pagarruyung, at this point weakened by loss of revenue from dwindling gold mines, could not. Thus we see in Minangkabau a familiar merger of religious and economic interests in enforcing Islamic law in lieu of traditional, local laws. For both Ibn Abd Wahhab and Tuanku nan Tuo, there existed a similar interest in reforming *fiqh* as a means of transforming society for the better. The thinking that proper worship would lead to proper conduct and consequently a stronger society also translated into keen interest in regulating individual behavior. From preaching against idolatry, Wahhabi adherents extended their criticism towards Muslims who did not observe regular prayers or the alcohol prohibition while Tuanku nan Tuo's followers expanded their active protest to include social vices in the village such as drinking, cockfighting and gambling.<sup>18</sup>

We thus find similar social ecologies between Minangkabau and Nejd: Tuanku nan Tuo was similarly positioned to Ibn Abd Wahhab as a local religious preacher in a highly decentralized state,

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<sup>15</sup> Kratz and Amir (2002). *Surat Keterangan Syekh Jalaluddin*. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism*, 125.

<sup>17</sup> Dobbin (1983) *Islamic Revivalism*, 127.

<sup>18</sup> Fakih Saghir for Tuanku nan Tuo and Commins, p. 12-14 about Wahhabi behavior in Mecca. Find source other than Commins for Wahhabi.

marked by geographical inaccessibility. Such a position enabled both men to move from village to village to find new allies, when expelled by dissatisfied villagers who found their ideas repellent. Followers and students of Tuanku nan Tuo - some of whom we would track more closely in subsequent sections of this chapter - repeatedly found themselves having to shift from place to place before finding a home base with a strong customary (*adat*) political leader as ally. Again, this echoed the experience of Ibn Abd Wahhab, pointing us to a possible reason why reformist ideas were able to spread widely in Minangkabau, but not in other peripheries of the Muslim world. Minangkabau was one of the few places in Muslim world with such anarchy of political authority.

While the reformist movements of Ibn Abd Wahhab and Tuanku nan Tuo seemed to have developed in parallel under similar social ecologies, the turn of the 19th century *did* find these two movements converging towards violence. The historiography on the Padri Wars often cited 1803 as a starting point for the conflict, linking aggressive violence to the return of three pilgrims and students of Tuanku nan Tuo – Hadji Miskin, Hadji Piobang and Hadji Sumanik – from the *Hajj* in Mecca.<sup>19</sup> This was also the year when Muhammad Ibn As-Saud, ally of the now-dead Ibn Abd Wahhab captured the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina leaving a trail of death and destruction from Karbala – where the Imam Husayn shrine was desecrated and at least 5000 people were killed – to Taif, at the outskirts of the city of Mecca where a massacre left almost 3000 people dead, including women and children.<sup>20</sup> The violence disrupted not only Ottoman trade caravans but also pilgrim caravans on their way to perform their devotions. Pilgrims would not have witnessed the massacres first-hand but the news certainly would have reached them. With the As-Saud's men in charge of Mecca, exhorting and forcing

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<sup>19</sup> The 1803 start date for the conflict given by Radjab (1964), Cuisinier (1959) marks of the importance of the return of the three Hajjis. Dobbin (1983) started her analysis of the period of revivalism at 1784 but also noted 1803 as a turning point for violence as did Hadler (2008).

<sup>20</sup> Bowen, Wayne H. (2008) *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Greenwood Press, p. 153. The script of violence in the early nineteenth century in Mecca could also be seen through Haj accounts from Malay sources about the pilgrimage. For example, Raja Ali Haji from Riau wrote of violence between the Syarif in Mecca, driving back Bedouin nomads in the Haj season of 1828. See Henri Chambert-Loir ed. (2013). *Naik Haji di Zaman Silam 1482-1964*. Jakarta: Gramedia, 246

Muslims to observe regular prayer and proper conduct in accordance to Wahhabbi doctrine, pilgrims would also have observed at first-hand the connection between coerced compulsion and religion.<sup>21</sup> It was perhaps this apparent divine sanction of violence that impressed these pilgrims from Minangkabau who allied with other students of Tuanku nan Tuo upon their return and began an increasingly aggressive campaign against the social ills that their teacher had preached against. Chief among these students was Tuanku nan Renceh who demonstrated his fierce conviction in change through violence not only by burning cockfighting dens but also summarily executing his aunt for flagrantly using tobacco.<sup>22</sup> Tuanku nan Renceh also initiated the import the style of Arab dress – white flowing robes and a turban – that later became a characteristic feature of Padri, called “kaum putih” (the white ones). Women, possibly coerced, also dressed in Arabic style white or blue, “concealing their heads under a kind of hood, through which an opening is made sufficient to expose their eyes and nose alone.”<sup>23</sup> This left an indelible impression of Wahabbi influence in the minds of European observers.<sup>24</sup> The two previously independent movements thus intersected on points of violence at both the center and periphery of the Muslim world.

Once the violence was unleashed, Tuanku nan Renceh and other similarly aggressive reformists of the Padri movement also appeared to gravitate towards the *takfiri* aspect of Wahabbi ideas. To disagree is to defy implies that to reform is to convert. This insider-outsider demarcation subsequently facilitated the marginalization of non-violent reformists. This could be seen through the experience of Tuanku nan Tuo. At first approving of his students’ efforts, he subsequently turned against them and denounced their violent behavior on the grounds that it contravenes Islamic tenets.

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<sup>21</sup> H. Alger (2002). *Wahabbism: A Critical Essay*. Onconta N.Y: Islamic Publications International, 20 and Commins (2006) *Wahabbi Mission*, 31

<sup>22</sup> H.A Steijn Parve. 1854. “De Secte Der Padaries (Padries) in De Bovenlanden Van Sumatra. *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. 2:3, 271-72.

<sup>23</sup> Raffles (1830), *Memoir*, 404.

<sup>24</sup> Stein Parve (1854) described these robes as did Raffles (1830) and de Stuers (1849).

“There are good aspects to the Padri, they established regular prayers, gave alms, fasted during Ramadan and performed the hajj if they could afford to, repaired mosques and bathing places, wore modest clothes and commanded people to pursue knowledge and commerce. And there are wicked aspects to the Padri who committed arson, murdered without just cause the brave people who opposed them, killed intellectuals and called them traitors, pillaged and looted, took women without their consent, captured people and sold them to slavery and made concubines from the captives, insulted the elders, nobility and called the faithful infidels.”<sup>25</sup>

Tuanku nan Tuo’s condemnation of these actions did not change the conduct of Tuanku nan Renceh and other like-minded erstwhile students. Just as radical revolution often turned against its own, Tuanku nan Tuo’s students turned against him and dubbed him as “Raja Kafir” (king of the infidels).<sup>26</sup> Rational dialogue did little to stem this tide of criticism. At one point, a truce was declared and Tuanku nan Tuo agreed to a public debate with a Naqsyabandiya scholar from Talawi invited by Tuanku nan Renceh, who had hoped that the latter would trounce and denounce his former teacher. This strategy backfired when that scholar ended up agreeing with Tuanku nan Tuo’s moderate stance that reform should not entail violent coercion.<sup>27</sup> The failed debate neither changed Tuanku nan Renceh’s mind nor curbed the coercive enthusiasm of the reformist-minded who heard it. At the village square in Koto Tuo where this argument was waged, a young man called Peto Syarif among the audience and it was he who unleashed the most devastatingly violent campaigns of all – towards the pagan Bataks in the north.

## CONVERTING LANDSCAPES

Peto Syarif was born Muhammad Sahab in Pasaman at the northern outskirts of Minangkabau in 1772. Having studied with Tuanku nan Renceh, this young Padri leader combined a military acumen with sincere but gradually coercive piety. Initially allied with an adat chief Datuk Bandaro in Alahan Panjang, he was forced to resettle at the foot of Mount Tajadi with his followers after hostile

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<sup>25</sup> Kratz and Amir (2002). *Surat Keterangan*, 49. Note that Tuanku nan Tuo also went on to condemn the vices of the people who opposed the Padris including gambling, drinking, fornication etc. effectively declaring that he was on neither side.

<sup>26</sup> Kratz and Amir (2002) *Surat Keterangan*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Dobbin (1983), *Islamic Revivalism*, 135. This episode is also in Kratz and Amir (2002) *Surat Keterangan*.

confrontations with villagers opposed to his moral reforms. This settlement was named Bonjol (lit. “stumbling block”) and the name proved prescient. Peto Syarif, later widely known as Tuanku Imam Bonjol, became the most iconic leader of the Padri movement, his white robed and bearded figure embodying Islamic resistance against the Dutch.

It is perhaps, not coincidental, that when Tuanku Imam Bonjol looked to expand his movement beyond Minangkabau, it reached out towards another region that had an anarchy of political authority reminiscent of pre-Padri Minangkabau. While Tapanuli was later to become categorized by the Dutch as the land of the Bataks, the area had never coalesced around any state structure or statesman. Even Si Singamangaradja, a putative “priest-king” in Batak society wielded very little overt power among his constituents in North Tapanuli and had almost no influence in South Tapanuli, making him somewhat comparable to his militarily weak counterpart in Pagarruyung.<sup>28</sup> Already subdivided by the ridges of the Bukit Barisan mountain range, the main Batak linguistic groups – Karo, Toba, Simalungun, Dairi, Angkola and Mandailing – were further split by clan groupings, family lineages and attendant village affiliations. Loosely tying these micro-societies together were a web of affine ties created through marriage and obligations of *anak boru* (wife giving) and *anak tulang* (wife taking) clans.<sup>29</sup> The Tapanuli highlands sheltering the Bataks were thus essentially stateless.

If politically fragmented Tapanuli provided an ideal condition for aggressive external incursions to succeed, the forbidding landscape mitigated this vulnerability. Tapanuli covered much of the northern portion of Bukit Barisan, the mountain range that was the north-south spine of Sumatra. Sandwiched between Aceh in the north and Minangkabau in the south, Tapanuli finds itself relatively protected as the overland route to reach it from East-West direction involved arduous trekking over mountainous passes that were at times so narrow that it could only accommodate two

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<sup>28</sup> Some scholars don't even think Si Singamangaradja is a king at all and instead is a person of unusually strong *tondi* (personal charisma or power). See Leonard Y. Andaya (2008) *Leaves of the Same Tree*, 82-92.

<sup>29</sup> The history and organization of Batak society will be covered in Chapter 1.

men. Furthermore, the western coast was exposed to the annual monsoon and offered no shelter from the elements except at Tapanuli Bay and Air Bangis. Even within Tapanuli itself, there is a natural barrier between North Tapanuli with dense settlements around Lake Toba and South Tapanuli dominated by cattle herders and rice cultivators of Angkola and Mandailing. One could follow the Tapanuli river from Sibolga near the Tapanuli Bay in a northeasterly direction towards Silindung Valley or travel parallel to the longitudinal troughs running south-east to north-west through Rao. Both were arduous treks which took fit young men approximately twenty-three hours in 1824 but travelling in a north-south direction is comparatively easier than travelling from the west or east coasts.<sup>30</sup>

Any hypothetical invasion of Tapanuli from her neighbors would involve transporting heavy equipment and large numbers of men, a task that would consume a great deal of energy, leaving little for battle. European travelers in the region reported that it took native male porters a day to cover thirty kilometers with a 25-30 kg burden strapped to their back.<sup>31</sup> With 225 kilometers separating Bonjol and Padang Sidempuan, a central village in Mandailing, this indicated an approximately eight-day march over hostile terrain and at least another equivalent amount of time to reach Toba. One *pikul* (sixty two kilograms) of goods also needed ten men or one packhorse to transport.<sup>32</sup> This weight limit effectively prohibited the use of heavier cannons to provide superior firepower to subdue the Bataks.

The mountain range also protected Tapanuli when approached from the east and the west. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans generally stayed at the coast, clustering in the towns of Padang, and to a lesser extent, Barus, two important points in a stretch of pepper ports running south to north on the West Sumatran coast. Bukit Barisan asymmetrically divided the two halves of the island. Short

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<sup>30</sup> Burton and Ward (1827) "Report of a Journey into the Batak Country, in the interior of Sumatra, in the year 1824" *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*. London.

<sup>31</sup> Van Hasselt, 1882, *Volksbeschrijving*, p.362; Raffles 1830, *Memoir*, p. 367.

<sup>32</sup> Freek Columbijn, "A Moving History of Middle Sumatra, 1600- 1870" *Modern Asian Studies*, 39:1, p. 11

rivers churn down the steep slopes on the west side from the watershed to the Indian Ocean. Ascent from Padang to Minangkabau highlands took at least two weeks on foot, where crossing these treacherous rivers alternated with hiking steeply uphill, punctuated by stops at villages to obtain permission from local chieftains to pass through.<sup>33</sup> The eastern side provides relatively easier access; a mere uphill walk along a choice of wide flowing rivers that connect the mountains to the Straits of Malacca: the Rokan, the Siak, the Kampar and the Indragiri. Thorny shrubs, muddy paths replete with leeches and potholes made by elephants who liked to tread in the footsteps of man might make the journey uncomfortable but the incline was certainly gentler and less forbidding. The rivers on both the east and the west allow trade goods to be transported down to the coast as the currents did most of the work once the Bataks made the trek from the village to river. However, equipment, men and supplies could not flow up in the opposite direction, preventing hostile forces from accessing their heartland.

There appeared to be little incentive for the Bataks to encourage a higher traffic in trade by establishing roads that bridged distant territories. Instead, Tapanuli markets were run as shifting trading posts on periodic four day cycles, each a short link to another local point. Marsden (1783) described them thus:

“For the convenience of carrying on the inland-trade, there are established at the back of Tappanulli (sic), which is their great mart, four stages, at which successively they hold public fairs or markets on every fourth day throughout the year, each fair, of course, lasting one day. The people in the district of the fourth stage assemble with their goods at the appointed place, to which those of the third report in order to purchase them. The people of the third, in like manner, supply the wants of the second, and the second of the first, who dispose, on the day the market is held, of the merchandise for which they have trafficked with the Europeans and the Malays.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Raffles (1830), *Memoir*, 431-433. Raffles also intended to reach Toba but never managed that, another indication of the difficulties of the journey.

<sup>34</sup> William Marsden (1783) *The History of Sumatra*. London: Thomas Payne & Son. 379-80.

This description suggests that trade did not furrow indelible grooves in the mountainous landscape, rather, there was a lack of permanence in the Batak's market networks. This market relay prevented an uneven concentration of power, energy and resources at focal points in their territory, complementing the dispersal of political authority.

The Batak tendency to diffuse rather than aggregate power is, to some extent, sacralized. A leader usually becomes anointed *raja* (king) only when he breaks away from his place of origin to found a new *huta* (settlement), earning him a spiritual pre-eminence even as the functional leadership itself is shared. This provides an incentive for family lineages to disperse their strongest members rather than cluster them to maintain dominance in one village. Sacralization of power dispersion was also reflected in rituals. Accounts of communal Batak cannibalism of their enemies or wrong-doers in society – controversial though these might be – depict a transmission and dispersal of power.<sup>35</sup> To consume a person is to imbibe his *sabala* (essence or strength) and a communal ritual for such a punishment ensured that the power of the vanquished was not only transferred but also distributed. The animist belief that entities in nature – plants, animals, mountains, sea, sky and humans – each possesses its own *simangot* (soul power) further implies a dispersion of power across the earth, banalizing the sacred, sacralizing the banal.

It was this landscape of forbidding yet diffuse power that confronted Tuanku Imam Bonjol as he contemplated an armed incursion northward. Such an environment lay in direct contrast with Bonjol itself. Over a decade, the tiny settlement of Bonjol had grown into a large and fortified town, encouraging trade that drew resources to strengthen the town-*qua*-town. Although conflicts between

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<sup>35</sup> Accounts of Batak cannibalism from European observers are many and varied. Among them, Marsden (1783) *Sumatra*, 299 described how a Toba Batak chief told him that when the chief approved of the punishment, the condemned man would be tied up to a stake, where men in the village would gather and the injured party would throw lances at him until mortally wounded. The rest of the men would then run up and cut off parts of him to be eaten with salt and lime. Raffles (1830) *Memoir*, 426 mentioned how he corroborated this interview with another Batak chief when he made the trip to the interior in 1819 and according to his informant “there could not be less than fifty or sixty men eaten in a year.” I will consider cannibalism from a Batak religious perspective in Chapter 1.

the Padris and the non-Padri villages were later collectively termed by the Dutch as a (civil) “war” (*oorlog*), they initially proceeded more like a series of periodic tit-for-tat raids rather than pitched battles. Bonjol and other Padri-dominated settlements raided non-Padri villages for a variety of reasons: to protect trade routes and caravans, to retaliate against non-Padri aggression, to help allies and to subdue what they perceived as wrongdoing and transgression. Not all of these reasons were religious and none of these motives could be neatly separated. The net result of a successful raid on either side, however, was repetitively similar: destruction of enemy property and appropriation of cattle and buffalo, all flowing back to the victorious villages. The main difference was that a Padri victory would entail establishing a Padri affiliated *kadi* and *imam* as leaders to enforce religious standards that undermined the traditional order while an *adat* victory often entailed chasing reform minded Muslims out of the village.<sup>36</sup> Padri villages tended to encourage the new growing trade in coffee by securing and expanding roads around the villages that they controlled for the safety of merchants while non-Padri villages emphasized subsistence agriculture or the waning gold extraction.<sup>37</sup>

The Padri conflicts steadily transformed Minangkabau by strengthening supra-level village authority through Islam. Trade had long opened roads in Minangkabau prior to the Padris - roads that the Dutch were later surprised to find so well maintained - but these connections did not lead to a wider unity beyond villages. *Suraus* had previously provided connections by propagating Sufi teachings but the multiplicity of *tarekats* prevented unification of philosophy or coalescence of territory. The purist form of Islam advocated by Tuanku Imam Bonjol along with his older Padri compatriots, the *Harimau nan Selapan* (lit. “Eight Tigers”) led by his old teacher Tuanku nan Renceh, broke a new path by creating fortified nodes of Padri power that were geographically scattered among non-Padri villages but intellectually and politically knit. The Padri brand of Islam was arguably the main key to this

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<sup>36</sup> Tuanku Imam Bonjol (2004) *Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol*. Transliterator Syafnir Aboe Nain. Padang: PPIM, 12-13. This is an autobiographical memoir by Tuanku Imam Bonjol written in exile in Ambon. See methodological note at the end.

<sup>37</sup> The importance of securing trade is discussed in Dobbin (1983) *Islamic Revivalism*, 161-187.

unifying change as such a practice of religion better suited an environment with denser populations, rather than dispersed ones. If the Batak tended to sacralize dispersion of authority, Muslims tended to sacralize concentration of power, symbolized by the *Ka'aba* where all Muslims turned towards in prayer. Unity through density is emphasized by the concept of an *ummah*, a global community of Muslims that is, according to a *sahih hadith* “one body, in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy.”<sup>38</sup> Congregational prayer where a minimum of forty people as an ideal requisite number further ritualizes this alignment between religion and population density. Islam had - logically and historically - spread more quickly in the coastal polities of Sumatra with relatively congregated populations but faltered in the climb up to the highlands.<sup>39</sup> Bonjol and other Padri controlled settlements in the Minangkabau region were not only promoting religious reform but also pioneering a different type of environment where connections were made more concrete and energy in the form of crude manpower of vanquished slaves, labor input of livestock as well as subtle power of sacral authority were concentrated into nodes of higher population densities. Minangkabau and Tapanuli had begun with rather similar anarchy of authority; their paths had now diverged. An armed push into Batak territory would require a similar transformation of the landscape.

Tuanku Imam Bonjol started this transformation by building a road from Bonjol to Lubuk Sikaping, a Minangkabau village close to the neighbouring territory of Rao. The existing route from these two points could only accommodate two men abreast; Tuanku Imam Bonjol ordered it to be expanded to enable a six-man wide march.<sup>40</sup> With that wider path, Lubuk Sikaping was swiftly taken over by Bonjol, allowing the latter to turn its attention towards Rao. Rao, with its *mélange* of peoples

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<sup>38</sup> From *Riyadhus Salihin*, p. 224: Nu'man bin Bashir reported: Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said “The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with fever and wakefulness.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

<sup>39</sup> Note that the affinity of Islam with denser and unified authority need not imply that Islam inherently promotes a modern state structure through religion. Wael Hallaq (2013) certainly argues otherwise, highlighting the importance of distinguishing community from a state. See Hallaq (2013) *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics and Morality's Modern Predicament*. N.Y: Columbia University Press.

<sup>40</sup> *Tuanku Imam Bonjol*, 12.

who identified as Batak, Minangkabau or simply as “orang Rawa” (people of Rao) was the backdoor to Tapanuli.<sup>41</sup> The widened path to Lubuk Sikaping opened the way to Rao, the fulcrum to subsequently prise open Batak territory and re-organize it physically and spiritually. It was by no means certain that Tuanku Imam Bonjol was moved by religious zealotry to convert pagan Bataks to Islam by continuing to move northwards from Lubuk Sikaping to Rao and from there, to Tapanuli. His memoir indicated no such zeal, instead, his march towards Rao seemed guided by retaliatory instincts, in chasing recalcitrant villagers from Lubuk Sikaping who had fled to Rao.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever his initial motivations, Rao was subdued and enlisted to the Padri cause through Bonjol acolyte Tuanku Rao who put in charge of the territory. Tuanku Imam Bonjol himself then returned to Bonjol with substantial war booty. It was Tuanku Rao who, with the help of another Bonjol student-turned-ally Tuanku Tambusai, attacked Batak settlements from the south and the east respectively, where one after another, they burned and fell.

Batak accounts of this invasion was sparse but those that exist agree on the general direction and geographic spread of the attack from the Padris, whom they termed collectively and simply as “Bonjol.”<sup>43</sup> “Bonjol” the militia entered through the south, conquering Batak settlements in Mandailing territory on roughly a north-south overland axis from Kota Nopan to Padang Sidempuan. While some of these villages were burned to the ground, others were left intact, recruited as converts and allies to Tuanku Rao. Padang Sidempuan, for example, was converted into a fortified base, webbed

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<sup>41</sup> The Dutch later categorized Lubuk Sikaping and Rao as part of the administrative region of West Sumatra together with much of the Minangkabau highlands. The importance of Rao in this conflict also lived on in their reputation of their diaspora at Malaya. The Rawa/Rao were known for being combative and their aggression is associated with Padri leader Tuanku nan Renceh captured by their nickname in Malaya as “orang Renceh.” See A.C Milner (1978) “A Note on the Rawa,” in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 51:2, 147 and C.W Watson (1982) “Rawa and Rinchi: A Further Note” in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 55:1, 82-86.

<sup>42</sup> *Tuanku Imam Bonjol*, 16-17.

<sup>43</sup> For this section, I mainly use three accounts collected by Dutch officials or ethnographers who interviewed Batak subjects in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early twentieth century.

by surrounding waterways.<sup>44</sup> Other villages relocated when the inhabitants converted to Islam, building a new settlement that mirrored the Padris fortifications and encompassed the requirements of the new religion. For example, upon conversion, Huta Dolok was renamed Huta Godang and shifted to a new location near a river some 20 kilometers away so that the new converts would have a convenient water source for ablution before prayer.<sup>45</sup>

This layout of these bases of convert collaborators are significant for two reasons. First it mirrored the settlement in Bonjol with its high walls armed against a defensive siege. Second, it projected energy *outward* through mounted canons and set itself in a network of flowing water that connected it with other settlements. This distinguished them from Batak villages, which usually lay open with communal houses and open buildings laid out in straight lines facing each other, elevated four to six feet above the ground.<sup>46</sup> Instead of fortification, defence was associated with the term *pagar* (fence) that encapsulated not just or even primarily constructed impediments but spells to turn energy *inward* and build up inner spiritual strength. *Pagar* spells were associated with the strength of the elements, for example, trees or water, or a particularly powerful individual.<sup>47</sup> Also, the positioning of the village with respect to the elements mattered in maximizing its strength.<sup>48</sup> Such *pagar* spells did not preclude the presence of fortifications to protect the villages - bamboo fences and gates existed along with the magic spells – but the power to protect was distributed between nature, man and the

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<sup>44</sup> Parlindungan's *Tuanku Rao* was the only source that provided this description, and with his trademark outré flair but Gabriel's Tuanku Rau indirectly supported the idea that Sidempuan was converted to an important base, noting that "the white ones" from "Angkola, Mandailing, Sidempuan and Sipirok," came to attack Toba Batak settlements in the North, suggesting that the latter two were also important bases for launching Padri aggression.

<sup>45</sup> Zainudin Pangaduan Lubis, *Kumpulan Catatan Lepas tentang Mandailing*, Jakarta: Kelompok Humaniora-Pokmas Mandiri, 2012, p. 7. In Islam, it is recommended that water for ablution be taken from a pure body of water that exceeds 2 *qulla* or 216 liters. I am not certain why drinking water sources in Mandailing were insufficient for this purpose but it could be related to this volume and purity requirement.

<sup>46</sup> Burton and Ward (1826) *A Journey into Batak Country*, 490.

<sup>47</sup> P. Voorhoeve (1951) "Batak Bark Books" in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 33, 283-98. Literature on these spells, to date, is quite limited.

<sup>48</sup> Vergouwen (1964). *The Social Organisation and Customary Law of the Toba-Batak of Northern Sumatra*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff,

supernatural.<sup>49</sup> Depending primarily on centralized, fortified bases as the Padris did, indirectly disenchanting nature and supernatural, instead concentrating defensive energy to repel aggression through man-made constructs.

As the Padri-affiliated aggressors moved further north, however, the infrastructural changes that they made left less of an imprint on the landscape. Broadened roads in South Tapanuli gave way to hastily constructed rough bridges that were little more than logs to facilitate the swift crossing into North Tapanuli before they were swept away.<sup>50</sup> The number of men involved in the attack, however, swelled numerically as the Padris swept north, augmented by converts who found it in their interest to cooperate with rather than resist the Padris. By the time they reached the territory of the Toba Batak clan Naipospos, in North Tapanuli, the militia numbered 3000.<sup>51</sup> The element of surprise had evaporated and news of the hostile militia reached the several Toba Batak settlements before the armed men themselves did. Many preferred flight over fight. Bonjol men apparently found the important large Batak settlement of Silindung empty.

“Seeing the chaos in Sitompoe Pinang, and the coming of a large male buffalo, the people of Silindung fled in terror, with only the clothes on their back and whatever possessions they could carry....there was no one capable of fighting, even the strongest were frozen with fear.”<sup>52</sup>

The mention of the buffalo is telling of the ecological imbalance wrought by the Padris and their allies. Why would the appearance of a large male buffalo be juxtaposed with the coming of hostilities and inspire almost mindless fear? The buffalo was a sacred animal in Batak culture, as evidenced by the buffalo horns that adorned the front of every Batak house, but it was not associated

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<sup>49</sup> There is also regional variation in the level of fortifications depending on the level of internecine warfare; Mandailing (South) and Toba (North) appeared to have rudimentary fortifications while the Pakpak (North Tapanuli) had higher levels of internal conflict and more bamboo stockades. See B. Dawson and J. Gillow (1994). *The Traditional Architecture of Indonesia*. London: Thames and Hudson, 35-36. No source indicates that cannons were used by the Bataks at any point in the Padri wars.

<sup>50</sup> “Kedatangan Bonjol,” Collectie V.E Korn, Leiden.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

with any impending doom. It's premium position in Batak households was, rather, reflective of the animal's contribution in driving work done in procuring sustenance; ploughing the land in preparation for rice cultivation, transporting agricultural produce, and in a final sacrifice, accompanying the rice that it had helped produce as a main dish in customary rituals to celebrate birth, death and alliances. The buffalo was at the center of a social metabolic cycle, not of harbinger of death. I suggest that what was peculiarly frightening in the coming of this buffalo was not the animal itself but it's lone state. Isolated and aimless, the lone buffalo sends a message of a catastrophic upending that had untethered this valuable animal from the herd and village which had hitherto protected it. There could be no clearer sign of a vanquished and abandoned village than a lone buffalo wandering on it's own.

The figure of the vanquished buffalo recurred prominently in all the extant narratives of Padri incursion into Batak territory. Tuanku Imam Bonjol himself wrote of how, with each village that was conquered, his men herded the buffaloes that the village had owned and drove them back to Bonjol, at times side by side with people taken as slaves. These chains of bovine and human labor powered the construction of Bonjol itself, not only in building fortifications and houses but also a site of sacred authority – a mosque.

“And so, Tuanku Imam called on all his men to build stone fortifications around the village. He sent word to all villages under his dominion and the day came when labor began streaming in from Toba Mandailing, Nan Tigo Lurah, Kampar Kiri, Kampar Kanan, Mahek, Lubuk Rao, they all gathered in Bonjol. He put (some of) them to work digging ditches, and the remaining half to gather stones and line them four-stones wide. They formed a line, linked arms and passed each stone down the row from one person to another to build a wall that encircled Bonjol and *after that, a large mosque*. There were about 500 000 people working. They managed to build the mosque in one month.”<sup>53</sup>

While the rerouting of animal and bovine power into Bonjol contributed to her quick rise to become a node of commercial and sacral authority, the Batak lands waned in vitality and health. The wandering buffalo in this conflict presaged impending starvation as the herd, a key agent in the

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<sup>53</sup> *Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol*, 27.

production cycle had been appropriated and directed elsewhere. The Bataks cautiously returning to their villages after their flight up highland forests found existing supplies of rice running low due to appropriation by Bonjol men and little means to cultivate more. Thus began a period termed in a Toba Batak account as “*Begoe Aroem*” (a time of bad spirits) when starvation and disease decimated the population.

“When the people returned to their villages from the jungle, they saw that their fields were completely wrecked, their storehouses were gone. The people were (starving) like birds in the cold.... Ashes bitter like coffee grounds floated in the paddy fields. So it was that women and children had no chores to do, and could only beg for rice. Their tools for cultivation were burned, their blankets were gone and it was difficult to weave more....Those without houses stayed in the shelter of where bamboo grew...and the bad spirits (*begoe aroem*) attacked them in their sleep. *Begoe aroem* at that time was so potent that many died. In a household of six, if two survived that was already considered fortunate.”

At some level, though, the vanquishing of the buffalo and the destruction they signified also seemed to trouble Tuanku Imam Bonjol. One of the most vivid and lurid passages in his account tells of violence, not against man but against the buffalo.

“The people of Kuok fled across the river Bangkinang and Bonjol decided not to follow. They tarried for four days but could not find a way to bring the buffalo through (to Bonjol). Finally, they filled the cannons and fired them at the herd. All the buffalo died because they could not be transported. They returned to Bonjol, empty-handed...”<sup>54</sup>

The scattered remains of these unfortunate buffalo might have clogged up the river pass but they also appeared to clarify the sheer destructiveness of Padri action to disconcerting effect. In the paragraph immediately following this passage, Tuanku Imam Bonjol sent three of his protégés to Mecca to “ascertain the just law of the God’s Book.”<sup>55</sup> The three men’s return, with the news that the Wahabbis had been driven from Mecca, galvanized Tuanku Imam Bonjol’s repentance whereupon

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<sup>54</sup> *Tuanku Imam Bonjol*, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Tuanku Imam Bonjol did not state that it was the destruction of the cattle that made him doubt his righteousness but it is implicit in his sequencing of events. See pages p. 30-31. The exact phrase quoted here is translated from Indonesian “mencari hukum Kitabullah yang adil.”

he vowed to return all that he had unlawfully appropriated and left Bonjol on a self-imposed exile.<sup>56</sup>

In a public declaration that is today often cited as the quintessence of Indonesian Islam, Tuanku Imam Bonjol proclaimed “adat basandi syarak,” meaning that *adat* (tradition) and syariah are inextricably part of each other.<sup>57</sup> In effect, he declared the conflict between tradition and religion to be over.

His repentance, occurring circa 1832, did not do much to stop further episodes of violence in the Batak territories. Just as Tuanku nan Tuo had rued that he could exercise little control over his protégés Tuanku nan Renceh and his student Tuanku Imam Bonjol a decade earlier, Tuanku Imam Bonjol in turn found it difficult to consistently direct the action of his convert collaborators.

### CONVERTS AS COLLABORATORS

Two figures stand out in the Padri incursions to Batak territories: the elusive Tuanku Rao, who administered Rao once it fell to Padri rule and Tuanku Tambusai, the "Tiger of Rokan" who transformed his home region of Daludalu from a northeastern backwater in the highlands to a node connecting the Padris to the Straits of Malacca. Although they started as protégés of Tuanku Imam Bonjol, these two men acted largely in an autonomous fashion, directing the push to conquer the Batak territories without necessarily consulting Bonjol.<sup>58</sup> Collaborating with them were large groups of Batak men especially from Angkola and Mandailing in the South, many of whom professed a

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<sup>56</sup> *Tuanku Imam Bonjol*, p. 44. Local Minangkabau lore asserts that ‘adat basandi syarak’ is constitutionalized through a treaty between Minangkabau leaders in Bukit Marapalam in 1837, an event which lacks documentary sources. Also see Hadler (2008) *Muslims and Matriarchs*, 29. Hadler further argues that in the late 1950s, Minangkabau modernist Muslim leaders transformed the phrase to “adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah,” meaning tradition is based on religion and religion is based on the Holy Book, effectively casting religion in a higher position than adat and projected this new formulation back into history by attributing it to Tuanku Imam Bonjol. Hadler’s position is rejected by some Minangkabau religious teachers and scholars but is supported by the Imam Bonjol manuscript which clearly did not contain the addendum “syarak basandi kitabullah.” The debate over this phrase highlights that tension between the position of *adat* and religion continues to this day.

<sup>57</sup> Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol, p. 44-45.

<sup>58</sup> Tuanku Rao, by all accounts, had been killed in battle just after his teacher Tuanku Imam Bonjol’s abrupt repentance but his autonomy in battle is indicated by his stubborn push toward Toba, for which there is little evidence of direction from Bonjol. Tuanku Tambusai, on the other hand, was the last surviving major Padri leader, falling out with Tuanku Imam Bonjol sometime in the 1830s. He fought on, despite his former teacher’s repentance and surrender to the Dutch, until 1838 before escaping down the Rokan in a small *prahu* (Malay boat). By some accounts he reached Malaya, settled in Negri Sembilan and was buried there. In some others, he drowned and his body was never found, unshaken in his beliefs to the last.

conversion to Islam. The following two sections explore the pivotal role of these convert collaborators and their agency after embracing the faith, which is instrumental in reifying a split between North and South Tapanuli.

We start in North Tapanuli with Tuanku Rao who was instrumental in defeating influential priest-king Si Singamangaradja X in Toba. By most extant European and Batak narratives, Tuanku Rao appears to be the first and perhaps most faithful, convert collaborator.<sup>59</sup> In Toba Batak accounts of his life, Tuanku Rao was said to be born to the sister of priest-king Si Singamangaradja IX of Toba clan Sinambela who had married her own uncle. The couple was banished for their relationship - doubly taboo as marrying within one's clan is considered incestuous - and Si Pongki Nangolngolan (The-One-who-Yearns-for-Home), as Tuanku Rao was named at birth, signified that isolation. Si Pongki Ngolngolan's parents eventually separated - in some versions, his father converted to Islam and moved to a new life in Aceh or in others, he simply passed away. What is clear is that Tuanku Rao's mother, now unencumbered by her inconvenient husband, returned to her birth family in Toba. Initially accepted by her brother Si Singamangaradja X who now ruled, her son gradually wore out his welcome by proving to be exceptionally inept.

"When the little boy (Si Pongki Nangolngolan) was eight, he was put to work pasturing cows and but the cows sickened and died....(next), he was tasked to scare away birds from rice fields but he failed in this task too.....later, he was charged with the weaving and to look after the drying rice but in his neglect, chickens and pigs got to the rice..... So, his uncle, Si Singamangaradja thought that it was best to be rid of him before he was impoverished. After thinking for a day and night, he put the boy in a sarcophagus with his father's dagger and threw

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<sup>59</sup> Each account is not first-hand but appears to be collected by the Dutch in the 1920s. No extant source that I can find dated back to the actual time of the conflict itself. The first is C. Gabriel "Kriegszug der Bondjol unter Anführung des Tuanku Rau in die Bataklander, zusammengetragen von Guru Kenan Huta Galung und aus dem Batakschen ins Deutsche ubersetzt", in *Tijdschrift voor ische Taal, - Land, en Volken*, 61: 1922. The second is a similar tale collected by V.E Korn in 1929 dictated to his clerk and found on a microfiche of his papers in Leiden. The third is from Ompu Batilan's *Sejarah Batak* and echoed in Adniel Lumbantobing's *Si Singamangaradja*. A fourth is M.O Parlindungan's book. All of them agree on the key points of Tuanku Rao's origin as a Batak convert. Tuanku Rao's identity as a convert comes into question though, when we consider Minangkabau sources. Hamka, in his response to Parlindungan's book, considers this story doubtful and argues that Tuanku Rao was born in Pasir Matinggi to a Minangkabau family but supplies little convincing evidence referring to hearsay by older people in the village. Moreover, both versions were reconcilable if Tuanku Rao was adopted by a Pasir Matinggi family after his exile from Toba. Tuanku Imam Bonjol's manuscript account is silent on the origins of Tuanku Rao and Tuanku Tambusai and only mentioned that they were young students of his. Given that the Batak and Dutch sources appeared to triangulate better, I rely on them narrate the story of Tuanku Rao.

him into Lake Toba, praying to the Gods and his ancestors to spare the boy if he could be made to lead a useful life."<sup>60</sup>

Si Pongki Ngolngolan's unnatural, incestuous birth was thus paralleled with an unnatural capacity for upsetting the order of things. In this saga, Si Pongki Ngolngolan went on to use his father's dagger to escape from the sarcophagus and swam to land. He was brought up by a Minangkabau family, apprenticed his services to a student of Tuanku Imam Bonjol and later, converted to Islam became a student of the latter himself. Nominated as Bonjol's representative in Rao, he married the daughter of the Rao chief and took upon himself the task to conquer the Bataks, returning with a vengeance to the land of his birth as Tuanku Rao. He killed, enslaved and converted and finally, in a supreme act of revenge, he lured his uncle down to a marketplace in Butar under the guise of a peace negotiation and decapitated him.<sup>61</sup> These lurid details, impossible to verify, add an understandable human motivation of revenge to an inexplicable invasion. Particularly significant in this tale is how non-human agents acts at the interface between the gods and man. One of the Bataks' strongest taboos was marrying within one's own clan and here, in the destructive Tuanku Rao, nature itself rejects the product of such a marriage and reinforces the virtue of such a means of social organization. Unnatural marriage begets unnatural violence. This version of the tale did not suggest that the Bataks' faith in their notion of divine social structure needed reconsideration; it instead fashioned Tuanku Rao into a figure that proved the Toba Bataks right.

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<sup>60</sup> Gabriel, 61. Parlindungan's version essentially agreed with this sequence of events, with more embellishments about Tuanku Rao's mother and the role of soothsayers in advising Si Singamangaradja to dispose of the boy. Korn's account was silent on Tuanku Rao as a child, opening with him at the Haj where he was told by unnamed mysterious elders that he could not complete the Haj unless he converted his people to Islam. However, in a later part of Korn's account dealing with Si Singamangaradja X's death, it mentioned in passing that Tuanku Rao knowingly killed his uncle, Si Singamangaradja X.

<sup>61</sup> Gabriel, 63. Also Lumbantobing, 28 and Korn, 15-16. Parlindungan did not agree on the details of the decapitation but agreed on the execution.

This rightness of the Toba Bataks' sacred beliefs was further accentuated when the disease and ensuing famine that bitterly decimated the Toba Batak population claimed more than its fair share of peoples who had attempted to profit from Bonjol's violence against the Bataks in North Tapanuli.

“In the wake of Bonjol's return...people needed to head back to their villages because banditry and looting over unguarded property was rampant. Many people died trying to defend what they owned. For five years, the people were uneasy because they kept hearing rumors of Bonjol's return, while those who had spied for him awaited him. The thieves and the spies all died of starvation. The spy, still holding his gun, leaned against a green tree, so still that a passerby would have thought him asleep. But he was actually dead of hunger, and this was the judgement of God for those evil people.”<sup>62</sup>

Bonjol did return, briefly in 1829<sup>63</sup> but for all intents and purposes, his hold over North Tapanuli was never re-established after the advent of disease. Tuanku Rao himself died in an assault on Dutch-held port Air Bangis in 1833.

Reading these Toba Batak narratives about Tuanku Rao for their embellishments as representations of a truth rather than mining them for facts, we find a narrative construct that emphasized a vindication of the prevailing sacred order. The exiled offspring of a taboo marriage unsurprisingly, grew up to become a vengeful and destructive man. He was the product of an unnatural marriage and nature itself rejected him. Nature, too, rejected the traitors who had collaborated with him, wiping them out in a tide of pernicious disease. The “bad spirits” were at once devastating, cleansing and *renewing*. In their retreat, in the waters of the rivers sweeping away Bonjol's temporary bridges that had facilitated the Padris' crossing, in wiping out the collaborators through disease, the sacral ecology of the Toba Batak in North Tapanuli asserted itself and ultimately declared a victory.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Korn, p. 46-48.

<sup>63</sup> Dobbins, 258.

<sup>64</sup> Dobbins (1983) showed that the Padris entered Toba in 1820 and returned briefly in 1824 and 1829. Raffles (1830) *Memoir*, 429 also indirectly corroborated the story of the disease by mentioning an outbreak of “cholera morbus” in the highlands stretching towards Aceh in 1820. It is interesting to note that Burton and Ward (1826) the indirectly corroborates renewal as their visit to Silindung Valley in 1824 revealed that the Toba community appeared to be thriving and that women were in their bare-breasted traditional garb, not the blue and white hooded robes of women in Padri villages. Taken together, this indicates that the violence reached a peak in Toba in 1820 and declined after that, when Dobbins suggests that the Padris began encouraging more trade with the Bataks but did not seem able to impose a different social order.

Could such an exiled interloper as Tuanku Rao have inspired others to genuine and permanent conversions in Tapanuli? In this Toba Batak tales, self-interest and only self-interest had appeared to govern Tuanku Rao's conversion and colored his motives for converting others. His only weapons were violence and a sense of righteousness. What kind of followers would join him? This fragment in Korn's narrative provides a little clue.

“Bonjol returned (to his base) but before that he burned all the villages of the Hutabarat and stole all their livestock that were left behind when they fled. (He did this) because many of his companions wanted to eat the flesh of swine, particularly the people from Angkola and Sitomtom.”

Consuming swine was one of the practices that distinguished Batak and Muslim, a practice that Muslims in the coast, Minangkabau and Aceh assiduously avoided. By tacitly allowing the putative converts from Angkola and Sitomtom the liberty to continue with their pre-conversion dietary habits, Bonjol as represented by Tuanku Rao, appeared to be looser with his adherence to Islamic rules of consumption that one would expect of a hardline Islamic revivalist. From the perspective of the Batak converts, their persistence in their pre-Islam habits suggested a nominal rather than genuine, zealous conversion. Was conversion then a mere expedient label for a conscripted collaboration between conquered Batak groups in South Tapanuli with those who conquered them? To understand the nature of South Tapanuli's conversion, we must now turn to the narratives from the South.

## **COLLABORATORS AS CONVERTS**

Unlike the North, South Tapanuli struggles with a vexed relationship with the legacy of the Padri Wars. On the one hand, this epoch marked their entry into a new sacral ecology where there was promise of salvation in an afterlife that was never clearly defined of old. On the other hand, the blessings of that salvation was troubled by the very real remembered trauma of war and dislocation in this transition period. How does one reconcile faith in a religion while deploring the suffering inflicted by co-religionists imposing their beliefs?

We turn to Padang Lawas, at the eastern periphery of the South Tapanuli highlands, a territory dominated by clan Harahap and lever to prising open South Tapanuli from the east. Cattle herding was one of the most important economic activities in this area, the cattle herds grazing on the valleys crisscrossed by two rivers – the Rokan and the Barumun – as well as their tributaries. Ruins of temples bearing an eclectic mix of Buddhist, Hindu and Batak iconography dating back at least to the tenth century lay along the tributaries of these rivers. The Rokan also linked Padang Lawas to the Tambusai settlement in the coast from where Padri incursions to the area originated. The main agent in this incursion is a man known as Tuanku Tambusai.

Tuanku Tambusai was born in 1784 in Daludalu, an important settlement near the eastern coast of Sumatra. Before he was Tuanku Tambusai, he was Muhammad Saleh, the son of a local *imam* (religious leader) from whom he received early instruction before being sent to Bonjol in his youth for more training. Reputedly mild-mannered and charismatic, Muhammad Saleh return to reform the practice of religion in his home village – successfully overcoming the challenge without overt violence – to secure the Tambusai region for the Padri cause, thus earning the title Tuanku Tambusai. Like Tuanku Imam Bonjol and Tuanku Rao, he then turned to the Batak highlands, sometime in the early 1820s, tackling the challenging route from east to west. This he navigated by following the path of the water, converting the settlements in by Loeboe river, then moving further and further up to Sioetam and Sosa rivers to the valley of the cattle herders in Padang Lawas, Angkola.<sup>65</sup> The difficulty of the terrain and steep climb upward precluded a large army and preaching appeared to be relatively more crucial in his mission than in Tuanku Rao's. That he enlisted a significant amount of local support there was evident through his ceremonial adoption into a family in the Harahap clan, blurring the traditional religious division between Batak and Malay.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Schnitger, *Forgotten Kingdoms*, 81

<sup>66</sup> Amir Luthfi and Umar Ahmad Tambusai, 23.

But while Tuanku Tambusai received a fair amount of support and converts, his convert collaborators proved to be no more reliable than that of Tuanku Rao. Having stabilized Tambusai and Padang Lawas, Tuanku Tambusai was called away by his ally and friend, Tuanku Rao, who faced increasing threat from the Dutch once the British handed over the ports Natal and Air Bangis – positioned so threateningly close to Rao. Together, the two men built up fortifications at Rao and expanded their influence northward. However, they could not team up for long as the convert collaborators of Sosa and Padang Lawas soon reverted back to their old religion, in some cases killing the *kadis* left in charge by Tuanku Tambusai. Hearing news of unrest in his own base, Tuanku Tambusai returned to pacify it.

Resistance, however, proved hard to quell and at this point, violence appeared to escalate. Refugees began fleeing up the mountains (*dolok*). In Padang Lawas, resistance in the environs of Simanabun became emblematic of the reversion in which the Batak Mandailing chief Raja Bange (clan Harahap) refused to flee but held out stubbornly against the Padris from a hideout high in the mountains that only his family knew how to access. Yet, even the altitude and hidden passes could not protect him as he was eventually betrayed to the Padris by his own younger brother.<sup>67</sup> This betrayal facilitated a massacre where most of the Batak men were killed while the women were enslaved and brought back to Padri territory. Raja Bange himself managed to escape with some members of his family northward, finding shelter in exile with a different clan, among whom his family eventually settled, reproduced and merged with the other clan. Left behind were the cattle, rerouted to Padri territory or appropriated by Tuanku Tambusai's collaborators who had remained loyal.

Such dislocations and uncertain loyalty to religion that can be pieced together from Dutch accounts above also resonates in family narratives as a means of explaining why families from certain

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<sup>67</sup> *Greget Tuanku Rao*, 45. Basyral Hamidy Harahap argued that despite the rebellion was against Tuanku Tambusai's rule rather than Islam itself and the converts remained Muslim. Schnitger argued otherwise.

clans found themselves distanced from the territories which they had traditionally dominated and uneasy with the legacy of violence insurrected by those whose religion South Tapanuli now embraced. Mandailing native Mangaradja Onggang Parlindungan's account of his family history - sensationally titled *Tuanku Rao: Terror Mazhab Hambali di Tanah Batak* (Tuanku Rao: Hambali Terrorist in the Bataklands) – best interlocutes the uneasy ambivalence of South Tapanuli towards the violence that marked their conversion. Central to this narrative is Parlindungan's own ancestor called Tuanku Lelo, who was put in charge of Mandailing and Angkola in South Tapanuli while Tuanku Rao went marauding up north. Parlindungan relished describing him this ancestor as a “monster”, who killed and raped without compunction. His favored method of rapine was to set fire to the homes of women, capturing the women who fled the smoke before dragging them to his base in Padang Sidempuan bound and naked.

Again reading the narrative not for ascertaining facts but for the pattern of embellishments, we find the naked and rapacious blood lust in this account is in marked contrast with Tuanku Imam Bonjol's deliberate silence on the human cost of the Minangkabau aggression towards their northern neighbors. As a character, Tuanku Lelo recalls the archetypal holy warrior of religious extremist nightmares. Parlindungan's overblown description, however, paradoxically underscores just how the unholy this violence was. Almost inhuman in their violent excesses, Tuanku Rao, Tuanku Lelo and numerous other Batak convert collaborators fingered by Parlindungan in his narrative were anything but heroic. Parlindungan appears to deal with this legacy by divorcing human debasement from religious sanction. Acknowledging such deeds recognizes their perversity while comfortably placing it beyond the pale.

Parlindungan punctuates his account with claims of scientific veracity – a history recovered through a “Max Weber system” – but his narrative is often outlandish. Purportedly based on the papers of a Dutch colonial official who served in Tapanuli in 1930s and his father's research among

prominent Angkola and Mandailing families in the 1930s, Parlindungan recasts the conflict as one between Sunni and Shi'ite. The Minangkabau, Parlindungan writes, were initially Shi'ite in religious orientation but in the late eighteenth century, Sunni reformers identifying with *mazhab* Hambali crept in and caused the chaos. The three returning Hadjis were depicted as war mercenaries who had served in the Ottoman army against the armies of Napoleon in Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century. Now they allied with Tuanku nan Renceh and Tuanku Imam Bonjol to conceive of a grand plan to take over the whole of Sumatra. Through a three-pronged military strategy that the Hadjis had learned from the Ottomans, the Padri army, centered in Bonjol, was to grip each village from east and west before launching a full-fledged frontal assault that was difficult to withstand. Their broader strategy was to conquer the Bataklands in order to reach and subdue Aceh, thus uniting the two major Muslim polities in Sumatra.

Parlindungan's tale is compelling but its overarching framework is almost certainly inaccurate. There is no convincing evidence that the Muslims in Minangkabau were ever Shi'ite and his characterization seemed to stem from twentieth century Sunni-Shi'ite friction rather nineteenth century Muslim reformism.<sup>68</sup> Far from being an intractable foe of the Padris, Tuanku Imam Bonjol documents how Aceh lent a hand to his campaign to push the Dutch out of a port in Air Bangis in 1933 by sending ships to blast the port from the sea while Bonjol's men approached it from land.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the three pronged pincers military feint that he claimed was key to Padri victories appeared unworkable in much of the South Tapanuli highland landscape where many villages could only be accessed by one path.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Hamka in his public refutation of Parlindungan's work lays out fully why the argument that the Minangkabau were Shi'ite is unlikely to be true. (Give some reasons here). See *Antara Fakta dan Khayal*.

<sup>69</sup> Tuanku Imam Bonjol, pp. 35 – 36. According to his account, the help rendered by Aceh to Bonjol and his allies was swiftly cut out when the *perahu* (boat) of Acehnese leader Saidina Merah was blasted out of the water from mid-range canons mounted at Air Bangis after which the Acehnese retreated and sailed back to Aceh.

<sup>70</sup> Tuanku Imam Bonjol's attack on Kuok, however, corroborated the three points pincers approach in which Tuanku Rao and Rajo Baro attacked from the flanks while Rajo Mudo attacked the settlement head on. This was the only fight in the highlands in Tuanku Imam Bonjol's manuscript which described using this strategy. This strategy was employed again in

What *do* his embellishments tell us, though? Parlindungan's three-pronged strategy, repeated over and over again in his rendering of Padri victories subconsciously maps the military plan of a flat desert plain to a tropical highland. The South Tapanuli landscape, in his imagination, is very much flattened, open to attack. Violence then scourged not just the landscape but also the moral order. The gendered displacement of the population, embellished by Parlindungan but consistent across various accounts, raise a question: *why* were so many women left behind in their villages, vulnerable to enslavement? It seemed unbelievably unchivalrous and callous of the men to leave behind their women while running for forest cover themselves. One possibility is that in fleeing, the men never expected such an outcome. An unwritten code of conduct known as *patik dobot ubum* (lit. rules and custom) had guided the Bataks in their own raiding forays with each other: there was an implicit understanding that there were not be no attacks in night time, no enslavement of women in war and no burning of homes.<sup>71</sup> The advent of the Padris flouting these unwritten rules with impunity and *winning* through this undue advantage illustrated yet again how violence de-sanctified respected previously respected spaces. Once pushed aside, such norms became difficult to reinstate. *Patik dobot ubum* as an ethical guideline for war gradually fell into disuse in the North and became all but unheard of in the South.<sup>72</sup> It became, like the women, a displaced casualty of the conflict that could not find its way back.

The brand of Islam brought into South Tapanuli catalyzed this ethical void but never quite manage to refill it. Indeed, Tuanku Imam Bonjol's uncomfortable ellipsis on this issue instead lends the implied execution of unspeakable violence more credence, rather than less. Skating over his collaborators' excesses accuses their deeds more pointedly than any detailed description. It suggests a deep failure of the moral reform the movement had started with once it inveigled a widening web of

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a battle against the Dutch port at Air Bangis but this was a coastal landscape, not a high altitude one. See *Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol*, pp. 29-30 for the attack on Kuok and pp. 35-36 for attack on Air Bangis.

<sup>71</sup> Bisuk Siahaan, *Kehidupan di Sebalik Tembok Bambu*, Komunitas Bambu: 2005, 150-51.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

collaborators. Even worse, it is an indictment of the indifference to cruelties perpetuated by Bonjol towards his non-Muslim Batak neighbors. At best, Bonjol's silence was an admission of the lack of moral authority in the Batak territories, at worse it bespeaks an approving congruence of such actions with their cause. The Angkola-Mandailing narratives deal with complicity in violence with admission, the Minangkabau with muted silence and both pointed towards moral voided space to be filled. Unlike in the North, the essential rightness of Batak societal and ethical organization was never restored. Their sacral ecology when shaken, teetered towards collapse.

In essence, North Tapanuli and South Tapanuli found themselves in markedly different positions as the Padri wars inflicted wounds on their populations, religion and landscapes in the decade between 1818 and 1829. The North, despite profound losses, found its way towards resuming old norms and restoring their desacralized spaces. The South, overrun and torn apart, never did. What ended up filling the South's voided moral space depended on how the flattened landscape repositioned itself, which in turn hinged on one final twist – the entry of the Dutch into the conflict.

### **ERSATZ CONVERSIONS, REAL COLONIALISMS**

The Dutch entered the conflict in 1821, in part as a response to a request for help by Minangkabau aristocrats who had escaped Pagarruyung and fled to Padang after the court was burned down in 1815. Their entry was marked on the highlands landscape through the building of forts. This act of active construction paralleled and indeed, mirrored the fortifications set up by the Padris. The Padris had fortified their villages with fences and ditches and built wooden forts in Muoro Bubus as well as stone walls in Bonjol and Daludalu, using Batak slave labor.<sup>73</sup> The Dutch upped the landscape transformation with stone fortresses lining the ridges from Bukit Tandikek, Batu Sangkar, Bukittinggi to Koto Tuo, at the heart of Minangkabau and finally encroaching Bonjol territory in Alahan

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<sup>73</sup>Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol, p. 27. Also note that the land was cleared with Batak labor from Gunung Tajadi to Padang Lawas, Musu and Padang Limau Bungo.

Panjang.<sup>74</sup> In response, the Padris fortified further, building a double layer of defense where the elderly, women and children were ringed in by walls that lay behind firing outposts mounted with canons.<sup>75</sup> The Dutch forts, for their part, housed professional soldiers, a few drawn from Holland but mostly from their colonies on Java. Behind their fortifications, Padri fighters were subsistence farmers or merchants who believed in the cause enough to participate in raids in between harvest and market seasons. The net effect was a deepening of the trend in centralizing power and authority into constructed nodes. In short, Dutch imperialism – far from protecting *adat* - dug into the Minangkabau landscape more deeply, uprooting traditional power structures in the same way the Padris attempted to but never truly succeeded in accomplishing.

European intervention came late to the Batak territories. The Dutch were hesitant to act in Sumatra without assurance that they would not also be provoking a fight with the British, which also had a substantial presence in West Sumatra around Padang and Natal. This assurance they obtained in 1824 through the Anglo-Dutch treaty where the British pulled out from all its bases in Sumatra and Java in return for Dutch withdrawing any claims to Malacca and Singapore, effectively dividing the region into non-overlapping spheres of influence. An uprising by Javanese prince Diponegoro from 1825 to 1830 then prevented the Dutch from responding decisively to the Padris in Sumatra as they were not willing to fight on two fronts. Dutch troops thus only entered Rao and Mandailing in South Tapanuli around 1831. But the capitulation of the region was relatively swift; several chiefs were in fact eager to ally with the Dutch to remove the Padris. The most well-known of these chiefs was called Radja Gadombang, the chief in Huta Godang. In 1832, he took the initiative to approach Colonel Elout on the Dutch side and offered his services and his men to help defeat the Padris. Other chiefs in Mandailing Julu joined him, including a very young Raja Asal.

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<sup>74</sup> Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol, p. 46-49 provides an account of the forts built by the Dutch.

<sup>75</sup> Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol, p. 47

Bonjol and Daludalu were the most stubborn Padri obstacles to the imposition of Dutch rule. Mandailing – providing a geographical gateway to both- became the base for which the Dutch launched their operations against these stubborn pockets of the Padri movement.<sup>76</sup> Belying any solidarity for their co-religionists, the converts became a key part of Dutch military operations into Padri territory, often at the frontline.<sup>77</sup> Mandailing too, became marked by a chain of Dutch forts erected between 1832 and 1833, at Tamiang, Singengu, Kotanopan and Rao.<sup>78</sup> The forts signified the end of South Tapanuli's independence as it shifted from Padri imperialism to Dutch imperialism. Tuanku Rao was killed in 1833, Tuanku Imam Bonjol captured and exiled in 1837 while Tuanku Tambusai escaped down the river Rokan under a hail of bullets in 1838 but was never heard of again.<sup>79</sup>

While South Tapanuli was fairly easily – and eagerly - conquered, the Dutch appeared wary of pushing through to the North Tapanuli. Certainly, they made no attempt to extend their chain of forts into the Toba region. One of the reasons was that the Bataks in Toba, fearful of another Padri incursion, were extremely hostile to strangers, in particular those bringing a new religion. Two missionaries, Henry Lyman and George Munson, sent by American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, struck out for Silindung Valley in North Tapanuli in 1834 against the advice of Dutch colonial officers. They never returned. Ambushed by a large group of Toba Bataks, the two men were promptly killed and reportedly devoured.<sup>80</sup> Such behavior was not ordinary. For instance,

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<sup>76</sup> Lance Castles, *The Political Life of a Sumatran Residency*, Yale University PhD Dissertation, 1972, pp. 21-22. *Naskah Tuanku Imam Bonjol* also briefly alludes to the crucial turncoat role of Rao and Mandailing that enabled Bonjol's eventual defeat. See pp. 57-58.

<sup>77</sup> Details of the battles can be found in Minangkabau historian Muhammad Radjab, *Perang Paderi di Sumatera Barat 1803-1838*, Balai Pustaka 1964, pp. ? He also referred to the Mandailing somewhat derisively as “umpan peluru” (cannon fodder) for allowing themselves to be used by the Dutch.

<sup>78</sup> The fort at Rao is named Fort Amerongan, after the Dutch general who controlled it.

<sup>79</sup> A grave, allegedly that of Tuanku Tambusai can be found in Negri Sembilan, Malaysia supporting the view that he made his way there after escaping from Dalu Dalu. Some people in that village in Negri Sembilan claimed descent from him. However, this cannot be proven with certainty.

<sup>80</sup> See “Missionaries: The Martyrs of Sumatra” in Theodore Baird, *The Most of It: Essays on Language and the Imagination*, Amherst, Mass: Amherst College Press, 1999. Lyman was an Amherst graduate, class of 1829. Note that Baird makes the argument that the passion of the language of the missionaries obscures the truth of the events and Batak language scholar Uli Kozok argues that the missionaries were never eaten. However, there is no doubt that the two missionaries were killed and that the hostility was partly generated by the experience of North Tapanuli in the hands of the Padris. Other sources

two other missionaries, Burton and Ward, had made a similar journey in 1824 while the Padri raids were ongoing without encountering such hostility.<sup>81</sup> It seemed probable that the Bataks of North Tapanuli were in a state of heightened tension and suspicious of “*Si Bontar Mata*” (the White-Eyes) because of the presence of the Dutch in their southern doorstep. The purveyors of yet another foreign religion, bearing a physical resemblance to leaders of an alien military force camped at South Tapanuli, were thus not kindly treated. The fate of Lyman and Munson, reported back to the Dutch Resident Bonnet in Sibolga, South Tapanuli by one of their translators who had escaped, likely deterred the Dutch from making a foray to the North. Moreover, they were preoccupied by challenges to their imperialistic aims within the two territories that they had conquered: Minangkabau and South Tapanuli itself.

Where did resistance to Dutch rule emerge after the last Padri bases in Bonjol and Dalu Dalu had been defeated? From the same group who had enabled the imposition of Dutch rule: the convert collaborators of South Tapanuli. We thus return full circle to the episode that opened this chapter, which the semi-aubiographical *Max Havelaar* characterized as violence motivated by the zealous Mandailing Muslim convert and his hatred for all Christians. Unpeeling the layers of memories in this tale reveals not fanaticism but deep ecological parallels between Dutch and Padri imperialism.

When the Dutch made their compact with chiefs such as Raja Gadombang to ally against the Padris, they were already struggling to hold on to the territories that they had conquered. Bonjol provides the most striking illustration why resistance to the Dutch emerged, even in a region exhausted by decades of civil war. Initially surrendering to the Dutch in 1832 after Tuanku Imam Bonjol’s

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documenting the ill-fated expedition include Schreiber A. “The Batak of Sumatra and the Mission Work among Them” in *The Missionary Herald: Containing the Proceedings of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, 96: 6, p. 232; Ida Laura Pfeiffer, *A Lady’s Second Journey Around the World: From London to the Cape of Good Hope, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Celebes, Ceram, the Moluccas, California, Panama, Peru, Ecuador, and the United States*. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1856, p. 150; (n.a), *American Missionary Memorial. Including historical sketches*. New York, Harper 1853; William Thompson, *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Munson and the Rev Henry Lyman: late missionaries to the Indian archipelago*, New York D. Appleton & Co., 1829.

<sup>81</sup> See Burton and Ward (1827) “Report of a Journey into Batak Country.”

repentance, the people of Bonjol found soon themselves inflamed by the imposition of forced labor, requisitions of coffee harvests and the disrespect that Dutch troops showed to their sacred spaces, including the new large mosque that they converted to a base camp.<sup>82</sup> After a few months of Dutch occupation, Bonjol rose up and killed most the Dutch and Javanese quartered at the mosque, sending the survivors fleeing to the nearest fort, extending the conflict for a few more years and never again capitulating until Tuanku Imam Bonjol was captured. From the Batak perspective, this Minangkabau outrage at Dutch conduct could have appeared rather ironic since forced labor, requisitioning of goods and disrespect for sacred spaces were precisely the watermark of Padri incursions in the Batak highlands. However, South Tapanuli chiefs who allied with the Dutch, often failed to see that they were only exchanging one imperial power for another until the Dutch began flexing their authority in the area.

Like the Padris, Dutch rule, even in its earliest iteration, sought to transform the sacral ecology of the South Tapanuli highlands. Where subsistence cultivation had previously intertwined with animism to organize South Tapanuli society around stateless clans enmeshed in a web of reciprocal relations of kinship, the Dutch now sought to introduce centralized hierarchy. Once South Tapanuli was brought under Dutch rule, Assistant Resident Bonnet sent a letter to all chiefs in the region, commanding them to attend meeting every month in Singengu, where he would listen to updates from each chief and adjudicate when necessary. Any chief that failed to attend would be fined a fixed amount of gold.<sup>83</sup> In effect, conforming to this order would mean undermining the *Namora Natoras*, or Council of Elders representing the main families in the village, who had traditionally made consensual decisions with the chief. With the Dutch order, the chief is elevated above this sacralized

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<sup>82</sup> Tuanku Imam Bonjol, 314-318

<sup>83</sup> Pangaduan Lubis, *Catatan Lepas*, pp. 14-15. Lubis quotes the Dutch letter from copy handed down in his family, through his ancestor Raja Junjungan Lubis, a contemporary of Raja Gadombang.

institution.<sup>84</sup> Already diminished by Padris' installation of a *kadi* as a parallel religious figure, the Dutch thus picked up desacralization where the Padris left off.

Such changes were put in place partly to facilitate a new economic base through which the Dutch could profit from the colony. With a hierarchical order, forced labor and requisitions could be more easily implemented where chiefs were incentivized mobilise free labor for the cultivation and transport of coffee. Incentives were also handed out hierarchically. For every pikul (42 kg) of coffee delivered to Dutch ports in Padang and Air Bangis, the kepala kuria (province head) received 20 guilder cents, the kepala huta (village chief) was paid 40 cents and the kepala ripe (the elder who supervised a neighbourhood within a village) was awarded 40 cents.<sup>85</sup> This reorganization oriented the region towards a centralized node of power, now in Padang, and again intensified a process started by the Padris. An apex of traditional power was also created by the Dutch: in the formerly stateless region, a *Yang Dipertuan* (Malay title for Sultan) was appointed, nominally holding sway over all the chiefs.<sup>86</sup>

The forced cultivation of coffee also required heightened clearing of land for roads, further transforming the landscape. Insidiously violent, this transformation could be traumatic for Mandailing peoples coerced into chopping down certain trees. When confronted with a tall tree that would have stood respectfully undisturbed before the Dutch imperative, it was not uncommon for a Mandailing man to refuse to ply his axe until he could pay his respects to the spirits lodging in the tree through a ritual apology where he assured the spirits that his action was not of his volition but by order of the Dutch controleur.<sup>87</sup> Such a ritual displaces responsibility for the violation to the Dutch, highlighting both the sacrality and ultimate banalization of the tree. Each tree hacked down without supernatural

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<sup>84</sup> I describe Namora Natoras as 'sacralized' as it is an institution created to implement the principles of Dalihan Na Tolu (moral reciprocal relations) that guided Batak societal ties.

<sup>85</sup> Castles, *Tapanuli Residency*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>86</sup> The chief of Huta Siantar was appointed to this position. See Castles, 3.

<sup>87</sup> JG Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*. The Maximillan Press. London 1971, p. 153.

retribution to the Dutch chipped away at the notion of powerful sacred spirits dwelling within, bringing the peoples of South Tapanuli closer to the notion of one God brought by the Padris.

With such reshuffling in South Tapanuli, winners and losers in the power politics abounded. Candidates recognized by the Dutch were ushered into positions of hitherto unmatched authority while those who did not find favor lost prestige. It would be easy – but inaccurate - to view the ensuing Mandailing-based uprising against the Dutch in 1839 as a protest by the losers. The uprising was instead initiated by a man already anointed by the Dutch as king of Huta Godang; the brother of Raja Gadombang called Sutan Mangkutur. Gathering all the chiefs in Mandailing Julu (Upper Mandailing), he convened a gathering at a sacred grove near Huta Godang and extracted a pledge from them to fight the Dutch. A family story circulated down to his descendants suggests this uprising was shaded in religion, not Islam but animism.

“At this gathering, all the chiefs who were present each handed over a bullet. The bullet was then mixed with yellow rice using a magical heirloom dagger as each man pledged to bury his bullet into the body of the White-Eyes. To swear their oath...a chicken whose eyes and anus were sewn shut and a bamboo shoot was brought to those present. The *datu* (witch doctor) leading the ceremony peeled the skin of the bamboo, chanting ‘Whosoever betrays this pact will face the fate of this bamboo, becoming rootless and fruitless (childless) and the fate of this chicken, unable to move forward and back.’”<sup>88</sup>

Whether truth or reconstituted historical memory, the Mandailing uprising scripted this way stood against the sweeping away of animist rituals, began by the Padris and completed by the Dutch. From the Batak perspective then, the two imperialisms were remembered as being indistinguishable in their effect. The convert collaborators of South Tapanuli asserted their agency one last time by carrying out the pact to attack the Dutch but failed. Their failure was in no small part due to the newly Dutch appointed *Yang Dipertuan* who, despite participating in the ceremony in the sacred grove, backed out and instead warned the Dutch of the impending attack. The leaders of the uprising including Sutan

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<sup>88</sup> Pangaduan Lubis, *Catatan Lepas*, pp. 22-23. Lubis notes that this account was taken from a family manuscript handed down from his ancestor Raja Junjungan Lubis. The original not available to the public.

Mangkutur were captured and exiled to Ambon. The betrayer, *Yang Dipertuan*, far from leading a fruitless and rootless life, remained comfortably ensconced in Huta Siantar with his family for several generations to come.<sup>89</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The trickiest challenge for an expansionist religion bent on recruiting new followers is how to ensure that coerced converts stay loyal to the new religion. Employing violence as a means of coercing conversion into a purer faith catalyzed, at most, a very short-term direct success in acquiring new followers. Instead, without direct supervision and monitoring in each village, mass superficial conversions were swiftly accompanied by almost wholesale reversion to customary practices. The ineffectiveness of violence as a means for directly forcing conversion does not deny its existence or impact in the conflict. While violence could neither inspire loyalty nor provide a moral authority necessary to anchor real faith, its most significant and blunt impact was working considerable changes to landscape and demographics that can in turn become a new reality for that each community had to internally grapple with. Fresh roads and paths carved out by military raids, the introduction of urban fortresses, diverted waterways - these are the changes to the land that opened the way for world religions (through Islam) and the world's capitalists (through the Dutch) to enter the region. It was in this aspect - landscape transformation - that violence succeeded in shaking old beliefs as the latter could no longer be squared with the surrounding changes to the environment. Kinship and reciprocity relations that had connected village-based clans dispersed throughout the Tapanuli highlands were sundered by war and betrayal. In their place, the new paths, exit and interaction routes. Violence could not eliminate the banalized aspects of religion, the unremarked parts that was woven into the fabric of life and society in attitudes towards sacral objects in nature. However, it did manage to re-orient

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<sup>89</sup> Douwes Dekker later claimed in Max Havelaar that General Michiels even protected *Yang Dipertuan* when the Dutch controleur in Mandailing (Douwes Dekker himself) charged him with corruption and murder. He was brought to Padang for trial but acquitted and released. See Max Havelaar, p. 217

the landscape towards a different reality, divesting formerly sacred practices of their significance and restructuring the landscape towards different forms of authority that appears more congruent with a different religion. It is in these migrations and ecological changes that necessitates navigating a changed landscape that cleared the way for non-nominal conversions to later take place.