SUSAN RODGERS

Sutan Pangurabaan rewrites Sumatran language landscapes

The political possibilities of commercial print in the late colonial Indies

The Sipirok area of the southern Batak highlands in Sumatra was a notably school-focused (even, school-obsessed) region by the 1920s. Indigenous village aristocrats, market town merchants, civil service clerks, and mission staff competed with each other by this era to see whose family could boast the most child graduates of local Batak and Malay-language primary schools and the nearby, even more highly prestigious Hollandsch-Inlandsche Scholen, the Dutch-language HIS. The culture of school success as a badge of family honour extended into the Toba Batak region, where Toba memoirist P. Pospos (1950:1, 72-5) later mordantly wrote, ‘To succeed in [exams] meant that you would also succeed in life. Our estimation of our worth was measured with a diploma. Diplomas = us.’ (see also Rodgers 1995:133). This feverishly competitive school world was undergirded by an official school bureaucracy of lower and higher status Batak teachers, Batak and Dutch school principals and school inspectors, and district administrators. This bureaucracy spawned its own print universe. In late colonial Tapanuli, the public school administrators often recruited especially promising school principals such as Sipirok’s Sutan Martua Raja Siregar to write officially approved textbooks in the Batak languages. Some of these became local classics: for instance, Sutan Martua Raja’s Rante omas (Golden chain) (1918) and Dua sadjoli (Two walking along in line) (1917-19) and Radja Goenoeng’s Moetik I, II, and III (Fruit and flower buds) (circa 1923).

In churning out such beautifully written primers and reading anthologies for young pupils, these Batak schoolmen in Tapanuli were following in the footsteps of the pioneer Mandailing Batak textbook author and master teacher Willem Iskander. His renowned 1872 Si Boeloes-Boeloes, Si Roemboek-

Roemboek (Mr. Quick on the update, Mr. Fleet afoot) (a collection of poems, dialogues between child characters, and short reading selections) had also been commissioned and vetted by the colonial state. In fact, this whole range of officially approved textbooks for youngsters acted as something of a public transcript for the school administration’s vision of proper school learning for the rural Batak, to use political theorist James C. Scott’s term (1990:xii-xiii, 2-4, 13-4, 52-8). The public transcripts approved by those in power, Scott contends, will often promote somewhat clichéd and heavy-handed imageries of the ‘rightness’ of the extant social hierarchy. Very much in line with this, aspects of reading anthologies such as Sutan Martua Raja’s Dua sadjoli encouraged southern Batak pupils to be well behaved in class and at home, clean, health-conscious, cheery, deferential to authority, and unfailingly hardworking: all traits that are self-evidently part of Dutch officialdom’s construction of the colonial subject at the time. However – also much as Scott (1990:xii-xiii, 4-5, 191-2, 206-12) would predict – textbook authors such as Sutan Martua Raja and Willem Iskander before him were playing a double game in penning their primers, for they managed to insert subtly seditious messages into their books that encouraged child readers to take great pride in Batak social worlds and to regard the colonial state with a critical eye. Such textbook authors were surreptitiously writing the critical child in the Indies (Rodgers 2002, 2003:140-4).

These hidden transcripts, authored by the dominated, were sometimes cleverly veiled from official oversight. For instance, Sutan Martua Raja’s presentation of ‘old folktales’ in his primers seemed on the surface of things to encourage child readers to understand such stories in a mild, antiquarian light. More subtly, he was encouraging pupils to question narrative authority in general in the Indies and to develop a critical stance toward the lessons they were given in the government schools (Rodgers 2003:140-4).

To take another example: the centrepiece poem of Willem Iskander’s Si Boeloes-Boeloes was ‘O Mandailing’, which seemed at first glance (rather, upon first recitation, as these primer chapters were meant to be read aloud) to be a simple paean to the Mandailing region’s beautiful mountain scenery and economic potential. But underneath such panegyric the poem gently encouraged the southern Batak schoolchild to see beyond Mandailing’s present, dire poverty and social isolation to glimpse a hoped for, coming age of prosperity and political self-sufficiency (Harahap 1976:1-5; see also the newspaper stories reprinted in 90-107; Rodgers 2002:490-5). By the nineteen teens this poem was being recited throughout southern Tapanuli as a coded, secret rallying cry for the overthrow of the colonial regime; in the 1920s the school authorities banned Si Boeloes-Boeloes as a dangerous text (Harahap 1976:1-5).

Print publications designed for the Batak public’s edification were obviously politically complex and multilayered in late colonial Tapanuli. In
this essay I take as my starting point Scott’s further insight (1990:xii) that ‘ideological resistance can grow best when it is shielded from direct surveillance’. This leads me to explore a range of largely unknown works written for schoolchildren and ‘adult learners’ (construed as such) by the Sipirok schoolman and writer Sutan Pangurabaan Pane in the nineteen teens, 1920s, and 1930s. He often signed his name as ‘Sutan P’, a jaunty reference to his high profile as both a hereditary nobleman and a locally well-known public intellectual. Sutan Pangurabaan, a polymath and a man of great industry, had turned to newspaper work, pamphleteering, and freelance writing after an earlier career as a schoolteacher and school principal in Tapanuli. His many pamphlets and small booklets were largely self-published, often through his family’s publishing house (‘Sutan P’) located on the main road leading into Sipirok from the direction of Tarutung.

Many of his works appeared in the 1930s, or at least were reissued then by the ‘Sutan P’ publishing house. It is possible that some of the titles first appeared in the latter half of the 1910s or 1920s. A few of his booklets were published by a business in Sipirok called Paroesahaan Indonesia and another in Padangsimpuan called Partopan (other family printing businesses). Given his abundant self-publishing venues and his close ties to the Tapanuli newspaper business as the prominent editor of such newspapers as Sipirok’s *Pardomoean* (Public meeting place) (an Angkola Batak language paper), Sutan Pangurabaan was able to base his oeuvre in commercial print publishing, not in the colonial government’s official school textbook-sponsoring institutions. This relative lack of official surveillance and sponsorship gave Sutan Pangurabaan much latitude in writing Sumatran social landscapes as he saw fit. What resulted was a literature of Batak self-improvement that had occasional flashes of sly sedition via-à-vis colonial power. But, like most Batak print production of the pre-national period, Sutan Pangurabaan’s works were at times ambiguous in their politics, and in their understanding of print authorship per se. This gives us the opportunity to explore a conflicted literature of late colonial Sumatra and to introduce nuance into Scott’s observation that relatively ‘unsurveilled’ ideological resistance to a state regime takes robust form. Many of Sutan Pangurabaan’s publications were indeed daring and forthright in their critiques of colonialism. Other booklets he wrote were more uncertain in their political stance. Some sectors of Sutan Pangurabaan’s work bears out Homi Bhabha’s observation (1997) that colonial discourse on the part of the colonized can sometimes display somewhat tortured ambivalences, as indigenous writers mimic discursive forms that they have learned from their colonizers. As we shall see, this was sometimes the case with Sutan Pangurabaan’s pamphlets about language.

Most of Sutan Pangurabaan’s publications for leisure time self-study (apparently for Sipirok residents) addressed such ostensibly innocent top-
ics as Sipirok’s old village lore and ritual ways.¹ Some of the small books he offered for sale (Sutan Pangurabaan 1930b, 1931, 1935a) were first primers for the youngest children and reading anthologies for older youngsters – other seemingly apolitical genres. Sutan Pangurabaan apparently modelled these textbooks closely on government schoolbooks such as the Toloe sampagoel (Three in a clump) series (I, II, III, prepared by P.N.W. Trap in Leiden in the Angkola Batak language and sent to Tapanuli as instructional materials (Trap 1904)). Sutan Pangurabaan’s schoolbooks were possibly written to give his publishing houses some textbook titles and also to emphasize local authorship and agency. Many of his schoolbooks were apparently designed for home study, to help youngsters supplement the official schoolbooks.

Other titles by Sutan Pangurabaan (1935b) focused on such seemingly uplifting and constructive endeavours as providing the public with a simple grammar of Angkola Batak, again for home study. Such volumes were probably also modelled on Dutch templates — in this case the great grammars of Batak languages such as H.N. van der Tuuk’s A grammar of Toba Batak (1864-67) and Ch. van Ophuysen’s works on the southern Batak languages (for instance, Van Ophuysen 1914). Van Ophuysen served as the director of the kweekschool (teacher training institute) in Padangsidimpuan and had an abiding interest in the linguistic study of Malay (Van Ophuysen 1915), and Angkola and Mandailing Batak (Masjkuri and Sutrisno 1980-81:34-5). Sutan Pangurabaan was also clearly in contact with the linguist H.J. Eggink, whose excellent Angkola- en Mandailing-Bataksch-Nederlandsch woordenboek (Angkola and Mandailing Batak-Dutch dictionary) was published in 1936, based on years of fieldwork in Tapanuli. In his foreword to that dictionary, Eggink (1936:2 of Foreward) mentions the ‘Woordenboek Batakhsch-Maleisch door St. Pangoerabaan, Sipirok 1935’.

In his own dictionary and his grammar book, Sutan Pangurabaan mimicked these Dutch sources, overtly at least. But, he went far beyond that to imply to his Batak readers: we have a real language, too, like Dutch with its grammatical rules that we memorize in school. And, we ourselves can do research and publish books on our own language’s grammar. Moreover, anyone with a bit of money can buy such studies.

Soon Sutan P (1933a, 1933b) was flooding the southern Tapanuli buying public with his diminutive tomes on (for instance) how to read the Arabic prayers (that is, to understand them semantically); how to say the traditional speeches in adat (inherited custom, traditions) ceremonies (Sutan P 1937a); and how to calculate the most auspicious days for family events such as wed-

¹ Sutan Pangurabaan’s booklets examined here can be found in the Perpustakaan Nasional (National Library) of Indonesia, Jalan Salemba Raya, Jakarta. The wonderful verse narrative Nasotardago (Unexpected events) is sometimes ascribed to Sutan Pangurabaan but was actually written by M.J. Soetan Hasoendoetan, author of the novel Sitti Djaerah.
dings (presumably so that one would not have to pay good money to consult a datu, an augurer-spellcaster) (Sutan P 1937c). In all these publications Sutan Pangurabaan was crafting a southern Batak how-to literature of ambition and depth. But, occasionally he used a small measure of self-censorship. This makes his works especially interesting as texts entangled in colonial discourse.

Sutan Pangurabaan wrote in Angkola Batak and sometimes in Malay, which he saw quite forcefully as ‘Indonesian’. I shall employ that usage here, as opposed to referring to Malay. Sutan Pangurabaan was also fluent in Dutch as a former HIS teacher but his curriculum of Batak culture writings did not employ that language except for the occasional phrase. Dutch, in fact, loomed as a foil in many of his publications: a language against which he could define ‘saro hita’, our way of speaking, Batak, and as a contrast to an emergent Bahasa Indonesia. His publications celebrated indigeneity at every turn, whether he was describing language or customs or the promise of an Indonesian future. Yet, as a product of the Dutch school bureaucracy in his formal education, his debts to Dutch forms of print were evident as well.

Sutan Pangurabaan’s small booklets were apparently conceptualized on the model of the schoolbook. However, they went beyond the constraints of that genre to constitute a veritable encyclopedia of southern Tapanuli life, language, and folkways. In authoring this stream of public educational texts with such rhetorical, not to mention commercial, exuberance, in the largest sense Sutan Pangurabaan was in effect writing the independent-minded Tapanulier (his word, from Dutch), or Tapanuli man or woman. In his small books, he imagined this social person to be erudite, curious-minded, and as intelligent as any other world citizen. These were striking claims, since the Batak were still heavily stereotyped by other Indies peoples at this time as backward and rusticated, and perhaps even physically dangerous.

Toiling in these highly unofficial textbook vineyards, Sutan Pangurabaan’s political scope as a writer could thus be somewhat less encumbered and less anxious than was the case with the official school textbook writers such as Willem Iskander and Sutan Martua Raja. In the main Sutan Pangurabaan was writing the world with insouciance, all the while attempting to sell books, raise money for his family, and burnish his public profile. Every so often, though, he would pull his punches a bit and enter literary territory that Bhabha would say was filled with colonial discourse’s hesitations and ambivalences.

This quality of Sutan Pangurabaan’s work, as exuberant, relatively unsurveilled yet occasionally a bit conflicted print production in late colonial times, would be interesting in itself. But, Sutan Pangurabaan’s publications have an additional notable aspect that relates to his immediate family’s literary accomplishments. Sutan Pangurabaan was the father of the well-known novelist and essayist Armijn Pane and the dramatist, poet, and historical writer Sanusi Pane. His sons’ role in helping to invent an Indonesian-language
national literature are well known. By contrast, Sutan Pangurabaan’s contributions to late colonial Indies literature in Angkola Batak and Bahasa Indonesia are almost totally unheralded by literary scholars. Perhaps the Pane sons derived some of their conviction that writing matters in politics and in nationalist projects from their extraordinary father. Attention to Sutan Pangurabaan’s lively work as a writer and print publishing businessman can help lay the groundwork for others to address such questions.

Sutan Pangurabaan’s publications that deal primarily with issues of language and speech can be explored here as a small domain of his dauntingly large commercial print work from the 1910s to the 1930s that show his output’s underlying, complex political dynamics with special clarity. This essay is not intended as a comprehensive account of Sutan Pangurabaan’s entire work; that would be a book-length study of considerable worth, however.

A pamphleteer in full

A brief description of Sutan Pangurabaan’s multifaceted career in the Tapanuli schools, newsrooms, print businesses, and political parties will be helpful first as background before going on to take a close look at several of his booklets that concern language in general and languages in the Indies more specifically. His publications on these topics offer insight into his personal language ideology but beyond that they also shed light on the politics of transgressive writing in the late colonial Indies—a time otherwise known for fairly repressive government censorship of indigenous authors. What was Sutan Pangurabaan really writing about, when he discussed language matters in the Indies? His biography provides context. This sketch is quite incomplete, though, as his life is not well documented.

2 For background discussion of the Pane sons’ role in Indonesian modern literature, see Teeuw 1994:24-31; on the Pudjangga Baru movement, see Teeuw 1994:41-6; on Armijn Pane’s Belenggu (Shackles) and his literary theory contributions, see Teeuw 1994:79-84. On Sanusi, see also Freidus 1977:30-1, 37, 39, 45; on Armijn, see also Freidus 1977:41-2. Faruk (2002) and Sarwadi (2004) also provide good overviews for understanding the Pane brothers’ contributions to modern Indonesian literature. None of these works discuss Sutan Pangurabaan as a writer. Ethan Mark’s thought-provoking study (2006) of Sanusi Pane’s politics does delve into the family history; see especially p. 468, where Mark asserts that Sutan Pangurabaan was founder and editor of the newspaper Surya (Sun) in Sibolga.


4 Much of my fieldwork in Sipirok and in two nearby villages (1974 to present) has concerned the interactions of ritual speech and print literatures. Family history interviews with numerous schoolteachers in this region have provided information on the Pane family and their print businesses in colonial times. An especially rich additional source is the circa 1920s Sipirok newspaper Pardomoean (in Angkola Batak), which Sutan Pangoerabaan edited. His life and works are also
Sutan Pangurabaan Pane was born in about the 1880s into a hereditary noble family in Pangurabaan. This is a small settlement near Sipirok dominated by the Pane clan. His aristocratic status within the southern Batak clans (Siregar, Pane, Harahap, Nasution, Hutausuhut, Batubara, Rambe, Ritonga, and so on) is indicated by his use in his adult years of the honorific title, Sutan. Other titles of this sort in this part of Tapanuli include Baginda and Mangaraja. ‘Sutan Pangurabaan’ indicates that he hailed from the core, village-founding lineage of the Pane clansmen in the Pangurabaan settlement. The Panes of the Sipirok area are traditional marriage alliance partners of this region’s more dominant clan, the Siregars.

In the Sipirok area from the 1880s through the end of the colonial period, traditional nobility status of this sort often intersected with a family’s relative degree of good access to formal schooling in the Dutch-sponsored public schools and also to print literacy and paid jobs. Sutan Pangurabaan’s family were among the privileged in these ways. The sons and sometimes also the daughters of elite and well-schooled families of this sort were generally proudly multilingual at this time. They were often fluent in Angkola Batak, including several of its ritual speech registers, and in Malay (as noted, then being construed in school circles in southern Tapanuli as Bahasa Indonesia). Malay had been a trader’s lingua franca for years in this part of the southern highlands. A few also often knew Dutch from school.

By the 1890s, much school instruction in the Sipirok region had switched over from the aksara (the old Batak letters) to the Latin alphabet. The latter became the vehicle for southern Tapanuli’s explosive growth of an indigenous print culture by the 1920s (Rodgers 1997:8-12, 19-35). All of Sutan Pangurabaan’s publications, as far as I know, were written in the Dutch letters, as the Latin alphabet was then known in Tapanuli.

Sipirok and the larger market hub of Padangsidimpuan had become major southern Batak schooltowns by Sutan Pangurabaan’s young adulthood. These were sites where ambitious Angkola youngsters from families close to the Dutch civil bureaucracy or the Rhenish Mission could sometimes gain access to immensely prestigious Dutch-language schools such as the HIS and the MULO middle schools (the Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs schools, which gave promising youth a conduit to elite high schools).

The Sipirok region is notable for its mixed religious character and long-time commitment to ecumenism between the majority Muslims and minority Christians. This may have shaped Sutan Pangurabaan’s life. The Rhenish
Mission of Barmen, Germany, established a small Protestant community in Sipirok and a handful of nearby villages such as Parau Sorat in the 1860s and 1870s (for background, see Castles 1972:21-45, 123-70; Masjkuri and Sutrisno 1980-1:36-41). They established Batak-language village primary schools (open to Muslims and Christians) and also translated the New Testament into Angkola Batak. In contrast to predominantly Christian Toba, Angkola remained about 90 per cent Muslim. Islam had been introduced to this region by Padri forces from Minangkabau in the 1820s (Castles 1972:21-9, 91-122). Veneration of clan ancestors and belief in the magic luck powers (tua) of benevolent wife-giving lineages remained strong among many converts to both religions. From what I can determine, Sutan Pangurabaan’s family was Muslim. He wrote a good deal about Arabic prayers and Koranic verses in his how-to guides. In addition, his sixth child, Lafran Pane, was educated in Muslim schools and helped to found the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI, Muslim Students Union). Lafran went on to become a prominent academic in Java. It is possible that Sutan Pangurabaan’s larger family experienced some switching of religions between Islam and Christianity, due to intermarriages (common in the Sipirok area).

Sutan Pangurabaan realized his ambition and became a public intellectual via his early work in the Tapanuli classroom. As a younger man he was a schoolteacher and then a school principal at a HIS in Padangsidimpuan. He had been trained by the Dutch colonial school authorities in a kweekschool, probably the one in that same city. A kweekschool background, then a career as a teacher or school principal, then work as a published writer was a common trajectory for many famous southern Batak vernacular authors of the time (Said 1976; Masjkuri and Sutrisno 1980-81:34-5).

While still teaching in the HIS in Padangsidimpuan, by the nineteen teens Sutan Pangurabaan emerged as a published novelist. In 1914 his Angkola Batak-language novel Tolbok haleon (Famine season) started to be serialized in a local newspaper to what was apparently wide acclaim (this, from evidence of fieldwork interviews with schoolteacher families in the 1970s-1990s). Many commentators in Sipirok today consider Tolbok haleon to be Sutan Pangurabaan’s masterwork.

This long, emotionally wrenching novel takes its title from the ‘famine season’ or hunger period near the end of the rice-growing season, before the next harvest comes in. In years when there are problems with rainfall amounts or pests, during this tolbok haleon time poorer families can run out of rice and have to mix their remaining supplies with low status cassava or corn in order to avoid starvation. The hunger season of Sutan Pangurabaan’s novel referred to actual food insecurity that the poor suffered in southern Tapanuli in the 1880s and 1890s. But, in a larger sense, the title also evoked the economic, social, and spiritual threats posed by poverty in Tapanuli and
political oppression in that time period. That was an era when many Batak young people could not make a living in the rural farm villages and trekked on foot to east coast Sumatra’s Deli plantation belt in search of jobs there. Corvée labour demands were also a serious issue in the southern Tapanuli hinterlands. Tobacco and tea plantations in Deli acted as a magnet for southern Tapanuli youth, but often their migration journeys ended unhappily. Instead of securing employment as clerks on plantations as they had hoped (given their relatively high degree of Latin alphabet literacy acquired in the Tapanuli schools), some young migrants fell into extremely low-status jobs as coolie labourers. They also suffered a devastating loss of social contact with families in the home villages (a sort of social death, as Sutan Pangurabaan portrays it in his novel). Famine season narrated these losses and travels via love stories about rural young Tapanuli women and men who saw Deli as a golden land of prosperous, prestigious salaried jobs but found actual life in the plantation belt to be bleak.

This remarkable novel appeared in feuilleton format over many months in the Angkola Batak-language newspaper Poestaha (Ancient Heirlooms, first based in Padangsidimpuan and then in Sibolga). Poestaha was being published in Padangsidimpuan when Tolbok haleon was serialized there, on the lower half of Page One (see, for instance, Poestaha, 8-10-1914). Mangaradja Tagor Moeda was the weekly’s editor. The novel’s subtitle was Siriaon di na tobang, sipaingot toe na poso boeloeng (An entertainment for older people, but advice to youth). The publishing house Partopan Tapanoeli in Padangsidimpuan issued the narrative in book form in 1916. It is noteworthy that a title page entirely in Dutch follows the first title page, which is written in Angkola Batak (although the novel’s text itself is in Batak). By the time the novel had been reissued in its fourth edition in 1937, by Handel Mij. Indische Drukkerij in Medan, it was famous among Angkola Batak-language readers both in Tapanuli and in Deli. Along with M.J. Soetan Hasoendoetan’s 1927 novel Sitti Djaoerah (a girl’s name) (on quite similar themes of Deli migrations and tragic love stories), Sutan Pangurabaan’s book gave shape to Angkola Batak understandings of life in the ‘modern’ Indies. Tolbok haleon did this in an elegant blend of conversational-level Angkola Batak liberally mixed with phrases from the old oratory and turi-turian chanted epics.

Well launched as a Tapanuli public intellectual via the popularity of this serious-toned Batak-language novel, during the 1920s Sutan Pangurabaan transitioned from formal school employment to become a full-time pressman, author, and political activist. He worked as a newspaper editor in Sipirok in

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6 I have translated Sitti Djaoerah into English (Rodgers 1997); my Introduction there explores the popularity of the migration-to-Deli love story format for late colonial-era southern Batak novelists who wrote in Batak. Sitti Djaoerah had also been published as a newspaper serial, also in Poestaha, before it appeared as a book.
1927 and 1928 for the Angkola Batak-language weekly *Pardomoean*. He was also active in nationalist political parties, helping to found Partai Indonesia (PARTINDO) in Tapanuli. His political activism in PARTINDO in the Sibolga and southern Sumatran areas may have made further school employment impossible.

In the 1910s to 1930s period the area covering Sipirok, Padangsidimpuan, and Sibolga was a social place where being a newspaper editor was a dashing and emblematically modern role. Batak-language weeklies such as *Poestaha* and *Pardomoean* served as outlets for commercial news, crime items, school stories, serialized novels, and fillers of international news. But these and other Batak-language Tapanuli and Medan papers such as *Oetoesan* (Messenger) and *Partoengkoan* (Core sources) also served as places for editors, stringers, and writers of letters to the editor to debate the gains and losses of ‘*jaman hamadjoean on*’, this present age of progress. In this sector of the Batak press the latter was attributed to (once again) migration from villages to the cities, to school success, European-style dress, and immersion in Latin alphabet print literacy. The role of the newspaper editor (this Batak press culture averred) was similar to the role of the Batak schoolmaster: to help members of the public make these transitions safely. Sutan Pangurabaan may well have seen the role of the Deli love story novelist in the same light. His work does have a holistic character to it in this respect.

Sutan Pangurabaan occupied a further specific cultural locale within this newsroom, schoolhouse, and literary landscape: that of the encyclopedist, broadly defined. In self-publishing his stream of guidebooks, folklore tomes, and so on, Sutan Pangurabaan seems to have been attempting to describe the entire known universe. With ready access to printing presses in Sibolga, Padangsidimpuan, and Sipirok he was now in his element, publishing no fewer than 17 short volumes on a variety of publically edifying topics between 1913 and 1937. Determining the initial publication dates of most of these is difficult as the versions available in the Perpustakaan Nasional (National Library) in Jakarta are editions issued from 1930-1937. As noted, some of these may be reprints from earlier versions.

Sutan Pangurabaan wrote a specifically modern world, one where knowledge of old ways and new discoveries could be studied and purchased from printing shops for an individual’s betterment. Overall, he presented a delectable, outside-the-schoolhouse curriculum of southern Batak culture for thoughtful adult readers. For youngsters, his primers offered a stream

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7 For background, see also Said 1976; Adam 1995:108-58. These fascinating late colonial era Batak newspapers are preserved in some abundance in the newspaper archives in the National Library, Jakarta. For details, see Santoso 1984. For historical background on newspaper publishing in Sumatra in pre-war times, see especially Adam 1995; Said 1976. That study focuses on the 1885-1942 period.
of texts parallel to the official schoolbooks. He put some of his Batak culture interests into yet another commercial venue: in 1939 he and some business colleagues formed an Angkola traditional music troupe, called Oening-Oeningan Sibualbuali, named after Sipirok’s volcano (a fact reported with approval in the Sipirok newspaper *Suara Ra’jat* on 20 May 1939).

We can turn next to a description of his booklets of all these sorts, before zeroing in with more detail on several of his works that focus primarily on language.

**Sutan Pangurabaan’s booklets: An overview**

Sutan Pangurabaan wrote about virtually everything. For instance, for young school children just learning their letters, he wrote about the parts of the body, the colour of flags, and walking to school (entries in a primer); for Muslims supposedly in need of instruction outside the mosque, he wrote about the meanings of the Arabic phrases in the Muslim daily prayers; for the leisure time adult antiquarian, he offered pamphlets on Sipirok’s old chant tales, the *turi-turian* (redacted into highly abbreviated form for the time-pressed reader). His booklets on the nature and content of human language and languages included such works as a word list sort of dictionary of Angkola Batak, a folk grammar, and several guidebooks to delivering the ‘old ritual speeches’. There was also the practical-toned, do-it-yourself guide to spellcasting and augury mentioned already. The latter volume came complete with a diagram on a flat page of a rounded bamboo tube marked up into arcane lines and boxes, in graph paper style. This chart (a length of bamboo reimagined through print) was apparently designed to allow readers to calculate lucky days for scheduling weddings or long journeys. Sutan Pangurabaan the constant pamphleteer had positioned himself as the secular competitor of officialdom, of many sorts.

In these short books Sutan Pangurabaan seems to have been writing ‘towards a new world’, to cite the title of one of his volumes (this one, a longer one from 1934, in Indonesian: *Mentjapai doenia baroe: Djendjang kemadjoean bagi diri, bangsa dan tanah air*, where the homeland was clearly Indonesia, not some Batak community. The title in English is approximately ‘Towards a new world: A ladder upward for self, people, and homeland’). This was a world geography book, one clearly designed by its author to arm readers with knowledge that they otherwise would not have. Sutan Pangurabaan

8 There is a valuable literature on transitions from different sorts of oral cultures with script literacies to print literacies in Southeast Asia. A core source is Amin Sweeney’s *A full hearing*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987. An especially insightful recent study of the politics of communications systems change (including script literacies, in Indies colonial context) is William Cummings’ ‘Rethinking the imbrication of orality and literacy: Historical discourse in early modern Malacca’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, 2003:531-54.
apparently saw the official schools as mis-educating the Batak in this respect. Note in the excerpt below, however, that he defines his readers as *Indonesiërs* (Indonesians, in Dutch). His audience was probably largely confined to southern Tapanuli and perhaps Medan.

The Introduction reads (in my translation),

People really love to read books full of knowledge about the world. In fact, doing that makes them bold in any undertaking, for all the contents of the planet appear clearly before their own eyes and in their hearts.

Now, we understand, our people, Indonesians, greatly lack knowledge about the world.

Because of this we have been forced to create this book, one that will force us to sharpen our minds and to push ourselves forward – we the people of Indonesia, of the homeland of Indonesia.

It is on purpose that we produce books like this one whose paper is not all that pretty or nicely made—rather, we follow the Japanese practice here, not caring about appearances, just valuing the utility of something.

And, we make sure to publish reading (*lectuur*) books that have the very cheapest possible prices.

The ensuing chapters offer demographic information, basic geographical facts (p. 1, ‘The earth is round like an egg’), information about the various seasons in different places, and data about world cities with a definite stress on those in Asia. Indeed, the categories ‘Asia’ and ‘Indonesia’ are highlighted throughout this 76-page booklet. Readers also learn about the typical crops and foods of the different regions of the world. Considerable attention is also paid to précis of political histories of the various nations. Here, Sutan Pangurabaan incorporates current-day news stories on such events as uprisings among Arabs (pp. 23-32, conveniently taken from *De Locomotief* and *Pandji Poestaka* (Banner of literature). Batak book authors of the time would sometimes incorporate previously published newspaper items into their volumes).

The geography book ends with a detailed account of the economies of a range of islands in the Indonesian archipelago, an entry about Islamic College, Padang (a sort of informal advertisement, perhaps), and then a section on the geography of Europe and America. It is telling that this last-mentioned topic is placed at the very end of the book. Maps accompany the text, in the form of simple line drawings. Throughout, the reader is urged to consider Indonesia a fait accompli and Asia as the true centre of the world. This geography text is probably Sutan Pangurabaan’s most audacious and self-confident work, in those respects.

In his 1930s works in Bahasa Indonesia Sutan Pangurabaan was indeed consistently writing *towards Indonesia*, as a national project. His many Angkola
Batak-language works were implicitly confined to a southern Batak readership; people from other Indies ethnic societies rarely read a Batak language. But, these volumes too seem aimed at an audience on the journey ‘towards a new world’. The tone here is ebullient, even cocky.


*Singgorit* was a primer for very new readers, complete with short exercises in large block letters. The text is in Angkola Batak but includes many loan words from Indonesian (for example, *gaja*, *baju*, *cap*, *wayang*, *waris*, and many more). *Na Mongkol* was directed toward relatively more advanced pupils. It consisted of short chapters on such topics as ‘The house’, ‘The bicycle’, ‘The flag’ (a yellow-and-black one owned, readers find, by a boy named Si Lomos), ‘Playing ball’, ‘The motorcycle’, ‘Songs’, and ‘Birds’. The entries are generally about a page long, with short sentences: still for neophyte readers. The entries implicitly urge youngsters to imagine themselves in active scenes: betting small sums at the horse race track, cooking curries with their mothers, fleeing from marauding tigers, and so on. The settings are largely Sumatran but a few of the block print illustrations portray Dutch children in wooden clogs. Block prints of this sort were often used throughout Batak publishing at this time in both newspapers and books (for instance, this same scene of European children in wooden shoes appears occasionally in the Sipirok newspaper *Pardomoean* that Sutan Pangoerabaan edited in the late 1920s).

*Anggota* was for older Angkola Batak students who were improving their Indonesian language skills to supplement their home language of Angkola Batak. In this case readers were to do this via studying one-page, Indonesian-language chapters on such bodily and health-related chapters as ‘Bathing’, ‘Sleeping’, ‘Nerves in the body’, ‘Bones’, ‘Blood’, and ‘The brain’. Public health education along a Western European model was also a staple of southern Tapanuli newspaper publishing of the time.

*Anggota*’s chapter on ‘Sleeping’, (‘Tidoer’), demonstrates the hortatory tone of this entire volume. While building up their Indonesian vocabulary young Batak readers also learn the following (my translation):

Children should sleep no fewer than 10 hours. Adults sleep 8 hours. People who fall short on sleep have tired bodies.

It is best to go to sleep before midnight. The clock striking midnight – that is something we should never ever hear anymore.
Sleeping on a wooden sleeping couch is far better than sleeping on the floor. Try to sleep behind nets to guard against mosquitoes and dew. While asleep it is best to straighten out the body, so that the blood flows well. Do not sleep in an overly cramped room. The chamber should ideally be no less than 3 x 3 metres. The window should be wide, to let the air in. Sleep is one of life’s joys.

This vision of an expansive, airy Batak house was illusory, aspirational, and predicated on European models. My fieldwork interviews on Sipirok family histories indicate that southern Batak families in the pre-war decades had strong reservations about keeping windows open at night even a crack, for fear of intruders and ‘chills’. Few families then could provide a mattress per person, and village youngsters were sometimes even wrapped up in rattan mats on the floor, for warmth. Sutan Pangurabaan’s young readers were being urged to imagine themselves as well-off moderns who could enjoy such circumstances as well-ventilated bedrooms. His dual loyalties are evident here.

In 1937 Sutan Pangurabaan published *Adat*. This small booklet includes a descriptive account of Sipirok’s main ceremonial occasions (weddings, new house entries, funerals) as well as esoteric practices such as calculating bride-wealth payments in terms of heads of livestock and numbers of slave gifts (Sutan Pangurabaan 1937a). By the 1930s, this was a calculus known largely to the high aristocrats. ‘Slave gifts’ were entirely ceremonial by this time; bride price was being paid in cash, gold, and livestock. But with this booklet in hand, readers from the commoner class could now unlock the old marriage exchange secrets of the high nobles, the anak mata. This booklet and several others were strikingly democratic little volumes in this regard. Sutan Pangurabaan was providing populist guidebooks to the old esoterica of the hereditary nobles.

That same year Sutan Pangurabaan (1937) also contributed *Kehidoepan bagi djasmani dan rohani* (Bodily and spiritual life), an amusing Indonesian-language set of moral tales about villagers who stumble through various life dilemmas. The subtitle is A reader for school. In some chapters he relates stories about ne’er-do-wells who need to become better citizen-readers (he harps on this point, perhaps the better to sell his books). Through funny cautionary tales, other chapters deal with the importance of keeping oaths and being sensible and careful in daily dealings with friends (so as not to be made into fools). *Kehidoepan* also includes chapters on such animal heroes as Mousedeer, familiar from Malay tales. This book could have served as a reader for both children and adults, for whomever might have wanted to polish his or her Indonesian-language reading skills.

Additionally, Sutan Pangurabaan wrote and published a verse narrative of over 110 pages. This was named after its young heroine, *Nai Marlangga* (Sutan Pangurabaan 1933c). The tale is in rhymed couplets in four-line verses,
in Angkola Batak. This verse style is tied to *martandang* speech, courtship rhymes. The story is a love story and growing up narrative, complete with songs and *andung* laments at appropriate junctures.

In this same line of oratory-derived works is Sutan Pangurabaan’s version of a *turi-turian*, albeit a very brief one (*Ampang Limo Bapole* (Five measuring bags full), Sutan Pangurabaan 1930a). *Turi-turian* in their full form are seven-night-long chanted epics sung in an extremely high ritual register of Angkola Batak, one that is distant from everyday, conversational speech. Versions of southern Batak *turi-turian* had been published in Latin alphabet, printed form as books and also as newspaper serials by the first and second decades of the twentieth century. Some of these *turi-turian* books had run to 140 or more pages, but Sutan Pangurabaan’s *Ampang* was only 37 pages long.

This little Angkola Batak language book was mostly a prose format story about disputes within the family of the wondrous Raja Martua of the Heavens, Raja Good Fortune of the Sky. The narrative is not so much a print version of an oral *turi-turian* chant as it is a sort of novelistic and easy-to-understand summary of one. Significantly it is written largely in prose, with paragraph breaks. *Ampang* includes a few typical phrases from the chants (for instance, circumlocutions such as head-the-honoured-bearer-of-burdens, for head) but most of the narrative is much simpler to understand. This makes the booklet a populist *turi-turian*, and perhaps even a dumbed down one.

Prose was, in fact, Sutan Pangurabaan’s forte, although a number of other southern Tapanuli and Sibolga writers of the time were writing in verse in Batak or in Indonesian. The latter sorts of text often involved a rhymed *pantun* style, evocative as noted of southern Batak village courtship duel speech. The verse repartee also recalled *osong-osong*. This type of ritual speech is traded between marriage alliance partners in mock combat style, at the lavish weddings of nobles. Sutan Pangurabaan’s own investment in prose narrative of course dated back to at least his 1914-1916 novel *Tolbok haleon*.

Sutan Pangurabaan’s several booklets on speech customs struck a more scholarly tone. These included *Hata ni pangoepa dohot hobar di kandoeri di hordja dohot na asing* (Words of the speeches for blessing ceremonies, horja rituals, and other celebrations) (1934), *Parhalaan: Tondoeng hatiha dohot hadatoen* (Figuring the auguries, day-divinations, and sorcery spells) (1937c), and *Parpadanan: Hata sipadage-dageon taringot toe hata Batak* (1935b). All of these were in Angkola Batak. Some of these (for instance, *Hata ni pangoepa*) dealt

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9 My English translation of M.J. Soetan Hasoendoetan’s folkloric and delightful version of the famous *turi-turian* of Datuk Tuongku Tuan Malim Leman (a favourite in the Sipirok-area) is available in Rodgers 2005. This *turi-turian* text shows how novelistic prose, newspaper writing, folklore scholarship, and ritual oratory interpenetrated in the late colonial decades.

10 For examples of verse narrative books in Angkola Batak, see Hadi, 1925, 1926. Another exhilarating verse narrative of the same type is Mangaradja Alom Sari 1931.
with how to deliver good ritual orations, how to praise the village elders, how to say the special words for offering a magic blessing meal to a new mother and her baby, and so on. As mentioned Sutan Pangurabaan (1935c) also published a word list-style Malay/Angkola dictionary, and a small grammar for *saro hita*, for ‘our way of speaking’ (*Parpadanan*). As we shall soon see in more detail, *Parpadanan* was apparently designed to foster a consciousness of *saro hita* as a system, with predictable rules: a proper language, much as *saro Bolanda* was (that is, the Dutch way of speaking).

There were also the unstoppable Sutan Pangurabaan’s works on Islam, executed in much the same language explanation mode as the small volumes just mentioned. These volumes are similar to his other explanatory works on esoteric lore. In this range of short publications Sutan Pangurabaan (1933a) deals with such topics as the rules and regulations for saying the Muslim prayers properly (*Roekoen bersoetji* (Sacred pillars of faith). There is also *Roekoen iman dohot roekoen Islam* (Pillars of faith and pillars of Islam) (Sutan Pangurabaan 1933b; also in Indonesian). This is a kind of panoptic set of explanations of important but quite elementary points about Islam (for instance, what the holy book is, who the Prophet is). Both booklets are written in a conversational style, designed to inform the Muslim everyman and everywoman about such basics as ‘prayer’, and so on. As we shall soon see, one of Sutan Pangurabaan’s underlying *poda* lessons, in all these publications seems to have been the idea that modern Angkola people, on their way ‘toward Indonesia’, will have at hand printed books about their own old speech ways and about religious speech, broadly construed.

Another text about Islam was *Hata soembajang* (Words of the prayers), in Angkola Batak this time (Sutan Pangurabaan 1933d). This was a guide to deciphering the Arabic of the daily prayers. Here Arabic phrases are set out to the left of a page alongside their *hata Angkola* ‘equivalents’ in the right-hand column. Other short sections of the booklet narrate the daily sequence of prayers and explain when to stand up, when to kneel, and so on. This is a very elementary primer on the rituals of the faith, with an emphasis on the semantics of the prayers as opposed to their sheer aural qualities. A cryptographer’s aesthetic also shines through here. Simple translations become efforts of code-breaking, with booklet in hand.

Sutan Pangurabaan’s output was not only massive and practical-minded but notably fun to read. He bantered with his readers, pushing them to excel in their task: diligently studying heritage while at the same time learning of their Indonesian future, confidently imagined (for the most part). Similarly, in his portrayal of Sumatra’s language worlds in the pages of his guidebooks to *hata Batak* (and in his volume on ‘how to do’ the *datu* sorcerer/spellcasters’ lore), he invites the reader to partake of the sheer pleasures of language study. In describing *hata*, languages, and making them accessible to wide
publics, Sutan Pangurabaan did more, however: he attempted to position Sipirok heritage and peoplehood in strong ways vis-à-vis both Indonesian and the Dutch language, and in regard to the larger populations and saro’ (ways) that lay behind those hata. In making these claims, however, his presentation of hata Batak through commercial print did entail some losses as well as some gains. In this regard we can now look at a few of these texts on language in more detail.

A word list project and a grammar of ‘our way of speaking’: Writing a real language

Sutan Pangurabaan’s books that deal directly with languages (Arabic, Indonesian, Angkola Batak, which he tends to term ‘Batak’) and with language per se are obviously politically fraught. This range of titles includes his 199-page-long word list dictionary of Angkola words and their Indonesian equivalents (the aforementioned Woordenboek; Sutan Pangurabaan 1935c) and his Parpadanan, essentially a home-grown grammar (Sutan Pangurabaan 1935b). In that title’s rather awkward phrasing, ‘making word agreements’, Sutan Pangurabaan was apparently searching for ways to indicate how root words can produce a range of other words, according to grammatical rules. Both of these small books are telling texts for discovering how Sutan Pangurabaan conceptualized languages in relation to each other.

In the most generic sense, dictionaries and simpler word lists are the antithesis of secret speech codes. They specify the meaning of words for inquiring readers; they organize the jumble of actual spoken discourse into handy, alphabetically arranged sequences of definitions; they put a guidebook to a language’s world of meanings into the hands of any literate person of whatever social standing in the community. At first glance, Sutan Pangurabaan’s ‘dictionary’ would strike a current-day reader as a sparse and rather simplistic work. It consists of a running list of single words in hata Batak Angkola printed along the left side of each page, joined to very brief, single-line Indonesian supposed equivalents on the right. As such this text is another in Sutan Pangurabaan’s long series of works meant to empower the southern Batak everyman and everywoman. But, many subtleties of Angkola Batak meaning have been lost as the eye moves from left to right and as the Batak terms are ‘changed over’ to Indonesian. It is illuminating to explore the layers of political action here.

For instance, on p. 72 readers learn that mali-mali is ‘the name of a tree’ but they do not discover anything further about what type of tree the mali-mali might be. Angkola Batak readers of the 1930s must surely have known what this tree was, from sheer visual experience (the mali-mali is a sort of stumpy, low-lying shrub, in Latin Leea sambuelna Willd). In adat oratory,
listeners are encouraged to be like the tall, big-branched, sheltering *bergingin* tree, not like the small, modest-sized *mali-mali* (that is, one should strive to be generous-hearted, in order to take good care of kin). Similarly, on p. 83, ‘*ogoeng*’ is explained as ‘*gong*’ (in English, no less) but Sutan Pangurabaan writes nothing about the numerous aesthetic and also political meanings that Angkola Batak associated with this musical instrument as it is used in *horja* feasts of honour involving buffalo sacrifice and contact with the ancestors. As a Sutan, a titled noble, the author was undoubtedly familiar with the oratory phrases about special types of *horja* gongs. Each of these would have an honorific name and would index different stages of the *horja* feasts; the different gongs were also thought to call forth different responses from the unseen spirit world. Sutan Pangurabaan must have had more information about the word than he elected to set into typeface here.

In *turi-turian* chants and orations, for instance, gongs are evoked in ways like this:

> […] the gondang gongs were struck in low, deep tones, and the swift-paced little gondang gongs too, and then the Batak-style gondang gongs, the Malay-style music too, till it all rang out in tumult, and the land beneath the fertile valleylands of Gala-Gala Ayer Anjung Julu started to sway softly like the ocean waves, and the Earth Shaker Warning Drum was struck and it called out booming sounds that shake us, as we are shaken by a huge forest ape bellowing afar off in the distant trees, and this was joined by the voices of the small, sober gongs, and then the Thousand Cannons were fired […]

This, from a printed, folkloric version of a *turi-turian* chant was written by a newspaper freelancer and published in 1941 (Soetan Hasoendoetan 1941, in Rodgers 2005:125-6). Sutan Pangurabaan would also have heard such oratory in *horja* feasts, as a hereditary noble. In addition, he would very likely have read some of the abundant Angkola-authored folkloric newspaper stories of the 1920s which described such gongs in detail, with oratory examples (such antiquarian materials were staples of the Batak-language press of the time). But, Sutan Pangurabaan’s word list includes none of this *tabo* (‘delicious to savour’, to eat) sort of esoteric speech about gongs. In many of its entries, in fact, his list is consistently under-documented in this way.

What is Sutan Pangurabaan doing here? Perhaps his ‘word guide’ so to speak is more about the politics of language and language hierarchies in the Indies (and about books per se and Sutan Pangurabaan’s role as a print author) than it is about formal word lists or dictionary meanings.

In publishing his word list of Angkola Batak and supposed Indonesian correlates, Sutan Pangurabaan may have been demonstrating (at the most obvious level) that his people have a language worthy of literate and scien-
tific investigation, public study, and dissemination in official-looking form. Angkola words are ‘the equal’ of Indonesian ones; readers can tell that by simply looking up their familiar terms in the volume. Reading such a word list in this sense becomes a public ceremony similar to the ritual of newspaper reading in nascent national communities as described by Benedict Anderson (1991:32-6) in *Imagined communities*. A community of Angkola reader/moderns is constituted through this diligent, studious ceremonial action of opening one’s home ‘dictionary’ and finding Indonesian equivalents in a dependable way. *Saro hita’s hata*, our way of speaking’s words, thus have a place in *jaman modern*, in the modern age.

In this word list project, Angkola Batak is also manifestly a language open to translation into other tongues. Its words can be arranged into an alphabetic order that enjoys international acceptance, as a component of books about speech. The word list gives the Angkola Batak language and its speakers a weighty presence in the library stacks of dictionaries found in Dutch scholars’ studies of the Indies, among missionary families, and in the homes and offices of civil servants.

*Hata Batak* translates. Correspondingly, a reader whose grasp of Indonesian was shaky could use this word list volume as a daily guide to navigating Indonesian usage. Again, Sutan Pangurabaan as author is providing a gyroscope for doing modernity, in terms of how readers might participate in a world of publicly acceptable, decodable speech ways.

But, Sutan Pangurabaan was self-censoring out some of the glories of *hata Batak* in compiling so blunt and brief a word list. He may have veiled the layers of ritual speech meanings that Angkola Batak speakers knew their language possessed in an effort of reverse snobbism vis-à-vis the ‘simpler’ language of Bahasa Indonesia. This strategy would set up an imagined language hierarchy with *hata Batak* at the valorized centre. Perhaps, as was the case with his geography text’s conceit that Asia lay at the centre of the world map, here in his Angkola Batak/Indonesian word list he was placing *hata Batak* as the prime human language of greatest (if hidden) semantic depth. All other languages, starting with Indonesian, lay in Batak’s penumbra, as less precise tongues and as ones that can never quite measure up to *hata Batak*’s profundity.

In his full range of publications and in his newspaper work it is clear that Sutan Pangurabaan wanted all Tapanuli people to attain fluency in Indonesian for nation-building purposes. But, it is telling that he wrote his one novel in Angkola Batak, for a story about migration to Deli that called for emotional subtlety. Perhaps Sutan Pangurabaan was self-censoring in order to protect *hata Batak*’s greatest depths for an in group of *halak hita* (our people). His work is full of ironies.
A grammar of saro hita: Towards a ‘real language’

Sutan Pangurabaan’s ‘rules’ (1935b) of Batak grammar (Parpadanan) follows a similar agenda of establishing hata Batak Angkola as something open to study. Like the 1935 word list, this publication too seems to have been created in tight response to Dutch linguistic scholarship. In this case, as noted, the model could well have been Van der Tuuk’s monumental *A grammar of Toba Batak* (1864-1867) and/or some of Van Ophuysen’s works. In *Parpadanan* Sutan Pangurabaan uses simple, non-technical language to demonstrate that his and his readers’ hata, language, has hidden rules of considerable complexity. The Batak hata which emerges from this 16-page booklet is orderly, serious-minded, and open to hometown scholarly inquiry, of a puzzle-solving sort.

Sutan Pangurabaan begins his treatise with a schoolmasterly flourish: ‘here are the basic rules for forming hata Batak’s various types of compound words’, here are their root words, and here, furthermore, are the rules for their use. The tome is apparently targeted at an audience of adolescent school pupils, for after this introductory section Sutan Pangurabaan inserts a helpful practice drill to reinforce the lessons. This format continues throughout the booklet. After going through his idea of hata bona, source-words or root words, he invites readers to read (out loud) a set of words. Find the root here, he asks. And, find the words that have ‘been added to’. Can you tell them apart? (good students can – Sutan Pangurabaan is once again in his HIS schoolmaster mode). Page 1 reads in its entirety (my translation):

1

*Hata Batak* is divided into two parts.
1. Words to start with.
2. Words that follow along after these with associated meanings.

2

The basic words to start with are divided into 3 sorts.
1. Root words, for example: house, five, black, pointed, and so on.
2. Combination words, for example: earthenware cookpot, dinnerware knife, rice paddy field hut, Raja’s flower, and so on.
3. Words that have been added to, for example: marbada [to fight, a verb from the root word bada], targompang [to fall down headlong, from gompang], parpoedi [to be way at the back, at the pudi, the last one], loemboeton [an animal for riding], papintjoer [to sharpen, to make pincur], and so on.

3

Now, for the words that follow, you tell us: which ones are root words? Which ones are combination words, and which ones have gone through transformations?
Sopo eme [fieldhut for rice grain] — marserong [to wrap the head in a headcloth] — tarpoedi [the last one in line] -- sambilan [nine] -- …

And this list continues on with eleven more words or phrases for the student/reader to puzzle through. Sutan Pangurabaan has obviously described a grammatical system by his own lights here as opposed to following Dutch linguistic scholarship closely. His ‘root words’ include all manner of nouns and adjectives that European linguists would separate.

Page 2 of *Parpadanan* goes on to introduce fully 10 types of *hata*. Sutan Pangurabaan may have been responding to Van der Tuuk’s listings of the different types of speech found in Angkola and Mandailing dialects of Batak, in the Introduction to *A grammar of Toba Batak* (1971: xlviii-xlix). Sutan Pangurabaan’s list includes not speech registers, however, but parts of speech. For instance, he lists ‘names of things’; words that describe qualities of matter (‘small, hot, and so on’); ‘words that do things’ (‘to walk, to pound rice’); ‘words that clarify things’ (‘over there, right here’); ‘words that join things’ (‘and, with’); ‘words that point’ (‘to, at’); ‘words that exclaim’ (‘Ile, Ois, and so on’). This list is also followed by practice drills.

Later on Sutan Pangurabaan identifies rules for converting more word forms into other structural formats. But, Sutan Pangurabaan does not actually explain any semantic changes that might be involved in such operations. The reader is invited to tinker with his *hata* (by now, language is indeed seen as ‘words’) and to see what new shapes its words might be converted or pushed and tugged into. But, little actual deeper cultural understanding of word formation is admitted here, although Sutan Pangurabaan must have known the semantics at issue, as was the case with his word list.

*Parpadanan*’s short section No. 28, for example, treats the emotionally laden issue of adding the honorific prefix *da-* to the standard kin terms of address and reference (for instance, adding Da- to Ompung, grandparent; to Inang, mother). Sutan Pangurabaan presents this in a simple ‘how to do it’ mode (join this to that), offering no indication of the social weight that such prefix additions carry in actual conversation (a social weight that Angkola speakers above the age of three will all know). In actual speech, the Da- (as in Daompung, Dainang) indicates that speakers are referring to their very own mother, father, mother’s brother, and so on and not just to classificatory kin. This Da- usage denotes special affection and respect. Grandparents and their young grandchildren can use a mutual Daompung kin term toward each other, in direct address. This shows mutual love and support and also a sort of conspiratorial air over the middle generation of the children’s parents. Similarly, a daughter can address her mother as Dainang and that woman calls Dainang back to her daughter – again, a usage of great sweetness and closeness. The Da-form also appears often in women’s andung lament speech and lends that
special register an extra measure of poignancy and emotional immediacy.

Against this range of interpretive possibilities, though, language form is treated in this booklet with a sharp exteriority: *hata Batak* is being presented as a set of building blocks, much as any *hata* from Dutch to German to English to Indonesian could be (Sutan Pangurabaan implies) so portrayed. Overall, Sutan Pangurabaan’s vision of language as something that can be resolved into lists and reformatted mechanistically into a sort of adjustable tinker toy belies the semantic depth that he and his readers surely knew to be there.

In book-ifying Angkola Batak speech for moderns, then, Sutan Pangurabaan has shorn it of much sense and sensibility, at least for public consumption. But, he has presented it as a *hata* that can contend with other world languages on the scientific, scholarly stage. Again he seems to have traded semantic subtlety for form.

Angkola Batak speakers today in Tapanuli have huge self-consciousness about language and languages, wordplay, the aural qualities of ritual speech, and the punning possibilities of inter-languages contact. This was likely also the case in the 1930s. At the time Sutan Pangurabaan wrote, many villagers would have experienced moving among registers, from (for instance) conversational Angkola Batak to *andung* lament speech to *turi-turian* chant speech to various types of oratory employed during the buffalo sacrifice feasts. These were language sophisticates, and multilingual language mavens. In his *Parpadanan* grammar, however, Sutan Pangurabaan was not attending to any of the densely affecting and fun aspects of actually ‘doing *hata Batak*’ in real world, performative senses. Rather, he was presenting this *hata*, and all *hata*, as subjects of cool study, dissection, and book learning for moderns. This may have been his way of signalling to readers that Angkola Batak was now ready for modernity. The cost here, though, was any public acknowledgment of Batak’s beauty and semantic suppleness. In his small booklets about language, he was again striking a devil’s bargain. It is noteworthy that he had not made that compromise in writing his great novel *Tolbok haleon*, which had been narrated almost fully in Batak. Sutan Pangurabaan was a man of layered talents.

**Datu sorcery knowledge for everyman and everywoman**

Beyond word lists and grammars, how, and why, does Sutan Pangurabaan attempt to write Angkola Batak ritual speech in print for his 1930s readers? His handbook *Parhalaan* (Sutan Pangurabaan 1937c) provides a delightfully choppy, circuitous response. I have already discussed one of the volume’s charts, for calculating lucky days for family events. Another passage on page 6 shows another aspect of auguries, how to determine which precise day of a month is a good one for embarking on major life trajectories.
The 59-page volume is a grab-bag collection of toned-down secret spells, home-study augury charts, astrology guides, and folksy stories about villagers who consult datu diviners for advice on determining lucky wedding dates. Now, wondrously enough, in this modern age of print and how-to-do-it guidebooks (the booklet’s very presence implies), households can simply purchase this book and ‘do it yourself’ in all these once mysterious, even dangerous spheres of life. Pay your money and get your spell, the book’s title implies.

Yet, few actual spells are provided. Once again, ironically enough, Sutan Pangurabaan is offering up a rather dried-out version of the Angkola Batak language ways that he so pellucidly wished to cultivate in the lives of his Tapanulier and Deli émigré readers of his novel Tolbok haleon. He is democratizing secret language ways as his imagined reader moves ‘toward Indonesia’, but this does come at a price.

All of Parhalaan’s range of lore apparently fits under the rubric of secret knowledge for Sutan Pangurabaan, who was again serving his usual role of illuminating obscure corners of power knowledge for his up-to-date, scholarly minded readers. Left totally out of consideration in this booklet are the ritual speeches of the buffalo sacrifice feasts, the horja. The writer does acknowledge the existence of those genres in his leaflets on adat, but here he concentrates on the admittedly more attention-grabbing sorcery items. Yet here he hedges, once again, and lapses into more distanced descriptions of sorcery spells qua old customs. Some examples will show his vacillation.

In Parhalaan, Sutan Pangurabaan takes a school primer approach to informing his readers how they might select auspicious days for important family events such as weddings or departures to Deli. In these manifestly helpful sections of the book, Sutan Pangurabaan maintains a comfortably paced, regular-speech prose style. He uses no inserts of verse speech and no arcane oratory phrases. Rather, he writes with an air of studious reportage. In consequence the book has intriguingly superficial sections on reading the phases of the moon for its implications for one’s family life, or reading signs of moral meaning in the leaves of the tropical forest (that is, reading the surat tumbago holing, the ancient leaf letters), or making sense of hatiha times (that is, magically charged temporal loci as one month turns to another).

For none of these subjects does Sutan Pangurabaan delve very deeply into the lore at hand. For instance, he does not cite the long passages of andung lament speech linked to the secret leaf messages of the forest; nor does he switch into the equally esoteric language of the camphor-gatherers (a register that is also full of surat tumbago holing, ancient leaf letters phraseology).11 His

11 For English translations of such high registers of Angkola Batak ritual speech, see Rodgers 1997. Sitti Djaoerah, first published in 1927, offers a deep and affecting engagement with such forms of high ritual speech as andung laments and reading the ancient leaf letters. As noted, Soetan Hasoendoetan was the author.
volume is flat, unnuanced. As an aristocrat he would have been familiar with at least some of the secret language used to lure the camphor resins from the spirit trees. But little to none of that appears here.

Similarly, in the part of the book where Sutan Pangurabaan presents his chart version of the marked-up bamboo tube for doing auguries for determining lucky days, Sutan Pangurabaan uses the same sort of distanced, mechanistic aesthetic for ‘doing language’ found in his word list and grammar projects. A reader/avocational augurer is invited simply to plug in data on days and desired events into the chart’s empty spaces and then go on to derive a neat answer. This is reader as student of elementary mathematics.

Another part of the book deals in a related, mechanistic way with beliefs about jinns, dangerous spirits (tagged here with the Arabic term, from Islam (pp. 14-7)). He handles this truly terrifying subject by describing the life of an old woman with jinn-linked magical powers whom he knew as a child. He follows this passage with an omnibus account of more personal memories about various types of spirits one must respect and fear. His treatment of the subject of jinns appears almost cavalier – one might say, journalistic.

Another part of the volume (p. 6 again) details the matter of calculating life decisions in relation to the eight cardinal points. For this, Sutan Pangurabaan veers a bit into the power-charged world of Batak astrology. Here, each ari, each named day, speaks directly to the reader (‘I am the day of good fortune’, ‘I am the day of danger’ and so on). The old Batak calendar (that is, the pre-European contact one) had special names for each of the days of the full month, as opposed to repeating sets of 7 days and 4 weeks. In this part of Parhalaan when the different days ‘speak’ to the reader in the first person there is indeed a frisson, as another dimension of reality threatens to break in. The book as a whole, though, remains in a kind of epistemological suspended animation, with augury language presented in dispassionate and distanced terms as (again) a system.

The volume is a mixed-origins, mixed-loyalties sort of work, celebrating, selling, but also sometimes undercutting ‘heritage’. It could be that Sutan Pangurabaan was a bit wary of the powers of the datu priests and their spells and hesitated to catalogue and merchandize their secret knowledge too forcefully and thoroughly. He himself was ‘doing modernity’ but with an anxious edge.

Conclusion

Writing in 1954 in national times in a warm Foreward to Angkola school principal Baginda Marakub Marpaung’s Batak clan history book, Buku pusaka tarombo Batak (Heritage book of Batak clan histories), Sutan Pangurabaan
(1954:5) railed against the lack of good history books by Indonesians about Indonesia. He praised Marpaung’s study as righting the balance a bit, commenting (in Indonesian, with my translation):

From the perspective of research, one cannot deny the fact that the native residents of Indonesia are seriously lacking in historical works.

They undervalue history books. They lack interest in writing history books in line with historical knowledge and research.

One can contend, however, that nowadays the Indonesian people’s soul is opening up to history […].

Sutan Pangurabaan goes on to congratulate Marpaung for writing his erudite history of the Batak clans, commenting, ‘The history of each and every people is extremely important’. Why, even the Dutch back in that old era directed their close attention to the history of the various peoples of Indonesia (Sutan Pangurabaan 1954:5). True to his younger self of the late colonial decades, here in this alternately scolding and encouraging Foreword, Sutan Pangurabaan was still prodding his readers to strive for excellence, to learn about their world — and to acknowledge Dutch accomplishments in the realms of history and scholarship. Still positioned between two worlds, Sutan Pangurabaan retained his cocksure identity as a teacher of the Batak and a journalistic chronicler of their foibles.

Hopefully, this present essay’s excursion into some of the Batak-language and Indonesian-language writings of this Diderot-esque encyclopedist has demonstrated the worth of studying regional literatures of the period 1910s to 1930s. As historian Robert Darnton (1985) has commented about Diderot’s own Encyclopedie projects in France, this expansive type of writing is always an exercise in power. That is how I have read Sutan Pangurabaan’s works here. By claiming to write the world, Sutan Pangurabaan was attempting to capture some of the apparatus of print capitalism for indigenous purposes. As Partha Chatterjee (1993) has counselled, sometimes such local-level writing projects in colonial worlds took on distinctively local shapes, ones not fully predicted by Benedict Anderson’s somewhat programmatic predictions about print and power in Imagined communities.

Sutan Pangurabaan’s works about language show his hand as a Dutch-trained indigenous writer of much political complexity and self-contradiction. Studies of eclipsed authors like Sutan Pangurabaan, who straddled language worlds in the pre-Revolution decades, can only enrich research into more canonical national language, national Indonesian literature figures like his own two sons Armijn and Sanusi. In the novel in Javanese, George Quinn (1992) urges scholars of Indonesian modern literature to realize that their topic should be Indonesian literatures, plural. This surely applies to the
Sutan Pangurabaan rewrites Sumatran language landscapes

literary landscapes of colonial Sumatra as well, where writers such as Sutan Pangurabaan worked at the same time that other southern Batak authors such as Merari Siregar and Armijn Pane were creating such famous novels as Azab dan sengsara and Belenggu in Indonesian. While Armijn was theorizing a literature in Bahasa Indonesia his father was theorizing Batak. Perhaps the whole sweep of print production by Batak authors in colonial Tapanuli, the Deli coast, and in émigré Batak communities in Java should be taken as a single, densely intertextual field of literary study. Sutan Pangurabaan’s profuse literature of Tapanuliers on the move helps point the way.

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