Folklore with a Vengeance: A Sumatran Literature of Resistance in the ...
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Folklore with a Vengeance: A Sumatran Literature of Resistance in the Colonial Indies and New Order Indonesia

This paper considers the resistance potential of a locally authored "old customs" literature from North Sumatra as a body of texts that wrote back to the power of states in both colonial and postcolonial Indonesian contexts. Starting by the 1910s, Angkola Batak school textbook authors and amateur antiquarians captured part of the Dutch colonial folkloristic enterprise for their own political and aesthetic purposes. Attention to two sample translated texts by colonial-era Angkola Batak allows access to these authors' concrete rhetorical strategies for writing Angkola identity in robust terms. A third text from Angkola antiquarian literature from the Indonesian national era echoes the colonial political situation and illustrates a third writing strategy for contesting central state control.

In certain historical settings, writing about "customs" can carry ideological freight, as Roger Abrahams notes in "Phantoms of Romantic Nationalism in Folkloristics" (1993). There he explores the often murky interdependencies between late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European nationalist movements and the then-emerging field of European folklore, which turned an antiquarian, appreciative gaze on the "traditions" of country people. The old oral heritage (so construed) of European villagers was documented with enthusiasm by early European and British folklorists at a time when urbanization and a shift toward science in formal education were putting such "folkways" under threat. Abrahams delineates the exact sociological genealogy of this field of study:

> The study of folklore was formulated by antiquarian scholars who, in the main, came from the lower middle class. These men of learning saw in the study of antiquities the possibility of obtaining political and social advancement by identifying scarce remains of past cultures, and calling attention to their strange status as dislocated remnants that carried with them a certain mystery and power. The ways in which the past manifests itself in the present provided these virtuosi with their subject; somehow, they believed, the genius of the countryside and its past inhered to these remnants.
>
> In the study of these remains of ancient practices, antiquarians recognized the prospect of adding to human knowledge even while they received the notice of their betters, members of the aristocracy who were looking for ways of condescending. (3)

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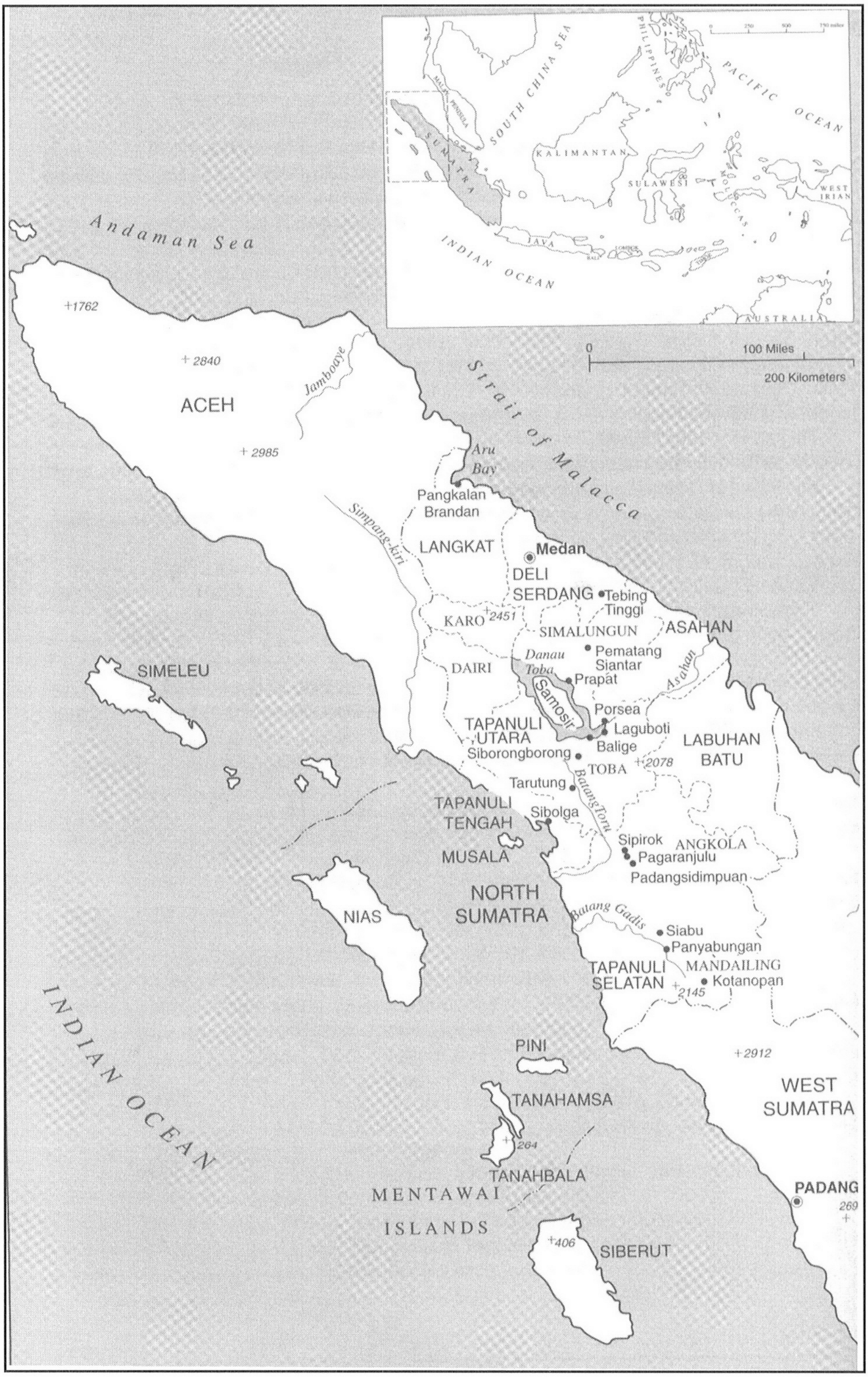
Nationalist movements (Coe 1999) and even Nazism (Kamenetsky 1972) at times exploited traditionalist folklore studies' documentary interest in "the folk" and their purported old ways, seen through the lenses of European Romanticism. As students of scholarship on European literary epics such as those of Bulgaria have also seen (Beissinger 1999), folklore studies carried out under public education banners and concentrating on certain narrative forms sometimes provided a language of legitimation for key points of fervent nationalism. For example, the linguistic sweep of chanted epics, encompassing multiple forms of "folk poetry," gave early nationalists in places like the Balkans a base for claiming an "ancient," "rich" culture, as a supposed precursor to a "natural" new national community. Abrahams cites similar examples and urges present-day folklorists to become more critically aware of the ideological underpinnings of some of the work from the early years of their discipline. He advises folklorists to move beyond entanglements with nationalist projects toward a more pluralistic, reflexive reconceptualization of their area of study.

Literature about "heritage," however, is a textual field full of irony. An antiquarian turn of mind in certain other historical settings can work to contest nationalist, state hegemony over a "local people." Stanley Brandes has documented a clear case of this in "The Sardana: Catalan Dance and Catalan National Identity" (1990). The costumed circle dance reported there, "a prototypical invented tradition" (24), was wielded by Catalans in 1980s Spain as a loaded symbol of the purported genuineness, authenticity, and ancient origins of Catalan heritage itself, which such advocates then tied to Catalan claims for regional autonomy. Brandes also inquires into the role of Catalan folkloristics within Catalan-to-Spanish state relations. He finds that Catalan students of Catalan dance were sometimes able to marshal the intellectual apparatus of traditionalist international folklore scholarship (i.e., its documentary thrust; its rhetorical tone of enthusiasm for old customs under threat of extinction) to portray not only the sardana but also, by implication, Catalan-ness itself and a Catalan land as worthy repositories of cultural excellence, vulnerable to Spanish state engulfment. These Catalan authors' efforts to write about this seemingly arcane circle dance worked at a not-so-hidden level in the 1980s to inscribe locality into Spain's politics of culture debates. Other recent studies have also alerted the fields of both folkloristics and anthropology to the resistance potentials of local "customs" writing within state contexts (Appadurai 1990; George 1996).

In this paper, as an anthropologist, I also read some instances of writing about customs, in this case from Indonesia in a part of Sumatra where I have done fieldwork on ritual speech, language ideology, and the transition to print literacy (Rodgers 1986, 1991a, 1991b, 1995; Soetan Hasoendoetan 1997). I will examine portions of this "old village ways" literature, produced by schoolteachers and self-taught antiquarians, for these texts' possible political valences as they have worked in contrapuntal (Said 1993) and often contentious relationship with state imageries of local peoplehood. Specifically, I look at a locally authored Angkola Batak heritage literature as it has worked to construct a sometimes nervous but at times proud and exuberant local ideology of Batak peoplehood within two hostile state contexts: the colonial Indies when the Bataks were one of Sumatra's subject peoples, and the national-era New Order, where South Tapanuli, North Sumatra (the administrative district encompassing the Angkola Batak home area [Figures 1 & 2]) was a small, marginalized outer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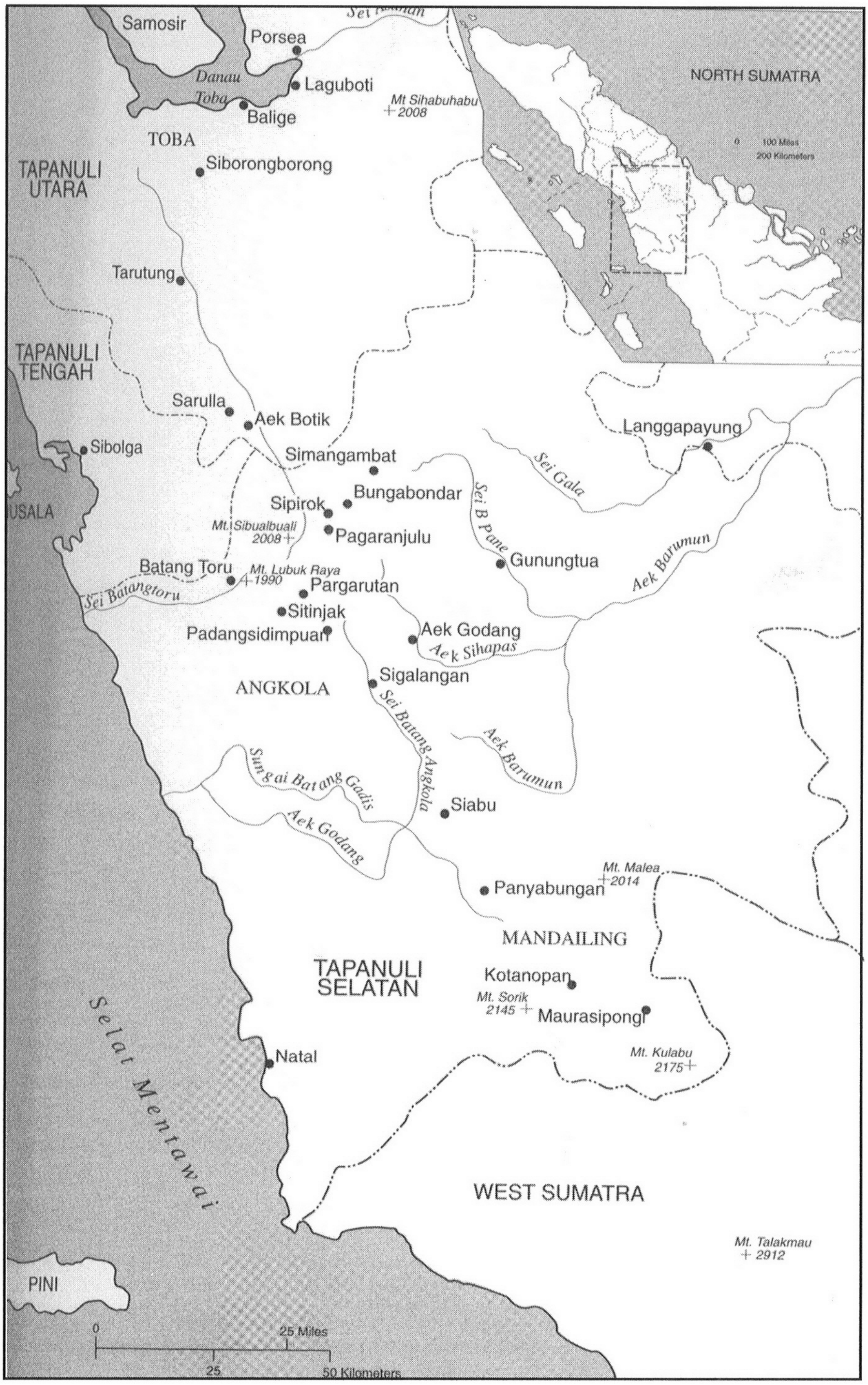
The Batak regions of North Sumatra, Indonesia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Detailed map of the Angkola and Mandailing areas island subprovince of the Republic of Indonesia. National culture in the 1965–98 New Order under former President Soeharto was dominated by the policy concerns and sheer population size of the "inner island" of Java. New Order state portrayals of the nation's social landscape cast the Bataks as one of Indonesia's 300-plus constituent *suku bangsa,* or ethnic peoples.

To see how an Angkola sense of "our people" emerged in part through print venues in encounters with states, I will consider three concrete texts. I want to move a bit beyond Brandes's valuable but somewhat programmatic findings about the workings of local folkloristic projects toward an investigation of specific rhetorical strategies that regional writers have used either to contest colonial state control or to deal with nationalism directed at them from distant capitals. The benefits of considering sample texts are several. First, actual literary texts keep the focus on the pesky ambiguities and inconsistencies of local ideological processes involved in peoplehood discourses: a guard against interpreting complex, local knowledge material in too mechanistic a Western social science way. Second, literary texts work as *art,* reminding would-be interpreters that political processes such as "our people"-to-state relationships sometimes occur, albeit in hidden ways, on the aesthetic plane. Third, keeping an eye on texts can also work to remind analysts that old heritage authors in places like Sumatra are exactly that, writers, not "strategizers" primarily intent on marketing their people and peoplehood to this or that target audience. All the writers here were closely attuned to issues of Angkola Batak–language beauty and saw the poetic elusiveness of *saro hita* ("our way of speaking") as a foundational part of what that *hita,* that "us"-ness, consisted of, in the colonial Indies and the New Order. Reading literary texts that take language excellence as one of their primary foci helps keep this inquiry about Angkola political life focused where much of that politics plays out: on language ideology.

Peoplehood Politics

Identities have often been problematic in Sumatra, where "the Batak" have at times been stigmatized as dangerous backwoods rustics. This context makes Angkola Batak–authored "Batak customs" writing from the 1910s and 1920s especially interesting. The Netherlands' commercial interests were strong in the Indies for 300 years, but in this part of Sumatra the colonial state only solidified in a practical military sense in about 1910, exactly the time when Batak old heritage writing arrived on the literary scene. I view this literature as one that "wrote back" to unflattering stereotypes held by other Sumatran peoples but, even more, I view indigenous old-customs texts as writing that contested Dutch colonial state control of Sumatran social and linguistic landscapes. Superficially, some of this Batak literature lauded the colonial social order (for instance, Angkola Batak school textbooks sometimes praised Dutch standards of school success). More subtly, though, some Batak texts subverted Dutch state power.

Angkola ancient traditions literature was also written vigorously in the 1980s, in the Soeharto years. These texts were issued by vanity presses and small commercial firms, often in Batak hands. The New Order was a military-backed, fervently economic, development-oriented government based in Jakarta. The New Order's interpretations of Indonesian national culture sometimes construed the rural, upland Sumatran Batak home regions as quaint backwaters in need of Jakarta's *oeuvre civilatrice:* for instance, road-building projects, school development, and the "gift" of health clinics that the center would bestow on needy villages. Both the Dutch colonial and the New Order regimes had formal, legal, civil bureaucratic, and military domain over the Angkola Batak and the upland ricelands that Angkola see as ancestral territory. Local clan genealogies claim this land was carved out for human use twenty generations ago, when the area was settled from "other Batak lands" (i.e., Toba).

In both the colonial-era local antiquarian literature and in Angkola texts produced during the New Order, schoolteachers and amateur old-customs experts mined their "disappearing oral heritages" of tales, chanted epics, laments, courtship songs, and ritual registers of speech to make statements about Angkola peoplehood in their authors' political here-and-now: deep in the Dutch East Indies colonial domain, and in 1980s New Order times, with that state's denigration of minority societies far from Java.

Rival claims about "who exactly is in charge" in what is now called South Tapanuli have been longstanding. By 1930 many educated Angkola Batak were strong Indonesian nationalists, working toward an independent Indonesia free of Dutch control. Loyalty to at least the potential of an Indonesian nation faithful to the spirit of the 1945–49 national revolution remains strong in the Angkola highlands. People there are generally proud Indonesians (though not New Order supporters) as well as claimants to various sorts of Angkola and/or Angkola Batak identities. Agitation for formal secession from Indonesia (except for some support for a major separatist rebellion in 1957–59) has not been a viable public issue. In this, the southern Batak areas stand in contrast to Aceh, at Sumatra's northern tip.

"Ethnic society" designations in this area have also been socially complex. As Edmund Leach pointed out for Burma (1954), ethnic peoplehood units in Southeast Asian uplands that have been in long-term contact with lowland traditional state societies often have shifting boundaries. Leach found that "Kachin" highland villages oscillated between "being Kachin," with a political system based on flexible marriage alliances, and "being Shan," tending toward the more hierarchical political structure of the lowland Shan states. In Sumatra the Dutch identified several Batak peoples. Their most prominent classification claimed six to eight such societies: Karo, Toba, Simelungun, Dairi or Dairi-Pakpak, Angkola or Angkola-Sipirok, and Mandailing. For the Dutch these were ethnolinguistic units, with each "Batak society" outfitted with its own named dialect of Batak. Anthropologists today question such peoplehood maps; it could be that the Dutch colonial experience itself had a large role in constructing ideas of "the Batak" in the first place for local and European audiences. The Mandailing and Simelungun Batak (if we may still use those terms) have had many dealings with neighboring state-level societies, possibly ushering in dynamics of the sort Leach identified in Burma.

In addition, individual "Batak" have sometimes migrated to other Batak regions (Angkola to Karo, say) and changed their clans (and thus their Angkola-ness, in that case) for the duration of their stay (Kipp 1983). And, in some historical contexts, especially in east-coast Sumatra where many Angkola have migrated, the term "Batak" has been associated for Muslim Malay and other Sumatrans with imageries of fierce, upriver, pig-eating Christian Toba Batak—something many Angkola and Mandailing (both largely Muslim since the 1850s) very much did not want to be. In other contexts, though, Angkola have claimed a degree of Batakness, a heritage tied to ancient migrations from Toba, the purported home of the clan founders. This positive view of Angkola Batak–ness also often has been linked to pride in speaking "a Batak language." The local writers I deal with are tillers in these specific fields: all posit a linkage among the "Batak peoples" and promote a proud heritage linked to the old speech ways of the Sipirok area, seen as a subregion of Angkola. Sipirok is the town where I have done most of my fieldwork.

As is evident, Angkola Batak–ness has not been so much a natural entity in the colonial Indies or Indonesia as it has been an ideological construct, built up in relationships with other "peoples" and with states. Anthropologists have studied such identity formation processes elsewhere in Indonesia (Steedly 1993; Tsing 1993). Angkola Batak–ness has been a coat of many colors, but it has emerged in small yet important part from such discursive processes as local customs writing by some but not all local authors. These domestic, textualized visions of Angkola-ness have emerged in complex literary settings that have included antiquarian investigations about "the Bataks" written from 1860 to 1940 by Dutch teacher training institute principals and linguists. More recently, other parties to the conversation have been authors in the New Order state's own investigations of Batak customs, through programs such as the "Proyek Dokumentasi dan Inventarisasi Kebudayaan Daerah," or Project for the Documentarization and Inventorying of Regional Cultures, a central government endeavor based in the Ministry of Education and Culture in the 1980s, when government oil revenue was abundant enough to fund such nationwide cultural activities.

This essay focuses on the writing of a Sipirok schoolteacher, a Sipirok-area novelist and journalist, and a Sipirok old-customs writer from a nearby village, not on central government publications per se (although state literatures surely helped shape indigenous folkloristics). None of the three authors was a professional folklorist in the sense of having a degree in that field. One colonial-era writer, Sutan Martua Raja,[1] was a school principal devoted to pushing Angkola schoolchildren rapidly toward "*hamajuon*" (progress in the sense of technological but also "civilizational" gains in a self-consciously "modern" Indies). His folkloric schoolbooks (all in Angkola Batak, and "folkloric" in the sense that Sutan Martua Raja was a self-conscious, serious student of Angkola heritage matters) were commissioned and published by the Dutch school authorities. However, Sutan Martua Raja exercised considerable editorial control. The second colonial-era writer, Soetan Hasoendoetan, was a novelist, newspaper freelancer, and recorder of chanted epics called *turi-turians*. In oral performance, turi-turians extend for seven nights of droned ritual speech and concern human interactions with Skyworld supernaturals in a mythic past. Soetan Hasoendoetan wrote these epics down mainly in Angkola Batak, not Malay, although he was fluent in both. He never graduated from high school; such attainments were limited to more privileged families with more connections to the Dutch. The third author, Sutan Habiaran Siregar, worked mostly in the 1980s and 1990s and was a retired city businessman who had turned his pensioned years into an effort to "dig up" (*menggali,* to use his Indonesian word) all Angkola ancient customs (funeral practices, ritual dances, songs) and set them down in books for the benefit of Angkola city migrants. These he saw as lamentably cut off from their roots (at times to such an extent, he has told me with disdain, that they cannot even speak Angkola Batak). Sutan Habiaran's ancient-lore volumes use a mixture of Angkola Batak and Indonesian.

Most Tapanuli residents between age seven and eighty are fluent in both languages. City-born Angkola sometimes have Indonesian as their mother tongue. Indonesian is at base Malay, developed over the last seventy years as Indonesia's national language. All three authors were very much in the business of writing Angkola traditions and, quite importantly, in the same process lauding Angkola Batak language excellence as a heartfelt language ideology point. As Mary Steedly notes, the notion of there being such things as Batak languages, *qua* local languages, is as much an ideological construct as the idea of Batak-ness per se (1996). She points to the role of Christian missionaries in fostering ideas of the Batak dialects as "natural local languages," over Malay, which was seen as a cross-region *lingua franca.* Steedly holds that this was a proselytizating strategy shaped by the Dutch Calvinist missionaries' conviction that Malay was "too foreign" and "too Muslim" for new Karo Christians. In Angkola the German Rhenish Mission's hand in local language discourse was also strong, starting in 1850. They, too, chose the vernacular over Malay for Bible translations and preaching. Influenced by mission policies and colonial classroom language use, all three authors apparently saw *hata Angkola* as distinct, as one of the Indies' and Indonesia's many "local languages."

All three writers used self-consciously modern Latin alphabet print literacy in their old-customs endeavors. Angkola Batak also has an Indic script, but it has long been marginalized as little more than an elective subject in school and is known to few. The "old Batak letters" (the *aksara*) have sometimes been a topic for Angkola antiquarians to write about, but the script has never been a medium for this type of literature (on aksara use in divination, spells, and love messages, see Kozok 2000).

In their books on old ways and Angkola identity in the Indies and Indonesia, all three writers contest state narratives in sly ways. Colonialism's culture has been of interest in anthropology and history lately, with the stress often laid on the ways in which "states oppress" local populations, construct individuals there as colonial subjects, and constrain local political agency (cf. Dirks 1992). What I attempt here is to look for "noise" in such a system of political control, to document the microprocesses of resistance in a concrete type of print textuality when states assert hegemonic control but do not always attain it far from government centers. With a mix of defiance, obsequiousness, dissembling, and speaking in code (Scott 1990), speakers and writers in towns like Sipirok have attempted to tell their own stories in the face of strong state narratives. In other words, things have been quite "noisy" out in the hinterlands of the Indies and Indonesia. The southern Batak societies, nervously defined though they may be, are quite large minority populations in Indonesia with many prominent national figures. So Angkola efforts to write Angkola in commercial print and in relatively lightly censored sectors of colonial schoolbook publishing have had a freer hand than have smaller, less well-connected, outer island societies.

Before going on to the texts, we need to consider some postcolonialist approaches to literatures of empire, as these might relate to resistance themes. This body of theory is illuminating in regard to Batak print textuality.

Rhetorics of Empire and Rhetorics of Resistance

There has been much recent, valuable research on Euro-American colonial regimes and their "rhetorics of empire," to use David Spurr's phrase (see, for instance, the essays in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, and Spurr 1996). Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) helped set the postcolonialist agenda for the study of writing and colonial power. In interpretations of familiar nineteenth-century British novels, Said advocated a type of analysis in which the power relations between the metropole and the colony are factored into the study of literary texts. Said writes that the presence of colonial possessions shaped British fiction in profound ways, even those novels not overtly about empire. Correspondingly, he asserts that the literatures of the formerly colonized world were generated in part by large-scale societal relations of domination, subordination, and resistance. A Nigerian novel written in English, he would contend, must be read with an eye toward the history of national-level power relations. Postcolonialists also often call for careful histories of the formation and maintenance of colonial worlds. Frances Gouda's *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942* (1995) offers a good example of this type of study about the establishment of a colonial culture and its institutions of control. Gouda devotes attention to the institutional but also the everyday mechanisms through which Indies residents were transformed into colonial subjects. She also looks at colonizing texts used in the Indies to construe local people *as* local people, and as colonial subjects. John Pemberton has recently suggested that even such ideas as there being a "Java" with an associated Javanese culture were notions rooted in the Netherlands East Indies' colonial project (1994).

How does writing factor into all this in detail? Spurr (1996) offers a typical postcolonialist answer, writing mostly about Africa and South Asia. In *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration,* he parses the colonial imagination in those types of writing, noting that Euro-American empires tended to appropriate locality in rhetorical terms in public texts, through such narrative strategies as surveillance, aestheticization, classification, debasement, negation, and idealization. In surveillance, the privileged gaze belongs to the colonial metropole, which surveys the dominated lands as from a promontory. In aestheticization (especially its journalistic varieties), print fosters a distinctive dramatic arc, turning the subject matter of reporting—a flood in India, for instance—into an eye-catching storyline. Real people in such lands are "aestheticized out" of the picture. Classification consists of a rhetorical position in which a continent like Africa is "analyzed, judged, and admonished" (61) in terms of a laundry list of negative patterns, such as "endemic poverty" and "family disarray." These are again bandied about to the literary exclusion of actual biographied selves. In debasement as a colonialist rhetorical strategy, Spurr contends, "the qualities assigned to the individual savage—dishonesty, suspicion, superstition, lack of self-discipline—are reflected more generally in societies characterized by corruption, xenophobia, tribalism, and the inability to govern themselves" (76). Colonized lands and their postcolonialist successor states are portrayed in the texts Spurr investigates as deeply flawed in an essentialist sense. A rhetorical approach involving negation is one in which colonized places are rendered as "areas of darkness" and "cultural emptiness." On the other hand, the idealization of colonial space involves writing "the native" as a noble savage. A rhetorical conquest of the natives' land comes about by portraying it as "paradise" as opposed to human territory.

This same postcolonialist critique could be applied to some of the Dutch folklore about the Batak peoples and to some of the New Order government's documentary folkloric projects. Both streams of writing sought to categorize Batak "customs," dissect them as to theme and use, and portray performance forms such as laments as "oral literature" suitable for scholarly appreciation and pedagogical application. But here I am looking at the other side of the coin: what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1994[1989]) call instances of "the empire writing back"—cases where people in colonized lands have seized the technology of print and literary forms such as newspaper writing, novels, and "customs" studies to document themselves.

In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures,* Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin usefully identify rhetorical strategies present in Caribbean and African writing to contest European canons, standards of literary excellence, and notions of "language" itself. They investigate such textual strategies as abrogation and appropriation, for instance. "The abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication," they write (38), referring to writing in the British Caribbean. They go on to assert that "[a]ppropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience" (38), as in various textual "revolts" occurring on the margins of empire. Ashcroft and colleagues' findings are helpful guideposts for considering Angkola Batak old heritage texts but do not go far enough. That is, the southern Batak folkloric endeavors were sometimes executed so close to indigenous ideas about the power and authority of ritual words (and so far from the examples from the English-speaking world often cited in postcolonialist research) that I find much of this scholarship to be imprecise. Thus, this paper's intent is to try to read in detail some Sipirok-area rhetorical strategies in local folkloristics. I am not claiming that veiled textual critiques of Dutch or New Order power necessarily had any major impact at the social institutional level. Both regimes, after all, stayed in place for decades and were only overthrown after massive military or economic events (the Japanese Occupation of 1942–45, and the Southeast Asian currency crisis of 1997 that destabilized the Soeharto administration). The literary reinventions of Angkola tradition explored here were more in the nature of epistemological experiments, through print textuality. The three authors wrote reality in fundamentally more liberated and community-affirming ways than states suspected—although it cannot be claimed that any reader took up arms or staged a protest as a result of his or her engagement with the texts at hand.

I should also add a word of caution about resistance as an anthropological topic. Perhaps because the notion that the underdog in situations of domination and subordination can mount resistance efforts is so attractive to Western liberal social science, resistance studies became quite popular in fields like anthropology about fifteen years ago. Resistance quickly started to be found (and celebrated) seemingly everywhere: in popular culture, costume, women's life-history narrative, village ceremonies, and so on. But, as Sherry Ortner (1995), Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), and Michael Brown (1996) have noted, anthropologists might do well to guard against romanticizing resistance here. They counsel precision in specifying what the actual power relations are in any historical or ethnographic event where domination and resistance are at issue. That is excellent advice when looking at Batak writing, since Batak identities and loyalties have so often been multivalent.

Colonial Indies Folklore Scholarship and School Development in the Bataklanden, the Bataklands

In many ways, early Batak-language print literary brilliance began in interaction with and in response to H. N. Van der Tuuk's 1851–57 linguistic and literary investigations of the Batak languages (Nieuwenhuys 1999[1972]:100–103).[2] An early visitor to the Batak regions, Van der Tuuk lived on the Indian Ocean coast and worked with highland salt merchant informants to document the grammars of the several Batak dialects (again, it is an open question whether his informants considered themselves "Batak," at this early date). Van der Tuuk also described special speech forms (laments, dirges, tales, verbal duels, curses, shaman's talk, blessings, the turi-turian chants, camphor gathering talk). A Eurasian trained in Leiden, Van der Tuuk had been hired by the Netherlands Bible Society to document the dialects and scripts in preparation for mission work. He reported five main dialectics of Batak: Karo, Toba, Simelungun, Dairi or Dairi-Pakpak, and Angkola-Mandailing (these last two, virtually indistinguishable). His pathbreaking *A Grammar of Toba Batak* (1864–67) and superb Toba dictionary (1861) established "Batak studies" as a force to be contended with in Dutch Indies scholarship. His collecting prowess also set high standards for later Dutch students of the Batak literatures: he amassed piles of bark-book texts inscribed in the syllabaries. He saw these as the primary form of Batak literature, dismissing southern Batak efforts at the time to learn Malay. His findings on dialect boundaries and his preference for "traditional literatures" shaped colonial school plans for Sumatra.

The Agrarian Reform Act of 1870 opened Sumatra to intensive European capital investment and to the development of large plantations on the Deli coast, down from the uplands. European planters foresaw major manpower needs for Deli clerks with basic literacy and arithmetic skills. The implementation of the Ethical Policy at the turn of the twentieth century further spurred demand for educated workers, both in Deli and the highlands. This policy called for intensified attention to the *inlanders'* social-welfare needs (schooling, family health care, home-economics programs). The Angkola and Mandailing (beginning to be seen as such by then) were targeted populations for these school plans for an Indies "on the move" toward modernity. Schoolhouses had arrived in those areas quite early. In fact, the southern Batak had become school boosters by the 1870s, at the dawn of the intensification of colonial school-system development after the passage of the 1871 Fundamental Education Act.

In the 1840s Natal in Mandailing became the first Dutch toehold in what later became known as the Batak lands. The colonial administration was investing heavily in coffee production in west-coast Sumatra and was exploring expansion into Mandailing and Angkola. By 1850 inland Panyabungan had also been brought into the colonial fold via alliances with nobles. Mandailing's first school was built there in the 1850s, followed by a pioneer teacher-training institute (a *kweekschool*) in Tano Bato, headed by Panyabungan noble Willem Iskander. Mandailing was Muslim, the result of conversions during the Wahabhist Padri Wars of 1816–37. At that time militant Muslim forces from Minangkabau swept northward, forcibly converting villages. By the 1850s Angkola, too, was partly Muslim (Castles 1975); the German Rhenish Mission began work in Sipirok at the same time, eventually converting about 10 percent of the population.

By the 1870s changes were afoot in school policy for the southern Batak areas. A larger kweekschool was planned for Padangsidimpuan. Its scope was expanded in line with the government's new charge to the teacher-training schools: they were now to become centers of local culture study and language research for their surrounding areas. According to a 1871 central school policy, the kweekschools' personnel (local men, led by Dutch administrators) were to fan out into the countryside, documenting such things as folktales, and then to incorporate these into textbooks for local pupils. Descriptive linguistic research, the publication of dictionaries, and folklore studies in general, as that might be tied to school development, were all encouraged. Batak teachers were urged to write textbooks, and local languages were to be nurtured as media of instruction alongside Malay. In line with this, Ch. A. van Ophuysen, the Kweekschool Padangsidimpuan's principal, did major work in Batak folktale studies (1914).

The kweekelings and their pupils dominated Batak education until the 1920s. At this date the schools in Sipirok were coming into their own and the town was emerging as a writing center as well as a long-term hub for great oratory (nobles there were famous speechmakers). Sipirok had government schools, Bible schools, and even its own Hollandse Inlandse School, an elite primary school using Dutch. Sipirok had newspapers in Angkola Batak and Malay; Sipirok-born novelists gained fame in Deli. Other kweekschool graduates had gone on to careers in Tapanuli and Deli as newspaper editors (Said 1976). The presses of the small, rural, Batak-run papers began a sideline: the publication of small volumes on "old lore" for local audiences and homesick Tapanuli migrants to Deli. Sipirok then thrived both as a center for oratory and antiquarian literature. To appreciate the linked politics and aesthetics of this we can turn now to sample texts.

Writing the Critical Child: Sutan Martua Raja's Lessons on Folktales

My first text is from a remarkable Angkola Batak–language schoolbook written for Angkola ten- to fifteen-year-olds in 1917, when Tapanuli was, on the surface, deeply colonized. Dutch school standards of achievement were in place in Sipirok's Hollands Inlandse Scholen (H.I.S.), high-prestige Dutch-language elementary schools; the economy was shifting to salaried work; and the Ethical Policy had arrived even in mountain towns. The textbook's title was *Doea Sadjoli* (*Two Walking in Line*, as ducklings do). Commissioned and published by the colonial-school authorities, it was written by Sutan Martua Raja, an Angkola traditional aristocrat and school principal, a graduate of a Dutch- and Indonesian-language Sumatran kweekschool. In the excerpt here, Sutan Martua Raja "tells" his young charges a folktale about a mysterious volcanic mountain lake in their home area. In carefully framing his folktale, Sutan Martua Raja constructs his imagined young reader as a critical-minded skeptic. The child reader is subtly urged to doubt the veracity not just of mountain lake origin tales but also of bodies of received wisdom in larger senses. In drawing on Dutch colonial folklore scholarship and its then-preoccupation with Batak folktales, Sutan Martua Raja was in effect writing the critical child, preparing for that youngster's future engagements with Indies colonialism. Writing self-consciously modern Sumatran-language worlds in unapologetic ways was a key process here. School uses of folktales surely can work toward state ends, but in this case a teacher turned folktale study toward nurturing states of disbelief.

Sutan Martua Raja Siregar was an impresario of Batak school life. Hailing from the Bagas Lombang lineage of high-born Siregar clansmen (Sipirok's founders), he served as a well-regarded H.I.S. principal in Sipirok and then was reassigned by the school authorities to develop elite schools in Toba and Pematang Siantar. His schoolbooks, *Two Walking in Line I* and *II* and *Rante Omas* (*Golden Chain*, 1918), were all written in an elegant form of Angkola Batak and drew lavishly on the region's many narrative forms such as complaint songs, laments, and tales about boys who go on forest quests (a turiturian idea). The Bagas Lombang Siregars claimed special access to oratorical powers. As a schoolman, Sutan Martua Raja cast Sipirok's oral heritage as a sort of source for textbook material for his child scholars. *Two Walking in Line* and *Golden Chain* were designed to polish the reading skills of schoolchildren in the *soerat Oelando*, "the Dutch letters": the Latin alphabet. The subject matter was shaped by European secular pedagogy but was also deeply Angkola in focus. It was also much caught up with the rhetorical processes of imagining Angkola in the Indies. His textbooks were phrased in the intimate tones of an adult storyteller/teacher gently ladling modern-era *poda*, moral lessons, to receptive child readers. The subject matter was challenging but gentle.

Print's penetration into a people's way of self-representation can lead to a sentimentalization of language and special speech forms. Angkola folkloric projects in the late colonial years and the textbook literacy it was tied to could certainly have developed in this direction. Early print literacy can lead to syrupy, nostalgic, conservationist approaches to such speech forms as folktales, as local writers in the early years of print's influence in a society come to "look back on" oral forms (Ong 1982; Goody 1986) and catalogue them in wistful, fusty ways. Angkola's folktales, laments, and so on would have lent themselves to this approach and to the list-making tendencies of early print. But, in general, in early 1900s southern Tapanuli writing, this did not happen. Rather, what developed was a critical approach to such forms as folktales, one that asked even very young readers to question narrative authority. Why? Part of the answer may be that Sutan Martua Raja inoculated generations of Angkola-speaking pupils against nostalgia and propelled them toward a sophisticated grasp of the fictiveness of all narrative.

Two Walking in Line covered a variety of topics chosen to appeal to eager, perspicacious students. Chapters cover "The Man with the Rifle," "Don't Go Badgering Animals!," "Being Sick," "The Cloth-seller," "The Cart-Pulling Water Buffalo," "Lake Toba," and "Coffee" (on the government's forced cultivation system). Other chapters pursue turi-turian themes or relate familiar stories. Here, the latter tend not to be the standard Malay world tales about such animal heroes as Mousedeer, but instead feature very local Sipirok-area tales. The genius of *Two Walking in Line,* at least for alert readers, was the intellectual setting into which such snippets of folk culture were set. In volume 1, the child reader meets his or her opposite number: two school pupil characters, Si Badia and Si Anggara. These boys, often joined by two others (also boys), go on friendly visits to the town district officer, or to the Demang (a higher official). These men are always Angkola adults. At times the youngsters pay visits to a kindly raja and orator, Dja Kodair. It is in the context of the bantering conversations the children have with these men and with the mother of one of the boys that they hear such things as the tales. A story of this sort, set within a frame of the visit to the benevolent older person, typically occupies most of a chapter. Then, after this, the children reconsider the veracity of the pleasing oral story they have just heard. Sutan Martua Raja's pair of chapters on the puzzling mountain lake illustrate this. "Lake Marsabut" concerns a small crater lake near Bungabondar Village, near Sipirok. Sutan Martua Raja begins by describing a gathering of the children in the Demang's house. He then paints a Sumatran landscape in concrete terms. He asks readers to recall mountain paths with which only Sipirok area residents would likely be familiar.

> One time on a Sunday, the four children gathered once again at the house of the Demang. Apparently that day the Demang's workload was rather light, so he told the children a story as follows: "Over to the East of this district we inhabit, still in the kuria-ship [chieftainship district] close to us here, there is a certain choppy, mountainous area. If you go along the main road headed East about 5 *pal* markers [a colonial-era unit of measurement] you will come to the base of a mountain facing downriver. Off to the side of a loading area there you go on up, following the winding road that curves along the spine of that mountain. That road is not in too terrible shape and even though it is not paved with gravel, it is still easy to traverse, for folks keep it clear of brush and in good order. That is the road on up toward that choppy, rough area just mentioned.
>
> "After you get to the spine of the mountain you still have about 3 pals to go, to get to the mountaintop, going upward nonstop. Because you get so tired climbing this path, people have prepared a small bench there to sit on, there in a rest stop in the folds of the mountain. Whosoever has stopped to sit there awhile will not soon forget how lovely the view is, from that good rest stop.
>
> "Looking from West to North, the mountain peaks pile up in rows, inhabited thickly by people. The rice paddies thrive, growing greenly, like lakes surrounded by small landings. People's houses in all the small villages are beautiful to see. A few of them have higher than normal roofs, pointed skyward: those are the mosques and churches. Seeing that, a feeling of happiness and contentment grows inside one. When those young-in-body happen to stop there at that rest stop, some may simply burst into song, from delight, and also perhaps from feelings of poignant loneliness." (Sutan Martua Raja 1919:10–11, my translation)

This last idea evokes a sense of being isolated from family, far from one's home village, mired in sad but piquant loneliness. Angkola Batak writers of late-colonial times often sought to evoke these emotions. Sutan Martua Raja continues, taking the reader up hill and down dale and then the chapter ends with the comment: "After very long on your way you arrive at a slope, leading down to Lake Marsabut itself. Now, how Lake Marsabut got that name is no longer known, but as to how it came into being, people say . . ." and then we move right into chapter 4, "The Woman Who Went and Changed Things All Around." This is the origin story itself, nested a bit down inside the first part of the chapter. This reads in full, again in my translation:

> Now this lake we're telling the story about, it is not all that wide. Its layout is from East to West set out lengthwise. It is about 200 meters long from one end to the other and about 80 meters across. The lake is quite deep. It is greenish black, from the shade of the trees all around and from its depth. Back in the dark dark ancient past age, so many hundreds of years ago one cannot even determine how long ago it was, where that lake is now there was a village. One time, in the heat of a sunny day, when the villagers were all out in the dry fields harvesting the crop and almost no one was left behind in the village, a lone old woman was drying rice grain there on her rattan mats, out on the main path through the village. Because so very few people were there in the settlement, that single lone woman was sort of bored, left there all by herself, sitting there about to nod off to sleep, trying to keep an eye on her rice mats, trying to watch for birds to shoo off. Now, she knew that she should not fall asleep for all the rice grain was still spread out on the mats and needed watching. Well, what do you know but she started to remember and think back to all sorts of things from the past, that old woman sitting there. She thought, Ah, my body may be old, but my heart's still young, and suddenly her thoughts turned to the extremely pleasing image of a young girl just grown up, all attired to be wed.
>
> With thoughts like those, it wasn't enough for her to just have them in her heart: she wanted to actually see them too. Because her memory of the beauty of a girl going off to her wedding in full regalia was so strong, she took the bejeweled belt, the ceremonial hairbun, and the gold spangled headdress out of their special storage cases in the house. She said to herself that because she felt so very young, she would just have to attire herself in all this bridal finery. But, it seems, because there were not any mirrors yet back then, her heart gained no satisfaction: She could not see her beautifully dressed body. So! She reached out and grabbed the housecat and dressed her up in the wedding clothes—she costumed the cat like a girl attired for her marriage ceremony.
>
> Because she had gone and changed manners of doing things all around, Those-Not-Seen grew intensely angry, a lightning bolt crashed down from the sky, a thunderclap boomed out, and! That overly fervent woman and her costumed housecat were struck dead in their tracks. The village itself was immediately scorched all the way down to the ground: totally wiped out, with not only all the houses burnt down but the very earth beneath them turned to ash, to be blown away by Blustery Blowing Wind. Not long afterward a strong rain began to pour down and that village turned into a lake—and it is now Lake Marsabut of today.

After relating this tale, the narrator switches back to his framing device and has his fictive child listeners discuss the truth or falsity of the origin story: What a charming tale, one child says, but can we really believe old stories like that? Um, maybe not, the child consensus goes:

> "Is that really true, stories like that, d'ya think?" said Si Badia. He was looking at Si Anggara.
>
> "Ah, good pal, I don't really know whether it is true or not. But, how could folks be allowed to tell that story like that, if it's not really true?" answered Si Anggara. He hunched his shoulder up a bit, saying he was sort of bothered to be saying that the story was true.
>
> "So, listen, you believe that, do you? That just because someone has dressed up a cat Those-Not-Seen grew angry and a lightning bolt crashed down and got that cat? But, look: folks today do much worse things but nothing at all happens. Thunderclaps don't crash down—why, even the chickens don't cackle," Si Badia went on to say.
>
> "Yeah, right! Now, that's true what you say. I don't believe it, that because a cat got dressed up in ceremonial clothes that a lightning bolt crashed down. But, maybe right when that cat was dressed up

> thunder came, and after that, a very hard rain happened to fall, maybe. And because the ground was very soft, or maybe because there was no solid rock foundation underneath all that earth, maybe all the topsoil ran off forming a small hollow. And that's what made water gather there, and turn into a lake. Now, that sort of thing I could believe, if it happened that way," said Si Badia.

The kindly adult tale-teller smiles, pleased that the child has been clearsighted about such events and stories: "Even though he is still quite young in body, because he is so diligent at reading lots of good books, his thoughts have now become sharp and clear." The boy is able to differentiate between stories of lesser and more plausibility; he also listens to older pupils' opinions. The Demang goes on to tell the boys that scientists have discovered that some of Sumatra's lakes have developed in just the way Badia outlines. The chapter ends, "'When you hear that story, maybe it was because a very heavy rain fell, back in the past, and that made that lake come into being,' said the Demang, going on to stand up and then go out for a walk" (13).

In other chapters of similar format, a kindly adult teller of a tale will laugh and remind the children that there may still be some measure of worth in those old tales. But, in each case, the children in the story and the child readers of the textbook are left to consider an odd circumstance: now they, though children, have an extra dimension of critical interpretive skill about stories that have been told to them by anyone—Batak adults, but perhaps by the Dutch as well. Since this lesson about listening, reading, group discussion, and interpretation comes early on in volume 2, the poda lesson here frames all later chapters as well—on turi-turians, coffee cultivation, Tapanuli poverty, and (in the writer's words) "*sipamarenta i*" (or that guy who came to govern us). When taken as a whole, over the course of years of school study, Sutan Martua Raja's books present pupils with a drumbeat of object lessons in reading beyond content, toward the evaluation of claims for authoritativeness in colonial-era texts. At times he becomes quite bold in this, asking readers to grapple with complex arguments about market expansion in Toba and Tapanuli's heritage of slavery.

Stunning the Reader with Local Language Loveliness: Soetan Hasoendoetan Upends Colonial Language Hierarchies

The second text, also from colonial times, is more complex and thus reading it offers more insight into possible local rhetorics of resistance to colonial control. The Angkola Batak–language novel *Sitti Djaoerah* was serialized in a newspaper in 1927 and reissued as a book in 1929. This novel is an Angkola Batak–language undertaking, not an Indonesian-language one. In fact, it fired an important local salvo in attempts to imagine Angkola Batak as a splendid "local language" (Soetan Hasoendoetan 1997).

The novel was written for a sort of "we-Angkola-speakers" readership. The passage offers a dense evocation of a young Angkola woman's breathtaking beauty as a "girl of the seven lovelinesses," a sort of Skyworld spirit girl. In this passage and many others, the novelist, newspaper freelancer, and turi-turian collector Soetan Hasoendoetan played around the margins of Angkola Batak–language turi-turian chant speech. He and his fellow Sipirok writers had been ushering turi-turian narratives and their highflown ritual speech into print over the previous decades. Soetan Hasoendoetan transformed epic chant sung-speech into grist for a novel (that self-consciously modern form of writing) to dislocate colonial-language hierarchies and to promote Angkola Batak as a much more refined, intellectually sophisticated, and emotionally evocative language than either Dutch or Indonesian. This was a key aspect of his resistance work in *Sitti Djaoerah.* Soetan Hasoendoetan was a virtuoso novelist and self-taught folklorist who was close to some of Sipirok's last turi-turian bards. Drawing on his informal research, he imagined novel-writing in distinctly local terms, as a sort of turi-turian recitation and wow-the-audience endeavor cast into print. By combining the world-overseeing capacities of the chanted epic and the socially realistic novel—and by exulting in the language play of both these forms—he was able to contest Dutch control of Sumatran-language landscapes.

The passage comes far into the book, a love story and journey-to-Deli novel. First, a few points about turi-turian chant narrativity in relation to Soetan Hasoendoetan's conceptualization of novels are necessary. Soetan Hasoendoetan was a graduate only of several grades in school, but he became Sipirok's premier literary experimenter. A clerk on a Dutch-owned tea plantation in Pematang Siantar, he wrote books and newspaper stories as an avocation and a way to earn money for his large family. From a 1992 interview with his daughter, I learned that he did not speak much Dutch but was fluent in Malay. He clearly had read some of the famous Indonesian-language novels published in the 1920s by the government's official publishing house for "fine literature," Balai Pustaka (Teeuw 1972; Freidus 1977). Concerned that new school graduates would not have enough high-quality literature in the state's chosen language of pedagogy and commerce, the administration founded Balai Pustaka in the early 1920s to commission indigenous novels written in "good Malay." A large, quite popular literature of moral uplift and public entertainment ensued. These novels often concerned the tribulations of Sumatran young people caught between the demands of village tradition and life in cosmopolitan Indies locales such as advanced schools. An ill-fated love story about star-crossed young people often drove these plots. The books frequently ended bleakly, with the protagonists unhappily married to someone else, or even dead (especially the heroines). Balai Pustaka novelists seemed to be asking: Can village traditions survive in an Indies "on the move" toward modernity? And should they? Soetan Hasoendoetan tells us in a preface that *Sitti Nurbaya,* a famous Balai Pustaka novel (Rusli 1922), was the direct inspiration for *Sitti Djaoerah.*

The latter is not a retelling of the Balai Pustaka book, but is instead a new, more upbeat story. The heroine, Sitti Djaoerah, is thriving at the book's end, happily married to her longtime admirer, Djahoemarkar, Raja Opener-of-Hearts, Raja Opener of Deep Wells of Longing. The book is based in some part on the novel-writing models Soetan Hasoendoetan had gleaned from *Sitti Nurbaya* (ideas tied to Dutch novel-writing of the 1880s; Nieuwenhuys 1999[1972]), but *Sitti Djaoerah* also derives from Angkola storytelling, specifically from turi-turians. In his novel, Soetan Hasoendoetan's avocation as a folklorist who had studied and documented the local chants comes into play. He seems to have mined the turi-turians' linguistic brio and their omnivorous approach to Angkola ritual speech as source material and inspiration for driving home *Sitti Djaoerah*'s key social point, that the Dutch were not actually in control of Sumatra. Not party to the elite circles of Sumatran writers who worked mostly in Indonesian, he had to invent the Angkola novel on his own. Perhaps this allowed him political room for maneuvering that the more well-known Balai Pustaka writers did not have.

Why did Soetan Hasoendoetan write *Sitti Djaoerah* in Angkola Batak? He tells us in his preface: much as *halak hita* (our people) will always prefer their own home cooking made with Angkola's distinctive curries to foreign dishes, no matter how richly oily the latter might be, so too Angkola-language books were necessarily going to be more delicious, more *tabo,* to them than any Indonesian-language works like *Sitti Nurbaya* could ever be (Soetan Hasoendoetan 1929[1927]:3–4). As newspaper readers quickly discovered, *Sitti Djaoerah* would deal in terms of the tastiest language repast possible: turi-turians.

The chanted stories included in his novel were actually on the edge of extinction as oral performances when Soetan Hasoendoetan reworked their vision of language play and language excellence in order to write his turi-novel (they were performed with some regularity until about 1920, Sipirok interviewees tell me today). As chants, turi-turians have a sweeping linguistic comprehensiveness—a main source of their lusciousness. In a complete turi-turian, listeners hear examples of all major forms of Angkola special speech, from sobbed laments, to courtship rhymes, to verbal duels between marriage alliance partners, to praise speeches to the ancestors, to riddles, to tales (all contextualized within the action). As stories, turi-turians concern mystical quests taken by young princes in past times, through jungle realms of supernatural tigers, up to a Skyworld inhabited by the kings, queens, and lovely daughters of the Above. As oral performances, turi-turians would go on for hours, showering audiences with droned, rhymed couplets and blessings, and proceed from mysterious incident to incident in a special register of highly esoteric speech in which everyday words are replaced by circumlocutions (e.g., "Head-the-Honored-Bearer-of-Burdens"). Soetan Hasoendoetan eventually published a book version of Sipirok's hometown turi-turian (1941). Other such literary epics had been written by Mandailing newspapermen, starting in 1914 (e.g., Mangaradja Goenoeng 1957[1914]; on Indies-era vernacular journalism, see Adam 1995). These books were celebrated locally as omnibus "tours" of the old language landscape, one held locally to be in danger of slipping away as more Tapanuli mountain people moved to east-coast Sumatra. In these printed versions, turi-turian narrative sometimes emerged as somewhat novelistic prose.

The two volumes of *Sitti Djaoerah* cover 457 pages—the better to keep newspaper readers buying their papers, perhaps. It appeared first on page 1 in the Sibolga weekly *Poestaha,* or Ancient Heirlooms. This paper was a sort of old-heritage journal that covered the usual run of stories for the vernacular press (crime stories, court news) but focused on such matters as the beauty of Angkola ritual speech and the place of such oratory in "the modern Indies." On page 1 in many issues would be a crucially important "speech" for the modern age: a serialized novel.

Sitti Djaoerah's subtitle was "The Firm Oath-Vow," a reference to the promise volume 1's young hero makes with two supernatural companions, Fighting-Cock-as-Angry-as-the-Bubble-Boiling-Rice-Cooking-Water and Fighting-Cock-Protecting-

Us-Out-on-the-Ramparts. These are magical rooster titles from turi-turians. The two boys promise volume 1's hero, Young Martial Arts Battler (a turi-turian touch), that they will defend him in the face of adversity. He also vows to do this for them, but it turns out that the youths panic when Young Martial Arts Battler encounters a mystical attack from a supernatural tiger out in the forest where the three companions have gone (shades of turi-turians) to search for aromatic resins to sell at the market to make good on gambling debts (not shades of turi-turians but surely reminiscent of the action in a famous Balai Pustaka novel, *Azab dan Sengsara, Torment, Misery,* by Merari Siregar [1958(1927)]). That broken vow contributes to volume 1's final tragedy: Young Martial Arts Battler's murder by his two old helpers after he pursues a court case against them. The vow appears again in volume 2, which concerns the childhood and young adulthood of Young Martial Arts Battler's son, Djahoemarkar, and his school friend, Sitti Djaoerah. The vow here is their secret promise to wed in the face of parental displeasure.

Midway through volume 2 Sitti Djaoerah is a young, blooming *bujing-bujing* (a marriage-age adolescent girl). She has run away from home with her sympathetic mother to escape her father's plans to pair her off to a rich old merchant. Through this marriage, her father, Awaiting Riches, hopes to secure the other man as a new business partner. The other merchant hopes to secure the budding, fourteen-year-old Sitti Djaoerah as a wife. The threat of a forced marriage to a loathsome old merchant is a plot device familiar to Balai Pustaka readers. The girl and her mother have sought refuge in Panyabungan and are selling cakes at the market to support themselves while they await word from Djahoemarkar. About twenty at the time, Djahoemarkar has left his Tapanuli schoolteaching position in search of a salaried job near Medan. A pestilence has destroyed his family herds back in Tapanuli (an occasion for lengthy funeral laments on his mother's part: after all, the novelist had to stick in every ritual speech form possible in his *turi*-book). At this point the narrative is going along at a comfortable pace, in the recognizable tones of 1920s Angkola-language novelistic social realism:

> Now, Dear Reader, as days went by, Sitti Djaoerah grew taller, as she attained her full adult height. As she grew, her face just got prettier, her figure filled out—and she became that much more outstanding in comparison to all the other girls in that marketplace.

At the end of this passage, however, comes the following interlude, which the novelist seems to have designed to take the reader's breath away. In this case, one might perhaps say "reciter," as passages of *Sitti Djaoerah* invite oral reading, and at times the novelist notes in an aside to Dear Reader to sing certain sections. This passage has no such directions to that effect, however. The paragraph goes as follows:

> Nowadays, it seemed, she was as lovely as the tall bamboo shooting skyward, protected from the winds by two surrounding mountain slopes, what with her face as lovely as the round, full moon; her hairbun as big as the weaverwoman's huge ball of thread; her eyebrows curved jauntily like the rooster's back claw; her cheeks rosy and round like a ripening mango; her eyelashes thick like fat buzzing black bumblebees; the nape of her neck curved like a bunch of bananas on its stalk shimmering in the early morning sun; her chin rounded and oval like the honeybee's pendulant hive; her fingers long and slim like the quills of a young porcupine; the calves of her legs rounded like rice grains swelling in their

> husks; the soles of her feet smooth and round like the tender eggs of a hen laying for the first time; her sight so sharp it sends the hillsides cascading down in landslides; her steps so slow and deliberate one thinks she is carrying a burden atop her head; her strides swaying like the undulant sea waves; her teeth white and even like grains of sand at Bagan Si Api-Api Beach; her smile coming and going like the glistening shining flying fish as they jump in and out of the water in the Moonlight Radiance; her manner of speaking as elegant as the bamboo bending gently down in our path; her very cough stirring our feelings of deep love and longing; her gentle throat-clearing making whirlpools of our feelings, like hidden eddies in the deepest woods. (Soetan Hasoendoetan 1997:281–82)

This sort of description occurs in the midst of much more mundane prose, such as information about Sitti Djaoerah's job of selling little treats in the Panyabungan marketplace. What was Soetan Hasoendoetan doing here, working as he was in the borderlands of orality and commercial print literacy, antiquarian studies of turiturians and novel-writing, Balai Pustaka narrative and Batak literature, and between "Angkola" and "Deli" as social but also linguistic locales that he was helping to write into the common imagination for Angkola speakers "on the move"? Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the novel and Benedict Anderson's insights (1998[1983]) about novel-writing and the imagined community of the nation (in this case, a Batak nation that never came to be) suggest an answer.

Sitti Djaoerah is abuzz with language activity. Not only does it take readers on a tour of Angkola special speech forms, the protagonists also visit distant ethnic regions of Sumatra where other languages are spoken. When these areas are Batak, with dialects close to Angkola Batak, not only the main characters' dialogue but sometimes the full narrative switches over to a language like Toba Batak for that part of the story. Toba Batak is a close enough dialect to Angkola Batak for an Angkola reader to handle this, to a degree. At times the author writes such passages in a kind of pseudo-Toba, flattering the Angkola reader as someone who "of course" had a broadscale grasp of Sumatran languages. On other pages, Angkola or Mandailing characters spout oratory to each other for entertainment or in school lessons. Forest animals converse with humans with onomatopoeic verve; spirit beings lure vulnerable young men over into shadow realms through chant speech full of secret phrases from distant Minangkabau. The writer praises a character's lovely name through "ancient-sounding" words; bereaved protagonists mourn a rural home left behind in a move to Deli via laments. As well, characters contact each other by writing oratory-filled letters, and when characters migrate to Medan, they are often shown reading newspapers and even writing ads for them.

None of this sense of language play or this irreverent admixture of usually distinct genres will come as a surprise to followers of Bakhtin, in his work on what sort of literary text early novels in a culture tend to be (1990). He writes that the novel is a radically anticanonical sort of writing, one that gobbles up historically previous forms of writing and ritualized speech and redacts these according to its own irreverent aesthetic. Genres such as epics or written romances, which previously stood on their own in aesthetic terms, frequently get the authoritative stuffing knocked out of them when novel-writing arrives on the scene. Bakhtin further asserts that novel-writing tends to come on a historical stage when previously more isolated languages ram into each other in new nations (here we might say, new nations in the making) and when the emergence of a national language throws other possible political candidates for this role into high relief. Languages in such circumstances "throw light on each other" and all this "sets into motion a process of active, mutual cause and effect and interillumination" (Bakhtin 1990[1981]:12). This is much what occurs in *Sitti Djaoerah*'s portrait of Sumatran-language diversity of the 1880s to the early 1920s.

Bakhtin goes on to note that novel-writing offers new ways of narrating time and social space. Characters are firmly planted in secular history; "the traces of the epoch are imprinted" upon them and the storyline (1990[1981]:157). Protagonists move through time unidirectionally, unable in general to work the supernatural feats of myth. In *Sitti Djaoerah,* supernaturalism abounds in volume 1 and later recedes; the second volume stays on the socially realistic plane and when characters tell each other supernatural tales, they usually do so as entertainment (Rodgers 1991b). By the book's end Soetan Hasoendoetan is writing the sort of novel that Anderson posits as a key building block for a public in a place like the colonial Indies to read as a way to imagine nationhood (Anderson 1998[1983]:9–46). Anderson writes that the socially realistic novel (the "old-fashioned novel") describes much the sorts of social space and time conjured up as well in visions of nationhood—secular landscapes in which characters share a common membership in a society, where events happen simultaneously without parties in other events knowing what is going on just then. The omniscient reader joins the scenes together much as the reader of a newspaper (another key cultural source for the nationalist imagination) oversees the action in his or her morning paper. The citizens of a new nation's imagined community do not all know each other, but they discover their common identity as participants in the same secular pageant of the nation-marching-on in a temporal sense. In *Sitti Djaoerah,* Soetan Hasoendoetan seems to have been evoking an Angkola imagined community, one that never coalesced as a nation. Indonesian nationalist narratives swamped it by the time of the actual national revolution. When a writer of the talent and social insight of a Soetan Hasoendoetan drew on both novelistic storytelling techniques and those of the turi-turian (from performance and print), the result could be a text of greater fictional power and linguistic mischief than the usual Balai Pustaka novel. A profoundly indigenized novel such as *Sitti Djaoerah* could emerge as an instrument for reconstructing the Indies and Indies historical time for its readers, at least in their imaginative lives.

The characters Djahoemarkar and Sitti Djaoerah themselves are portrayed as energetically writing colonial locales such as plantation-provided homes into aesthetic existence as Angkola places, through the medium of a defiant, remarkably nonnostalgic use of Angkola "ancient speech" as something that deserves a place in Latin alphabet print. That is, the couple decorates their Deli house with "old sayings" written out in the Latin letters and stenciled across the top of the walls. In so doing they reflect Soetan Hasoendoetan's own writerly approach to Sipirok's old-language ways: in his turi-turian studies and his novel-writing, he pursued a vigorous antiquarianism that did not defer to the prestige of Malay or Dutch, though those two languages were accorded higher status than Batak was in such colonial locales as schools. In *Sitti Djaoerah,* Angkola Batak is placed dead center as the loveliest *saro,* way of speaking, for "our people"—an "us" the novel is in the process of creating for readers. The author's technique of privileging "our way of speaking" lies at the center of his understanding of home language, folkloric novels, as devices to renarrate the Indies. He drew here on *Sitti Djaoerah*'s turi-turian roots.

The girl of the seven lovelinesses format, the one alluded to in the passage above, is a common turi-turian praise oratory technique for introducing a ravishing Spirit World girl into the chant. The turi-turian bard uses numerous such formulaic geysers of beautiful phrases (a familiar technique in many oral epic traditions [Lord 1995]). Such rushes of lovely words eulogize the stunning appearance of ethereal beings from the Upper Continent. In print, such passages remind readers of the poignant feelings such scenes evoke in the chant's male protagonists when they glimpse one of these luminous girls.

Print's seditious potential to allow subtle critiques of the colonial regime had greatly intensified in Tapanuli and the southern Batak diaspora by the 1920s, the crest of Angkola-language publication. In *Sitti Djaoerah* Soetan Hasoendoetan attempted a veiled denial that the Dutch held effective linguistic dominion over Tapanuli, or even Deli. He seems to have been attempting several things at once in such passages, all of them tied to his overall effort to invent the Angkola novel in a form faithful to his view of Angkola language excellence in the Indies. In sections like this one, he placed Angkola standards of female beauty at the center of Sumatran aesthetics for his audience. His readers encountered few ravishing Tapanuli girls in the official public imageries of the ethnic feminine in 1920s Deli. In novels, though, these Spirit Girls could work their magic. The Dutch would not even see them: even those few fluent in Angkola Batak generally could not read this high level of oratory. Soetan Hasoendoetan was placing Angkola spoken art at the center of his reader's aesthetic world in even larger senses, too, implying that Malay and even Toba Batak—and certainly Dutch—had no such metaphorical depth as Angkola Batak does and could not offer such a font of praise words. Angkola Batak turi-turian speech flows just "to us," as Angkola-language readers, as do the folkloric local, printed chants. The novel could not be read by Javanese and so on: its flow of words just toward "us" acted as a communal secret in the midst of the Indies' maelstrom of print sources surrounding the Angkola Batak–language reader. In *Sitti Djaoerah*'s reinvigorated vision of turi-turian language beauty and storytelling, the European novel-writing enterprise, its Balai Pustaka offshoots, and Dutch folkloristics had been poetically domesticated, at least in a few spots along the Indies literary landscape.

Dictation by the Dead: Sutan Habiaran and His Lineage History Book

My third text, from a 1986 mixed Angkola Batak– and Indonesian-language history of its author's lineage (Siregar 1986), starts:

> A *Tonggo:* O———— Ancient Ancestor Creator of the Rice and Land, Starter of the Sky, Originator of the Earth and Sulfur Fields, oh-kind-revered-grandparent, may you not start in surprise nor grow angry, to hear this so-far-from-lovely voice of mine, this voice so far as it is from perfection. Surely my voice is like that of a village billy goat braying out his harsh call, splitting the night, disturbing our rest, the voice of this poor body here, this voice relating this sad *turi* tale, this tale for our common meeting here.

This high oratory continues on for half a page; tonggo chants begin turi-turians to unseen audiences of the benevolent dead. Then Sutan Habiaran slips down into somewhat less esoteric reaches of Angkola Batak, though still mixed with turi-turian styles. He begins his lineage history, "back in Toba":

> Location.
>
> In the distant, far-past age, back in times when coconuts first grew in Portibi, back in times when origin-waters pooled in swamps, in times when the sacred bark books first were made from the tree stumps, back in the ancient age when the lychees tumbled off their trees in profusion, when mangoes always grew in clumps, when the red sugar palms grew thickly toward the sky in clusters, when numberless fruits fell to the ground too many to clear away, back in that age when the harvest never ended. . . . (my translation)

These are turi-turian images. He goes on to praise the beauty and luxury of the nobles' Great Houses in that past age—those Great Houses "whose roof peaks pierce the clouds, . . . whose wooden floorboards never dry," given that they host so many ceremonial meals. These ideas are also from turi-turians. In that past age of abundance, he continues, "There lived a powerful, magic-luck-filled, glowing-with-authority Great Raja, that is: Raja Toga Siregar Dongoran. He was the second son of Raja Toga Siregar, who had four sons whose-heads-bear-great-burdens and one daughter." This family lived in Baringin Tumbur Jati, in Humbang (between Angkola and Toba). The land was infertile; the sons were forced to migrate south to find better farmland. The narrative follows the four sons' descendants into their new settlements in Pangaribuan, Padang Bolak, and, finally, Sipirok, "that is, beautiful Sipirok land, that contented continent, that cool mountain land all laid out around the skirts of Mount Bubbler-Steamer," Sipirok's volcano. The story details which lineage descendants settled which village, and then Sutan Habiaran goes on to "Ompu's Sacred Order to Us." This is the ancestor's command that his Siregar clan descendants grow in number, "especially in Medan, that populous settlement, that Unity-Village of the-ones-who-govern-our-people, here in North Sumatra"—a reference to Medan's national status as North Sumatra's provincial capital. This section mixes Angkola Batak ritual oratory phrases with Indonesian. Then comes a part on "The Unifying-All-Beneath-Its-Umbrella Organization," and then a lineage history song composed by the author. This is in the key of C, Sutan Habiaran tells his readers, to a cha-cha beat. It begins "Famed and renowned is our Ompu of-powers-and-luck, Our Ompu ancestor who glows with authority: Toga Siregar Dongoran" (Sutan Habiaran has tape-recorded it, for commercial sale). Framing all this is an introduction, in Indonesian, in which Sutan Habiaran notes the urgent need for Indonesian citizens to know their local history. He then relates the book's striking mode of dictation to him from the world beyond. That is, a dead ancestor tonggo-chanted the volume's entire contents to him one night.

This booklet perhaps could be seen as nostalgic fluff. I see it in darker colors, as a morally brave text, one reminiscent of colonial-era Angkola local-customs literature in terms of its power dynamics vis-à-vis states. In 1992 when I was translating *Sitti Djaoerah* into English in Bungabondar (Soetan Hasoendoetan 1997), my translation colleague Baginda Hasudungan Siregar, a ceremonial orator, school principal, and folktale writer and recorder, encouraged me to discuss Angkola heritage with his lineagemate, Sutan Habiaran, down the road. So I would drop by Sutan Habiaran's house casually several times a week. He was still vigorous in his eighties and was vastly enjoying his retirement from his lumber business in Medan. He had become an antiquarian writer of no small repute, having published over ten small volumes on Sipirok *adat* (heritage) lore and a tome on the Siregar clan founder "back in Toba" (1974).[3] Sutan Habiaran and I had met on my initial Saturday in Sipirok in 1974 when I was invited out to a village to attend a bone reburial ceremony. As it happened, this was one of Sipirok's very first secondary mortuary rituals. Some rajas attending the funeral, in fact, wondered what a secondary bone reburial was. The hosts, Jakarta city people, had attended some impressive bone reburials held by Toba families and had subsequently decided to employ the practice in their home village after they received a cash windfall from Jakarta real estate sales (they transformed this money into a praise feast to their ancestors).

Sutan Habiaran and I had kept up with each other since 1974 in a desultory anthropologist/local culture expert way, but it was after my 1992 move to his village that our talks became frequent. He was dividing his time between his upscale house in Medan and his ancestral home in his village. At least, "ancestral house" was the way he often defined his abode, although the structure was a newly constructed bungalow built as a retirement getaway and a home for his son. I found that Sutan Habiaran had mounted an intensive effort to investigate "all" aspects of what he called the traditional adat from "the distant past age." He told me that my graduate-student fieldwork with Sipirok orators in the 1970s had first inspired his own adat investigations (my devotion to tape-recording ceremonial speeches had apparently been an object lesson to him in professionalism). Whatever the case, by the 1980s Sutan Habiaran was assiduously writing down his findings in lined notebooks and typing them up as manuscripts, which he would privately publish, for sale at Sipirok and Medan newsstands. Other copies he would give to kin.

He also had artistic interests touching on Angkola lore. In the 1980s he decided that the old Batak house carving arts needed to be revived in Sipirok. This was his view: he tended to speak of Batak this or that—this, despite pervasive public apathy in Sipirok toward anything looking remotely like a Sipirok "traditional house." Convinced, though, that this region, like Toba, once had magnificent house-carving and house-painting traditions, he set himself the task of studying traditional woodcarving with the aim of reimporting the art back into Bungabondar, which he hoped would become a model arts village. To study traditional housecarving he went to Ubud, in Bali: after all, all the tourist guides identified Ubud as the country's top craft village. His skills thus upgraded in the refined arts of Bali as an ethnographer/culture tourist/arts connoisseur. Sutan Habiaran then returned to Bungabondar to collect materials for his books on old ways and to take on commissions to decorate new homes "in the traditional Batak style," which he saw as tracing back to Toba.

A pivotal text in these efforts to document ancient lore for future generations was Sutan Habiaran's *Sejarah Toga Siregar Dongoran* (History of the Siregar-Dongoran Lineage), based on his own traditional lineage. His recollection of the book's mode of writing can be seen politically and in terms of the visions of language it embodies. The book was dictated to him in its entirety by the dead—the rhetorical circumstance

I focus on here. He told me that it had been his paternal grandfather, his Ompu, who tonggo-chanted the book to him from the other world. When Sutan Habiaran was small, he and his grandfather had been close. Every night the boy would be called into the front room by his grandfather to massage Ompu's aching feet. At these times, his grandfather would spin stories about the old times to the child. He was vastly knowledgeable, a true raja, Sutan Habiaran assured me. Many of the stories were clan origin tales, but when the adult Sutan Habiaran sat down to write his lineage genealogy book on these narratives, he could recall few details. Moreover, he soon found himself suffering from near-total writer's block. He tried and tried but could not launch into this book. Then, one night, when his wife was asleep beside him in their Medan house, Sutan Habiaran suddenly woke up in a state of resolve, moved as if sleepwalking to the office at the side of their bedroom where he kept the typewriter, and started to type out the lineage history in perfect prose, in a single draft. His dead Ompu was dictating the sentences directly to him, in a low, moaned tonggo. By dawn the small volume was complete.

Sutan Habiaran and his fellow local, nongovernmental antiquarians were publishing their works in the 1980s in a print landscape filling up with Indonesian-language, government-backed folkloric volumes in an Indonesia dominated by Jakarta's assertions that the national culture was forward-thinking and modern and that minority cultures in places like upland Sumatra were mired in the past and bound for extinction, except as tourist relics (and Angkola failed there: it had no natural wonders and most of its "culture," its *budaya,* was phrased in esoteric Angkola-language oratory, opaque to outsiders). Sutan Habiaran's accomplishments as a writer gain added seriousness in this context of central state disdain for "outmoded" Sipirok. In fact, his work might best be taken not as the diverting retirement hobby of a sentimental city man but as a small volley in a muted but bitter contest with the state over what the Angkola past is and how it can be accessed.

Under the New Order, the Indonesian nation had a large state apparatus for trivializing outer-island minority social worlds and their aesthetics of ritual speech and writing (cf. Kuipers 1998). The Ministry of Education and Culture documented southern Batak customs in condescending ways, portraying Sipirok's village chiefs, for instance, as oral-literature informants. The Proyek Dokumentasi publications about South Tapanuli's "customs" focused on quaintness in studies of old children's games, old weaving techniques, old sayings shorn of village political context. The workings of Sipirok's chieftaincy leagues were eclipsed in these government books in favor of a portrayal of southern Batak village polities in terms of their traditional lore. In *Dissociated Identities,* Rita Kipp (1996) has astutely summarized the central government strategies used by the New Order in managing dissent in the country's hinterlands. Kipp writes that President Soeharto used a "politics of ethnic culture" approach, which promoted Javanese cultural greatness and tended to "miniaturize" outer-island cultures, while indeed rendering them as local cultures in the sense of collections of folkways. This had several aspects. A regal Javanese court culture of gamelan gong orchestras and shadow puppet plays was identified by the state with Indonesianness per se. The histories of the nation's constituent peoples such as the Bataks were subsumed under a larger, nationalist history. Certain showpiece cultures such as Bali or Toraja were then promoted as tourist attractions for foreigners. These showpieces were alternatively "Indic" (Bali) or exotically primitive (Toraja). Indonesia's social class structure was erased in this ethnic peoples portraiture; resentment against the Indonesian Chinese business class, cast as a "racial group," was catalyzed by the state to deflect critical attention from itself (most notably, from its extraction of natural resource wealth from the outer islands).

Other processes of representation also occurred during the New Order, however. Toby Volkman (1990) reports apparently successful Toraja efforts to control some of the touristic discourse about "primitive Toraja," while Janet Hoskins (1987) notes that Sumba's Kodinese turned some of the government's own programs promoting National Heroes toward Kodinese ends (by backing a Kodinese headhunter warrior as an Indonesian National Hero). Kenneth George (1990, 1996) has detailed ways in which some Sulawesians have recast their own headhunting traditions into line with Indonesian modernity without fully giving up regional autonomy. Webb Keane (1997) documents similar politics of representation dynamics concerning language use for central Sumba. This research overall has shown much ingenuity on the part of hinterland peoples in dealing with New Order dictates.

Seen in this context Sutan Habiaran's jaunty song and his book gain added weight. In composing his volume, Sutan Habiaran was writing back to central government publication streams that attempted to categorize the Bataks in negative ways, as "primitives." By insisting on an epistemology of print where dictation of a book by an ancestor could occur, he was also implicitly challenging the New Order's authority claims about language. In the obligatory national public schools, which in Sipirok employed Indonesian after third grade, Angkola Batak was cast into the role of a language of childhood out of which successful, modern children would grow. Angkola Batak ritual speech was degraded as mere "lore" in Proyek Dokumentasi books. But, in Sutan Habiaran's small texts, albeit for their delimited audience, the voice of the ancestors spoke a fuller truth.

Conclusion

In colonial times Dutch folkloristic study of country people and their heritages in the outer islands had ideological similarities to Dutch scholarship on the great court traditions of central Java. In *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales,* Laurie Sears (1996) asserts that Dutch fanciers of the wayang shadow-puppet plays artificially elevated this performance form to the status of the "master key" to Javanese culture. She asks, "[W]hat powers and purposes were served by the preservation of the storyrealms" that the wayang characters inhabited (12)? Dutch-established Javanese court culture institutes promoted the study of such arts as palace dances, the wayang, and the gamelan. This had a hidden political dimension: these study centers worked to define "true Javanese culture" for certain Javanese aristocratic audiences as being separate from Muslim Java. The religion was then being tested in parts of the archipelago as a base for anti-Dutch agitation. A Java shorn of Islamic reference would be more manageable for the colonial state.

Batak Studies was less grand than these Javanese palace arts institutes, in part because Batak highland society was less ceremonially prepossessing and less wealthy. For the Dutch, the southern Batak "lore" to be collected and celebrated in the Tapanuli teacher-training institutes focused on such modest arts as the folktale. A miniaturized, sanitized version of Batakness emerged in European reports. However, a much larger and considerably more politically boisterous Batak "old heritage" was being penned at the same time by southern Batak authors themselves. The printed texts of this counterfolklore celebrated locality and difference and undercut the Dutch empire in small ways, if only in the imaginative lives of schoolchildren and fans of Batak novels. As my third example illustrates, southern Batak folkloric writing struck related antihegemonic chords in the New Order. The case of Sutan Habiaran's supernatural interpretation of the inspiration for his book demonstrates the raggedness of the New Order's control of Sumatra. An informal, privately published, locally authored antiquarian literature thrived in Batak communities "under" Soeharto.

If some Batak writers in effect captured part of the Dutch colonial folkloric project for their own ends, and if this situation found echoes in the New Order, then these authors have likely been anxious mimics of colonial writers, to a degree, to put the matter into Homi Bhabha's terms (1997). In this essay I have stressed the robustness and energy of their writing projects, not their possible nervous hesitations as they took on rhetorical forms first used by their colonizers. I have also not fully explored the negative implications of these writers' decisions to concentrate so fully on the domestic sphere (the education of children; courtship; family history) as an arena for celebrating Angkola Batak language excellence. Partha Chatterjee (1993) suggests rich lines of further research here. My interpretation of these Angkola texts on traditions are not the only possible ones—as perhaps Sutan Martua Raja's child readers of the 1910s would chime in to say.

Notes

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1. "Sutan Martua Raja" is an honorific title, meaning approximately "Sultan Full-of-Prosperity-Luck High Chief." This particular writer's clan name was Siregar but, as was common in some southern Batak areas until national times, he often sought to keep his clan name in the background, not using it in publications. The other two writers considered here also have elaborate honorific titles, which they received as young men in buffalo sacrifice feasts. Soetan Hasoendoetan (Sultan Sun Sets in the West, and a title usually printed in the old spelling, with "*oe*" for today's "*u*" usage) was from the clan Sipahutar. He never used this clan name in print. Sutan Habiaran (Sultan Most-Fearsome) is a Siregar man and he did often use his clan name in his personal life and in print. I have conformed to these authors' self-presentation in my references by placing Sutan Habiaran Siregar under "Siregar" but by locating the two earlier writers under the first word of their titles. Two other appellations used in this article bear explanation: Mangaradja Goenoeng (Great Raja High Mountain) is another chiefly title, and "Si" prefacing a first name is a kind of person category marker. When two speakers speak of another person, one not present, they often call him (for instance) Si Martin or Si Mohammad or whatever. This marks a certain fondness for that person.

2. The bibliographies of Steedly 1993, Kipp 1996, and Rodgers 1995 include mention of much of the Dutch scholarship on the Batak peoples. For Dutch folklore scholarship on Angkola see Ophuysen 1914, Eggink's 1936 dictionary; on Toba see Van der Tuuk's linguistic studies (1861, 1971[1864–67]). The

monographs of Leiden's Bataksch Instituut concentrated mostly on Karo, Simelungun, and Toba, but one volume by Ophuysen deals with Angkola: *Kijkjes in het Huiselijk Leven der Bataks* (1910).

3. Some of Sutan Habiaran Siregar's many booklets are listed in the bibliography; many are available in the Southeast Asia collection of the U.S. Library of Congress.

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