Ganti Andung, Gabe Ende (Replacing Laments, Becoming Hymns): The Changing Voice of Grief in the Pre-funeral Wakes of Protestant Toba Batak
(North Sumatra, Indonesia)

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Music

by

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September 2009
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July 2009
Ganti Andung, Gabe Ende (Replacing Laments, Becoming Hymns): The Changing Voice of Grief in the Pre-funeral Wakes of Protestant Toba Batak

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by

William Robert Hodges Jr.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The individuals and institutions that have assisted me, encouraged me, mentored and guided me in the processes of researching and writing this dissertation are simply too many to count. To each of them I owe a great debt of gratitude for their kindness, patience and help. I also beg their pardon for my shortcomings and failures in understanding, interpreting, or representing them in the pages that follow.

In particular I would like to express my deep gratitude to my dissertation committee for their patience with me during the production of drafts and revisions, their thoughtful guidance along the way, their encouragement and support of my research efforts, and the friendship that has grown between us during these several years. I trust that I will steward well the wisdom they have imparted and that our friendship will carry forward for many years to come.

I am so very thankful for, and honored to know, those in Sumatra with whom I have been privileged to work in various capacities and over a span of nearly 20 years. Some, dearly loved, are gone now. Their passing remains an ache but the memories of our friendship are sweet and fragrant. I am particularly indebted to Pdt. W. F. Simamora, MTh. His kindness toward me and toward our family has been immeasurable and stretches over many years. The help he provided during my field research, our conversations together, his insight, his sensitivity, and his ability to
reflect on events have been of tremendous benefit to me and have become my model for professional and interpersonal relations with others. Likewise, I am deeply thankful for the kindness and loving embrace of the Limbong family. The welcoming openness of the family of Rev. Dr. Bimen Limbong in Aek Hahombu as well as that of Bapak Washington Limbong in Medan has been a great source of strength, laughter and comfort over the years.

I am grateful to colleagues at the HKBP Theological College in Pematang Siantar—the staff, faculty and administration—who welcomed and included us in their lives during the years in the 1990s when I taught there and again in 2002 when we returned for field research. I also want to express my thanks to the students we have over the years who now serve in Batak churches throughout Indonesia and beyond. Their friendship toward our family was a rich resource for learning and growing during that time.

Particular thanks go, as well, to colleagues in the Music Department of Nommensen HKBP University in Medan as well as the Ethnomusicology Department at the University of North Sumatra in Medan. It has been my privilege to teach alongside some of their outstanding faculty in past years and to benefit from their insights and encouragement during the research for this dissertation. Among those to whom I am especially grateful are Ritha Ony Hutajulu, Irwansyah Hutasoit, Ben Pasaribu, and Dr. Mauly Purba who encouraged and graciously mentored me during my field research, who warmly welcomed us into his home on our arrival in October
of 2002, and who, with his wife Tetty br. Aritonang, has remained a steady friend to our family in the intervening years.

I would like to express my gratitude to my music teacher, Bapak Kalabius (Sampeltek) Simbolon, and all the members of Grup Gondang Dame Nauli at Batu Opat in Pematang Siantar (including, of course, Ibu—the real brains behind the operation). Pak Sampeltek patiently taught me tunes and techniques, answered an almost endless barrage of questions, crafted beautiful drums, and welcomed me to join the others on many occasions of playing for funerals, secondary burials, and other feasts. I cannot forget our bus rides to gigs in far-off places, playing and dancing into (and through) the night, Bapak’s energy and enthusiasm as he practiced his craft, and all the many ways he cared for and shared himself with each of us.

I am grateful for the strong support, shown in so many ways, of friends and family in Porterville and in Santa Barbara. You are as delightful a squadron of cheerleaders, meal makers, hikers, sailors, photocopy specialists, music software manipulators, deity petitioners, and back rubbers as any one has a right to hope for in this life, and I’m grateful for each you. Particularly, I am grateful for the wonderful love of my parents-in-law, Dr. Laurie and Donna Abbey (“Hube and Glo”) for their always-warm hospitality, peaceful home and amply forenstitcious fixings.

Finally, I want to express my deep love and gratitude to my family: my dear parents, Reverend W. Robert Sr. and Constance; all my supportive siblings; my best beloved, Catherine, who has endured this ordeal by dissertation with grace, stood with me these past 25 years, strong, steady, wise and astoundingly capable; and my
incredible children Clara and Mac. I adore you and I thank you for enabling this project to reach its conclusion – it belongs to you. Now, let’s get up and dance!!
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of

Constance R. Hodges
Inong Pangintubu
1922-2007

She moved with grace and strength, a dedicated and compassionate teacher.

And

Estomihi Simamora
Silansaponki
1974-1992

He was too soon gone, this young man of gentle spirit.
VITA OF WILLIAM ROBERT HODGES JR.


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This dissertation is a multifaceted investigation of the ways in which Protestant Toba Batak mourn their dead through song during the pre-funeral wake period preceding the burial of older Toba Batak. It investigates the way in which a musical practice contains and conveys meaning, cultural value and identity to members of that community in the present day.

Toba Batak mourning rituals today are marked by an internal and emblematic opposition between the need to fulfill long-standing practices of ancestor spirit veneration in association with Toba Batak adat law and the obligations which the primarily Protestant Christian Toba Batak feel to live in accordance with the doctrinal teachings and practices of the Batak Protestant Christian Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan—HKBP). The tradition of lamenting in funerary contexts is challenged by church leadership which views the veneration of ancestor spirits
through laments as inconsistent with the doctrinal teachings of the Batak Protestant Church.

In contemporary practice, many of the formal and stylistic characteristics of traditional Toba Batak funerary lamenting are being replaced with the singing of Protestant Christian hymns drawn from the corpus of hymns in use by the Batak Protestant Church—a phenomenon captured in the oft heard expression *ganti andung, gabe ende*, translated as “replacing laments, becoming hymns.” This dissertation is an examination of the processes (cultural, religious, historic, etc.,) surrounding the replacement of laments for the dead with the singing of hymns in the context of Protestant Toba Batak funerary ritual. These processes not only represent changes in the way a community voices its grief, but also reflect dynamic and ongoing processes of cultural and religious identity negotiation for Toba Batak Protestants in the present day. My thesis is that the dialectic nature of present day mourning rituals (particularly the pre-funeral wake period) for Protestant Toba Batak, as evidenced through formalized expressions of grief (i.e., laments for the dead and Protestant funerary hymns) reflects the larger and ongoing processes of both socio-cultural and religious identity formation, negotiation, and expression for Protestant Toba Batak.
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All translations from Toba Batak to English or Bahasa Indonesia to English are mine, unless otherwise indicated in the text. Non-English terms appear in italics throughout and include a reference to the language of origin, i.e. TB: Toba Batak; BI: Bahasa Indonesia; Ger: German; etc., as well as an English translation of the italicized term.
MUSIC TRANSCRIPTION KEY FOR LAMENT EXAMPLES

Indicates a melodic ambitus:

Indicates a melodic phrase:

Indicates a reciting tone:

Descending pitch glide with indeterminate ending pitch:

Indicates a break or momentary pause:

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Part I
Introductory Matters
Chapter One
Introduction to the Dissertation

December 17, 1992. As evening approached I made my way slowly and thoughtfully along the narrow foot path leading from the Simamora home, situated on the northern edge of the campus, toward the chapel, located on the central quadrangle of the theological college. Shortly, I would lead the college choir in a final rehearsal for the next day’s end-of-semester Christmas concert and worship service. For the past several months I had been working diligently with my friend and music faculty colleague, Pandita (Reverend) Waldemar Simamora (hereafter, Pdt. Simamora or Simamora), to prepare the choir for this program. We had worked together long and hard to teach the choir the music and movement that would mark a polished and well-prepared program. I looked forward to the presentation, among other things a reflection of the friendship that had developed between Simamora and myself during the past several months. At that moment, however, walking along the pathway, my heart felt shriveled up inside me as I realized that I’d just said my final farewell to Simamora’s eldest son, Estomihi, who was gravely ill with the cancer that had been diagnosed just ten months before. Earlier that day he’d slipped into a coma as his body, now shrunken and failing, was unable to sustain consciousness.
The next afternoon, as the Christmas hymns and chants were set to begin, word came that Estomihi’s life had just ended. As I led the choir through the music of the Christmas season, I was keenly aware of the contrast between the sound of joyful voices celebrating the Christmas birth and the deeply bitter cries of grief at the untimely loss of a child all swirling around together in the air which filled the few dozen meters between the Simamora home and the chapel where the worship service was taking place.

Moments after the service concluded, I made my way to the Simamora home. Estomihi’s body was in repose on a bed in the center of the front room. Guests and family sat on the floor around the bed. His mother sat in a chair positioned near the head of the bed and his siblings sat nearby on the ground. My friend, Simamora, sat near the door, ready to rise and welcome new guests as they arrived. We embraced long and hard as I entered the room, burying our faces in one another’s necks and crying openly together. Estomihi’s loss, though I’d seen it approaching, was a hard one for me. He and I had enjoyed many hours reading children’s books out loud in English as he prepared for the English language portion of his university entrance exams. After completing his first semester at a large university in Medan, he’d returned home for holidays. It was during that break that I noticed and asked him about a large bulge on his side, just below his ribs (a pulled muscle from soccer, he thought). Several weeks later it became evident that the bulge was not a muscle pull, and subsequent tests revealed that Estomihi had a very aggressive cancer attacking his liver. A little more than ten months was all that remained of his life, and now we
were gathered in a small front room seated around his remains, wrapped up in our
grief.

My experiences of Estomihi’s illness, death and burial, as well as of his
family’s grief, were abrupt and uncomfortable awakenings for me. I had been
exposed to death before. During the summers of my undergraduate years I had
worked in the funeral industry as a gravedigger and grounds keeper at a large
cemetery near Los Angeles. However, my work experience during those several
years, while an eye-opening first-hand experience of the American funeral industry,
kept me largely at a remove from the up-close, personal experiences of grief and loss
I was now witnessing in the front room of the Simamora home.

During the days that followed of pre-funeral wake, burial, and post-burial
ceremonies, I listened to the words of comfort and encouragement (TB: hata
pangampulon) offered to Estomihi’s parents by neighbors, extended family, teaching
colleagues, and fellow-pastors. Mainly these words were intended as a palliative to
soothe the ache of grief and convey sympathetic support. There were periods,
however, when the tone shifted—when voices and attitudes were harder-edged and
confrontation was in the air. Such shifts in sentiment appeared to be connected to
moments when the Simamoras’ grief was especially sharp and found its expression
through periods of sobbing or crying loudly. The attitude and words that
accompanied these expressions of grief were critical of them, suggesting that, as a
Christian and particularly as a member of the clergy, Simamora shouldn’t outwardly
express such hopelessness. As a representative of the church he should instead
practice what he preached: hold on to the promise of eternal life, put his own sadness aside and quietly accept the situation for what it was. As a listener-in at several such moments, I was struck by the words and the tone with which they were delivered, and was left pondering the importance these Toba Batak seemed to place on propriety, position and profession, as well as the importance of maintaining an attitude of respectability with regard to outward expressions of religious belief and practice—particularly at a time when, to my mind, outward expressions of deep sorrow and grief were not only appropriate, but expected.

My experience with Estomihi’s death and funeral wake occurred near the end of my second year in Indonesia. I had come with my family to Indonesia to work as a teacher at the Batak Theological College in Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra. We were there as members of an international Protestant mission organization headquartered in Singapore, seconded to the Theological College of the Batak Protestant Christian Church to work on their teaching faculty. After a year of full-time language and culture study in Bandung, West Java, we relocated to Pematang Siantar where I took up a position at the College. Although I was initially invited to help with the establishment of a church music program focusing on the use of Toba Batak indigenous music for the church, the reality of my teaching experience in Pematang Siantar was primarily that of an English language instructor for the students, an English tutor for faculty and administration, and only secondarily did I teach courses in church music or work with the College’s choirs. While I found this situation initially frustrating, in the end I realized that it afforded me the opportunity
to explore Toba Batak music traditions at my own pace and in keeping with my particular interests.

Our college maintained a traditional gondang sabangunan ensemble (a drum chime, gong and reed ensemble) whose members were accomplished players of the various instruments. Most of them had come to the College from small villages around Lake Toba or Samosir Island, areas where Toba Batak traditional music is still commonly used to accompany ceremonial feasts or other rites associated with the practice of social-customary adat law. After some months of teaching and living on campus, I expressed an interest in learning some things about the music and began receiving lessons on the double-reed sarune bolon—an instrument “assigned” to me once it was discovered that I could manage the requisite circular breathing technique used with this instrument. My teacher was the student who played the sarune bolon with the college’s gondang sabangunan ensemble. I worked to keep our upside-down roles (student-as-teacher to teacher-as-student) relaxed and casual, realizing that my teacher was struggling to teach within a methodological paradigm very unlike the one in which he had learned himself. After several months of labored practice I was invited to join the college’s gondang sabangunan group (primarily as an interested observer) when they traveled off campus to play for church fund raising events or other church feasts throughout the province. These events were rich opportunities for me to observe Toba Batak Christians celebrating in ways that, because of their context as church feasts, clearly displayed aspects of their religious identity as Protestant Christians. Additionally, they became opportunities for me to
observe the performance of cultural identity through the use of traditional music instruments and traditional *tortor* dancing, the wearing and use of traditional clothing, the preparation, distribution and consumption of ritual foods, and the use of ritual speech for requesting dances, as well as giving and receiving blessing.

My many conversations with the student musicians and with Simamora, the group’s faculty leader, as we traveled to and from these events, along with my own observations (and occasional opportunities for participation), helped me to begin acquiring some understanding of the importance which many Toba Batak place on their sense of religious identity as Protestant Christians as well as on their unique sense of cultural and ethnic identity as Toba Batak. What further impressed me was my growing awareness that these two concepts of identity did not neatly (nor harmoniously) overlay one another but, in fact, seemed to be situated in a dynamic and, at times, dialectic tension with one another. My perception of this tension deepened and became profoundly connected to Toba Batak musical expressions of grief when I attended another funeral wake in the mid-1993.

Through a series of contacts at the College, my wife and I had gotten to know a Toba Batak family from the Sinambela clan. Ibu Sinambela, separated from her husband for many years because of marital strife, was a very successful merchant at the local outdoor market, Pajak Horas. She ran a surplus clothing business and supplied sellers throughout the region with used and surplus clothing. Shortly before we came to know the family, Ibu Sinambela’s husband returned to the home of his wife and children because he was seriously ill with cancer and wanted to be with his
family when he died. His illness was drawn out and difficult, and by the time of his
death he had been under the constant care of his wife and children at the family’s
home, for many months. My wife and I attended his pre-funeral wake soon after his
body had been prepared and laid out in the front room.

As it was early on in the pre-funeral wake period, emotions were raw and
exposed and there was a great deal of outward wailing and weeping on the part of
family members as well as nearby neighbors. Ibu Sinambela sat in a wooden chair
near the head of her husband. Her upper body was wrapped in a woven ulos shawl
and she was weeping and periodically stroking his arm. We sat quietly on the
perimeter and observed the comings and goings of others, occasionally engaging one
or another of the other guests in quiet conversation. Several times while we sat there
Ibu Sinambela would pull her ulos cloth off of her shoulders and cover her head with
the cloth. Having done so, she would begin to lament (TB: mangandung) her
husband. The language of her lament was largely unfamiliar to me, as it was drawn
primarily from the specialized metaphoric language of lament known as hata andung.
With her words (I later learned) she described for those listening around her, as well
as for her ancestors, the story of her husband’s life and their life together. As she
lamented in the chair, her upper body swayed back and forth along the length of her
husband’s body. Her ulos-covered head was bent and her arm and hands were
extended outward and upward, raised fingers indicating the numbers of children and
grandchildren, male and female that had resulted from her union with her husband.
Looking around me I was aware that others in the room were listening carefully to her lament—though not necessarily focusing their gaze directly on her. The attitude of the audience was reminiscent of what anthropologist Greg Urban, writing on ritual wailing practices in Brazil, described as not so much intending to hear (in the ordinary linguistic sense) but rather to over-hear, i.e. to be a listener-in (Urban 1988:329). As Ibu Sinambela’s lament unfolded, the emotional intensity of her voice rose and fell. On occasion, when the emotion was at a particularly high point—that is, when her lamenting was punctuated with sobs and cry breaks—others in the room would interject and tell her, in strong terms, “Ahh…that’s enough! That’s enough, now! You’re getting too sad!” (Or something similar to this). Frequently this interjection was followed by a call, from some other person seated there, to strike up a hymn.

In answer to the call for a hymn, someone else would respond by lining-out (speaking the opening line of) a familiar hymn text, after which he or she would begin to sing. The singer’s solitary voice was soon joined by other voices until the growing crescendo of communal hymn singing eventually covered over the sound of Ibu Sinambela’s lament and sobs. It was in those few moments, during which the sounds of lament were gradually fading and being replaced by the sound of the hymn, that the feelings of contestation and negotiation were the most palpable. As Ibu Sinambela moved out of her lament, she would wipe away her tears and begin singing the hymn with the others. Other times she would sit quietly and listen to the singing or join with other women sitting around her husband’s body as they moved their
extended arms in a gentle, steady, “pushing-down” motion over his body as a kind of
gestured rhythmic accompaniment to the hymn. Their hands were turned palms
down, a posture I later came to understand as representing their pushing the beneficial
message of the hymn’s words into the body of the deceased.

This movement of the hands with a palms-down orientation was the
counterpart to a similar, though older, gesture—one with the palms turned upward—
in which the mourners sought to “gather in” the soul-strength (TB: salaha ni tondi) of
the deceased for the benefit and blessing of the individual mourner as well as the clan
community. This gesture, and the intent connected with it, is perceived as associated
with ancestor spirit veneration and the possibility of ongoing interaction between the
living and the dead. As such, it has been strongly discouraged by Protestant church
leaders, who see the palms-down, pushing gesture as a replacement for the older
practice and one which reflects the values and teachings of the Protestant church with
regard to the finality of death, the severing of communicative bonds between the
living and the deceased, and the necessity of looking solely to God as a source of
blessing.

These two experiences with death and grieving, both of which occurred within
the first few years of our tenure in North Sumatra, left me pondering many questions
as I sought to better understand and interpret what was taking place in these dynamic
moments of tension, contestation, and negotiation. I found myself wondering how
these situations related to concepts and expressions of religious and cultural identity
for Toba Batak Protestants. Further, I was eager to explore the role that music
(particularly singing) played as a representation of cultural / religious identity, and as a vehicle for expressing grief in funerary contexts.

**Thesis Statement**

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which a community interacts with, and responds to, various aspects of socio-cultural change, particularly religious change, as expressed through its musical practices. It investigates the way in which a musical practice contains and conveys meaning, cultural value and identity to members of that community in the present day. Finally, it addresses questions related to the nature of religious belief and the phenomenon of living within and moving between belief systems.

More specifically, this dissertation is a multifaceted investigation of the lament singing practices of the Toba Batak of North Sumatra, Indonesia. Lament singing among Toba Batak has been, and continues to be, predominantly a women’s tradition. As such, it exists primarily in the context of mourning rituals, both at the mourning immediately following death and at the mourning that accompanies secondary burial rites. For Toba Batak, lamenting the dead serves as a visual and sonic indicator of outward and public expressions of grief associated with death. Lamenting the dead fulfills social-customary *adat* law requirements for venerating ancestor spirits. Laments serve as a communicative vehicle enabling the lamenter to address both the world of the living and of the dead in order to honor the deceased
and request blessing from ancestor spirits as well as from living relations. Lamenting reinforces bonds of communal solidarity and cultural identity, and helps ease the pain of loss through death experienced by both the individual and the larger community.

The institution of *adat* may be understood as the social-customary laws that serve to define individual and communal identity and regulate the rights and responsibilities of members of the community toward one another. Lothar Schreiner points out that, though *adat* is often viewed primarily in terms of social-customary regulatory laws, “*adat* is more than custom and usage, it is a traditional social law *supra partes*, sanctioned by the ancestors, who in the tribal religion determine the destiny of the community” (Schreiner 1972:285).

With the advent of Christianity to the region in the mid-19th century, not only was the Toba Batak religious system affected, but much of the traditional way of life underwent rapid and profound change. The evangelistic efforts and social programs of the German Protestant missionaries proved fruitful and soon many Toba Batak had embraced the new religion. Christianization, urbanization, and modernization among the Toba Batak occurred more or less simultaneously and with unprecedented speed. By the 1990s about 90% of Toba Batak were said to be registered members of either the now-independent, indigenous and self-governing *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* (Batak Protestant Christian Church) or another Christian church in Indonesia (the country with the largest Muslim population).

Although the vast majority of Toba Batak refer to themselves as Christians, the social and religious aspects of *adat* continue to strongly impact the Toba Batak
worldview, resulting in coexistent, and not infrequently conflicting, worldviews. As Yoshiko Okazaki asserts, “the relationship of adat and Christianity (in other words the interplay of Toba Batak ethnic values and what Christianity has tried to offer) has been the central issue among the Toba Batak people in the past one hundred and thirty years” (1994:54).

Toba Batak mourning rituals today are marked by an internal and emblematic opposition between the need to fulfill long-standing practices of ancestor spirit veneration in association with Toba Batak adat law and the obligations which the primarily Protestant Christian Toba Batak feel to live in accordance with the doctrinal teachings and practices of the Batak Protestant Christian Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan—HKBP). The tradition of lamenting in funerary contexts is challenged by church leadership, which views the veneration of ancestor spirits through laments, the requesting of blessing from the ancestor spirits through laments, and other connections to past spirit cult practices associated with lamenting, as inconsistent with the doctrinal teachings of the Batak Protestant Church. These doctrinal statements are found variously in the Confession of Faith of the HKBP (Panindangion Haporseaon di HKBP), the Book of Liturgical Rites of the HKBP (Agenda di HKBP), and the Order of Discipleship and Discipline of the HKBP (Ruhut-ruhut Parmahanion dohot Paminsangon di HKBP).¹ In contemporary practice, many of the formal and stylistic characteristics of traditional Toba Batak

funerary lamenting are being replaced with the singing of Protestant Christian hymns
drawn from the corpus of hymns in use by the Batak Protestant Church—a
phenomenon captured in the oft heard expression *ganti andung, gabe ende*, translated
as “replacing laments, becoming hymns.” This dissertation is an examination of the
processes (cultural, religious, historic, etc.,) surrounding the replacement of laments
for the dead with the singing of hymns in the context of Protestant Toba Batak
funerary ritual. These processes not only represent changes in the way a community
voices its grief, but also reflect dynamic and ongoing processes of cultural and
religious identity negotiation for Toba Batak Protestants in the present day. My thesis
is that the dialectic nature of present day mourning rituals (particularly the pre-funeral
wake period) for Protestant Toba Batak, as evidenced through formalized expressions
of grief (i.e., laments for the dead and Protestant funerary hymns) reflects the larger
and ongoing processes of both socio-cultural and religious identity formation,
negotiation, and expression for Protestant Toba Batak.

**Locating Myself in an Epistemological Frame**

The epistemological framework is that framework which reflects the
fieldworker’s unique (though not necessarily fixed) stance within the field, as well as
their theoretical orientation and methodological approach. This framework also
informs and generates the ethnographer’s particular narrative style in the
interpretation and translation of field experience to ethnographic document. The
epistemological framework that informs this dissertation is anchored to that
ethnographic narrative mode referred to as reflexive ethnography. According to
Antonius Robben, reflexive ethnography “implies a conscious reflection on the interpretive nature of fieldwork, the construction of ethnographic authority, the interdependence of ethnographer and informant, and the involvement of the ethnographer’s self in fieldwork” (Robben and Sluka 2007:443).

I am drawn to this particular approach as a framework for situating and interpreting my experience in the field due, in part, to the varied roles my family and I have had in Indonesia covering roughly nine years, beginning in 1989 and ending in 2003. I briefly trace that history in what follows, providing it as a means of locating myself in the field – the involvement of myself in observation, participation, reflection and interpretation. Writing it here assists me in reflecting not only on the variety of roles and experiences I’ve had during those nine years but also in reflecting on the variety of theoretical approaches (discussed below) with which I engage as I move through this ethnographic narrative. I find Deleuze and Foucault’s image of a “toolkit of engaged theory” (e.g., Foucault 1980:145) to be a helpful conceptual symbol for framing the various theoretical approaches I draw upon as I move through this ethnography.

**The Back Story—Our Early Years in Sumatra**

My family and I first arrived in Indonesia in 1989. We were relatively new members of an international and inter-denominational Protestant mission organization headquartered in Singapore. In the year or so prior to our arrival in Indonesia, we had been in ongoing dialogue with the leadership of our mission as well as with the Rector of the Toba Batak Theological College located in Pematang Siantar, a city of
some 150,000 located in the palm and rubber plantation district of North Sumatra, in Western Indonesia. The College, which trains the clergy of the largest Protestant church in Indonesia, the Batak Protestant Christian Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, or HKBP), was interested in developing a new educational program in Practical Theology which would utilize Toba Batak traditional music for use in Christian worship rites in the HKBP. The possibility of being involved in the development and launch of such a program seemed, in many ways, to align neatly with my particular interests, background and education. I had earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees in ‘cello performance with a secondary emphasis in choral conducting in 1984 and 1986 respectively. Rather than continue my studies toward a doctorate in ‘cello, however, I shifted direction in 1986 and began a second graduate degree program, at Wheaton Graduate School (near Chicago), completing my Master’s degree in Intercultural Studies with a specialization in Applied Ethnomusicology in 1988. It was through my studies at Wheaton, directed by Dr. Vida Chenoweth, that my interest in, and appreciation for, Christian hymnody with a firmly rooted connection to the indigenous music traditions of the people singing those hymns blossomed into something of paradigmatic proportion. Thus, it was with great interest that I learned about the possibility of joining the faculty at the HKBP Theological College as an instructor in music. In preparation for our move to Indonesia I learned what I could about the Batak Protestant Church. I was told that the HKBP church was well known, historically, for its abundant inclusion of music in its worship rites. Some suggested that church services were in fact over-abundantly
filled with choirs and hymn singing – that it was not uncommon to have as many as
nine different church choirs sing during the course of a single service. The choral
music was almost exclusively western European or American – both in origin and in
form, and little (if any) traditional Toba Batak music ever found its way into the
church. The primary reason for the exclusion of traditional music was long-standing
negative associations with, and prohibitions against, traditional music in connection
with ancestor spirit veneration and other aspects of Toba Batak pre-Christian beliefs.
Such prohibitions had been in place since the height of German missionary activity in
the late 19th century. Thus, with my graduate degree from Wheaton in hand, I was
excited to join the faculty of the HKBP Theological College and see what might
develop in that regard.

Our first year in Indonesia was spent in the university city of Bandung, West
Java, where my wife and I attended a language school for foreigners who would be
using primarily Indonesian in their work. We lived with a Javanese family in a small
neighborhood called Suka Warna, located near the airport. The Suprapto family, with
whom we were living, were nominally Muslim, blending their Islamic practice with
the Javanese mystical practice known as Kebatinan. Pak (Mr.) Suprapto was retired
from the military and the family supplemented their income by renting the extra
rooms in their modest home to college students. Our “home” was a simple 2 room
split-level apartment built originally as a guest living quarters for visiting friends and
family. The Supraptos’ sizeable family along with the several college students made
our little compound a very lively and active place to practice language and get
generally acquainted with Indonesian culture. Our daughter Clara, then just six months old with a head full of blonde curls, made getting to know our neighbors an easy task as she quickly became known as the boneka hidup (living doll). She bravely endured much well-intended cheek pinching and nose pulling by the neighbors, old and young alike.

After our initial year of language school, just confident enough in our language ability to realize we had so much more to learn, we boarded a ship in Tanjung Priok near Jakarta and headed northwest for three days toward the port city of Belawan, situated near the North Sumatra provincial capital city of Medan. We were met at the harbor by a van from the Theological College and driven to Pematang Siantar where we took up residence in one of the faculty homes on campus. The buildings and faculty housing on the campus, erected during the mid 1950s, reflect the architectural style of Dutch colonial era plantation homes – large open rooms with high ceilings, cement floors and tiled roofs. The house where we lived was located near the edge of the campus and was set in a large, verdant garden. On two sides of the property were cultivated fields of quick growing cassava trees (B.I. pohon ubi), a staple food crop throughout the country, grown for its vitamin-rich leaves and large tuberous roots.

The Backdrop—Brief History of the HKBP

The HKBP Theological College (BI: Sekolah Tinggi Teologia or STT-HKBP) has been in its present location since 1978, one of a number of Protestant theological colleges in the country united under the umbrella of the Indonesian Communion of
Churches (Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Indonesia—PGI). The STT-HBKP is the primary theological training institution for the HKBP church, the largest Protestant church in Indonesia with a current membership of approximately 4 million (p.c., Hutauruk, June 10, 2003, Pearaja-Tarutung). The HKBP church is the product of a 19th century German missionary effort by the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG), headquartered in the city of Barmen-Wupperthal in Germany. The missioner who pioneered the RMG’s work among the Toba Batak was Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen (1834-1918) who is revered in the HKBP as the “Apostle to the Batak.” So highly is Nommensen esteemed that in many HKBP churches it is common to see, prominently displayed on the front wall near the altar and on either side of the cross, two framed images: one of Jesus (frequently portrayed as the Good Shepherd of the Sheep) and the other of Nommensen (see Figure 1).

Nommensen arrived in Sumatra in 1862, settling for two years in the port city of Barus on the boundary of the Dutch colonial government’s influence in the region. In 1864 Nommensen, along with fellow missionaries Betz and van Asselt, moved into new territory, the Silindung Valley, in order to establish a mission outpost among the Toba Batak (Hasselgren 2000:88-89). This movement into the Silindung Valley on the southwestern edge of the Toba Batak lands was a movement in many ways in tandem with the expansionist intentions of the Dutch colonial administration into the region as it furthered its policy / program of “pacification.” While the work of the RMG in the Toba Batak region—the establishment of mission outposts, churches, schools and hospitals—was not directly connected to the Dutch colonial
Figure 1. Photo portrait of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft. Founder of the Batak Protestant Christian Church. Revered as the Apostle to the Batak. (Source: Pdt. Dr. A. Lumbantobing’s *Makna Wibawa Jabatan dalam Gereja Batak*. 1992. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, p. 70.)
administration, the two bodies worked closely together, largely for their mutual support, protection and benefit. As a result, they were viewed by some Toba Batak (those actively resisting the European colonial presence and Christian influence on Toba Batak culture) as a single organization.

Despite initial resistance, by the end of the 19th century Toba Bataks in great numbers were embracing the new socio-economic, political, educational and religious opportunities the Dutch colonial government and the German Protestant mission afforded them. In the 1880s there were some 3,500 Toba Batak members of the RMG mission church. By 1910 that number had risen to upwards of 103,000 and by 1918, the year Nommensen died, to 180,000 (Pedersen 1970:203). The direct influence and oversight of the RMG in Sumatra ended in 1930 when the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP) was formed and formally established as an indigenous, independent, and self-supporting church. From that time forward, leadership in the HKBP has been in the hands of the Toba Batak themselves. Thus, when I began my teaching at the HKBP Theological College, I was one of two non-Batak faculty members seconded to the HKBP by our mission organization.

What became increasingly evident to me as I began teaching at the College, attending faculty meetings, meeting with College and Church officials, attending Sunday services at one of the nearby HKBP churches, and interacting with students, faculty and neighbors on a day-to-day basis was the high value assigned to both cultural identity and religious identity among Toba Batak Protestants. The borders separating these two conceptual frames of identity were thin and porous, such that the
elements that defined one or the other were comfortably mixed and matched depending on the situation. The HKBP, while a member church in the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, and the Indonesian Communion of Churches, maintained its strong sense of ethnic pride by holding church services exclusively in Toba Batak—thus any non-Toba Christian who wished to attend worship would be at a significant linguistic disadvantage. (The situation has changed in recent years with the addition of early morning or evening services in the national language of Bahasa Indonesia.) This manifestation of ethno-linguistic exclusivity and cultural self-awareness was, at the same time, intermingled with elements reflective of European / German colonialism as evidenced in the architectural style of churches, the black woolen vestments of the clergy, the form and flow of the liturgy for worship, the use of music in worship (pump organs, church choirs, church bells, hymns, and brass bands), and even in the German model Mercedes-Benz that the Ephorus (Bishop), the HKBP’s elected leader, used as his official transport. To be sure, while many of these elements of Toba Batak Protestant ritual and material culture reflected, for me, a direct connection to European Protestant culture, for many Toba Batak Protestants these same element were, because of their long association with Toba Batak Protestant Christianity, primarily (though not exclusively) a reflection of their particular religious identity as Toba Batak Protestants (a aspect of which included a historic connection to European Protestant missionary culture).
Our Interaction with the College and Community

This intermingling of conceptual frames of identity expression impacted my experience on the faculty of the College and in the larger Protestant community. I found myself increasingly involved in the world of Batak Protestant church music—leading intensive conducting, theory, and sight singing workshops for church choir directors; judging at local and regional level church choir festivals; preparing lecture and seminar materials on church music history, liturgics, and the use of music as a spiritual discipline; and working as an assistant conductor with the two College choirs in weekly rehearsals and occasional performances. At the same time, I was learning all I could about traditional Toba Batak music—especially instrumental music and its use in and value to Toba Batak society. As mentioned above, I began learning to play the sarune bolon, one of the instruments in the gondang sabangunan ensemble, studying with one of the student musicians on campus. I have always been a performing musician, having completed undergraduate and graduate degrees in ‘cello performance some years before. Now, as a new faculty member in music at the College, I was convinced that one of the most productive methods I could practice in my efforts to learn about Toba Batak music was that of involvement with and participation in music making with Toba Batak musicians.² Eventually, I joined our College’s gondang ensemble and traveled with them to weekend-long church festivals and celebrations where we had been hired to play music to accompany the

² My approach was loosely modeled after the methodology of bi-musicality that Mantle Hood theorized and pioneered in the ethnomusicology program at UCLA. See his 1960 article “The Challenge of Bi-Musicality” in the journal Ethnomusicology.
traditional tor-tor dancing and fund raising auctions which were the main features of such church festivals.

As the non-Toba member of the group, I was often “on display” at these events. My playing was quite terrible—I was definitely a learner, but I found that my role as an interested and enthusiastic learner was patiently tolerated by the others in the ensemble as well as by those who had hired us to play. To my knowledge there was, at that time, no other Westerner actively involved in playing / promoting Toba Batak traditional music – let alone in association with Protestant church events. In my role as an “example” or “display object” at these church celebrations I believe I was intended to represent an amalgam of a Christian, a westerner, and an educator who saw value in Toba Batak traditional practices and cultural expressions, and who actively sought to both maintain and develop them. At that time the HKBP was making a conscious effort to prepare its people to move into an “Era of Industrialization and Globalization” (a trope which was very actively promoted at that time) without turning their backs on their traditions, practices, or other elements of their individual or collective cultural identity. In terms of my professional work activities during these initial years in Sumatra I feel that I was both a participant observer as well as, to borrow from John Messenger, an observant participator (Messenger, 1989).

**Methodological Approach**

Reflecting on his experiences in anthropology and the cultural encounter, Clifford Geertz states, “You don’t exactly penetrate another culture, as the
masculinist image would have it. You put yourself in its way and it bodies forth and enmeshes you” (Geertz 1995:44). Geertz’s image of cultural enmeshment aptly mirrors my own sense of our family’s experience in North Sumatra with our colleagues and friends at the College and in the community—those with whom we were fortunate to develop many deep and lasting relationships. As the youngest member of the College faculty, I allowed the “indignity” of my youth to serve as a means toward building friendships with male students on campus through sports—mainly soccer and badminton, two very popular sports on the campus. I had learned some of the rudiments of competitive badminton while living in Bandung during our first year in Indonesia and had enjoyed playing soccer for the several years before that. The students at the College graciously tolerated my periodic participation in competitions, but mainly we played (rain or shine) simply to recreate.

In our home we practiced a fairly “open door” policy which meant that students could and did regularly drop by to chat, play music, play with our daughter Clara, or just get out of the dorm for a few hours. With a handful of these students we developed particularly deep and lasting friendships. In the case of one of those students, Bimen Limbong, whose village we visited on several occasions, that friendship deepened to the extent that we were adopted into their family clan (TB: marga)—a profound and moving experience, though not necessarily an uncommon one for anthropologists during extended periods in the field (see Kan, et.al., 2001). Sometimes these close relationships were not without challenges or risks: one student lived with us for several months during a serious illness that, though originally diagnosed as lung
cancer, turned out to be advanced tuberculosis. After the correct diagnosis was made, he received the proper treatment and made a strong recovery. We were initially concerned for our daughter’s health, as she had lived in close proximity to (and often sat on the lap of) an active tuberculosis case. As it turned out, though, she was unaffected.

Our children’s presence with us in the field significantly impacted, in positive ways, the level and extent of relationships we were able to enjoy with Toba Batak students and faculty on the campus as well as with other individuals and families outside of the campus context. There is a growing body of anthropological literature which focuses on the subject of families in ethnographic fieldwork, including Joan Cassell’s (ed.) volume, Children in the Field: Anthropological Experiences (1987), Fieldwork and Families: Constructing New Models for Ethnographic Research, edited by Juliana Flinn, Leslie Marshall, and Jocelyn Armstrong (1998), a special issue of the journal Anthropology and Humanism (1998: vol. 23, no. 2) titled “In the Field and at Home: Families and Anthropology,” compiled by Renate Fernandez and David Sutton.

Our deep friendships extended to faculty as well as to students. Friendships with faculty often grew out of the collegiality of our classroom and faculty meeting interactions. As already mentioned, a strong bond of deep and loving friendship grew between myself and Simamora, the primary music instructor at the College, not only through our work together in College music activities but also, and more significantly, through the experience of the illness and death of his eldest child,
Estomihi. And, as with Bimen Limbong, our family’s relationship with the Simamora family—through work and through bereavement—resulted in the adoption of my wife, Catherine, into the Simamora marga. The network of kin relations these adoptions established extended well beyond our immediate families. We learned (through the patient repetition and correction of our new family members) the multiple layers of kinship terms we were expected to use with extended family members on the various occasions when we would meet, we learned something of our individual family histories—the names of ancestors and the regions in which they had lived or migrated, and we learned (in very practical ways) something of our roles and responsibilities in relation to others in our clan or close kin.

From an ethnographic perspective, our inclusion in these families was a tremendous benefit. We found ourselves included in family discussions and deliberations which otherwise would have been closed to us. At the funeral of Bimen’s father in 1997, I was involved in the care of the body during the pre-funeral wake (something which an outsider would not have been expected or permitted to do) and was included in family discussions and deliberations regarding funerary and burial feast expenses and how best to cover them. As a part of those discussions I was requested, as the “younger brother” of the deceased, to contribute (along with everyone else in the family) toward covering those expenses. More recently, at the wedding of Catherine’s adoptive younger brother, Gordon Simamora, in January of 2003, I was in the role of the boru, a Toba Batak kinship term applied to those who are the wife-receivers (because Catherine had been adopted into the Simamora clan, I
had received a Simamora daughter as my wife), and was therefore expected to serve my *hula-hula*, the wife-givers. In my case, this involved preparing and serving food at any meal associated with the wedding or pre-wedding negotiations, the ritual distribution of food (TB: *jambar*), and being on hand and ready to do whatever was requested of the *boru* group by the *hula-hula* group during the feast itself. This was a “backstage” (Goffman 1959), behind-the-scenes and literally back-in-the-kitchen kind of role that provided opportunities for observation, conversation, and modes of interaction that would otherwise be closed to a non-family member.

Our adoption into both the Limbong and Simamora clans provided us access to relationships with these immediate family members as well as those of the extended family which would likely not have been possible had we not, through our deep friendships, been invited to become part of these families. The particular methodological approaches that have helped me to both understand and explain, from an anthropological perspective, the nature of our relationships (and also that have, to a large extent, guided our ongoing interactions) are those operating in an anthropology which is both phenomenological and humanistic. ³

My family and I have been extremely fortunate to be involved in these relationships – with individuals and with large and extended families. Our relationships with those mentioned above and others not mentioned here have made

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our experiences in Sumatra much deeper and richer than they might otherwise have been. And they continue to impact our lives here in the United States—the relationships go on and we are caught up (enmeshed) in them. This quality of “ongoing-ness” impacts, I believe, the way in which I interpret and write about these experiences. As I reflect on my experiences and construct epistemological frames for engaging in the narrative process, I am drawn to Turner and Bruner’s formulation of an anthropology of experience (1986) and the dynamic nature of the relationship between “reality,” “experience,” and “expression.” It is a “relationship that is both dialogic and dialectical, filled with inevitable gaps between reality (life as lived), experience (life as experienced) and expressions (life as told / expressed), in which the tension among them constitutes a key problematic in the anthropology of experience” (Turner and Bruner 1986:6-7). Echoing this idea in her book *The Vulnerable Observer*, Ruth Behar, describes the dialectical tension between what the anthropologist may experience while in the field—“loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late, as defiant hindsight, a sense of the utter uselessness of writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something”—and what is expected or assumed when “the grant money runs out, or the summer vacation is over [and you]…go to your desk and write down what you saw and heard, relating it to something you’ve read by Marx, Weber, Gramsci, or Geertz and you’re
on your way to doing anthropology. Nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about them” (Behar 1996:5).

As I engage in this narrative process and work at appropriately situating myself in the narrative text, I am taken by what Behar describes as her attempts to navigate the subjective space between the observer and the observed. She advocates a genre of ethnographic narrative which she terms “writing vulnerably”—a genre “through which to attempt the dialectic between connection and otherness that is at the center of all forms of historical and cultural representation. An amorphous, open-ended, even rebellious genre that desegregates the boundaries between self and other and that has been the genre of choice for radical feminists and cultural critics pursuing thick description” (Behar 1996:20). By framing my narrative approach self-reflexively and in a manner which permits (even embraces) a voice that is vulnerable in its interpretation of experiences with death and expressions of grief among Toba Batak Protestants, I acknowledge the value of, and allow for the possibility of including all of our years in Indonesia, all of the roles in which we have been engaged, all of the relationships we’ve been fortunate to be included in, all of the joys, frustrations and sorrows that make up the various parts which, when combined, somehow form the whole of what this dissertation attempts to represent.

**Theoretical Approaches from Ethnomusicological Studies**

The narrative style and interpretive method I have applied in this dissertation are largely grounded in a number of theoretical approaches as they appear and are applied in various ethnographic studies from the field of ethnomusicology. Because
my primary research focus is on lament singing in the context of Toba Batak pre-
funeal wakes, ethnomusicological studies of a lament have significantly influenced
the contents of my own “theoretical toolkit.” Chapter Six, which focuses on Toba
Batak funerary laments, begins with a review of important studies on lament and the
variety of approaches taken in them. With reference to theoretical orientation in
studies on lament, those focused on issues of gender—particularly gender in relation
to power, agency, and representation—have been of particular value in my own
examination of Toba Batak lament. These include the works of Abu-Lughod (1986),
(1987), McClaren (2008), Seremetakis (1991), and Tolbert (1990). In addition to
these studies of gender roles in the context of lament, other helpful
ethnomusicological studies that focus on issues of gender, power, and representation
include those by Butler (1988), Magrini (2003), Robertson (1987) and Sugarman
(1997). In so far as Toba Batak concepts concerning the construction and
maintenance of socio-cultural and socio-religious identity are addressed in the
dissertation, I have looked at related ethnomusioiological studies by Anderson (1983),
Reed (2003), Shelemay (1998), and Stokes (1994) as theoretical models. Beyond
theories in ethnomusicology that focus on issues of gender, representation, identity
formation and negotiation, I have taken a narrative approach in my ethnographic style
that draws from sociological phenomenology as well as humanistic anthropology.
Representative works in ethnomusicology that have shaped my narrative approach
included those by Berger (1999), Feld (1982), Gourlay (1982), Kisliuk (2001), Rice (1987, 1994), Schieffelin (1985), Stone (1982), and Titon (1988) among them. Some of these works I had opportunity to read before heading to Sumatra for the first time. Some I have re-read and others I have read since returning from field research as I began the process of digesting, interpreting, and shaping the narrative for the dissertation. All of these texts (and many more) have spoken to me in various ways—urging, probing, challenging, and confirming among them as I work at the task of putting my experiences and interpretations of the words, songs, emotions, and enacted (or otherwise expressed) beliefs of others into this document.

**Fieldwork**

As I have stated, my family and I lived in Indonesia from 1989 to 1993 and again from 1994 to 1997. During that time I worked as a lecturer in music and English at the Theological College of the HKBP in Pematang Siantar and later Nommensen University and the University of North Sumatra in Medan. Though we were associated with a Protestant mission organization, my role was primarily that of a university lecturer and not that of a member of the clergy, nor of an evangelist. Neither was my role that of a researcher engaged in ethnographic fieldwork. Our daily lives and interactions as a family were primarily, though not exclusively, with the Toba Batak Protestant Christian community, and my experiences with Toba Batak traditional music, the music of the Batak Protestant Church, the mortuary rites of the Toba Batak and their related expressions of grief and loss—elements which, to varying degrees, have informed the conceptual framework of this dissertation—were
experienced only as I encountered them on a situation-by-situation basis and not in connection with the implementation of an organized research design.

By contrast, the field data gathered for the completion of this dissertation was collected during the 10 months from October of 2002 through the following July under the auspices of a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad grant. Specifically, my research was centered in the province of North Sumatra—the traditional homeland of the Toba Batak—though I did spend some time in Jakarta conducting research that involved collecting commercial cassette recordings and interviewing Toba Batak pop music recording artists as well as recording industry personnel. Within the province of North Sumatra, I spent the majority of my time in and around the cities of Pematang Siantar and Medan, the provincial capital, where I undertook library research at the Theological College of the HKBP in Pematang Siantar as well as at the Center for Batak Cultural Studies and Documentation (Perpustakaan Dokumentasi dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Batak) located at Nommensen University in Medan and at the Ethnomusicology library of the University of North Sumatra. I visited with, and recorded interviews and lament examples of, noted lament singers and their families in Medan, Pematang Siantar, Panombean, Balata, and Lumban Nabolon (see Figure 3). I conducted interviews with numerous clergy from the HKBP as well as with the Ephorus (Bishop) of the HKBP at the church’s headquarters in Pearaja / Tarutung (see Figure 3). Additionally, I interviewed the leader of the Parmalim (those who practice the pre-Christian Toba Batak belief system), Naipospos, at the village of Huta Tinggi during
the documenting of the *Sipaha Sada* (first month / new year) rites in April of 2003 (see Figure 3). An integral (and often deeply moving) part of my fieldwork was my attendance at and, to varying degrees, participation in pre-funeral wakes and burial rites. Most often these took place in and around Pematang Siantar, where my family and I were living during the research period, but on several occasions I had the opportunity to attend pre-funeral wakes in smaller towns or villages in the Tobasa region around Lake Toba and Samosir Island.

During my field research, I studied the traditional music repertoire associated with lament / funerary rites / loss and grief, giving my attention primarily to the 2-stringed boat-shaped lute called *hasapi* as well as the small reed shawm called *sarune etek* or *sarune na met-met*. My music teacher was K. Sampeltek Simbolon, a respected traditional musician living just to the west of Pematang Siantar in Batu Opat. Our lessons were a pleasant mixture of tune learning and technical skill development, ending with lengthy, informal discussion – usually taking place over *kopi* and *kretek* (coffee and clove cigarettes) at the neighborhood coffee stall. I also played with the traditional *gondang sabangunan* ensemble led by Pak Simbolon know as *Grup Dame Nauli* (TB: Beautiful Peace Group). As a member of the group, I shared the playing of the large *gordang* drum with Sampeltek’s son who was my always-patient teacher and whose sense of humor helped the middle-of-the-night hours to pass by more quickly while we accompanied dancing and festivities at burial rites, victory celebrations, secondary burials, and other rites (see Figure 2).
Figure 2. Members of Grup Dame Nauli from Batu Opat, Pematang Siantar. Kalabius (Sampeltek) Simbolon, playing the sarune bolon, is the group’s leader. Photo by the author. June 23, 2003, Pematang Siantar.
During my field research period I was fortunate to join the 12 other members of *Grup Dame Nauli* on approximately 15 different outings in and around Pematang Siantar and the Lake Toba region in which we played a mixture of traditional *gondang* music and popular Batak music (using keyboard, soprano saxophone, and bamboo flute) depending on the particular moment in the rite and/or the whim of the group requesting the dances to be played.

In an effort to produce an ethnographic account that adequately and accurately represents my particular fieldwork experience and also acknowledges that my fieldwork experience (and my subsequent interpretation of it) cannot claim to be representative of all Toba Batak and their understanding and practice of grief and loss through death, I have embraced certain boundaries in my fieldwork design. My intention in doing so is to sharpen the focus and broaden the benefit of the resulting ethnography. Toward this end, my field research was focused specifically on the Toba Batak (as distinct from other Batak groups: Simalungun, Karo, Mandailing, etc., or members of other ethnic groups in Sumatra). Among Toba Batak I directed my inquiry primarily toward those who identify themselves as Protestant Christians (as distinct from Catholic Christians—considered a separate religion in Indonesia—or members of some other religious affiliation). Among Protestant Toba Batak I focused particularly on those who are registered members of the *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* (Batak Protestant Christian Church), which is the “mother church” in that region (as distinct from those who are registered members of another Protestant denomination in that region of Indonesia, e.g., *Huria Kristen Indonesia, Gereja*)
Kristen Protestan Indonesia, Gereja Punguan Kristen Batak, etc.) and the largest Protestant denomination in Indonesia. In addition to these demographic and socio-religious boundaries, I also focused my field research on the pre-funeral wakes and burial rites of those Toba Batak who, because of their age and family status, were given the titles *sari matua, saur matua, or saur matua na mauli bulung* upon their dying. Generally speaking, these honorific titles are bestowed on those dead who are advanced in years, who have most or all of their children married and who have had the blessing of grandchildren, great grandchildren or great-great grandchildren. For such as these, the pre-funerary wake activities and rites may continue for up to a week, culminating with customary burial rites (TB: *ulaon adat ni hamatean*) that, because of the status of the deceased, are particularly elaborate and are referred to as full *adat* rites (TB: *ulaon adat na gok*). I was told that it was under these conditions that laments were most likely to be sung during the days of the pre-funeral wake, and so this became my primary research context.

During my field research experience I quickly found that most Toba Batak with whom I had (even occasional) contact were willing and eager to share their opinions on my research topic. This situation led to many fruitful conversations and anecdotes as I traveled around town on public transport, took longer journeys by bus or inter-city taxi, or passed the hours sitting and watching with family and friends during pre-funeral wakes. Beyond these stories and conversations, I spent considerable time in discussion with faculty in theology at the Theological College (most especially Pdt. W. F. Simamora) and with ethnomusicology faculty at the
University of North Sumatra (Dr. Mauly Purba) and at Nommensen University (Drs. Ben Pasaribu). Their cultural insight, theoretical understanding and supportive interest in this project were invaluable to me during my field research endeavor.

Content and Organization

The dissertation is organized in four parts. Part One includes chapters one and two, and provides the reader with introductory material to the dissertation. Specifically, the first chapter is the Introduction in which I discuss the particular research questions that form the central thesis of the dissertation. These questions arise out of narrative accounts of two early experiences I had with death and dying in Toba Batak society. From these narrative events I move on to include the conceptual framework of the dissertation, including discussion of theoretical / epistemological frames around which the research took place and the dissertation is organized. The Introduction also includes a section in which I locate myself within the scope of this project, discussing the various roles I have had during my tenure in Sumatra and the ways in which these roles are connected to the array of socio-cultural theories and paradigms that inform my mode of representation through the narrative. Finally, the introduction includes a section in which I discuss my fieldwork strategy and approach during the research component of the dissertation. The chapter concludes with a description of the content and organization of the dissertation.

Chapter two is a review of literature focusing on Toba Batak society and culture. This review of literature is divided into sections including literature focusing on early historic accounts of the Toba Batak, studies of Toba Batak religious
concepts, studies of Toba Batak culture from the Dutch colonial era, studies that focus on change in Toba Batak society from the colonial to the post-colonial eras, studies which explore the impact of Protestant Christianity on Toba Batak society, studies of Toba Batak music and related arts, and studies that focus on more recent research on Toba Batak musical forms.

Part Two of the dissertation is titled “The Toba Batak Social Complex” and contains chapters three, four, and five. Chapter three is an examination of Toba Batak culture and society in which I discuss aspects of Toba Batak cultural values, beliefs and practices. The discussion includes information on Toba Batak religious concepts and practices and the interaction between pre-Christian beliefs and practices and those of the majority Protestant Christian population. The chapter also discusses social-customary law (adat dalihan na tolu) and its application in the present day, with a particular focus on funerary contexts and rituals.

Chapter four is a discussion of music in Toba Batak society, focusing on the major instrumental and vocal genres. The discussion includes information on musical instruments and ensembles and their use in ritual, as entertainment, and the interactions between traditional music genre and modern / introduced musical styles.

Chapter five looks at death in Toba Batak society, tracing back from colonial era reports of death and mourning and up to the present day. The chapter looks at adat regulations with regard to death and funerary rituals, discusses concepts of the afterlife and also examines the position of the Protestant Church with regard to death and the afterlife.
Part Three of the dissertation is titled “The Voicing of Grief in Toba Batak Funerary Ritual” and includes chapters six and seven. The information contained in Part Three is gleaned from my own ethnographic experiences in North Sumatra, including observations and experiences that occurred during the several years I taught at the Batak Theological College, Nommensen University, as well as the University of North Sumatra in the 1990s. This is complemented by further ethnographic field research in Sumatra that was focused specifically on this dissertation topic and conducted under the auspices of a Fulbright-Hays dissertation research grant in 2002-2003.

Chapter six begins with a review of the literature on lament. It highlights the variety of regions in which lament studies occur, as well as the range of methodological approaches to the study of the lament genre. Following this, the chapter focuses on Toba Batak laments and the variety of contexts in which they are found. The chapter includes discussion of the origins of lament in Toba Batak culture, a taxonomy of lament types, discussion of the specialized lament language (hata andung), discussion relating to the gradual disappearance of lament in funerary contexts, the role of lament singers, and discussion of particular musicological and performative features in Toba Batak funerary laments.

Chapter seven looks at hymn singing in funerary contexts. The discussion includes information related to the origin and growth of Protestant hymns and hymn singing among Toba Batak Protestant Christians, the use of specific hymns in funerary contexts, as well as particular musicological and performative features
present in those funerary hymns. Both of the chapters in Part Three include vignettes related to the particular topic at hand. These are drawn from my ethnographic experiences and serve both to establish a context for what follows as well as reinforce the main points in the discussion.

The final part of the dissertation, Part Four, is titled “Replacing Laments, Becoming Hymns (Ganti Andung, Gabe Ende) and includes chapters eight and nine. Chapter eight focuses on the phenomenon of Protestant hymns as a replacement for funerary laments in Toba Batak society. The chapter looks comparatively at musical and textual similarities between these two means of expressing grief in pre-funeral wake contexts, addresses aspects of communal solidarity through hymns and laments, and discusses both forms as they function communicatively in funerary contexts. The chapter also addresses the role of the Batak Protestant Church with regard to the maintenance of lament as a viable practice for expressing grief by Toba Batak Christians. This chapter, like the two that precede it, also draws significantly on my ethnographic experiences in North Sumatra as an observer as well as participant at pre-funeral wakes, through my interviews and recording sessions with lamenters, discussions with members of the clergy, and conversations with a wide variety of Toba Batak Protestant Christians.

Chapter nine is a concluding chapter which sums up the foregoing discussion on lament singing and hymn singing in Toba Batak society and the processes which may affect the gradual replacement of laments with hymns as expressions of grief and loss as well as the re-placement of laments into other expressive areas in the ongoing
process of socio-cultural and religious identity formation and negotiation for Toba Batak Protestants in the present day.
Figure 3. Map of North Sumatra showing locations mentioned in Chapter One.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature on Toba Batak Culture and Society

The purpose of this chapter is to review some of the more significant secondary sources which have contributed to the study of Toba Batak society and culture in relation to the present study. The sources discussed focus on early encounters with the Toba Batak, the study of Toba Batak culture and religious practice, and research on Toba Batak music.

Early Historic Accounts of the Toba Batak

Literary references to the island of Sumatra date from the early centuries of the Common Era, evident in the writings of Chinese and Arab seafarers, explorers and merchants. Marco Polo as well as Ibn Battuta visited the northern regions of Sumatra in the 13th and 14th centuries and while their accounts give little detailed information on the inhabitants of the region they both mention substantial trade in camphor and benzoin as well as the practice of cannibalism. The Venetian Nicolo di Conti, who spent a year on the island of Sumatra during the 15th century, provides one of the earliest detailed accounts of the people in the region of northern Sumatra. Part of his account, as it appears in Kunstmann (1863:20) states: “In the part of the island called Batech live cannibals who wage continual war on their neighbors. They use the skulls of their enemies as coinage in commerce, and the man who possesses the most of these is considered the richest.” Uli Kozok, who has researched Batak laments and written extensively on the various Batak script traditions, makes the
point that since the time of Conti’s report, any mention of cannibalism in Sumatra has been in connection with the Batak (Kozok 1991:16).

By the 18th century British and Dutch colonial investment in Sumatra was well established. William Marsden’s 1783 History of Sumatra is considered to be the first scientific monograph on the island and Marsden devotes an entire chapter to the social culture of the Batak (called the Batta by Marsden). Marsden organizes his descriptions of Batak culture and social life systematically, including topics such as: governments, arms, warfare, trade, fairs, food, language, etc. (Marsden 2006:306-328). Of particular significance to the present study, he includes a section devoted to Batak funerals in which he describes pre-funeral as well as burial rites and customs. Included in his descriptions is what might well be a description of lamenting by women. He writes, “on the last of these days the coffin is carried out and set in an open space, where it is surrounded by the female mourners, on their knees, with their heads covered, and howling (ululantes) in dismal concert, whilst the younger persons of the family are dancing near it, in solemn movement, to the sound of gongs, kalintangs, and a kind of flageolet” (ibid: 323). His final section is titled “Extraordinary Custom” and refers to the Batak practice of anthropophagy. Marsden explains that, rather than eat human flesh as a source of food or to satisfy natural pleasures, the Batak practice cannibalism as a means of punishment for certain crimes. Though none of his information is derived from firsthand accounts, Marsden’s report provides a useful study of the Batak as seen through the eyes of colonial residents who lived in the area during the mid to late 18th century, revealing
as well some of the particularities of colonial prejudices toward the indigenous inhabitants. By way of example, Marsden reports on music among the various peoples he encountered in Sumatra, stating that, among other things “The Sumatran tunes very much resemble, to my ear, those of the native Irish, and have usually, like them, a flat third: the same has been observed of the music of Bengal, and probably it will be found that the minor key obtains a preference amongst all people at a certain stage of civilization” (ibid: 176).

It wasn’t until the mid-19th century that firsthand scholarly accounts of the Toba Batak began to emerge, produced primarily by Dutch colonial residents and German missionaries. One of the first of these was the work of German physician and naturalist Franz Junghuhn who traveled throughout the Batak region in 1840-41. Junghuhn’s description of the Toba Batak reflects, like Marsden’s earlier work, a timely European sense of moral and intellectual superiority, although he attempts to present himself as an unclouded and unbiased observer. Following Junghuhn, another important work of research and scholarship coming nearly 20 years later was that of the Dutch linguist Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk, who was contracted by the Dutch Bible Society to research and produce a translation of the Bible in the Toba Batak language. In addition to this monumental work, van der Tuuk’s significant contribution was a two-volume grammar of Toba Batak (Tobasche Spraakkunst, 1864 and 1867 and reprinted in English as a single volume in 1971 as A Grammar of Toba Batak). This study of the Toba Batak language included a dictionary, a grammar, a study of the Toba Batak script, as well as information on word structure and
pronunciation. The work became the standard guide and reference tool utilized by
colonial agents as well as missionaries working not only in the Toba Batak region but
also in areas of the neighboring Batak groups (such as the Simalungun and Karo,
even though there is little similarity between the Toba and Karo languages).

**Studies of Religious Concepts in Toba Batak Culture**

One of the earliest scholarly accounts to discuss Toba Batak religious belief
and cosmology is Johannes Warneck’s *Die Religion der Batak: Ein Paradigma für
die animistischen Religionen des Indischen Archipels* (1909). Warneck’s research
describes his understanding of the various Toba Batak gods, religious concepts of the
cosmos, man and the spirit / soul (TB: *tondi*), man in relation to death, and the
practice of spirit worship / veneration. Warneck’s account is based on firsthand
observations from his years in Sumatra (1892-1906) as a missionary teacher for the
German *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* (RMG) during the era of missionary I. L.
Nommensen, who is revered as the “Apostle to the Batak.” Warneck later replaced
Nommensen (in 1920) as the leader of the Batak mission / church, and served from
1932-1937 as Superintendent of the entire *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* His
knowledge of Toba Batak traditional religious beliefs and practices is of particular
value, despite his own anti-animist perspective as a Protestant Christian missionary,
because he presents the reader with an image of Toba Batak traditional religion from
an era during which its practice and influence were still strongly felt. As Harry
Parkin, a missionary anthropologist / Batakologist writing nearly 100 years after
Warneck, has suggested, “the influence of Christianity has influenced the thinking
even of those few Toba Batak who have not yet become Christian or Muslim” (Parkin 1978:145).

Early scholarly contributions by Toba Batak authors dealing with traditional religious concepts and practices are few. Two significant contributions by Toba Batak theologians include Philip Tobing’s *The Structure of the Toba Batak Belief in the High God* (1956) and Anicetus B. Sinaga’s *The Toba Batak High God* (1981), both of which address the topic of Toba Batak religious cosmology. Tobing, a theologian educated in Europe, examines Toba Batak mythology (particularly creation myths) and *adat*-related ritual practice to explore Toba Batak conceptualizations of the High God (TB: *Debata Mula Jadi na Bolon*). Tobing’s understanding and explication of the Toba Batak High God is as a predominantly immanent Being – completely omnipresent in his creation and forming the very essence of the cosmos. In contrast, the study by a Toba Batak theologian – Roman Catholic priest Anicetus B. Sinaga titled *The Toba Batak High God* (1981) sees the High God as simultaneously immanent, transcendent and symbolic by means of “spontaneous theophony” and “provoked theophony” (Sinaga, 1981:43-44). These terms refer to concepts which describe the manner in which the High God manifests in creation – that is, spontaneously, without any direct human intervention or interaction, or provoked / invoked through such things as myths, rites, ritual objects, statues, places, etc. (ibid.). Sinaga’s study, in many respects, stands as a response to Tobing’s earlier work. Although both of these studies do much to increase our understanding of religious concepts relating to the High God and the interaction
between these concepts and the socio-religious world of myth and ritual practice for the Toba Batak (particularly in pre-Christian times), neither work discusses the significance of ancestor spirit veneration and the vital role it played, and continues to play, in the daily lives of Toba Batak, as seen in many adat rituals, such as secondary burial feasts, pre-funeral rites, and tugu feasts, suggesting that the High God Mula Jadi na Bolon was not the central religious concept for Toba Batak during pre-Christian times. Rather, a well-developed concept and practice of ancestor spirit worship was, and is, much more central and active for Toba Batak. This idea is supported in the work of theologian Harry Parkin who, in his book Batak Fruit of Hindu Thought (1978), explores aspects of the origins of Toba Batak religious concepts, terminology, ritual practice and script in connection to possible influences from Tantric-Sivaite communities in the region around the close of the first millennium C. E. Parkin suggests, relative to the theogony of Toba Batak religion, that the High God and other deities are not indigenous but were introduced. Indigenous religious concepts are much more solidly linked to the cult of ancestor spirit veneration and the cult of the spirit / soul (TB: tondì) with their accompanying ritual practices.

Colonial Contributions to the Study of Toba Batak Culture

Following several years after Warneck, the Dutch administrative officer Jacob Cornelius Vergouwen, served in the Dutch Colonial Residency of Tapanuli during the 1920s. Vergouwen, a specialist in colonial law, produced one of the most comprehensive studies of Toba Batak adat and adat law to date. His work, originally
titled *Het Rechtsleven der Toba-Bataks* and later translated as *The Social Organization and Customary Law of the Toba Batak of Northern Sumatra* (1933, translated and reprinted in 1964), provides highly detailed information on Toba Batak pre-Christian religious concepts, the kinship system, the structure of the clan (TB: *marga*) system and genealogy, the political system of the Toba Batak and territorial governance, inheritance laws, the marriage system, as well as information on numerous kinds of adat feasts and rituals. Originally intended to assist those colonial officials involved in the study, practice and regulation of *adat* law in Indonesia, the book remains an important and remarkably detailed source of information on Toba Batak culture, custom and social structure for any scholar with research interests related to the Toba Batak.

**Studies of Batak Culture and Change from the Colonial to the Post-colonial**

Several works have dealt, to varying degrees, with the subject of social and cultural change among the Toba Batak, beginning from the time of their initial contact with Europeans and continuing through the period of Indonesian independence. Johannes Keuning’s monograph titled *The Toba Batak Formerly and Now* (1958, originally 1952) traces in outline form many of the socio-cultural, religious, and political changes that have occurred in Toba Batak society from pre-Christian times to the modern era. As Claire Holt, translator of the work, suggests in the introduction, Keuning’s research provides “a very clear statement illuminating simultaneously important historical, sociological and political facets of Toba Batak life” (Keuning, 1958:introduction). In a similar fashion Lance Castles’s 1972
dissertation, “The Political Life of a Sumatran Residency: Tapanuli 1915-1940,” focuses on changes that occurred in Toba Batak social life during the Dutch colonial era. The Dutch, having occupied the Mandailing Batak area since the mid 1830s, came into the Silindung valley region south of Lake Toba in the late 1850s, though they did not gain control of the region until the late 1970s. Castles examines the changes wrought on the political and social life of the Toba Batak because of Dutch colonial and German mission influences, noting instances of conflict and organized resistance from such religio-political groups as the Parhudamdam and Parmalim, as well as from the religious and political leader Sisinagamangaraja XII. Although Castles’s reporting ends at the start of the Second World War, the theme of rapid social change is picked up again in Clark Cunningham’s The Post-war Migration of the Toba Batak to East Sumatra (1958). Based upon Cunningham’s fieldwork experience in the small village of Meat on the shores of Lake Toba, the study explores the rapid migration out of the traditional mountain homeland areas and into the lowland plantation regions by nearly 250,000 Toba Batak beginning in the early 1950s, as lowland plantations formerly run by European and American companies opened up to localized investment and ownership. This rapid urbanization and migration followed the development of the Toba Batak concept of hamajuon (progress / development) that began earlier in the century, reflecting ideas and practices of development in the areas of education, commerce, and autonomy.

Urbanization, migration, and the maintenance of cultural identity are themes explored in the works of anthropologist Edward Bruner who began his research of
Toba Batak culture in the late 1950s. His significant contributions to the study of Toba Batak culture include “The Toba Batak Village,” (1959) as well as his article in *American Anthropologist*, “Urbanization and Ethnic Identity in North Sumatra” (1961). In them, Bruner explores the various ways in which the recently urbanized Toba Batak manage to maintain their sense of cultural and ethnic identity despite the rapid socio-cultural changes resulting from urbanization and migration out of the traditional lifeways of the village setting. Bruner’s research and analysis suggest that, rather than the break down of ethnic identity through the movement to a significantly more heterogeneous social context, Toba Batak were able to successfully maintain their strong sense of ethnic identity in urban settings. This was accomplished by conscientiously observing *adat* regulations, holding *adat* feasts, and maintaining kinship ties through the formation of newly established clan organizations in urban settings which enabled Toba Batak migrants to remain connected to one another, to their ethnic traditions, and to their rural village roots. As an interesting and valuable 40-year follow-up to his earlier research, Bruner’s 1999 article “Return to Sumatra: 1957, 1997” (*American Ethnologist* 26(2):461-477) traces changes in the field of ethnography and anthropological theory as they relate to issues of trans-nationalism and globalization and the notion of locality. Bruner states that, after 40 years many aspects Toba Batak society have undergone dramatic change. Even so, there are elements of Toba Batak society remain less changed: the urge to migrate to urban centers in an effort to improve one’s status, and the effort to maintain connections to the homeland and one’s ethnic identity through the “ever evolving but distinctive
Toba Batak social and ceremonial system” of *adat* custom and tradition (Bruner, 1999:472).

George Sherman’s 1990 ethnography of rural Toba Batak, *Rice, Rupees and Ritual*, examines changes in the socio-economic and ritual aspects of Toba Batak society. Sherman’s research, conducted during the mid 1970s, looks at changes which occurred due to the movement from rice as the primary medium of monetary and ritual exchange to that of cash, introduced by colonial and missionary encounters, and the impact of this change on Toba Batak social values. Sherman concludes that, although the monetary system of exchange and the socio-economic values of the Toba Batak have changed in recent years, the cultural values of the Toba Batak and the social value of rice have not changed because of the centrality of rice within Toba Batak ritual culture—it is still valued as a gift, as a source of food and as a medium of blessing within Toba Batak ritual practice.

**Studies of Protestant Christianity and Toba Batak Culture**

The history of Christian missions and the development of the Batak Protestant Church are important subjects that have been researched and written about by both foreign and Toba Batak scholars. In addition to Johannes Warneck’s work on Toba Batak religious beliefs (mentioned above), Warneck also chronicled the first 50 years of the growth of the Batak Protestant Church in his *50 Jahre Batakmission in Sumatra* (50 years of the Batak Mission in Sumatra) (published in Berlin, 1911). One of the earliest historic accounts of the establishment and growth of the Protestant Church among the Toba Batak written in English is the (1938) monograph *The Batak Church:*
An Account of the Organization, Policies and Growth of the Christian Community of the Bataks of North Sumatra. The report, written by Merle Davis after a visit to the region and in preparation for a gathering of the World Council of Churches in Tambaram, India, covers the early development of the Batak Protestant Christian Church (TB: Huria Kristen Batak Protestan—HKBP), with particular attention given to the social, financial, and political structures of the church in the late 1930s, shortly following the HKBP’s independence from the German RMG mission. A similar examination is found in Hendrik Kraemer’s From Missionfield to Independent Church (1958), which chronicles the independence movements of Indonesian churches during the decade of the 1930s. One chapter of the book recounts the work of German missionaries from the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG) among the Toba Batak, the development of the Toba Batak mission and its movement toward independence from the European mission in 1930 with the formal establishment of the HKBP, the first independent Protestant Church in the Dutch East Indies. At the time of its independence from the RMG, the HKBP had a membership of nearly 350,000, and maintained social institutions such as mission schools, a theological training school, a hospital, a leprosarium, and numerous other institutions, all of which made the transfer of leadership and autonomy a matter of significant complexity. Kraemer’s work exquisitely many of these complexities from the perspective of one standing on the cusp of an era of significant change as Toba Batak Christians reckoned with independence and autonomy.
American missionary and theologian Paul Pedersen’s 1968 dissertation, 
Religion as the Basis of Social Change among the Batak of North Sumatra, explored attitudes toward religion and society, particularly in light of rapid social change, among Christian Toba Batak. Drawing in part on his dissertation research, Pedersen later produced an important history of the development of national Batak churches in North Sumatra titled Batak Blood and Protestant Soul (1970), in which he traced the historical background and development of ethnic Protestant churches throughout the Batak region from the 1860s to the 1960s. As mentioned earlier, from 1930 the Batak Protestant Church was recognized as and independent, self-standing church although, as Pedersen points out, the Batak Christians struggled over the next 10 years for full autonomy from the German mission, finally gaining complete independence in 1942. Looking beyond the Toba Batak alone, Pedersen includes valuable information concerning the development and establishment of the Simalungun, Karo, and Angkola Batak churches, exploring some of the socio-ethnic, political, theological and linguistic issues which prompted the division of the Batak Protestant Church into its various denominations.

German theologian Lothar Schreiner, who worked for several years (1956 – 1965) as a missionary-lecturer at the Batak Protestant Church’s Theological College in Pematang Siantar, published an important work, based on his dissertation, titled Adat und Evangelium: Zur Bedeutung der altvölkischen Lebensordnungen für Kirche und Mission unter den Batak in Nordsumatra (Adat and the Gospel: The Relevance of Customary Law for Church and Mission among the Batak of North Sumatra).
Schreiner’s work (1972) traces the history of the dynamic encounter between Toba Batak adat and Protestant Christianity, examining in great detail the ways in which the coexistence of these worldviews has been one of the central and most challenging issues for Toba Batak since the introduction of Christianity in the 1860s. Schreiner contends that it is not possible for Toba Batak adat to be Christianized because, as he sees it, adat is too deeply connected to matters of ancestor veneration and a dependence on the benevolence of ancestor spirits. He does not promote the abandonment of adat but suggests, instead, that adat can be practiced by Toba Batak Christians as long as it is practiced as a set of social customs only, liberated from its pre-Christian religious implications. Schreiner’s book was translated into Indonesian in 1978 as *Telah Kudengar dari Ayahku: Perjumpaan Adat dengan Iman Kristen di Tanah Batak* (Thus Have I Heard from my Father: The Encounter of Adat and the Christian Faith in the Batak Lands).\(^4\)

Two works focusing on Toba Batak church history, authored by Toba Batak theologians, should also be mentioned. Both were published in 1992 and both are translations of doctoral dissertations by the authors. Andar Lumbantobing’s 1952 dissertation, *Das Amt in der Batak Kirche* (Leadership / Office in the Batak Church), was translated into Indonesian and published in book form as, *Makna Wibawa Jabatan dalam Gereja Batak* (The Meaning of Authority / Office in the Batak Church). Lumbantobing provides a socio-cultural background of the Toba Batak and

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gives a historic record of the growth of the Batak Protestant Church during the missionary era. Following this, he outlines the different types of office and their related duties within the Batak church structure. The book then describes particular issues that have arisen for those holding positions of authority in the church in relation to traditional Toba Batak values and the exercise of authority in Toba Batak society, in relation to the Dutch colonial governments authority structure, and in relation to the Pietistic theology of the German missionaries. Lumbantobing’s work is of particular value in that it insightfully explores the structure and dynamics of authority and leadership within the Batak Protestant Church – a church that has experienced episodes of profound conflict over issues of leadership over the years. The other book (published in 1992 as a translation of the author’s German-language doctoral dissertation) is J. R. Hutauruk’s *Kemandirian Gereja* (Church Independence). Hutauruk, former presiding bishop (TB: *Ephorus*)\(^5\) of the HKBP completed his dissertation in 1980 with the title, *Die Batak-Kirke: Vor Ihrer Unabhängigkeit* (1899-1942) (The Batak Church: Towards Independence: 1899-1942). The book examines the formation of various Christian political organizations and their role in the movement toward an independent Indonesia. Additionally, Hutauruk provides a good summary of the history of the Batak Protestant Church in its own development and movement toward independence from the German *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* during the first half of the 20th century.

\(^5\) The term ‘Ephorus’ is derived from the Greek, meaning ‘overseer’ and has been applied to the leadership of the Batak Protestant Church since the time of founding missionary Nommensen, the first Ephorus of the Batak Protestant Church.
Studies of Toba Batak Music (and Related) Traditions

Scholarly studies on the music traditions of the Toba Batak began to appear only recently. Claire Holt’s 1971 article titled “Dances of Sumatra and Nias”, published in the journal Indonesia, provides a brief, though insightful, look at the traditional dance of the Toba Batak known as tortor. She describes principal movements used in the dance as well as some of the social contexts in which the dance is found. Another early publication describing the tortor dance, giving particular emphasis to the rubrics of the dance movements, is Mangaraja Asal Siahaan’s 1953 book Gondang dohot Tortor Batak (Batak Gondang and Tortor). The majority of the book is focused on the gondang sabangunan ensemble (the primary traditional music ensemble of the Toba Batak), describing various feasts where the gondang ensemble performs and the tortor is danced. Siahaan’s account provides important terminology related to the performance of gondang music, lists the titles and meanings of some seventy different gondang pieces, and gives instruction on the proper dance for each gondang piece. He also writes in strong support of the maintenance of the gondang and tortor traditions, speaking against the long-standing prohibitions toward such performances by the mission leadership and colonial government, who felt that such ritual performances were hindering the spread of Christianity in the area.

Early publications by members of the German missionary community that describe in any length or detail the music of the Toba Batak are rare. There are passing references to music in Warneck (1909), including a reference to lament
(1909:67ff.), and in the journal of British missionary Hester Needham, published in 1899 as, *God First*. Needham traveled to North Sumatra some years after the RMG had established mission outposts and schools in the region. Her journal recounts several experiences (described in Chapter 3) hearing local Christians making music related to the daily activities of Toba Batak Christian converts. Many of these works indicate all too clearly, however, that the attitude of the European with regard to the music of the Toba Batak was that it was either entirely heathen in character or that it was non-existent, and that the Europeans were responsible for bringing music (meaning the hymns and other music of the Protestant church) to the Batak Christians. One of the most detailed early publications to deal with Toba Batak music was written in 1885 by missionary Gustav Pilgram. His article, “Referat über heidnische Musik und Tanz” (Report on Heathen Music and Dance) gives a good description of the use of the *gondang* ensemble and *tortor* dance in Toba Batak society at a time when the impact of Christianity was still quite minimal. Pilgram’s report was translated into Toba Batak and incorporated into Andar Lumbantobing’s 1981 book, *Parsorion (Riwayat Hidup) ni Missionar Gustav Pilgram dohot Hararat ni HaKristenon di Toba* (A Biography of Gustav Pilgram and the Spread of Christianity in Toba). Pilgram’s report includes descriptive information about the instruments in the ensemble as well as descriptions of the ritual contexts in which the ensemble played a role. According to Pilgram, the primary use of the *gondang* ensemble was in connection to rituals associated with ancestor spirit worship that were often overseen by a diviner-priest (TB: *datu*). Pilgram also mentions the use of
the *gondang* ensemble in connection with strictly social ceremonies, such as house blessings, birth celebrations, funerals, etc. His report provides insights into Toba Batak ritual celebrations and the important place of the *gondang* ensemble and *tortor* dance in them. Unlike many of the other missionaries, Pilgram did not call for the complete abandonment of the *gondang* practice. Rather, he supported the use of *gondang* and *tortor* for social occasions and celebrations, as long as these occasions were consecrated by church officials and did not involve ancestor spirit worship practices. He advised that Christian Batak not join together with non-Christian Batak in celebrations where the *gondang* ensemble was being used, and he felt that instruments which had been used in ancestor worship rites should not to be used by Christian Toba Batak. In comparing Pilgram’s report (descriptive and written by an outsider) to the later study of Siahaan (1953) (prescriptive and written by an insider) it is interesting to note similarities between the two (despite the nearly 70 years that separate them) with regard to their general assessment of the connection of the *gondang* and *tortor* traditions to ancestor spirit veneration. As such, both writers suggest that if the *gondang* is to be used by Christians it must somehow be separated from these practices and revised in accordance with Christian teachings (though neither writer goes into much specific detail as to how this should occur).

More Recent Scholarship on Toba Batak Music

It wasn’t until the 1980s that detailed scholarly research and publication on the music of the Toba Batak (particularly of the *gondang* tradition) began to emerge. German ethnomusicologist Artur Simon published a number of articles on Toba
Batak ceremonial music beginning with his article “Altreligiöse und soziale Zeremonien der Batak (Nordsumatra)” (Old Religious and Social Ceremonies of the Batak of North Sumatra) in 1982. Subsequent articles (1984, 1985, 1987, and 1993) published by Simon focus on his research interest in Toba Batak ceremonial music, ritual, and the impact of increasing globalization and westernization on traditional music practices and functions within Toba Batak society. In addition to his articles, Simon also published LP audio recordings of the instrumental music of the Toba Batak, “Gondang Toba” (1984), which includes extensive and highly detailed notes, and a documentary film (1984) on the secondary burial practices of the Toba Batak, “Toba Batak – Feast of a Secondary Burial: Ulaon Panongkokhon Saring-saring.” Simon’s contributions to scholarly research on the music traditions of the Toba Batak are prolific and noteworthy both in their breadth and depth of detail. The 1980s also marked the beginning of an increase in research and publication on Toba Batak music by Toba Batak scholars. This was due, in large part, to the establishment of an ethnomusicology degree program within the Faculty of Letters at the University of North Sumatra in the early 1980s. The research and thesis writing of the program’s graduates have significantly added to the body of knowledge related to Toba Batak music practices. Among worthwhile contributions are those of Nurdin Nainggolan (1979), whose thesis, “Musik Tradisional Batak Toba: Pembinaan dan Pengembangannya” (Toba Batak Traditional Music: Its Growth and Development), was researched and written in fulfillment of his teacher training degree at the

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6 Published in Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 107:177 – 206.
Teaching and Education Institute (IKIP) in Medan, out of which the ethnomusicology program at the University of North Sumatra grew. Nainggolan provides a comprehensive overview of many different genres of traditional Toba Batak music, classifying them under broad categories as either ceremonial or non-ceremonial, instrumental or vocal, solo instruments or ensembles. He describes instruments and the contexts in which they are found. His descriptions include information on the origins of instruments and connections between particular instruments and the folklore associated with them. Nainggolan’s approach to his subject tends toward the preservationist, including a chapter outlining the reasons behind the steady decline of traditional music – the main reasons being the influences of Christianity and modern culture. Where Nainggolan’s thesis is of value because of its breadth and scope, the 1986 thesis of Toba Batak musicologist and composer Ben Pasaribu, “Taganing Batak Toba: Suatu Kajian Dalam Konteks Gondang Sabangunan” (Toba Batak Taganing [tuned drum]: An Analysis in the Context of Gondang Sabangunan) is noteworthy in that he focuses on a single ensemble tradition (gondang sabangunan) and beyond that, on a single instrument (taganing) within the ensemble. Pasaribu’s thesis explores the important role of the taganing (a tuned drum chime and leading instrument) in the gondang ensemble. Pasaribu examines the role of the drummer within the ensemble as well as the social status of the taganing player in Toba Batak society. The field of his research is focused on three of the religious organizations that claim to maintain the religious practices of pre-Christian times, i.e. the Parmalim organization, the Parbaringin organization, and the Golongan Si Raja Batak
organization. His research indicates that within these three organizations the members of the gondang ensemble are viewed as mediators, through their practice of music and ritual prayer, between the world of the living and the world of the deities and spirits. A number of other theses from the University of North Sumatra have been focused on various uses of the gondang sabangunan ensemble, examining the topic from a number of important angles. These include Irwansyah Hutashuhut’s 1990 thesis, “Analisis Komparatif Bentuk (Penggarapan) dan Teknik Permainan dari Sebuah Gondang (Komposisi Lagu) yang Disajikan oleh Tujuh Partaganing” (A Comparative Analysis of the Form and Performance Technique of a Gondang Melody Performed by Seven Taganing Players); Nurmasitta Gultom’s 1990 thesis, “Suatu Studi Deskriptif dan Musikologis Upacara Gondang Saem di Desa Paraduan” (A Musicological and Descriptive Study of the Gondang Saem [healing] Ritual in the Village of Paraduan); and Emma Panggabean’s 1991 thesis, “Fungsi Gondang Sabangunan dalam Upacara Kematian Saur Matua pada Masyarakat Batak Toba” (The Function of Gondang Sabangunan in the Saur Matua [elder] Funeral Ritual in Toba Batak Society). Additionally, Mauly Purba’s 1991 article on the practice of requesting specific gondang pieces through ceremonial speeches in the context of an adat ritual is note worth. The article, “Mangido Gondang di dalam Penyajian Musik Gondang Sabangunan pada Masyarakat Batak Toba” (Requesting Gondang Pieces in the Performance of Gondang Sabangunan in Toba Batak Society), was published in the performing arts journal Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia. This article and the afore-

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mentioned theses display a wide breadth of theoretical and methodological approaches to the subject of the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble in its divergent roles in Toba Batak society. While Pasaribu’s approach is instrument specific (though within a larger ensemble context) and Hutasuhut’s focus is on performance practice and pedagogical matters, others looked at the ensemble as a whole and its ceremonial function and symbolic position within a rapidly changing society. Panggabean’s thesis is of particular relevance to the present study as she directed her inquiry toward the use of the *gondang* ensemble in Toba Batak funerary rituals for the burial of elderly Toba Batak (saur matua), for whom traditional funerary ritual is particularly elaborate.

Research focusing on genre of Toba Batak music other than the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble has been carried out in connection with the ethnomusicology program at the University of North Sumatra. Notable theses produced as a result of this research include Ritha Ony Hutajulu’s 1988 thesis on the music of *Opera Batak* composer Tilhang Oberlin Gultom. The traveling folk theater genre *Opera Batak* flourished in the decade just prior to, and in the first two decades after, Indonesian independence. The most prolific composer of songs and incidental music for this popular genre was Tilhang Gultom (1896 – 1970), leader of the *Opera Batak* troupe “*Serindo*”. Hutajulu’s thesis, “*Analisis Struktural Musik Vokal pada Opera Batak: Dengan Pusat Perhatian pada Karya Tilhang Gultom*” (A Structural Analysis of the Vocal Music of Opera Batak: With Particular Attention to the Work of Tilhang Pertunjukan Indonesia), based in Yogyakarta, Central Java.
Gultom), traces the melodic shaping, scalar inventory, melodic range, and form of more than half of Gultom’s 132 vocal compositions for *Opera Batak*. She examines the possible influences from Western popular music on the compositions of Gultom, and her biography of the composer as well as history of the genre make her thesis a valuable one for scholars of Toba Batak music. Additionally, Hutajulu provides useful information on numerous other genre of vocal music in Toba Batak society and their influences on Gultom’s compositions.

Popular music in Toba Batak society is the subject of a 1994 thesis written by Nommensen HKBP University graduate Ivo Panggabean. His thesis, *“Musik Populer Batak – Toba: Suatu Observasi Musikologi – Diskografis”* (Toba Batak Popular Music: A Musicological and Discographic Observation) is one of the very few research projects with a focus on popular music in Toba Batak society. Panggabean traces the historic developments of popular music and related technologies in North Sumatra during the 20th century. He also supplies a discography of recordings (both records and cassettes) of Toba Batak popular music from the archives of the Medan branch of the national radio station, *Radio Republik Indonesia* (RRI), listing the names of performers and composers, song titles, musical genre, and record label data. Another recent thesis dealing with popular music is that of Juliana Simanjuntak, whose 1999 thesis, *“Analisis Sosiologi Satra Terhadap Lagu Andung-andung Karya Komponis Nahum Situmorang”* (A Sociological Analysis of Text in the Popular Lament Songs of Composer Nahum Situmorang), explores the genre of popular lament songs, particularly those composed by Nahum Situmorang, a well-known
composer and performer of Toba Batak popular music during the 1950s – 60s.

Simanjuntak’s academic focus is on regional languages and literature, and her interest in the texts of Situmorang’s popular laments songs deals with his frequent use of, and fluency with, the traditional Toba Batak lament language, *hata andung*, in many of his popular laments. Nahum Situmorang is considered by many Toba Batak to be the innovator of the popular lament genre as well as the impetus behind its rise and development as a style of popular music with ongoing connections to concepts of Toba Batak cultural identity, not only for Toba Batak themselves but for other ethnic groups throughout the archipelago. Simanjuntak’s thesis provides an informative look into Situmorang’s life and background, exploring elements that influenced his popularity as a composer and performer of popular laments.

In relation to Toba Batak laments, mention should be made of the dissertation of philologist Uli Kozok, completed in 1994 and published in an online electronic format in 2002. His dissertation, “*Die Bataksche Klage: Toten-, Hochzeits-, und Liebesklage in oraler und schriftlicher Tradition*” (Batak Laments: Death, Wedding, and Love Laments in Oral and Written Tradition), is a thorough examination of the language of lament among the Karo, Simalungun, Toba, Mandailing, and Angkola Batak groups. Kozok provides useful historic and linguistic information in relation to Batak laments in oral tradition, as it is found among the Toba Batak, however the real emphasis of his dissertation research is on various laments as they are found in written form – particularly among the Karo and Simalungun Batak groups. His knowledge of the various Batak languages is solidly evident in his work, particularly
the development and use of the traditional Sanskrit derived writing system employed by the various Batak groups (TB: surat aksara Batak) in connection with the writings of medico-spiritual practitioners, those involved in divination, as well as composers of laments. Kozok’s discussion of laments among the Toba Batak is limited to the lament as a textual phenomenon primarily. He does not discuss the lament as a musical or social phenomenon, per se, as his field of expertise is philology / linguistics. As such, his dissertation is of great value in its attention to detail and thorough examination of laments in manuscript form – transcribed by researchers and linguists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and currently housed in European collections.

Two additional dissertations need to be discussed for their valuable contribution to the body of research on Toba Batak traditional music and in their connection to the present study. The first, completed in 1994, is the dissertation of Yoshiko Okazaki titled, “Music, Identity, and Religious Change among the Toba Batak People of North Sumatra”. The musical focus of Okazaki’s dissertation is the Toba Batak gondang tradition and the variety of meanings it contains for different groups of Toba Batak in relation to the ways in which they encounter and deal with cultural change, particularly religious change. Okazaki’s examination of the gondang performance tradition takes place in three diverse settings: traditional, adat-related ceremonial feasts (such as weddings, funerals, etc.); church feasts and worship services; and staged entertainment performances. Through her research, she examines the multi-layered ways in which carries and transmits meaning to various
groups of Toba Batak depending on the setting and depending on the use of the
ensemble within those diverse settings. Whether functioning as a unifying symbol as
it affirms kinship and community connections and affinities during adat related rites,
eliciting tensions between adherents to traditional beliefs and those who adhere to
Christian values, or in its value-neutral capacity as a staged entertainment, Toba
Batak gondang represents various aspects of Toba Batak people’s expanding
relationship to the larger world. In her study, Okazaki interacts primarily with the
Roman Catholic Toba Batak community and their use of the gondang in connection
with Christian worship. The Roman Catholic community’s attitude relative to
traditional arts as expressions of Christian faith is markedly more receptive than that
of the Protestant Christian community, having developed during the late 60s and
beyond as a result of the Second Vatican Council statements on the inculturation of
the Roman Catholic liturgy. While much of this receptivity to traditional arts in
Christian worship is commendable, Okazaki’s research indicates that, in the Toba
Batak context, there are also a number of difficult, and as yet unresolved, issues –
related to the creation of new (specifically Christian) gondang pieces, the associations
with former beliefs and the use of the gondang as a mediator for communication with
ancestor spirits, the economic burden of hiring an ensemble for a worship service, etc.
– which have arisen in recent years. Her research offers valuable insights into a
dynamic and vibrant socio-religious setting and her understanding of Toba Batak
traditional, pre-Christian beliefs as well as those of present-day Roman Catholic’s is
based on extensive fieldwork observation and interviews.
The second dissertation mentioned above is that of Mauly Purba, a Toba Batak ethnomusicologist, whose 1998 dissertation, “Musical and Functional Change in the Gondang Sabangunan Tradition of the Protestant Toba Batak 1860s – 1990s, with Particular Reference to the 1980s – 1990s”, stands as one of the most thorough-going examinations of the gondang sabangunan tradition as well as the traditional accompanying dance, tortor, in the context of the Protestant Christian church. Purba’s research provides detailed and well-documented information on Toba Batak culture and society, drawing on sources from pre-Christian times as well as the present. His examination of the adat system and its connections to the rules of adat concerning the performance of gondang sabangunan, the treatment of gondang musicians, and the gondang as it occurs in the context of an adat feast provide a clear picture of the complexities of this music tradition and its central role in the social and ceremonial life of the Toba Batak. Purba also provides detailed information on the performance practice of the gondang sabangunan, based on his own experiences as a musician and on extensive interviews with gondang musicians as well. His research raises intriguing questions related to the ways in which tuning within the ensemble is conceptualized and realized by gondang musicians, the ways in which melodic development occurs in a specific piece during performance, and the status and role of particular musicians within the ensemble. Purba’s main thesis deals with the conflict that arose in Toba Batak society when the missionaries and colonial government enacted bans on the performance of the gondang sabangunan and tortor dance as a means of more quickly enabling the Christianization of the Toba Batak by hindering
any social expressions which were perceived as contrary to their goal. Despite the bans, many Toba Batak (Christians as well as non-Christians) continued to participate in ceremonies where the *gondang* was performed, illustrating the centrality of the ensemble in all *adat*-related feasting and the importance of *adat* ritual to the maintenance of Toba Batak social cohesion. As Purba points out, “the *gondang sabangunan* was, and still is, *the* musical symbol of *adat*” (Purba, 2002/2003:69) and it was the inability of the European missionaries and colonial government to recognize the highly inter-related and deeply religious nature of these concepts and practices which contributed to the conflict over values, beliefs, and practices in the midst of significant social and religious change. Purba also examines the historic movement toward reconciliation and resolution of this conflict, pointing out the ways in which the Protestant Christian community has moved to re-incorporate particular aspects of the *gondang sabangunan* and *tortor* traditions and embrace them as integral expressions of a contemporary Toba Batak adat and also to Toba Batak concepts of cultural and religious identity.

The chapter that follows this discussion of important secondary sources with a focus on Toba Batak society and culture extends the discussion of the Toba Batak by focusing on specific aspects of Toba Batak culture in the present day. Topics discussed in the following chapter include the geographic setting, the Toba Batak system of cultural values, the system of customary laws and practices contained in Toba Batak adat, religious beliefs and cosmology, and the Protestant Christian Church and its place in present day Toba Batak society.
Part II

The Toba Batak Social Complex

Chapter Three

The Toba Batak Social Complex – Society and Culture

This chapter introduces the Toba Batak people, focusing on matters such as the geographic setting of the Toba Batak, their history, culture and society. It is designed to provide a general understanding of the setting in which the dissertation is situated. Toba Batak society in the present day is dynamically complex and multi-layered. Much of this dynamism relates to the ongoing interactions of socio-economic, religious, local cultural and global cultural factors in Toba Batak society. The intent of the present chapter is to examine particular aspects of this multi-faceted and multi-layered social complex as a means of providing the reader with a general (albeit, synchronic) understanding of the Toba Batak. After discussion of the geographic setting in which my research took place, I follow with a discussion of a number of Toba Batak core cultural values as expressed through the works of Toba Batak social anthropologists as well as through my own field experiences (spanning roughly eight years between 1989 and 2003). Following this I continue with a discussion of various traditional beliefs and customary practices, including religious cosmology, the system of adat, and the place of Protestant Christianity in Toba Batak society.
The Geographic Setting – Sumatra (Sumatera)

The island of Sumatra is the westernmost island in the Republic of Indonesia, a country made up of some 17,000 islands (6,000 of which are inhabited). The island, bisected by the equator nearly at its midpoint, is the sixth largest island in the world, and is the largest island completely within the boundaries of Indonesia. Covering some 182,800 square miles and stretches nearly 1,090 miles from northwest to southeast, Sumatra contains total population estimated at around 42 million, making it the fourth most populous island in the world. Even so, the population density overall is estimated at only 85 people per square kilometer, making Sumatra one of the more sparsely populated islands in Indonesia (compared with the island of Java, having a population density of approximately 980 per square kilometer).8

North Sumatra Province (Sumatera Utara)

The Toba Batak homeland is situated within the province of North Sumatra (BI: Sumatera Utara), one of 10 provinces within the island’s territory (see Figure 4). The province of North Sumatra covers roughly 71,680 square kilometers, is divided into 18 regencies (BI: kabupaten), and has a population estimated at 11.5 million, divided among various ethnic groups, including Javanese, Melayu, Batak, and ethnic Chinese. The Toba Batak are one of six ethno-linguistically distinct sub-groups of Batak (the others being the Karo, Simalungun, Mandailing, Angkola, and Pakpak). Altogether the Batak make up some 42% of the population of North Sumatra with an estimated population of 4.9 million living within the province and an additional 1.1

million living elsewhere. The Toba Batak form the largest of the six sub-groups of Batak, with a population estimated between 3 – 4 million. The capital city of the province is Medan, founded in 1590 C.E., with a current population of nearly 2.5

Figure 4. The island of Sumatra with the Province of North Sumatra highlighted.

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9 ibid.
million, making it the third largest city in Indonesia. Medan is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the country, with a population made up of Javanese, Acehnese, Malay, Tamil, Hokkien, and both Karo and Toba Batak communities, among others. Medan, however, is not the traditional homeland of the Toba Batak, who migrated to the area in large numbers from their highland villages near Lake Toba beginning in the mid-20th century. The area surrounding Lake Toba, and specifically Samosir Island, located within the lake, is considered to be the mythological point-of-origin of the Batak. Lake Toba, formed of a volcanic caldera, sits along the ridge of mountains running most of the length of Sumatra and known as the Bukit Barisan mountain range. Along this mountain range are as many as 65 volcanic peaks, several of which remain active.

The traditional homeland of the Toba Batak is on Samosir Island and in the mountains to the south of the Lake, encompassed by the regencies of North Tapanuli, Humbang – Hasundutan, Samosir, and Toba Samosir. The area is mountainous and largely forested, providing material commodities such as rattan, benzoin (incense), and timber products. The highland valleys between the mountains are the areas where much of the cultivation of rice, corn, peanut, cassava, and other vegetables and fruits has taken place, fed by mountain streams and small rivers. Major rivers and waterways in the province include the Asahan, Batang Toru, Bah Bolon, Bilah, Kualuh, Silau, and Wampu, whose waters flow through the Batak lands and, for many years, served as an important means of transportation for merchants and their merchandise, as well as for communications and trade between the inland, mountain-
dwelling Batak and those from the lowland and coastal regions where large plantations of coffee, tea, tobacco and peppers were established during the colonial era. Present day plantation products also include palm oil, rubber, and cocoa.

The Batak Ethno-linguistic Groups

The Batak are generally divided into six sub-groups, the Toba Batak, Simalungun Batak, Karo Batak, Angkola Batak, Mandailing Batak, and Pakpak Batak (sometimes referred to as the Pakpak – Dairi Batak). Historically there has been some claim that the Alas and Gayo people of Aceh and the Pardembanan people of the Asahan river valley were originally of Batak origin. In the present day, however, it is generally accepted that, while these peoples may have had connections to Batak groups who migrated out of the highland areas around Lake Toba in former times, they have since intermarried with other groups, taking on the languages, customs (adat) and religious traditions of other groups and thereby let go of their connections to Batak ethnicity (Pedersen, 1970:19; Niessen, 1985:5; Tobing, 1963:21; Iwabuchi, 1994:8-10). Of the six Batak sub-groups the Toba Batak are the most populous and, as such, lay the strongest claim to the ethnonym “Batak”. Many Indonesians associate the term exclusively with the Toba Batak. If, for instance, a Simalungun person identifies himself or herself as “halak Batak” (a Simalungun term meaning a Batak person), most others will assume that they are Toba Batak and not Simalungun. For that reason it is common for non-Toba Batak people to identify themselves only as “Karo” or “Simalungun”, dropping the term “Batak” altogether. In the case of the Mandailing Batak in particular, many shed the name “Batak” because the
predominantly Muslim Mandailing do not wish to be associated with the predominantly Christian Toba Batak, who regularly eat foods that are considered unclean to Muslims. For many Toba Batak Christians, their ethnic identity is closely intertwined with their sense of religious identity, such that claiming an ethnic identity of “Toba Batak” or simply “Batak” is equal to affiliating oneself with Christianity.  

**Batak Origins**

Toba Batak mythology claims that the Batak originated near the village of Sianjur Mula-mula on slopes of the mountain Pusuk Buhit, located on the southwestern shore of Lake Toba (see Figure 6). According to Batak legend (TB: *turiturian*), it was near the village of Sianjur Mula-mula that the first Batak, Si Raja Batak, was born. All of the Batak groups trace their ancestry back to this progenitor, whose descendents spread out from this region, establishing new clans and villages throughout North Sumatra. Though the six Batak sub-groups share many aspects of social structure, *adat*, and history in common, linguistically they fall into three broad groups: the Mandailing, Angkola and Toba in the south; the Pakpak and Karo in the north; and the Simalungun in the northeast. According to Sibeth there are various dialectical differences within the groups, however the groups themselves are quite linguistically independent even though they may have shared a language in the distant past (Sibeth 1991:11).

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10 This is not unlike other ethnic groups in religiously diverse areas of Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, for example, identifying oneself as orang Melayu (a Malay person) communicates not only information about one’s ethnicity but also about one’s religion (Islam).

11 Until the early 20th century the base of Pusuk Buhit was connected by a land bridge to Samosir Island (effectively making the island a peninsula), but in 1906 the Dutch colonial administration carved a half-kilometer-wide canal through the land bridge to facilitate water transportation, thereby separating Samosir Island from the mainland.
Anthropologically and historically there is very little definitive proof about the origins of the Batak. Generally it is agreed that they are a Proto-Malayan people having arrived in the islands of Indonesia from southern China via the Malay Peninsula sometime during the second millennium BCE. Initially living along the coastal areas, these Proto-Malayan tribes were later pushed up into the mountain areas by a second wave of migrants, referred to as the Deutero-Malay, theorized to have taken place around the 3rd century BCE (Vlekke 1965:8-10). This theory, though largely undocumented, has nevertheless been strongly supported by historians, archeologists and linguists.

Despite the lack of solid evidence concerning the timing and manner of the migrations into and around the mountainous region of interior Sumatra, archeological and anthropological evidence points to the strong likelihood that the Batak had, as Parkin suggests, some connection with Farther India and that as they were pushed up into the mountain areas, they brought with them a developed culture which had significant similarities to that of Greater India. These connections are explored in great detail in Parkin (1978), and include aspects of the agricultural system (the cultivation of rice), the kinship system, the cosmological system, the treatment of the dead, and the spoken and written language systems of the Batak. In whatever manner these migratory events unfolded, what seems clear is that the Batak eventually settled

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12 This is based largely on a theory first put forward by anthropologists Paul and Fritz Sarasin in the early 20th century.

13 Other speculations as to the timing and nature of the migrations which brought the Batak people into the mountainous region they now claim as a homeland have been set forth by Heine-Geldern (1945), Keesing (1950), Cunningham (1958), and Parkin (1978) among others.
in the mountainous areas of North Sumatra where they lived in relative isolation, traveling out of the region only for purposes of trade and commerce with groups living along the coastal areas, until the middle of the 19th century. As such, the Batak groups developed their own closely interconnected systems of social interaction, customary practice and religious belief. This situation changed dramatically beginning in the mid-19th century with the movement of the Dutch colonial administration of the East Indies Company (VOC) into the Batak highlands, followed shortly thereafter by the missionaries of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft, resulting in rapid and profound changes in the socio-cultural, religious and economic configurations of Batak (particularly Toba Batak) society.

**Toba Batak Core Cultural Values**

In North Sumatra an oft-repeated adage\(^\text{14}\) states that a solitary Batak will establish a new village, when two Batak meet, they will start playing chess, a gathering of three will launch into an argument and four Batak together will form a church choir. Though there are variants as to the kinds of activity in which the different groups will engage (sometimes the three will form a church, other times the two will begin to argue), the adage reflects, with a fair degree of accuracy, something of the stereotypical character associated with the Batak as well as the kinds of activities and behaviors which are perceived as valued in Batak society.

\(^{14}\) Even before our family’s move to North Sumatra (while living in Bandung, West Java where we studied the Indonesian language for a year) we frequently heard this statement as a characterization of a Toba Batak approach to life once it became known that we would be living and working with Toba Batak people.
There are numerous attitudes, behaviors and actions which, when considered broadly, reveal what Batak anthropologist Basryal Harahap refers to as the “nilai budaya utama” (core cultural values) (Harahap 1987:133) present in Toba Batak society. Harahap lists nine such core values: Kekerabatan (familial ties), Religi (religion), Hagabeon (abundant descendants), Hasangapon (charismatic respect from others), Hamoraon (abundant riches), Hamajuon (progressive advancement), Patik dohot Uhum (customary laws and regulations), Pengayoman (advocacy, support), and Konflik (conflict) (ibid: 133-134). The discussion which follows focuses primarily on the cultural values of kekerabatan, religi, hagabeon, hasangapon, hamoraon, and patik dohot uhum, as these are the values which relate most directly to the topic of this dissertation.

Kekerabatan – Familial Connections in Dalihan na Tolu (Three Hearthstones)

Familial and kin relations within Toba Batak society extend to include both consanguinal (blood) and affinal (marriage) relations. Such relations are viewed as a core cultural value among the Toba Batak and are expressed most clearly in the social institution expressed as dalihan na tolu, and the sib / clan structure referred to as marga. The term dalihan na tolu refers literally to the three stones (TB: dalihan) upon which a cooking pot rests, and figuratively as the tripartite interaction of the three kin groups whose formation is established through marriage. These three kin groups are known as the hula-hula (those from the wife-giving group), the boru (those from the wife-receiving group) and the dongan sabutuha / dongan satubu (literally: friend of the same womb—or one’s blood relations). These three relational
positions are represented figuratively by the three hearthstones of the *dalihan na tolu*
structure. It is the maintenance of harmony and balance between these three
groups, through various kinds of reciprocal interaction, that makes possible a
cohesive and harmonious Toba Batak society.

At the center of these three hearthstones sits the cooking pot which
symbolizes Toba Batak *adat*, the social and customary laws and practices which form
the socio-cultural and socio-religious bedrock of Toba Batak society. Proper care and
maintenance of the relationships in the *dalihan na tolu* will insure that the *adat* is
being upheld and remains strong and functional. The interactive relationship of these
three kinship groups and the social / moral responsibility of each person to maintain
stability between them is further articulated by the oft-heard saying: “*Somba
marhula-hula, elek marboru, manat mardongan tubu.*” This saying may be
translated as: Show honor and reverence toward your *hula-hula* (wife-givers), make
thoughtful, earnest requests of your *boru* (wife-receivers), be watchful over /
protecting of your *dongan tubu* (clan companions). This ideology of social and moral
responsibility suggests an equality and balance between these three kin groups which
is evident in the image of the three hearthstones that must be of equal size and shape
if the cooking pot (*adat*) resting on them is to remain stable. As it happens though, in
the daily working out of social relationships many Toba Batak feel that the *hula-hula*
group has considerably more agency than does the *boru* group. As expressed by
anthropologist B. A. Simanjuntak, the *hula-hula* are often referred to as “*debata na

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15 The expression *dalihan na tolu* means, in a literal sense, the three (*tolu*) hearthstones (*dalihan*).
“tarida” (the visible god / the god who is seen). They are the ones at adat feasts that give blessing, that bestow grace and good fortune on the members of the boru group. The hula-hula are the ones whose earnest requests cannot be refused (Simanjuntak 1976:1). Such a status places the members of the hula-hula group in a position superior to the members of the boru group. In order to counter any perceived imbalance in power which might arise between these three kin groups (particularly between the hula-hula group and the boru group) a further extension of the dalihan na tolu structure incorporates a fourth element: the sihal-sihal. In literal terms sihal-sihal are the small stones placed on and around the larger hearth stones if one of the three stones is smaller or shaped differently than the other two. The sihal-sihal is used to bring the hearthstones into balance and provide stability for the cooking pot. In terms of social interaction, the role of the sihal-sihal is a figurative description of a person whose role is that of an advocate and helper to those in the boru group during adat-related encounters between the boru and hula-hula when ritual speeches are being made and negotiations are taking place. In order to frame this concept, the expression “dalihan na tolu” is frequently extended to “dalihan na tolu paopat sihal-sihal” (three are the hearthstones, the fourth is the sihal-sihal). The saying is adapted from a Toba Batak umpama (a proverbial saying): “Tolu do dalihan, paopat sihal-sihal. Torop pe anakniba, sada do siboto sibunian” (Sibarani 1972:47). This translates as: Three are the hearthstones, the fourth is the sihal-sihal. Though many are the children, only one knows what’s hidden. This umpama describes the practice in Toba Batak culture in which, although a couple may have many children, the
youngest child (*siampudan*) is often the favorite and it is this child with whom the parents will share most deeply their thoughts and feelings. In addition, information about the family’s ‘holdings’ (land, dwellings, finances, etc.) will be shared with this youngest child so that they are the ones with the knowledge of what might otherwise be hidden from the older children. In much the same way it is the person acting as the *sihal-sihal* who knows most thoroughly what is in the heart and mind of the *boru* member for whom they are acting as advocate.  

Besides an intimate understanding of the one they represent, a *sihal-sihal* will often be chosen because they are known to possess a detailed knowledge of Toba Batak *adat* regulations and practices. Additionally, they will, ideally, possess a solid command of the language and an ability to speak with authority and confidence. During my field research I had the opportunity to observe these qualities enacted at the pre-wedding negotiations (*TB: martumpol*) between my adoptive father-in-law (from the Simamora clan) and the family of his middle son’s future bride (from the Situmorang clan).  

The Simamora clan was in a *boru* position relative to the Simamora clan (my *hula-hula*). Because of this I was involved in food preparation for the *martumpol* feast, food distribution during the meal, the distribution of the ritual portions of meat (*TB: jambar*), and the post feast clean up, a role which kept me in the center of activities during the feast.

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16 According to Sinaga, the *sihal-sihal* role in the homeland / home village (*TB: bonapasogit*) is taken by the *raja huta* (village head / founder) or a representative of the local government. However in areas outside of the Toba Batak region, since there is no *raja huta* nor is it likely that local government officials necessarily understand Toba Batak *adat*, the role of *sihal-sihal* is taken by a village neighbor or friend (*TB: dongan huta*) (Sinaga 1998:18). Having a *sihal-sihal* who was either a village head or neighbor would most likely place them outside the familial structure of the *boru* member they were supporting, as well as outside the social strictures of the *dalihan na tolu* system.

17 My own position during this negotiation feast was that of a servant / worker (*TB: parhobas*) to the Simamora family because I, having been adopted some years previous into the Limbong clan, am married (through adoption) to a Simamora woman, thus placing me in a wife-receiving (*boru*) position relative to the Simamora clan (my *hula-hula*). Because of this I was involved in food preparation for the *martumpol* feast, food distribution during the meal, the distribution of the ritual portions of meat (*TB: jambar*), and the post feast clean up, a role which kept me in the center of activities during the feast.
Situmorang clan on this particular occasion as they were about to become the wife-receivers. During the negotiation discussions, matters relating to the wedding feast preparations, the bride price (TB: sinamot), the wedding location, the reception facility, the music, photographers / videographers, etc., were parleyed among the respective families by men from outside clans acting in the role of sihal-sihal. They spoke with authority and confidence as each side made offers and counter-offers as to their contribution to the wedding feast and other details. It seemed clear that what the families of the prospective bride and groom were offering through their sihal-sihal spokesmen had been agreed upon and rehearsed prior to the martumpol feast, leaving the members of the Situmorang and Simamora families free to listen and enjoy the speaking skills of these negotiators. The role played by these sihal-sihal during the pre-wedding negotiations clearly illustrated an aspect of the stabilizing quality that the sihal-sihal can bring to the dalihan na tolu configuration. In explaining the dalihan na tolu system, many Toba Batak I spoke with made reference to the highly democratic nature of their society, stating that through the dalihan na tolu structure “all Batak are kings,” by which they meant that, depending on the context of a particular adat feast (what is being celebrated, who is hosting the feast, etc.), everyone is, at some point, in the position of hula-hula. During the pre-wedding feast described above I, as wife-receiver, was in a boru position relative to the Simamora clan and they, as wife-receivers, were in the boru position relative to the Situmorang clan. A few months later one of my Limbong younger sisters was being married to a man from the Situmorang clan. At that feast my position was as a member of the
hula-hula group and my actions relative to that ritual and feast were markedly different than during the previous wedding experience.

Kekerabatan – Familial Connections in the Marga (Clan) System

The marga (clan) system is a kinship system into which every Batak person belongs. Membership in a marga is a fundamental part of Toba Batak cultural identity. As mentioned above, each marga traces its lineage back to a single mythological progenitor, Si Raja Batak, the first Batak, born in the village of Sianjur Mula-mula located on the slopes of the sacred mountain known as Pusuk Buhit in the Limbong region near Lake Toba. The descendants of Si Raja Batak spread out from the village of Sianjur Mula-mula, opening new villages as they migrated. With the opening of each new village a new marga was created by the founder of that village, thus forming a strong connection between identity linked to clan name and identity linked to place. Batak cultural historian W. M. Hoetagaloeng’s 1926 study Pustaha Taringot tu Tarombo ni Bangso Batak (A Record of the Genealogy of the Batak People) is an important contribution to the history of the development of the Toba Batak clans, including commentary on their places of origin and migratory expansion. Because of the nature of record keeping and the prevalence of oral history prior to European contact, it is not clear when these migrations (and by association the marga system) began. Historian Sitor Situmorang suggests that it occurred both in the tenth and thirteenth centuries (Situmorang 1993:41) while Vergouwen estimates that the development of the marga system took place only about 400 years ago (Vergouwen 1986:24). In any case, there are at present several hundred marga and sub-marga
among the Toba Batak. All Toba Batak *marga* are situated within two large moieties: the Sumba moiety, originating with Raja Isumbaon, and the Lontung moiety, originating with Guru Tateabulan, both of whom were male children of the first Batak, Si Raja Batak. No new *marga* have been established for many years. Instead, this practice has been replaced with the establishment of Batak ethnic associations or clan organizations (TB: *punguan*) seen primarily in urban areas outside of the Toba Batak homeland, formed by those who have migrated out of their home area to other regions of the country. These groups meet together regularly to discuss various clan activities, hold worship services, form choral groups, and collect ‘dues’ (BI: *arisan*) which are then distributed on a rotating basis to various members of the organization for their personal use, thus maintaining the system of self-help and reciprocity that are important aspects of the traditional Toba Batak *marga* system (Bruner 1972:207-229).

Through the *marga* system and it accompanying practice of lineage tracing (TB: *tarombo*) a Toba Batak is able to trace his or her ancestry back through the generations, often as far back as Si Raja Batak. This process of genealogical record keeping and the naming of ancestors (TB: *martarombo / martutur*) is used in many situations in Toba Batak society such as *adat* feasts, casual social gatherings, at work, or when meeting another Batak for the first time. Engaging in *martarombo* (telling the family lineage) enables Toba Batak to ‘know their genealogical / generational position’ relative to those around them. By establishing rank in this way they become aware of their rights and responsibilities toward those around them, enabling them to
feel at ease in the social situation. It also enables the use of an extensive list of relational terms (such as hulu-hula, tulang, bere, ito, lae, namboru, etc.) which Toba Batak use as forms of address (and terms of endearment) as a way of showing the proper respect when interacting.

My Adoption into the Limbong Mulana Clan

In May of 1997 I was officially adopted into the Limbong Mulana clan at an adat feast held in Singkam village in the Limbong valley below Pusuk Buhit (see Figure 6). This was a wonderful and unexpected “rite of passage.” It came about, in part, in connection with a close relationship my family and I had formed over the previous few years with a young Limbong man who was a student at the theological college where I was teaching in Pematang Siantar. At that May adat feast, celebrating the recent death and burial of a 98 year old Limbong woman as well as the secondary burials of several other Limbongs from her immediate family, I was called aside during the burial day celebrations by the leaders of the seven Limbong lines (TB: angka raja ni pitu tali Limbong) who asked me about the history of my relationship with the Limbong family of my student. We talked together for close to an hour during which time I shared with them details of our visits to his village of Aek Hahombu in the southern part of the province. Our family had been fortunate during our visits to share in the life of his family – helping with the rice harvest, cooking food together, bathing together, sleeping together on the floor of the house, worshiping together in church, mourning the unexpected death of his father and participating in the pre-funeral and burial rites. After our conversation they dismissed
me to join the dancing once again. Some time later in the day, during the dance turn
that was led by my student’s family group (from the southern part of the province) the
leaders of the seven Limbong lines called on the musicians to stop playing
momentarily and then made the announcement that, after consulting with family
heads and after talking with me, they were officially welcoming myself and my
family into the Limbong Mulana clan from that day forward. Needless to say, I was
very moved by this welcome and demonstrated my acceptance by dancing with them
and embracing them as we danced. The next day, after the burials, dancing and
feasting had concluded, I was presented with the gift of a Limbong Mulana family
tree onto which my name had been ‘grafted’ (see Figure 5). My name was included
as part of the eleventh generation from the original Limbong Mulana, who was the
third of the five male grandchildren of Si Raja Batak. I was told that, when I had
occasion to martarombo with other Toba Batak, I should indicate that I was from the
Limbong Mulana clan and that, if I were to meet with other Limbong clans-folk, I
should tell them that I was, more specifically, from the branch of Ompu Naompat
Pulu (whose full name, according to the family tree, is Raja Sidompahon, Ompu
Dolok Sumurung – Naompat Pulu), the third of the six male grandchildren of the
original Limbong Mulana. If necessary, I could provide further information as to my
particular family, my adoptive Toba Batak father being Humala Partai Limbong from
the town of Padang Sidempuan in the south of the province. All of this ancestral
information, according to the practice of martarombo, would be shared with others
before I was expected to provide any specific information about myself. And even
Figure 5. The family tree Limbong Mulana into which I was grafted. Presented to me by Karisos Limbong, in Singkam village, May 23, 1997.

TAROMBO FOR MARGA LIMBONG (OMPUNG NAOPAT PULU BRANCH)

Siraja Batak

Guru Taten Bulan
Tuan Singa Mangaraja
(Nai Marata)

Raja Isombaon

Siraja Uti
Saribu Raja
Limbong Mulana
Sagala Raja
Silau (Malau) Raja

Ompu Paluan Na Onggang

Ompu Langgat Limbong

Tuan Ruma Ijuk
Tuan Parsang-sangge
Nasia Pulu
Naburnhan

Raja Sidompahon
Sidaguruk
Sihole
Habeahan

Ompu Dolok Sumurung
(Naopat Pulu)

Ompu Pulo Raru
Namoratimpus

Ompu Raja Nagodang

Ompu Niagori
Ompu Burju

Ompu Soingganon

Ompu Raja Musengan

Ama Soingganon

Ompu Surung Huta
Ompu Mangadium

Ompu Niasang Laut

Ompu Jarunjung

Ompu Solindagon

Ompu Tujoha
Ompu Suram

Ama Solindagon

Ompu Limut
Ompu Raja Ulas

Bohang
Ama Jogo

Gombul Tahilalo
Hurbe
Bilmen
Raja Niasal Parnapuran

Jogo
Humala Parti
Karumen
Jannes
Itiannes
Washington

Togar
Ompu Harry

Hirles

William (R. Hodges)

Karisos
Tongam
Hesbon
Bimen
Reinold
Denis
Leo Hamonangan

Harry

This represents the present generation
then, I would identify myself as the father of my firstborn male child (in my case, *Ama ni Leo* – the father of Leo). On the numerous occasions since that time, when I have *martarombo* with other Toba Batak (and particularly with other Limbongs), my use of the names of these ancestors of mine has elicited responses which indicate both pride and amazement that I have both a knowledge of these names and a willingness to invoke them as a means of performing my identity in a traditional Toba Batak manner. It also tends to open the way for lengthy discussions with others about how our two families are related and by what familial terms we should address one another. These terms, such as those mentioned above, establish an intimacy as well as a protective boundary between Toba Batak. Knowing how two Toba Batak strangers are related to one another creates a comfortable matrix of rights and responsibilities, and establishes behavioral guidelines that relate back to the maintenance of *adat* and the reciprocal inter-relations of the *dalihan na tolu*.

**Religi – The Cultural Value of Religion in Toba Batak Society**

*Religi* (religion) in Toba Batak society plays a central role in the construction and maintenance of Toba Batak cultural identity. Like all Indonesians, Toba Batak are required to register as members of one of the five constitutionally approved world religions: Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Due in large part to their prolonged encounter with European missionary and colonial representatives, beginning in the mid-19th century, the majority of Toba Batak today are registered as Protestant Christians. In an interview with Pdt. Dr. J. R.
Hutauruk, Bishop (TB: Ephorus) of the HKBP, I was told that nearly 90% of Toba Batak were Protestants, the majority of them being members of the HKBP (p.c., June 10, 2003, Pearaja). According to the 2000 national census, of the total population of Indonesia, 8.92% of the population are registered as Christians (both Protestant and Catholic) with the largest percentage of Christians (20.12%) residing in North Sumatra province (Suryadinata 2003:104, 114). Although the majority of Toba Batak are registered as Protestant Christians, much of their religious worldview shows a strong connection to Toba Batak traditional religious beliefs and practices, as evidenced in the proliferation of bone reliquary monuments (BI: tugu) erected throughout the Toba Batak region of North Sumatra as signs of honor and veneration of their ancestors, as well as through adat feasts and adat rituals intended to maintain and strengthen familial bonds between living relations as well as ancestors. Harahap points out that the fact that these tugu are erected and ritually celebrated at great cost by local farmers as well as by wealthy, highly-educated Batak in positions of prestige is an indicator that religion and religious belief holds a high position in Toba Batak society (Harahap 1987:152). Ancestor spirit veneration through such practices as secondary burial (TB: mangongkal / manambakhon holi-holi ni ompung), the singing of laments for the dead (TB: mangandung)—especially at secondary burial feasts, the presentation of food offerings to elders and members of the hula-hula group (TB: manulangi na toras dohot hula-hula), etc., are present-day practices which reflect a deeply religious connection between the living and the dead as well as a
responsibility to appropriately honor the dead with the expectation that the ancestors have a hand in shaping the future good fortune of the living.

**Pre-Christian Belief Systems (Aliran Kepercayaan) and Religion**

While the activities of the five constitutionally recognized religions fall under the purview of Department of Religious Affairs, those in connection to the practice of traditional religious beliefs have, since 1978, been assigned to the Department of Education and Culture, with the reasoning that traditional beliefs and practices are understood as unique cultural expressions and not organized religions. Among the Toba Batak there are five separate organizations registered with the Department of Education and Culture’s Directorate for the Development of Belief and Practice (BI: *Direktorat Pembina Penghayat Kepercayaan* as *aliran kepercayaan* (belief paths / systems) unique to Toba Batak society. These include: *Aliran Mulajadi Na Bolon*; *Golongan Si Raja Batak*; *Habonaran Do Bona*; *Persatuan Agama Malim Indonesia*; and *Ugamo Parmalim*. Each of these represents institutionalized and formal expressions of the pre-world religion (Islam, Christianity, etc.) belief practice of the Toba Batak in the present day (Harahap, 1987:153). Although these various *aliran kepercayaan* exist as separate organizations, distinct from the majority Christian organizations in North Sumatra (particularly the main Protestant denominations), the boundaries between them are quite porous and Toba Batak Christians frequently move between these belief systems as situation and circumstance inform, viewing many of the aspects of pre-Christian belief and practice as unique expressions of cultural identity and requisite elements in ritual *adat* celebrations such as wedding,
funeral, and secondary burial / tugu feasts. It is not uncommon then, to have adat rituals begin with the singing of hymns, the offering of prayers, or the reading of a Biblical text and an exposition on the text by a member of the clergy or a church elder. Often Biblical texts are chosen which enable and reinforce a connection between the Christianity of the Toba Batak and the ritual action to be performed as part of an adat ceremony. As an example, on a number of occasions – particularly at funeral and secondary burial rituals hosted by members of the HKBP – I heard Bible readings that emphasized the importance of faithfully observing the fifth commandment (from the ten commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai). This commandment, found in the Old Testament Book of Exodus, chapter 20, verse 12 reads: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”18 The elder or church official expounding on the reading would point out that through the observance of that day’s adat ritual the host family (TB: suhut) as well as the entire marga and related dalihan na tolu was showing honor and respect toward their parents – though the concept of ‘parents’ (TB: natoras) is easily expanded to include one’s ancestors. This interpretive expansion enables the appropriation by the Christian community of the pre-Christian belief system’s injunction to venerate and honor the spirits of their ancestors as a means of procuring blessing and avoiding misfortune through the faithful practice of adat rituals. Another commonly read verse from the Bible is that from the Old Testament Book of Joshua, chapter 24, verse 32 which reads: “And Joseph’s bones,

which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Schechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph’s descendants.”

This text is frequently quoted and explicated upon by church officials at the start of secondary burial rituals (TB: ulaon mangongkal holi), at which the bones of one’s ancestor are disinterred, ritually cleaned, feasted, and then placed into a cement vault (BI: tugu) that sits above ground, often in or near a rice field owned by the family of the one reburied.

These and other Biblical texts are often used as a means of enveloping pre-Christian belief practices in an inclusive manner by the Protestant Christian Church, a process reflective of the movement between belief systems mentioned above.

**Mediating Conflict in Belief Practices**

Situations such as these are not without conflict, however, as some Protestant Toba Batak feel that to maintain adat practices which venerate ancestor spirits and, in effect, acknowledge that communication between the world of the living and that of the ancestors is ongoing is in direct opposition to Protestant Church’s teachings concerning the relationship between the living and the dead. When this conflict arises, Toba Batak will seek to create conditions / circumstances which serve to ameliorate the tensions resulting from the perceived conflict. During my fieldwork I

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19 ibid.
20 Article 15 from the HKBP’s 1951 Confession of Faith (TB: Panindangion Haporseaon) states that “we reject the teaching of heathendom that the souls of the dead have a connection with the living or that the soul of the deceased remains in the grave.” (Panindangion Haporseaon, 2000. Pearaja – Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP).
observed, on several occasions, such tensions arise during some aspect of a funeral feast. In June of 2003 in the town of Parapat (see Figure 6), I was participating in a funeral feast for a woman who died with the venerable status of saur matua. I was playing the gordang drum with the gondang ensemble Dame Nauli Grup, led by Kalabius (Sampeltek) Simbolon, my music teacher in Pematang Siantar. The evenings festivities were initiated by an official of the Church and included a brief service of hymn singing, Bible readings, prayers, as well as an exhortation to keep things “under control” during the dancing that would follow the placement of the deceased into the casket (mompo). By “under control,” the church official meant that while the family were gathered to celebrate the life of this ompung (elder / grandparent) with dancing and feasting, they should remember that they were Christians and that Jesus was their Lord and the sole source of their blessings. As the hours passed and group after group came to dance their turns in the front room of the house around the casket, the atmosphere became increasingly energetic. The dances requested were faster paced, lasting longer than they had earlier in the evening. It seemed increasingly evident to me that the dancers were consciously trying to bring on a trance, and members of the gondang ensemble I was playing with confirmed this supposition when asked about it. Some time later a young man (in his late teens) began dancing a greatly exaggerated version of the particular tortor dance the rest of the group was doing. His timing was no longer with the musicians and he was spinning and leaping around the room. Once this began, many of the dancers stopped dancing and got out of his way (although a few of the older women continued
dancing with or nearby him). Others standing around started saying, “nunga dapot...nunga ro ma” (already got it…already here / it’s come), while still others encouraged the musicians to continue our playing. After a few minutes the young man collapsed on the floor in a faint. We stopped playing at that point and things were quiet for several moments. Finally, we were requested to play a very slow gondang, one with spiritual / reverential connections. While the music played, people in the room watched and waited. Eventually, an older man approached the young man who by this time was awake but seemed dazed. The older man was gesturing at the younger one and pointing repeatedly toward the body of the deceased in the casket nearby. It seemed that he was also saying something but this was not clear to me because of where I was seated with the gondang ensemble. (Later that evening I asked some of my musician companions about this and they told me the man was sending the spirit of the ancestor away, telling it to release the young man.) After some time the young man arose and the two men danced the slow dance together for a few minutes until we were signaled to stop playing. At this point things seemed to come to a standstill – people stood around chatting about what had just transpired and the atmosphere was one of satisfaction, surprise and contentment. Later that night I spoke with my friends in the gondang group about what had transpired during those moments. From my perspective, the event represented a clear instance of the kind of boundary crossing between belief systems described above. The requesting / calling of an ancestor spirit to the dance was something outside the bounds of acceptable behavior by these Protestant Christians (at least according to the Church’s
regulations) but was well within the bounds of appropriate action as far as the
compunction to honor one’s ancestors through the maintenance and practice of adat
traditions. I asked about the conflict between Protestant Christian and traditional
Toba Batak adat ideologies that were represented in the events earlier that evening.
My musician friends explained that, by their understanding, calling on ancestor spirits
and falling into trance was something the Church would not support, but because the
dancers did not permit the spirit of the ancestor to speak to those in the room there
was no problem – no punishable offense had been committed. In other words, the
presence of ancestor spirits at an adat ritual was something which the Church was
willing to acknowledge, however allowing those spirits to speak (or the act of
engaging them in conversation in order to make requests of them) was a line which
should not be crossed. In order to assuage any perceived conflict or ideological
dissonance Toba Batak have established such “lines-which-should-not-be-crossed”
within their belief practices as a means of maintaining a balance between potentially
conflicting ideologies. For many Toba Batak religion, as a cultural value, extends
beyond the particular institutionalized religion to which they belong and in which
they participate. Religious belief and practice as a cultural value (and as an
expression of cultural identity) is also expressed through their participation in the
adat feasts they attend, through their work to maintain balance and harmony in
familial relations, through their working of the land, their caring for the aged (in life
and in death) and their providing for the new and coming generations.
Hagabeon, Hasangapon, Hamoraon – (3Hs) as Core Cultural Values

One of the strongest cultural values among the Toba Batak is actually a combination of three distinct, thought interrelated, values: hagabeon (long life and procuring descendants), hasangapon (procuring honor and respect / prestige) and hamoraon (procuring riches / wealth). Collectively these three values are often referred to as the three Hs (TB: si tolu-H). The strength of this “3H collective” as a cultural value of deep significance in Toba Batak society is a strength evidenced in the high number of references to “tolu-H” appearing in print form, in political speeches, in adat ritual speeches, in church sermons, in popular songs, and in proverbial sayings and blessings (TB: umpama / umpasa).21 It is also a strength measured in years. Early colonial and missionary publications indicate that these three values have been embraced by the Toba Batak since pre-Christian times. Church historian Pdt. Dr. J. R. Hutauruk, quoting German missionary G. van Asselt who, in 1861 was visiting with Ama ni Holing from the village of Pangaloan in the Silindung Valley district, states that van Asselt asked Ama ni Holing how he would describe an ideal life and his reply was that the ideal life consisted of wealth, prestige / honor and a long life (Hutauruk 1992:70-71). The acquisition of hagabeon,

21 In May of 2006, the North Sumatra-based newspaper Suara Indonesia Baru published two news reports which made reference to “tolu-H”: one in a political speech by the Governor of North Sumatra, Drs Rudolf M. Pardede, concerning the need to increase education standards in the province (May 6, 2006) and another in a sermon by Pdt. Dr. M. B. Hutagalung, addressing a clan association gathering in Pematang Siantar which was collecting funds to assist earthquake victims in Yogyakarta and Central Java (May 30, 2006).
hasangapon and hamoraon bears a direct connection to the acquisition of that quality of life and character referred to as sahala (power, prestige). A person imbued with sahala is said to be a person with power, prestige, charisma, and blessing from the High God (Debata Mula Jadi na Bolon) as well as from the ancestor spirits. Batak church historian Andar Lumbantobing equates sahala with the qualities of leadership, material and familial riches, bravery, strength, purity and clarity in thought and reasoning, the ability to speak with authority, justice, miraculous powers, breadth in thought, etc. (Lumbantobing 1992:21). The person who displays the qualities of hagabeon, hasangapon, and hamoraon is viewed as one who has been blessed by the High God with success in all endeavors, who brings honor to their clan, who gives strength to the dalihan na tolu and from whom such blessing may also be received.

**Hagabeon as a Cultural Value**

Hagabeon is a term that denotes having many descendants and being long-lived. Toba Batak who, at the time of their death, are given the title saur matua (that is, having all of one’s male and female children married and having received grandchildren from each of them) are often proudly described by the expression “nunga gabe ma ompungta i” (our grandparent is ‘gabe’ – that is, hagabeon). Such an expression often carries with it a sense of relief, satisfaction, and pride – feelings due, at least in part, to the fact that in Toba Batak society there is a strong current of social pressure to produce children. Much of the weight of this pressure is placed on women, such that the value and worth of a woman (especially the newly married) is
often measured primarily by the fruitfulness of her womb.\textsuperscript{22} The significance of producing offspring – particularly males – thus adding to the decent line is expressed in a Toba Batak proverbial saying (\textit{umpama}) relating to the value of hagabeon:

\begin{quote}
“Laklak di ginjang pintu
\textbf{Tree bark above the door}

\textit{Singkoru digolom-golom}
\textbf{Singkoru (millet) clasped in the hand}

\textit{Maranak sampulu pitu}
\textbf{Male children seventeen in number}

\textit{Marboru sampulu onom.”}
\textbf{Female children sixteen in number}
\end{quote}

This and similar sayings, blessings, and prayers for the prospect of a large family are frequently included in ritual speeches made at weddings and at the funeral feasts of those who are accorded the title saur matua.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} A Toba Batak married woman who has not had children (or, to a lesser extent, has had only female children) may find herself facing the scorn both from her husband’s clan (because of disappointment in not adding to the next generation) and her own clan (because of the shame which might reflect on them, the ‘wife-givers,’ at her inability to produce children). It is considered deeply grievous if a couple is unable to produce children, a situation described by the Toba Batak word \textit{ripur} which can be translated as ‘doomed.’ I can recall several times during our years in North Sumatra when my wife listened to Toba Batak women friends confide their feelings of guilt, hurt, and fear because, though they had been married for some time, they had yet to conceive. They were facing tremendous pressure from both sides of the family and were living in fear that their husbands might abandon them and take up with another woman in order to produce a child (preferably a male).

\textsuperscript{23} Though large families are not uncommon in Toba Batak society (particularly in rural areas), thirty-three children is a rare occurrence. Indonesia’s family planning program (BI: \textit{Keluarga Berencana}) got underway on a national scale in the early 1970s. The program, known as KB, offers economic incentives to those willing to limit, through contraception, family size to two children, a male (firstborn) and a female. In the Toba Batak region of Sumatra the running joke is that, while in the rest of the country the letters ‘KB’ stand for Keluarga Berencana (family planning), for the Toba Batak they stand for Keluarga Besar (an Indonesian expression meaning ‘large family’). Despite this stereotypical image, average family size of Toba Batak has decreased significantly, especially among well-educated, urban dwelling Toba Batak. Population statistics from the 2000 census indicate that in the province of North Sumatra population growth percentage has steadily decreased from the 1970s to the present, from a 2.6 percent growth rate from 1971 – 1980 to a 1.32 percent growth rate from 1990 – 2000 (sources from 1971, 1980, 1990, 2000 Population Census and the 1995 Intercensal Population
Hasangapon as a Cultural Value

The term hasangapon conveys the idea of prestige, honor and power for Toba Batak. It is closely related to hagabeon in as much as the person who is seen to have obtained the blessing of children and long life is one who is much revered by others. Often such people will be asked to advise and give guidance in disputes. At ritual gatherings such as a martonggo raja (a ritual meeting of elders to discuss adat-related matters such as the preparations for a feast) and in matters dealing with the proper fulfillment of adat regulations, the distribution of ritual meats (TB: jambar), and the like, it is those who are seen to possess hasangapon whose advice is most eagerly sought and listened to. The kind of reverence accorded a persons believed to possess hasangapon is similar to the reverence which members of the boru group show toward members of their hula-hula group and which children display toward their parents—that is, those from whom they have descended. The quality of hasangapon is often related to success in business, the accumulation of wealth or the acquisition of a high position of leadership, though it is not exclusive to these things. As such, the person who exhibits the quality of hasangapon is said to be a person imbued with sahala.

Hamoraon as a Cultural Value

Hamoraon is the Toba Batak value that relates to the procurement of riches and wealth. A person of wealth and means is seen to be a person worthy of respect and prestige. This prestige often comes about as a result of public displays of one’s wealth. As Vergouwen points out, the main manifestation of wealth is hospitality and a quality he refers to as liberality: “It is ‘liberality’ with which is associated a blessing for host and guest alike: stinginess is not commendable; liberality is praiseworthy” (Vergouwen 1964:132). Public displays of wealth among Toba Batak are seen primarily through the hosting of large feasts such as wedding feasts and feasts of secondary burial feasts and the establishment of ancestral monument (TB: tugu). Such feasts are extremely costly, sometimes running for several days. The host group is responsible to feed hundreds (occasionally thousands) of guests. They must provide the livestock that will be consumed throughout, as well as ritual animals for slaughter and distribution during the feast. They must also procure musicians to play for the feast (this may include a “brass band”—Grup Tiup—as well as a traditional gondang sabangunan ensemble), and they will need to provide materials for the construction of the tugu monument. The host group may need to rent the venue of the feast, rent canopies for protection from rain, rent cooking and eating supplies, a sound system, videographers and photographers, lighting systems, etc. On occasion the hosts may also be required to pay transportation costs for family members traveling from other regions or islands in order to attend. During such occasions host families will spare no expense in order to make feasts as elaborate as possible in an
effort to make clearly evident their economic success and ability to display their means to those attending. It is through such displays of wealth that the prestige associated with hamoraon is gained. Ethnomusicologist Artur Simon documented one such secondary burial and tugu feast (TB: pesta mangongkal holi) in 1981.  

Although Simon’s documentary provides a detailed look at the secondary burial rite, the film provides no specific information as to the expense incurred by the host group for the feast. The economic impact of the ceremony is however discussed by Simon in a 1982 article titled “Altreligiöse und soziale Zeremonien der Batak” (Old-religious and Social Ceremonies of the Batak) published in Zeitschrift für Ethnologie. In the article, Simon calculates the overall cost of the 4 day ceremony at approximately 8,000,000 rupiah (Simon 1982:203) which, based on a 1981 exchange rate of roughly 625 rupiah to one U.S. dollar, equals approximately 12,800 U.S. dollars. In his book Penggalian Tulang-Belulang Leluhur (Mangongkal Holi) Tinjauan dari Segi Iman Kristen (Exhumation of Ancestral Bones: An Examination from a Christian Angle), Batak theologian H. Gultom includes the financial output for a secondary burial feast held in 1988, estimating that the total costs equaled 25,715,000 rupiah (approximately 13,900 U. S. dollars, based on a 1988 exchange of 1,850 rupiah to one U. S. dollar) (Gultom 1991:52-58). In April of 2003 I participated in a secondary burial feast on Samosir island, near the town of Tomok (see Figure 6). I was playing

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24 The feast took place in the village of Hutajulu, on the shores of Lake Toba in the Uluan District. At that feast the bones of some 71 members of the Hutajulu clan and their related clans were disinterred and reburied in a single, very large tugu during a 4 day-long feast. Thousands attended the feast which Simon video documented through the auspices of the Institut für den Wissenschlaftlichen Film, resulting in the 1984 documentary film “Toba Batak (Indonesia, North Sumatra) – Feast of a Secondary Burial ‘Ulaon panongkokhon saring-saring’” (IWF no. E2804).
with the Dame Nauli gondang group led by Kalabius Simbolon, hired by the Sitanggang family in Tomok. We traveled from Pematang Siantar to the feast in a rented bus, carrying our gondang sabangunan instruments as well as brass band instruments and our sound system. The feast lasted for two days and was held in a rice field near Tomok, where the newly constructed tugu stood. The tugu was moderately sized, with niches to hold the bones of 10 individuals on three different levels. It was box-shaped and capped with a steeple from which rose a white cross. The dancing and feasting area was covered by tents and covered an area nearly 10,000 square feet. There were between 500 and 700 guests attending the feast and a water buffalo as well as several pigs and chickens were consumed as ritual foods. I do not have an account of the total costs for the feast but I would estimate that the figure might have been roughly 200 million rupiah (approximately 19,000 U. S. dollars, based on a currency exchange rate at the time). The economic burden of these feasts is shared among the members of the host family (suhut), particularly those family members who have migrated out from the village homeland and have met with economic success in larger urban areas. Careful tallies of expenses are kept and discussions as to the division of financial responsibilities and debt repayment may go long into the night and beyond after the celebrations have concluded. These discussions are open and frank. Both men and women contribute their opinions and at times the atmosphere can become very intense as individuals begin to discuss the portion of the financial burden they are responsible to pay back. 25 To hold such a

25 Based in part on conversations with Toba Batak as well as on my own experience participating in a
feast may place such a financial burden on individuals that they take on considerable loan debt, sell lands or property, or contribute to this public display of wealth in some other way in order to pay off their portion of the debt. It is a serious and difficult undertaking to hold such a feast, however despite the economic burden such feasts place upon individuals, the high social status and prestige associated with *sahala hamoraon* significantly outweighs the resulting economic burden. Public displays of wealth reflect the deeply significant cultural value of *hamoraon* in Toba Batak society. The cultural values of *hamoraon*, *hasangapon* and *hagabeon* form the tripart cultural value structure known as *tolu-H*, the three-H structure, considered by many Toba Batak to be the predominant defining characteristics of Toba Batak cultural values and cultural identity.

**Patik dohot Uhum as Core Cultural Values and Connections to Adat**

The cultural values of *patik dohot uhum* might best be translated as regulations and laws. By regulations and laws, Toba Batak make a distinguish between regulations (*patik*) which are considered ‘formal’ and concern human affairs – matters between one person and another, and laws (*uhum*) which are thought to be ‘traditional’ and impact the larger macrocosmic world of the Toba Batak. Such traditional laws include a religious dimension and are thought to have originated from the High God *Debata Mula Jadi na Bolon*. These traditional laws were then received by the ancestors, passed down to the present generations and are intended to regulate the affairs of humans with the totality of the natural and supernatural worlds (Harahap similar meeting following the burial feast of my Limbong older brother in Aek Hahombu in 1997.
1987:165). These concepts of the distinctions between regulations and laws are not far removed from concepts of adat, often translated as customary law, to the degree that the boundaries between them are at times difficult to distinguish.

Earlier European scholars, particularly legal scholars from the Netherlands, researched and wrote extensively on adat law, attempting to codify and classify the extent of Toba Batak adat law. Later scholars saw adat as something perhaps less easily codified, whose boundaries were more porous. Theologian Lothar Schreiner expressed his understanding of Toba Batak adat as “more than custom and usage, it is a traditional social law supra partes, sanctioned by the ancestors, who, in the tribal religion, determine the destiny of the community” (Schreiner 1972:285). A more detailed discussion of Toba Batak adat will follow. For many Toba Batak, societal stability, a healthy and strong dalihan na tolu interrelationship, and the possibility of receiving blessing from the ancestors (in the form of children, wealth, and success) is directly connected to the faithful adherence to, and execution of, the regulations and laws connected to adat. When adat feasts are held, when adat rituals are performed, when customary practices are repeated time and again there is, in the doing of them, a thread that connects the action itself with the anticipated benefit to follow. Even so, these regulations and laws are not immutable. They are, as E. Harahap points out, “like rubber, they can be stretched and twisted to fit the changing situation and the march of time” (E. Harahap 1960:82). This is expressed in the Toba Batak umpama:

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Muba tano muba duhut-duhutna  
A different soil, a different grass,
Muba luat muba uhunna. 
A different region, a different law.

(Vergouwen 1964:141).

The notion that adherence to regulations and laws is of great significance in Toba Batak society is expressed by Harahap when discussing the idea of padan, a Toba Batak word meaning ‘promise’ or ‘oath’. He quotes several umpama related to the strength of an oath in relation to fulfilling regulations, among them:

Togu urat ni bulu  
Strong are the roots of the bamboo
Toguan urat ni padang,  
Stronger are those of the grass,
Togu hata ni uhun  
Strong are the words of the law
Toguan hata ni padan.  
Stronger are those of an oath.

And regarding those who break an oath, he quotes the following umpapa:

Denke ni Sabulan  
Fish from Sabulan
Tonggi jala tabo,  
Is sweet and delicious
Jolma siose padan  
A person who breaks a promise
Ripur jala mago.  
Is doomed and obliterated.

(Harahap  1987:165).
The importance of *patik dohot uhun* as a core cultural value for Toba Batak appears to be directly connected to concerns that failure to fulfill an oath or promise made with regard to the laws and regulation of *adat* will bring about disaster, not only on the one who failed to fulfill the oath but also on future generations. Such concerns link this cultural value with those of religion and familial relations, as discussed above.

In this section I have addressed a number of important cultural values that have operated within, and interacted upon Toba Batak society for generations. Since the mid-19th century the social matrix of the Toba Batak has experienced tremendous change, resulting largely from the rapid infusion of European socio-cultural, economic, and religious influence on the region. The processes of negotiating and mediating the impact of these cultural influences continues and is both tangible and visible in present day Toba Batak society through efforts to maintain connections to socio-cultural identity as expressed in traditional cultural values and customary practices while, at the same time, living in an increasingly global world.

While scholars of Toba Batak culture point out their relative isolation in the insular highland regions of North Sumatra as an important aspect of cultural cohesion until European contact in the mid 19th century, it is important to note that they were not completely cut-off from outside cultural influences prior to European contact, and remnants of these earlier cultural contacts are visible in Toba Batak society in the present day. The following section briefly discusses the history of contacts and influences from outside Toba Batak culture, focusing particularly on Hindu-Buddhist
contacts, contacts with Islam, and the influence of the German Protestant Christian
mission and Dutch colonial government on Toba Batak society.

**Hindu-Buddhist Influences on Toba Batak Culture**

The island of Sumatra, lying along a major trade route between India and
China, attracted the interest of both Indian and Chinese traders from the very early
years of the first millennium C.E. Although archaeological research in Sumatra is far
from complete, there is ample evidence, in the form of temple ruins (in Padang
Lawas), statuary (near Bukit Seguntang), travel writings, Sanskrit inscriptions, and
the ruins of dwellings to suggest that Indian settlements and the influences of Indian
culture in Sumatra, particularly along the coastal regions, was significant from the 6th
century (Kozok 1991:13). A number of inscriptions in old Malayan script dating
from the 7th century mention a state called Sriwijaya, located in southern Sumatra and
centered near present day Palembang (though the exact location is still a matter of
debate). Evidence suggests that by the 7th century the state of Sriwijaya was
flourishing in southern Sumatra, as seen in the writings of Buddhist pilgrim I-Tsing,
who studied Sanskrit at the capital of Sriwijaya for six months and who mentions a
community of more than a thousand Buddhist monks in the area during the same
period. Trade between the inland river cities and the interior mountain regions in
such goods as camphor, benzoin, spices, forest products, and precious metals (all
abundant in the Batak highlands) suggest a likely commercial network between the
merchant class of Sriwijaya, the middle-men Malay seafarers and traders, and the
mountain-dwelling Batak, who supplied many of these products (ibid: 14).

The cultural influences from this Hindu-Buddhist culture on the Batak is a
subject which as been explored by Parkin (1978), among others, who points out
notable Indian influences in the Batak script (TB: aksara Batak) found predominantly
in the bark books known as pustaha. These pustaha contained texts written in aksara
Batak that were used by magico-religious diviners (TB: datu) in the carrying out of
their duties (TB: hadatuon). The language used in the pustaha relates to divination,
magic, medicine, and calendars (TB: porhalaan) used for determining auspicious
dates and times. Research on the origins of the Batak script has been ongoing since
the mid 19th century (see H. N. van der Tuuk [1971], J. Winkler [1913], P. Voorhoeve
[1951, 1969] and L. Manik [1973]), and current philological research indicates that,
while based upon Indian models, the Batak script appears not to have developed
directly from an Indian source but most likely to have come to the Batak via another
Indonesian script, such as ancient Javanese Kawi script (Kozok 1991:100).

In addition to the primarily indirect contacts with the India-influenced
Sriwijayan state through trade, exchange, and other borrowings, other contacts
between the Batak and South Asia came through more direct interaction with a Tamil
trade guild numbering some 1500 traders and located around Labu Tua near Barus.
Information concerning the trade guild was found on an inscription near Labu Tua

27 There are about 200 loan words in various Batak languages that originate in Sanskrit, most of which
deal with matters of religion, divination, chronology, and ordinal terms. Parkin has listed these terms
as well as their related Malay and Sanskrit comparatives, categorizing them according to function as
religious, magic, calendar, social, trade, ordinary, and animal (Parkin 1978: 106 – 117).

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dating from 1088 C.E. It is likely that there was direct contact between these Tamil traders and the Batak who supplied them with commercial goods brought to Barus from the highlands (ibid: 14).

To what degree Tamil culture impacted the Batak conceptual and customary world is not clear. A great deal more research needs to be undertaken in order to draw firm conclusions. As Kozok points out, “archaeologically Batakland is still a closed book” (Kozok 1991:15). The fact that loan words found in Batak languages are almost exclusively Sanskrit derivatives and not Tamil, and that they relate to area of religious practice, divination, chronology, etc., as mentioned above suggests that the direct trade relations between the Tamil and the Batak were less influential on the development of Batak culture than were the more indirect contacts between the south Sumatran Hindu-Buddhist culture associated with the state of Sriwijaya.

**Islamic Influences on Toba Batak Culture**

From the 13th century onward Islam has been a major influence on the whole of the Indonesian archipelago. In Sumatra, the region known as Pasai (or Samudera-Pasai), in the northernmost province of Aceh, was ruled at the close of the 13th century by Sultan Malik al-Saleh, who was converted to Islam through contacts with Muslim merchants from Gujarat, in India. His tombstone monument, situated near present-day Lhok Seumawe, bears an inscription in Arabic that dates his death in the year 1297. Scholars such as Marrison (1951), and Nicholson (1979) are in general agreement that it was via Samudera-Pasai that Islam entered Sumatra and, via the trade route of the Malacca Straits, spread throughout the archipelago and the Malay
During the 15th and 16th centuries Islam spread throughout the Malay Peninsula to the kingdoms of Malacca, Perak, Pahang, Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengganu, and on Sumatra to the kingdoms of Siak and Kampar (De Casparis and Mabbett 1992:330). By the time the Portuguese arrived in the Malacca Straits (1509) and gained control over the kingdom of Malacca (1511), much of the coastal region of northern and eastern Sumatra as well as the Malay Peninsula had embraced Islam. From there, Islam spread toward the interior of the island, often through trade and commerce relations with suppliers and political leaders in the interior regions.

By the early 19th century Islam had spread to varying degrees throughout most of the island of Sumatra. Only the central mountain highlands remained in relative isolation from significant Islamic influence. This included the region of the Batak, who were impacted only minimally by Islam. Some attempts were made by Aceh in the 16th century to incorporate the Karo Batak plateau region into its realm. However, as Kipp points out, nothing of lasting substance ever came of it (Kipp 1990:125).

This situation changed somewhat during the 1820s, when warring factions from the Padri War in the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra began making incursions into Batak areas. The Padri War (1821-1837) was a struggle between Minangkabau traditionalists (known as the Adat faction) seeking to maintain local traditions and customs, and a group of orthodox Wahhâbi-influenced Minangkabau (known as the Padri faction—a term derived from Pedir, the northern port from which these reformist hajji entered Sumatra) intent on placing the Qur’an, the Sunna, and the Hadith at the core of Minangkabau culture. As the Padri faction moved further
northward and into the Toba Batak highlands however, they met stiff resistance from the Toba Batak, under the leadership of the priest-king Sisingamangaraja X, who was killed during a skirmish with the Padri. The Padri War concluded in 1837 with the defeat of the Wahhâbi – Padri faction by the Dutch colonial military, and the capture and deportation of their leader, Tuanku Imam Bonjol (who was subsequently recognized and honored as one of Indonesia’s first anti-colonial freedom fighters) (Pardede 1987:235-6).

It can be concluded that the direct impact and influence of Islam on the Toba Batak was minimal. Even prior to the arrival of European missionaries and the Dutch colonial administration in the Toba region there were antagonistic feelings toward Muslims on the part of the Toba Batak (Tobing 1963:25). Following the Padri encounter in the early 1830s the Toba Batak became highly resistant to any foreign intrusion on their lands, seeking to remain in a kind of protective isolation. Some Toba Batak I spoke with suggested that this protectionism was one of the reasons that American missionaries Henry Lyman and Samuel Munson, traveling from Sibolga to the Silindung Valley in 1834, were attacked and killed by Toba Batak. The legend of their death includes details suggesting they were cannibalized by those who killed them—a point that served to fuel subsequent missionary efforts directed toward the Toba Batak. However, in my conversations with Toba Batak whose ancestors came from the region where the two were killed, it was made clear to me that the eating of their flesh was not intended for nourishment but was merely a symbolic, ritualized
gesture intended to communicate emphatically to the outside that the Toba Batak would not tolerate any further intrusion by those from the outside.28

As stated earlier, the impact of Islam upon the Toba Batak was minimal. Even so, the events related to the Padri War did, in fact, bring to a close the long period of isolation that the Toba Batak had experienced in the highlands. The presence of the Dutch colonial military in the region opened the way for the colonization of both the Minangkabau and the Batak regions (from the 1824 Treaty of London onward the Dutch had exerted increasing administrative authority throughout Sumatra) (Pardede 1987:236), and made possible the movement of European missionaries into the Toba Batak highlands.

European Protestant Missionary and Colonial Influences on Toba Batak Culture

Christianity came to the Toba Batak region in the mid 19th century, brought there by German missionaries of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG), an interdenominational Protestant mission organization founded in 1828 in the German city of Barmen. At the time of its founding, the mission’s approach was predominantly Pietistic—emphasizing an emotional, personal and individual faith experience for all true believers. Some years later, a new mission theology developed, one that emphasized, as theologian Hasselgren points out, a collective Christian identity of the people (as opposed to the Pietist’s experience of the individual), as expressed in the German term Volkschristianizierung. Additionally, the mission sought the formation of a People’s Church—an idea which blended

elements of Lutheran theology with German Romanticism’s idea of the people (Volk) as a collective, organic whole (Hasselgren 2000:81). These ideas, coupled with notions of European moral and civil superiority and the importance of establishing colonies as a way of spreading the Christian message and fulfilling the missionary mandate, mark the beginnings of Toba Batak encounters with Christianity and the Dutch colonial administration.

Christian missionary outreach into the Batak highlands had been attempted prior to the coming of RMG missionaries, though with no apparent success. In 1824 two British missionaries, Richard Burton and Nathaniel Ward, of the Baptist Missionary Society in England, were authorized by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (the British crown’s authority in Sumatra) to establish a missionary work among the Toba Batak. The two, having already spent some years working in Sumatra, headed out from Sibolga, following the Tapanuli River, and made their way toward the Silindung Valley. According to reports, the two were warmly received by the Batak they met along their route. They stayed in the Silindung Valley for one week and then returned to Sibolga. Not long after this, the political situation in Sumatra changed and the Dutch regained control of the island with the signing of the London Treaty of 1824. This change in colonial administration meant that the members of the British Baptist Missionary Society were forced to abandon their efforts among the Toba Batak (Pedersen 1970:47-49).
Early Mission Efforts to Reach the Batak

Some 10 years later, two American Baptist missionaries, Henry Lyman and Samuel Munson, received permission to enter the Toba Batak highlands and begin a mission work among them. Leaving Sibolga in June of 1834, the two men traveled much the same route that Burton and Ward had, making their way toward the Silindung Valley. Their efforts failed completely and at some point along their way (reportedly near the village of Lobu Pining) they were captured and killed by a group of Toba Batak who opposed their presence in the area. The circumstances surrounding their death are not conclusive. Some have suggested that they were taken to be Dutch spies, others have suggested that one of them may have accidentally shot and killed a local woman and that they were killed in retribution by members of her family (ibid: 51-52). Whatever the case may have been remains speculation. It is also generally agreed (though not proven) that the two men were ritually eaten. The death of these two Americans, as well as the rumors of their final demise, served to further fuel missionary interest in reaching the Toba Batak. To that end the RMG, who had begun work in the East Indies in 1834, sent two missionaries to Sipirok, in the southern Angkola Batak region, in the late 1850s. There they joined forces in 1861 with two members of a small Dutch mission society (the Ermelo mission) and began to work among the largely Muslim Angkola Batak around Sipirok. Because the highland Toba Batak area was not yet under Dutch administrative control, it was difficult to get permission to work in that region. Interest in, and efforts toward, the Toba Batak continued nonetheless, and in 1861 the
Batak church officially began with the baptism of two Toba Batak men, Jakobus Tampubolon and Simon Siregar (Pedersen 1970:49). (The Batak Protestant Christian Church, i.e. HKBP, marks its Dies Natalis as 1861) The following year they were joined by Ignwer Ludwig Nommensen (1834-1918) who, in 1864, took over the leadership of the Batak mission station and moved its base of operations from Sipirok to the Silindung Valley, an area much less affected by Islam and with an almost entirely Toba Batak population. By the end of his first year in the region he had baptized 13 people: 4 men, 4 women, and 5 children (Pedersen 1970:61). Because of the strong kinship ties within Toba Batak society and the social obligations that accompany them, these new Christians soon found themselves in a social conflict, pulled between familial obligations and the regulations of their new religion. As a result they were expelled from their villages communities, losing their homes, fields, and rights of inheritance. In response to this situation Nommensen, who had by then (1866) been joined by missionary Johannsen, established a village for the new Christian converts which they named Huta Dame (Peace Village). This was a Christian village of which Nommensen himself was regarded as raja (village head). While this new village served to alleviate one difficulty, it led to others. Those who lived in the village of Huta Dame were isolated from the rest of Toba Batak society and therefore cut off from the possibility of participating in any future “People’s Church.” Also, Nommensen found that he was given a political role to which he did not aspire. Rather than be seen as a raja he preferred to be seen as a teacher so that
those who joined the new religion need not give up their culture or political allegiance (Schreiner 1972:116ff.).

Over time, Nommensen and his fellow missionaries gained acceptance increasingly powerful Toba Batak leaders. This they accomplished by providing medical aid to the sick, by helping to resolve tensions between clans or between village leaders, by giving financial assistance to those trying to get out from under a debt, and by providing education and other services (Aritonang 1988:153-4). For many of these leaders it seemed clear that the presence of the missionaries and the increasing presence of the Dutch colonial military on the Toba Batak borderlands signaled that a change was in the air and that the best way forward was to embrace the new and coming changes and align oneself with the mission. In 1867 a Toba Batak leader named Raja Pontas Lumbantobing was baptized and joined the small Batak mission church. The fact that Lumbantobing was a recognized *raja* (leader) meant that he had authority over those under his care. In such cases, when a raja became aligned with the church it often happened that his subordinates followed and joined the church as well. The head of a village was in a position to make decisions that would affect all of the members of that village. As such, when a Toba Batak raja became a Christian (as they did in increasing numbers), the missionaries placed them in positions of authority within the church, consulting with them on important matters regarding church discipline and the application of church polity in the region. The rajas were counted as important pillars of the Church and strategic in the spreading of Christianity among the Toba Batak. For their part, the rajas saw that being aligned
with the missionaries was a mark of increased power and prestige (TB: sahala). On
more than one occasion it is recorded that there was competition among the various
rajas as they vied over the missionaries and the villages where they would be
stationed (Hasselgren 2000: 90, note 122). Though clearly not the only reason, the
impact of the rajas aligning themselves with the church and the impact this had on the
number of converts from 1867 onward is visible in the following recorded
membership totals from 1861 to 1911: 1861—2; 1867—115; 1870—849; 1871—
1,250; 1877—2,173; 1881—5,988; 1892—21,779; 1898—40,723; 1911—103,538
(Lumbantobing 1992:74). Today, nearly 90% of the 3 million Toba Batak are
registered as Protestant Christians, most of them are members of the Batak Protestant
Christian Church (HKBP) which grew out of the missionary work of Nommensen and
the RMG.

**Opposition to the Mission’s Activities**

As Christianity spread in the Toba Batak region, some strongly opposed the
missionaries and their work, believing them to be nothing other than agents of the
Dutch colonial government with the intention of subjugating them to Dutch rule.
During the 1870s, those in strong opposition organized themselves under the
leadership of Guru Somalaing Pardede, a charismatic datu (magico-religious diviner)
from Balige, into a group known as the Parmalim. (Though the term is often times
equated with the traditional, pre-Christian religion of the Batak, the word ‘parmalim’
is most likely borrowed from the Arabic term al-mu’alim, which shifted, in the Malay
language, to malim, and refers to Islamic religious leaders / teachers.) The Parmalim
group claimed to maintain the traditional Toba Batak *adat*, swore allegiance to and worshipped the Toba Batak priest-king Sisingamangaraja, and vowed to drive the white-men (meaning the missionaries and colonial representatives) out of the area. The *Parmalim* group was one of numerous sects that sprung up during the latter years of the 19th and early years of the 20th century primarily in response to the rapid social and religious changes that were taking place among the Toba Batak. Other such groups include the *Parsiakbagi*, the *Parsitengka*, and, following the death of Sisingamangaraja XII in 1907, the *Parhudamdam*. These groups, in general, displayed millenarian tendencies, believing that once the whites had been expelled from the area the Toba Batak would then enter a period of peace, security, and enrichment with the re-awakening of their *adat* traditions and religious practices, with the Sisingamangaraja as their ultimate spiritual and social leader. These opposition groups borrowed significantly from the ideas and figures associated with Christianity and Islam. The *Parmalim* recognized a holy trinity consisting of Jehova, Mary, and Jesus who were surrounded by an array of other deities, including Sisingamangaraja, Raja Uti, Raja Hatorusan, Si Deak Parujar, Naga Padoha (all figures from Toba Batak mythology) as well as Raja Rum and Raja Stambul (most likely referring to the Pope and the Sultan of Istambul of whom Guru Somalaing had most likely learned while acting as a guide for the Italian botanist Elio Modigliani) (Castles 1972:74-75). Other groups incorporated elements of Islamic religious practice and dietary restrictions as well as aspects of Christian theology into their beliefs. The *Parhudamdam* believed, for instance, that they were spiritually protected from the bullets of the Dutch
military. If, however, they should be shot it was because their sins were too many and, once dead, they would rise again on the third day (ibid: 85).

**Mission Support from the Dutch Colonial Government and the Enactment of Civil Laws**

Growing opposition to the presence of the missionaries in the Silindung region had prompted Nommensen and others to request protection from the Dutch colonial military. The increased presence of the military in the area resulted in skirmishes between the Dutch military and Sisingamangaraja and his followers. Sporadic warring between the two factions erupted on and off for several years beginning in the late 1870s. By 1879 the Dutch had taken administrative control of the Silindung Valley region (Schreiner 1994:70) and by the end of the 20th century’s first decade the whole of the Batak region was under Dutch control. In addition to military support and protection for the work of the missionaries, Nommensen and others asked the colonial administrative government to enact laws that banned Toba Batak organizations that they felt impeded with their mission work. In particular, the communal sacrificial ceremonies known as *pesta bius*, at which all the residents in a *bius* (a federation of villages) would gather together and, under the guidance of the religious council (TB: *parbaringin*), would make offerings to the deities as well as to specific ancestor spirits of high status. The missionaries viewed these *bius* gatherings as contrary to their efforts among the Toba Batak in that they represented a moral “stumbling block” for the new Toba Batak Christians. The Dutch colonial administration saw in the *bius* organization a potentially threatening and destabilizing
political organization and so were pleased to enact a law prohibiting its continuation. The banning of the *bius* ceremony was only one of a number of prohibitive enactments on the part of the mission and colonial authority during the final decades of the 19th century. Christian Toba Batak were also prohibited from participation in any *adat* feasts or ceremonies where the veneration of ancestor spirits was taking place, where the traditional music of the *gondang sabangunan* was being performed or where the ceremonial *tortor* dancing was taking place. For the missionaries, these activities were too closely linked with former religious beliefs and practices that the Christian Toba Batak must reject (Purba 1998:250ff.).

Despite the efforts by the *Parmalim* group and others to end the missionary and colonial presence in the region, the mission’s work of Christianization continued, by and large, unchecked. Nommensen had expressed in letters to the RMG headquarters in Barmen, Germany, his own vision for the growth of Christianity among the Toba Batak and the resulting development of a People’s Church and a land transformed:

“In spirit I see scattered everywhere Christian congregations, schools and churches, groups of Bataks old and young, making their way to these churches: on every side I hear the sound of church bells calling the believers to the house of God. I see everywhere cultivated fields and gardens, green pastures and forests, tidy villages and dwellings in which are found properly dressed descendants of this people. Still more, I see preachers and teachers, natives of Sumatra, standing on the platforms and behind the pulpits, pointing
out the way of the Christian life to both young and old. You will say that I am a dreamer, but I say, No! I am not dreaming. My faith visions all this; it shall come to pass for all kingdoms shall be his and every tongue shall confess that Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, I am encouraged, though the people may oppose me and make all sorts of plans to resist God’s word they can just as easily keep the ocean back from its shores as to keep God’s word from their hearts. A stream of blessing shall certainly flow over them. Already the day begins to appear. Soon the clear light will break forth and then shall the Sun of Righteousness in all His glory shine over the horizon of Batakland from the South even to the shores of the Toba Sea” (Hemmers 1935:18).

**Educational and Social Programs of the Mission**

In addition to the construction of churches as a gathering place for the expanding Christian community, the mission also built schools for the Christian Toba Batak, offering education in tandem with Christianity as a means to further develop the civil and moral character of the Toba Batak (Aritonang 1988:27). The educational programs of the RMG proved to be very successful in drawing Toba Batak into a relationship with the mission. In 1870 the mission had established 10 public primary schools accommodating roughly 200 students. The Dutch colonial government managed 14 schools attended by 634 students during the same period. By 1936 the RMG had 585 schools with 43,000 students, and just prior to the Second World War the number had increased to 646 primary schools and 5 technical training
colleges spread throughout the Batak region (ibid: 30). The educational and social programs of the mission were extremely attractive to the Toba Batak, drawing many thousands to accept Christianity as a means to gain access to these opportunities for social and economic advancement (TB: *hamajuon*), recognition, and prestige. The acquisition of prestige has long been understood to be one of the core values of Toba Batak society. The Toba Batak term *hasangapon* most closely reflects this idea of prestige or esteem, and it is closely tied into the deeply felt need to strengthen and maintain one’s “spirit” (TB: *tondi*). This was a characteristic that had been noted by early visitors to the Toba Batak area, as reported by Burton and Ward following their 1824 encounter with the Toba Batak, “The only things which interested them in their first contact with the Gospel were increased wealth, prestige and power. If the Gospel could bring them these things, they were ready to listen, if not they were not” (Kraemer 1958:44).

**Impact of Western Music and Music Education**

The education that the mission schools provided was focused on developing the intellectual skills and spiritual / moral character of the student. The curriculum involved Bible study, history, mathematics and geography. In addition there were lessons given in singing (music theory, literacy and part singing) which were tied into the hymn and choral music of the church, the playing of the pump organ (TB: *poti marende*: lit. ‘singing box’), and the violin which, according to some reports, is the instrument Nommensen carried with him upon entering the Toba Batak region (Aritonang 1988:249-260). While these subjects were intended for the development
of intellectual and moral character, they also served as a replacement for those aspects of Toba Batak cultural practice and adat tradition that the missionaries felt to be morally corrupt or corrupting. While, for instance, the Toba Batak had a vibrant musical tradition in place long before the coming of the Europeans, one which was integrally linked to the social, ceremonial, and religious practices of their culture, the attitude expressed by the missionaries relative to Toba Batak music was that, prior to the arrival of the Europeans, the Toba Batak were completely ignorant of music and owed their musical abilities entirely to the Europeans (see missionary Hester Needham’s comments in Enfield 1899:71ff.; 144ff.). Beyond that, the missionaries enacted both church and civil laws (enforced by the Dutch colonial administration) banning the traditional music and dance of the Toba Batak and carrying the threat of fines or some church discipline (including excommunication) for those who were caught participating in either the music or dance. The prohibitions remained in effect until the early 1950s, and while they posed a significant threat against the survival of these traditions, they did not manage to wipe them away. (For a detailed analysis of this situation see Purba 1998:246-270.)

**Seeds of an Independence Movement**

Increasingly, the Toba Batak came to understand that the educational opportunities provided by the mission were an important component in the realization of their concept of progress (TB: *hamajuon*), and necessary for adapting to the changes introduced by the mission and the colonial government. Schooling dramatically increased the potential for employment by either the mission or the
colonial government and became such an integral part of the growing *hamajuon* movement among the Toba Batak that, as soon as a village aligned itself with the mission, construction would begin on a school, with demands, shortly thereafter, that the missionaries provide them a trained teacher. These progressive attitudes regarding education meant that by the close of the 19th century the Toba Batak had established a strong and well-regarded tradition of education throughout the East Indies (Aritonang 1994:166ff.). As Toba Batak attitudes of progress (TB: *hamajuon*) and prestige (TB: *hasangapon*) grew increasingly connected to their expectations of what the church and schools of the mission should offer, the demand for education in a language other than strictly Toba Batak (such as Dutch, Malay or English) began to be expressed. The missionaries were initially reluctant to grant this request, as it did not coincide with their initial vision of a People’s Church that was uniquely Batak – a kind of Christian island in a sea of Islam. Also, there was a general distrust, on the part of the missionaries, of the Malay language because it was the predominant language of Islam in Sumatra and the missionaries feared that Toba children who learned Malay would be exposed to Muslim teachings and ideas and might leave the Church, converting to Islam (Aritonang 1994:168). Eventually however, due to the increasing concern that vast numbers of Toba Batak Christians would leave the RMG and join Christian organizations where educational opportunities included the study of various languages, the mission acquiesced and in 1908 began to give instruction in Dutch and, several years later, Malay.
Toward an Independent Batak Church

Calls for greater independence from the German mission began to increase as the Toba Batak church and society moved further into the 20th century. One of the groups which played a significant role in gathering support for an independent Batak church was the group Hatopan Kristen Batak (United Batak Christians) (HKB) which grew out of a church choir organization that started in the town of Balige in the Toba region in 1917. Their goals included the strengthening of the Christian community among the Toba Batak, the giving of time and energy to build-up and strengthen the solidarity of their community, and the unification and development of Toba Batak society (Hutauruk 1993:85-86). By 1918 there were three branches of the HKB organization—in Balige (the Lake Toba area), in Tarutung (the Silindung area) and in Siborongborong (the Humbang area). At the groups first congress, in 1918, positions in favor of an independent Batak church and critical of the RMG as well as the colonial government were readily expressed. In the name of progress (TB: hamajuon) the group pledged to work toward that end and nearly 12 years later, in 1930, the RMG handed formal control of the Batak church over to the Toba Batak people. The church assumed the name, Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (Batak Protestant Christian Church), or HKBP, and expected to take over full control of all the church affairs following ratification of the transfer during the 1929 Great Synode (TB: Sinode Godang). While the Toba Batak Christians gained control over the administrative structures, various institutions, and finances of the church, the positions of highest church authority remained in the hands of the German
missionaries until the start of the Second World War, during which time they were, because of the nationality, rounded up and interned by the Dutch colonial government (Pedersen 1970:81ff.; Schreiner 1994:14). This situation placed the HKBP in the position of electing and appointing its first Toba Batak Bishop (TB: Ephorus), and in 1940 Pdt. K. Sirait was installed as the first Toba Batak Ephorus of the HKBP. In 1942 he was replaced by Pdt. Dr. Justin Sihombing, who served several terms in that position until 1962.

**Independent Church and Independent Republic**

The same period marked a time of significant change for the East Indies as well. Independence from the Dutch was proclaimed (1945) and, after several years of warfare, was gained (1949), bringing the thousands of islands of the former Dutch East Indies together as the Republic of Indonesia. On Sumatra, transitions affecting the Toba Batak took place around the eastern lowland plateaus and plantation areas where former land owners (both foreign and members of the Malay aristocracy) lost their holdings in the years leading up to and immediately following independence, opening up hundreds of square miles of land for occupation. From the early years of the 20th century there had been a number of Toba Batak who migrated to these areas, particularly to the area around the city of Medan. Their numbers were small however, and they experienced significant discrimination from the Malay residents and the Deli Sultanate, which prevented them from living inside the city (Bruner, 1961:511). A major road connecting various towns in the Toba Batak highlands to Medan was completed in 1915 and by the late 1920s the number of Toba Batak living
in the Medan area had risen to around one thousand (ibid: 511). The post-independence ‘land-occupation movement’ swelled the numbers of migrating Toba Batak into the hundreds of thousands as they flooded out of the highland regions in order to occupy commercially viable land for agriculture and other enterprise. Clark Cunningham (1956) suggests that by 1956 some 250,000 Toba Batak had left the highlands and moved into East Sumatra, effectively raising the number of newly urbanized Toba Batak above that of those who remained in the homeland region (Bruner 1972:209). Besides the motivating factor of potential economic benefit, the cultural values of ‘progress’ (TB: *hamajuon*) and ‘prestige’ (TB: *hasangapon*) were additional motivators that impacted the migration of Toba Batak out of the highlands. Many found employment as schoolteachers or government employees in the Departments of the Treasury, Industry, or Education and Culture. Others worked in journalism, practiced medicine or law (Pelly 1994:122). As Toba Batak settled in new areas they established churches as well as clan association groups (TB: *punguan marga*), neighborhood associations (TB: *punguan dongan sahuta*), and prayer groups (TB: *punguan partangiangan*). Such voluntary groups served as a means for urbanized Toba Batak to maintain ethnic-centered connections to their local communities as well as to their homeland communities. It provided them opportunities to practice adat rituals outside of the homeland as well as to maintain religious solidarity as a minority religion in that region (Bruner 1972:213ff.). These voluntary organizations remain a vital part of the social life of urbanized Toba Batak in the present day, playing an important role in the ongoing maintenance of culture identity.
The cultural impact of the European missionaries and colonial administration on the socio-cultural, economic, and religious life of the Toba Batak was, and in many ways continues to be, profound. Issues relating to the place of *adat* and the nature of *adat* practice for contemporary Toba Batak (the vast majority of whom are Protestant Christians) remains a topic which, if not being openly discussed or debated, is of played out in the day-to-day matters of life in Toba Batak society. Yoshiko Okasaki, who researched questions of cultural identity and traditional musical practice for Catholic Toba Bataks states, “the relationship of *adat* and Christianity (in other words the interplay of Toba Batak ethnic values and what Christianity has tried to offer) has been the central issue among the Toba Batak people in the past one hundred and thirty years” (Okazaki 1994:54). This dynamic, unresolved tension between value systems is not so easily construed as to become a dyadic “old way versus new way,” “pre- versus post-Christian,” or even an “*adat*-view versus Christian-view” approach to understanding Toba Batak society. The socio-cultural matrix of the Toba Batak is complex and, as has been discussed, the history of cultural contact and its impact extends well beyond that of contact with European outsiders. What the present chapter shows is that there are multiple ideologies coexisting and interacting with, and upon, one another. It is these interactions, in the context of funerary ritual in Toba Batak society and the musical expressions of grief that accompany such a loss, that forms much of the content of what follows.
In the chapter that follows I turn to an examination of music and musical expressions in Toba Batak society. Discussing the role of traditional music in adat ritual practices as seen in the primary traditional instrumental ensemble: gondang sabangunan. I discuss other types of ensembles – those with primarily ritual functions as well as those used for entertainment. The chapter also examines vocal music expressions in Toba Batak society (an aspect of Toba Batak music which is seldom discussed in scholarly publications on Toba Batak music) as well as those music practices which have been introduced from colonial and mission sources.
Figure 6. Map of North Sumatra showing locations mentioned in Chapter Three.

Pusuk Buhit / Sianjur
Mula-mula, p. 75

Parapat, p. 93

Singkam, p. 85

Tomok, p. 101
Chapter 4
The Music Culture of the Toba Batak

Early Reports on Toba Batak Music

Toba Batak culture has been an object of European missionary and colonial interest since the mid 19th century, resulting in a substantial body of scholarly publication on a variety of socio-cultural topics as well as general ethnographic material (as discussed previously in Chapter Two). However, published reports describing Toba Batak music culture have not, until fairly recently, appeared as a part of this body of scholarship. Kartomi echoes this idea by describing the province of North Sumatra as a musicological *terra incognita*, stating that only in the past fifteen years or so has the music of the coastal and inland peoples of North Sumatra begun to be studied in detail (Kartomi 1987a:333). The few early reports describing Toba Batak music in its social and religious context shed interesting light on this musical lacuna. A late 19th century (1885) monograph by German missionary Gustaf Pilgram entitled “Referat über heidnische Musik und Tanz” (Report on Heathen Music and Dance)\(^{29}\) provides an interesting outsider’s view of Toba Batak music, specifically the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble and *tortor* dancing in pre- or early Christian Toba Batak society. Pilgram describes the instruments used in the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble as well as some of the religious and social functions of the ensemble. His

\(^{29}\) Major portions of the *Referat* have been included in Andar Lumbantobing’s 1981 book *Parsorion (Riwayat Hidup) ni Missionar Gustav Pilgram dohot Hararat ni Hakristenon di Toba* (Biography of the Missionary Gustav Pilgram and the Growth of Christianity in Toba), published in Pematang Siantar.
report indicates that, while he could not tolerate the gondang sabangunan ensemble in its connection with ancestor spirit veneration and the worship of deities, some social uses of the ensemble could be maintained – a position at odds with many of the other missionaries, who felt that the musical tradition should be eliminated altogether.

**Recent Research on Toba Batak Music Traditions**

With the exception of brief references to Toba Batak music in a few published works from the early and mid 20th century (Warneck, 1909; Heintze, 1909; Vergouwen, [1933] 1964; Siahaan, 1953; Tobing, 1956), research publications focusing particularly on the music culture of the Toba Batak of North Sumatra did not begin to appear until the early 1970s (Schreiner, 1970; Holt, 1971; Manik, 1973/1974, 1977; Hutasoit, 1976a, 1976b; Nainggolan, 1979). From this time onward there has been a marked increase in scholarship dealing with Toba Batak music with important contributions coming from non-Toba scholars, including Simon (1982, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1993), Carle (1987, 1990), Kozok (1994 / 2002) and Okazaki (1994), as well as a growing number of Toba Batak scholars (primarily in conjunction with the University of North Sumatra’s program in ethnomusicology, initiated in 1979) including Gultom (1990), A. Hutagalung (2001), J. Hutagalung (1988), Hutajulu (1988, 1995), Hutasuhut (1990), Panggabean (1994), Pasaribu (1986, 1992), Purba (1991, 1998), Silaen (1990), Simangunsong (1988), and Simanjuntak (1999) among them. To be sure, the amount of scholarship and research on aspects of Toba Batak music that has been carried out since the 1970s (and especially by Toba Batak scholars) is significant. It is important to note, however, that this research has been
almost exclusively focused on the instrumental music traditions of the Toba Batak, particularly the ceremonial ensembles *gondang sabangunan* and *gondang hasapi*. Very little research, to date, has been directed at Toba Batak vocal music traditions. Notable exceptions include Hutajulu (1988) and, to some extent, Carle (1990) writing on aspects of the traveling theater genre *Opera Batak*, Simanjuntak (1999) writing on the popular lament song tradition (TB: *andung-andung*) of Nahum Situmorang; and Silaen (1990) Kozok (1994 / 2002) and Hutagalung (2001) writing on various aspects (morphologic, linguistic, and taxonomic) of traditional laments (TB: *andung*).

It is the intent of this chapter to provide an overview of music in Toba Batak society including discussion relating to those musical genres that have been thoroughly explored, as well as those that are frequently glossed over or neglected altogether.

**Framing the Discourse on Toba Batak Music – Coming to Terms**

Within Toba Batak culture music may be conceptualized and categorized in a variety of ways. Depending on the context in which the music is being used, on the role the music is playing in that context, and on the perspective of those engaging in musical activity, a variety of classificatory terms may arise. The Indonesian word “*musik*” (music) is commonly used among Toba Batak when discussing varieties of music, i.e. *musik tiup* (wind music / brass music), *musik vokal* (choral / vocal music), *musik gereja* (church music), *musik pop* (pop music), *music tradisionil* (traditional music), etc. but the word “*musik*” it is not autochthonous to the Toba Batak, having its origins in the Dutch word “*muziek*” which was then likely adopted into the Indonesian language as “*musik.*” There are, however, several Toba Batak words
relating to concepts and categories of music and music making which point to the
different ways music is organized and used in Toba Batak society.

According to P. Joosten’s 2001 republication of J. Warneck’s 1905
Tobabataksch-Deutsches Wörterbuch, the Toba Batak word *hinaloan* is defined as
“sebutan yang mencakup semua bunyi-bunyian musik” (a term which includes all
musical sounds) (Joosten 2001:131). This word (and the related term *parhinaloan*,
meaning the process or act of making musical sounds) conveys, in the broadest sense,
the concept of music, musical sound, and instruments used in the production of
music.30 During my field research in Sumatra however, the word *hinaloan* was rarely
used by Toba Batak to signify music or musical instruments. The only time I
encountered this word in use was when attending the First Month (TB: *Sipaha Sada*)
celebration of the *Parmalim* religious group based in Huta Tinggi near Lagu Boti (see
Figure 7). The musicians in Huta Tinggi used the term *hinaloan* as the name given to
the *gondang hasapi* ensemble that played during the Sipaha Sada ceremony, i.e.

Gondang Hinaloan.31 A much more commonly used Toba Batak word relating to
music, particularly the instrumental music of the *gondang* ensemble, is *gonsi*, defined
as the traditional music in the ensemble of the Batak orchestra (*taganing*) (Joosten
2001:107). This term is used almost exclusively with reference to the *gondang*
sabangunan ensemble and particularly with reference to the 5 tuned drums

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30 The word *hinaloan* appears in the Toba Batak translation of the Bible as a descriptor for music in
general terms or musical instruments in collective terms.
31 It is a common practice to give the set of instruments in an ensemble, either a *gondang hasapi* or
*gondang sabangunan*, a name. This name is also commonly used as the name of the group that plays
those instruments. Thus, the *gondang* group I played with was called *Grup Gondang Dame Nauli*
(Beautiful Peace Gondang Group) – a name referring to the group as well as the ensemble of
instruments we played.
collectively called *taganing* or *tataganing*. Musicians in the ensemble are frequently referred to as *pargonsi*, i.e. the players of *gondang* instruments (suggesting that the *taganing* is in some way symbolically representative of the collective ensemble). The term *pargonsi* is also a form of address used particularly in the context of ritual speeches addressed to the musicians during *adat* ceremonies where the *gondang* is being performed.

The term *gondang* is itself an important descriptor of Toba Batak music. As ethnomusicologist Mauly Purba explains, the term *gondang* has a meaning that extends well beyond simply defining an ensemble of instruments. According to Purba (1998) the term *gondang*, with its various affixes, or when joined to other words denotes an ensemble of instruments, a ritual ceremony, a single composition, a repertoire of pieces, a type of dance, a group of people dancing a *tortor* sequence, the members of a lineage, etc. (Purba 1998:146-149). While some scholars suggest the word *gondang* is nothing beyond a derivative of the Malay word *gendang* (Simon 1985:124), a general term describing a skin-covered drum, Purba’s assertion is that the word *gondang* is a highly flexible in its meaning and is used in a variety of expressions. Its breadth of meaning suggests that it “undoubtedly differs from the meaning of the Malay or Indonesian or Javanese words for drum, i.e. *gendang* (BI) or *kendhang* (BJ). The fact that they have a similar articulation does not, however, give them the same meaning (Purba 1998:149).

Beyond the terms *gonsi* and *gondang*, with their particular connection to the ceremonial instrumental music of the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble, the Toba Batak
term *uning-uningan* is another word commonly used in reference to instrumental music. This term is most commonly associated with instrumental music of a lighter variety, used for entertainment purposes. According to ethnomusicologist Marc Perlman, the term *uning-uningan* refers to music performed by an expanded *gondang hasapi* ensemble and is most often associated with the performance of light-hearted entertainment music and the music of the folk theater genre *Opera Batak* (Perlman 2001:vol. XII, 345). Toba Batak musician and teacher M. Hutasoit, in his book *Buku Theorie Margondang dohot Tortor Batak* [Book of Gondang and Tortor Theory], categorizes Toba Batak instrumental music as: *Uning-uningan* (*Instrumental Ringan*) [light instrumental] and *Gondang Batak* (*Instrumental Berat*) [heavy instrumental] (Hutasoit 1976a:i). Despite Hutasoit’s use of the terms “light” and “heavy,” it is not clear whether he is distinguishing between the instruments themselves (their material construction) or their contexts and the kinds of music they play (light instruments for entertainment purposes and heavy instruments for ritual purposes). Hutasoit then lists a third category of music not yet discussed: *Ende Batak*. The Toba Batak term *ende* is used to describe vocal music or singing of any kind. The term is defined simply as “song” (Joosten 2001:87), though in connection with specific affixes or other descriptors it can mean a way of singing, a song type, or a particular instrument, i.e. *ende mandideng* (lullaby), *ende andung* (lament), *ende huria* (church hymn), *marende* (to sing), *mangendehon* (to sing to / with), *poti marende* (literally, “singing box” / harmonium), etc.
In a paper presented during a 1977 workshop on the contextualization of the liturgy and worship for Toba Batak Christians, M. Hutasoit further explained his three broad categories of Toba Batak music. “Heavy instrumental” (associated with *Gondang Batak*) is understood in three ways: in terms of the value given to the work (by which he means the music and / or the crafting of the instruments), the value of the material (by which he means wood, metal, etc. from which the instruments are made), and the value of their use (that is, the context in which *gondang* is performed). He then lists the instruments that make up the “heavy instrumental” *Gondang Batak* ensemble: *ogung oloan*, *ogung ihutan*, *ogung panggora*, and *ogung doal* (four bossed gongs); *taganing (gonsi)* (a set of five tuned drums); *gordang* (a single large drum); *odap* (a single small drum); *sarune godang* (a large double-reed shawm); and *hesek* (a percussion plaque) (Hutasoit 1977:3). This list of instruments suggests that Hutasoit’s concept of “*Gondang Batak*” is limited to the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble in that he does not include the instruments that make up the *gondang hasapi* in this category.\(^{32}\)

Under the second category, “Light instrumental” (associated with *uning-uningan*), Hutasoit explains his use of the term in relation to the raw materials used in the construction of the instruments (bamboo, wood, palm fiber / palm leaves), the ready availability of, and easy access to, these materials, and the fact the crafting of instruments from these materials requires no specialized skill. The instruments he

\(^{32}\) For a detailed discussion of the instruments of the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble, methods of construction, tuning concepts, rules of *adat* for *gondang sabangunan*, the role of *gondang sabangunan* in Toba Batak *adat* feasts as well as Protestant church celebrations, the role of musicians in society, etc. see Mauly Purba’s 1998 dissertation, *Musical and Functional Change in the Gondang Sabangunan Tradition of the Protestant Toba Batak 1860s – 1990s, with Particular Reference to the 1980s – 1990s*.
includes within the category of uning-uningan are: hasapi (a two-stringed, boat-shaped, plucked lute), garantung (a wooden-keyed xylophone with between 5 and 8 keys), mengmung (a bamboo idiochord tube zither), sarune etek / sarune met-met (a small single-reed shawm), sordam (an open end-blown bamboo flute), sulim / suling (a side-blown bamboo flute), tulila (a bamboo flute with an internal duct), talatoat / salohat (a side-blown bamboo flute / whistle), saga-saga (a palm fiber idioglot jaw harp), jenggong (a metal heteroglot jaw harp), salung (a large side-blown bamboo flute / whistle), sidideng (a one-stringed bowed lute), and hesek (a percussion plaque made from a small slab of iron or an empty bottle, usually struck with a stick or nail) (ibid:3). An interesting comparative note in this discussion is the contrast between Hutasoit’s material-focused use of the term “light” instruments, and Perlman’s context-focused use of the term, with “light-hearted” referencing entertainment music.

The Contexts of Ceremonial and Non-ceremonial Instrumental Music

Beyond the distinctions of “light and heavy,” Toba Batak instrumental music is often discussed in terms of ceremonial music and non-ceremonial music. While this division works in general terms, I find that it is also somewhat problematic in that Toba Batak ensemble configurations are not rigidly fixed nor are the concepts of ceremony and non-ceremony clearly defined. That being said, those scholars who make use of the ceremonial / non-ceremonial division tend to place the gondang sabangunan, and to some extent the gondang hasapi, among those instrument ensembles used for the performance of the ceremonial repertoire (Nainggolan 1979;
Perlman 2001; Purba 1998; Simon 1982, 1984, 1987, 1993). In contrast, many of the instruments listed by Hutasoit under the category uning-uningan have been categorized as “non-ceremonial” instruments associated with non-ceremonial musical behavior (Simon 1984; Nainggolan 1979). Nainggolan defines non-ceremonial music simply as that music which does not have a functional role in Toba Batak adat ritual (Nainggolan, 1979:89), with adat ritual being the operative, determining factor. This definition largely squares with that of Simon (1984), who adds that non-ceremonial music is performed for the entertainment of others and oneself and includes instruments such as “one of several types of bamboo lutes, bamboo clarinet, paddy shawm, hasapi, jaw harp (genggong or saga-saga), tube zither, xylophone, or slit drum”. (ibid: 64). Simon asserts that these non-ceremonial instruments “have vanished completely today as a result of the influx of radios, cassette recorders, Western guitars, motorcycles, and other noise-making machines which are now found in every village.” Only the ensemble that accompanies the traveling theater genre Opera Batak and some solo entertainment music found in tourist areas around Samosir island remain (Simon 1984:64). I do not agree with Simon’s assertions regarding the complete disappearance of these musical instruments from Toba Batak society. My recent field experience indicates that while many of these musical practices may well have decreased in their frequency with the introduction and rise of the cassette industry, satellite television accessibility and, most recently, the video compact disc industry, they have not vanished. Many of these musics continue to
exist in Toba Batak society, albeit with significant changes to their conceptual and perceptual frameworks.

Nainggolan, in his discussion of ceremonial music and musical instruments defines ceremonial musical instruments as those commonly used for traditional rituals (BI: *upacara-upacara tradisi*) (Nainggolan 1979:43). His list of instruments includes those used in the *gondang sabangunan* and *gondang hasapi* ensembles (with the notable exception of the *sarune etek* / *sarune met-met*, which he includes in his list of non-ceremonial instruments (ibid: 89)). It is interesting to note, as well, that several of the instruments Simon describes as non-ceremonial, being intended for self-entertainment only, Nainggolan includes in his discussion of ceremonial instruments. This decision on Nainggolan’s part is because of their connection to traditional ritual behavior and also because of the relationship between these instruments and the Toba Batak folk beliefs and practices surrounding them.33

33 For example, Nainggolan explains that in former times the traditional midwife (TB: *sibaso*) would “announce” the gender of a newly born baby by the type of knife she requested to cut the umbilical cord. If the *sibaso* asked for a *sambili* knife (the sharp outer sheath of a bamboo shoot) this indicated that the newborn was male. If she asked for a *hodong ni bagot* knife (a sharp mid rib from a leaf of the *enau* palm [*Arenga pinnata*] – TB: *bagot*) this indicated that the newborn was female. This distinction between materials suggests that, for Toba Batak, maleness and femaleness are symbolized by bamboo (TB: *bulu*) and *enau* palm (TB: *bagot*) respectively. Nainggolan further explains that this symbolization of male and female is evident in musical instruments – the courtship instrument of Toba Batak young men is the *talatoat* / *salohat* (a bamboo side-blown flute with the mouth hole centrally placed and finger holes placed on either side of the mouth hole), while the corresponding courtship instrument of Toba Batak young women is the *saga-saga* (an idioglot jaw harp made from the central stem of an *enau* palm (TB: *bagot*) branch. According to information Nainggolan gathered through interviews with local cultural experts (TB: *raja adat*), a young man played the *talatoat* as a way of announcing to his parents that he had an interest in a particular young woman as a potential bride. After making this known to his parents the young man would travel to the young woman’s village as darkness was falling. In the quiet of night he would play the *talatoat* near her home as a way of announcing his feelings and intentions in her hearing. If the young woman were favorably disposed to his intentions she would respond by playing the *saga-saga* (Nainggolan, 1979: 44 – 49). Nainggolan reports similar kinds of symbolic representations based on folkloric beliefs and practices for other
As stated earlier, Nainggolan defines non-ceremonial musical instruments as those which, when played, have no connection to *adat* ritual but are more commonly used for entertainment purposes. His list of non-ceremonial instruments includes the *sarune etek* (small *sarune*, used in the *gondang hasapi* ensemble), *salung* (a bamboo side-blown flute similar in design to the *talatoat* but longer), *tulila* (a bamboo end-blown flute with an internal duct), *suling* (a bamboo side-blown flute, used in the expanded *gondang hasapi* ensemble as well as in other ensemble combinations), *along-along* (a bamboo single-reed conical shawm made from tube sections of graduated diameter), *jenggong* (a metal heteroglot jaw harp) and *gardap* (small single-headed cylindrical drum, struck with sticks) (Nainggolan 1979:89-95).

Western scholars writing on Toba Batak music categories have tended to weight their discussions toward the *gondang* traditions, particularly *gondang sabangunan*, viewing these musical practices in their connection to *adat* traditions and ceremonies. Simon, for example, states that *gondang* is an important musical manifestation of *adat* ceremony, thereby associating the *gondang* tradition with the function of ceremonial music in Toba Batak society (Simon 1984:58). In doing so, however, many scholars have largely bypassed those instrumental music practices such as the *hasapi, hesek, sordam, garantung*, and the various instruments of the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble.

Nainggolan gives no explanation as to why he includes the *sarune etek* in his listing of non-ceremonial instruments. My field observations as well as extensive discussions with Toba Batak musicians confirm that the *sarune etek* is an integral part of the *gondang hasapi* ensemble, which is associated with ancestor spirit veneration rituals and other rituals associated with pre-Christian *adat* beliefs and practices. That the *sarune etek* is also included in the *uning-uningan* ensemble playing the repertoire of *Opera Batak* music may, in part, explain Nainggolan’s choice of including it in the non-ceremonial category.
which are considered non-ceremonial (as introduced above) as well as the variety of Toba Batak vocal music genres, to be discussed below.

**Ende Batak – Vocal Music Genres in Toba Batak Society**

Toba Batak have long held a reputation among the many ethnic groups of Indonesia as being a singing people. They share this distinction with the Ambonese, another Indonesian ethnic group with a history of sustained European missionary contact. The strength of this reputation seems to be linked mainly to a rich Toba Batak choral singing tradition and, more recently, the Toba Batak pop music industry. Bill Dalton affirms this when he states in his *Indonesia Handbook*, “The Batak are renowned for their powerfully expressive, ethereal hymn singing...No matter what your religion, go to church on Samosir; the ardor with which they worship and sing in praise of Christ is a sight to see” (Dalton 1988:586, 592). Prior to missionary contact and the establishment of the Protestant Church in Sumatra, however, vocal music is thought to have played a significant role in Toba Batak society. This is evident when considering the variety of vocal music genres that are believed to have existed in pre-Christian times (and to varying degrees continue to exist) as well as the variety of contexts in which these songs were sung.

Returning to the earlier discussion of M. Hutasoit’s categories of Toba Batak music we find that his third category of Toba Batak music is that music he refers to as “Ende Batak,” which can be broadly categorized as Batak songs or vocal music. In his discussion of *Ende Batak* Hutasoit suggests three broad divisions of vocal music based primarily on function:
1. **Ende na marhadohoan** – *dipangke tu ulaon namarsintuhu* (Formal / specific event songs—those songs which are sung in connection with formal / structured events);

2. **Ende siriakon** – *dipangke tu ngolu siapari* (Everyday songs—those songs sung during everyday life and living);

3. **Ende sibaran** – *I ma ende na lungun, na manggombarhon angka na hansit* (Sad / bitter songs—these are sad songs, songs which illustrate all that is bitter or painful) (Hutasoit 1976a:7).

To these broad categories of song genres Nainggolan (1979), Pasaribu (1986) and Hutajulu (1988) have listed additional genre, including:

1. **Ende Parorot** (caregiver songs) these include **Ende Mandideng** (lullabies)—songs to encourage children to sleep, as well as songs sung while playing with young children (to encourage them to grow healthy and strong). **Ende Sipaingot** (advice songs)—these songs are most often sung by mothers to their daughters who are soon to wed. The lyrics of such songs convey advice on wifely duties to the husband and to his parents, the proper attitude of a wife and daughter-in-law, how to care for the home, etc.

2. **Ende Pargaulan** (love songs / courting songs) often light-hearted or teasing, sung between mixed groups of young people in a solo-response manner.

3. **Ende Tumba / Embas** (Tumba / Embas dance songs) these songs are sung by young people as an accompaniment to the *tumba* or *embas* dance, a traditional circle dance done in the village common yard (TB: *alaman ni huta*) in the days leading up to the wedding of a young couple. Adolescent girls formed an inner circle and
adolescent boys an outer circle around the girls. An old rice basket functioned as an
impromptu drum and dancers clapped hands together under their thighs and on their
hips while moving in a slow circle dance either to the right or left. The singing was
by the group while dancing the circle dance, often in a solo – response form. Song
lyrics were often spontaneously created and singers used the songs as a way to give
advice to the soon-to-be married couple, tease one another, or as a way of expressing
best wishes and farewell to those whose status was soon to change.

4. Ende Sibaran (sad songs of suffering or poor fate) also called ende parsorion (TB:
poor fate / bad luck). Mentioned earlier by Hutasoit as one of the three large
categories of song, this genre of song contains many sub-genres that are specific to
the circumstance of the singer, whether it be poor fate, poverty, illness, or grief over a
death. These songs are sung by a solo voice, most often the one experiencing the
hardship. Through these songs the singer will tell their story as a way of eliciting
sympathy from the listener but also as a way of expressing and releasing their
sadness. It is common for such songs to be accompanied by weeping – both by the
singer and by those who may be listening, and many times I heard it said that these
songs are cathartic, bringing about a sense of relief and a lightening of the burden of
their present situation. The term sibaran applies not only to a genre of vocal music
but is used to describe a category of gondang pieces including gondang papurpur
sapata (gondang for release from a curse), gondang tu angka na dangol (gondang for
all that is bitterly harsh), gondang tu na monding (gondang for the dead), as well as a
category of tortor dance (for example, tortor ondas—circle dance around the casket).
5. *Ende Pasu-pasu* (songs of blessing) these songs were often sung by elderly Toba Batak and were addressed to their descendants. They expressed hopes that the deities would bless and protect, strengthen and increase the present and future generations of their clan lineage.

6. *Ende Hata* (recitative / word songs) these are game songs / play songs sung by children, often with no fixed melody. Singers recite lyrics in rhymed pairs with playful meanings that often have no connection or relation between them.

7. *Ende Andung* (lament songs) these songs, primarily (though not exclusively) sung by women are used to mourn the dead. The lamenter, using a specialized vocabulary (largely metaphoric) of some 500 terms known as *hata andung* (lament language), recounts the life story of the deceased for the gathered mourners during pre-funeral wakes. As such, lament songs hold significant didactic value in Toba Batak society. Besides this, they serve as a means for the lamenter and the gathered mourners to express their grief through the emotional content and character of the lament. Funerary laments (TB: *andung ni na mate*) in Toba Batak society are spontaneously created, drawing upon life events of either the deceased or, in some cases, of the lamenter. Those who have mastered the vocabulary of lament as well as demonstrated a facility in lamenting are both highly revered and, to some extent, feared, as they are believed to be well-acquainted with grief and misfortune. Funerary laments have connections to ancestor spirit beliefs and, at times, become a means for communication with ancestor spirits – the lamenter speaking to or making

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35 Discussion of these song genres appears in Nainggolan 1979: 98-106; Pasaribu 1986: 27-28; and Hutajulu 1988: 8-20.
requests of the ancestors through the recently deceased, who is understood to be kind of go-between. Not restricted to funerary ritual, there are lament songs which are sung while herding (TB: *andung parmahan*), working in the fields (*andung parbabo*), while engaged in ulos cloth weaving (*andung martonun*), and while palm-wine tapping (*andung paragat*). Nainggolan reports that, in former times, there were wedding laments sung by the bride-to-be as her wedding approached. These laments, referred to as *andung ni boru muli* (lament of the beautiful maiden), were addressed to her mother and gathered family and expressed her sadness at leaving the security and familiarity of life with her family as she begins a new life with her husband and his family (Nainggolan 1979:103). In the present day these wedding laments have faded from common practice and have been replaced with Toba Batak pop songs that convey a message of grief over the loss of a daughter to marriage.36 A more detailed discussion of lament in Toba Batak society, including discussion of various lament types, follows in Chapter Six.

Beyond these traditional song genres there are work songs associated with such activities as paddling the large dugout canoes (TB: *sulu bolon*) as they traveled over the waters of Lake Toba. These songs are known collectively as *ende ni parluga* (paddler songs). Additionally there are songs associated with the work of shepherding (*ende ni parmahan*), as well as songs associated with traveling to new

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36 The most commonly heard of these songs is “Borhat ma Dainang” (Leave now, my Daughter), a song composed in the early 20th century by Sidik Sitompul. In the present day it is sung by a hired singer who entertains during the wedding feast.
regions and locating work, food, and lodging (*ende ni pangardang*) (Nainggolan 1979:110).

**Continuity and Change to Ende Batak Traditions**

As stated earlier, these Toba Batak vocal music genres are broadly varied with respect to function and context. That they are predominantly heterophonic or monophonic in melodic form is evidence in support of their pre-Christian origins, bearing in mind that the present day nation-wide reputation of Toba Batak as outstanding singers is historically connected to the practice of multi-part, homophonic choral singing that developed after the arrival of Protestant Christianity in the region. Many of these earlier, pre-Christian vocal music genres have either ceased to be practiced or have experienced a significant decline in performance over the past decades due, in large part, to socio-cultural changes introduced through interaction with colonial and mission cultures.

**Opera Batak and Vocal Music Style**

Through the vocal music associated with the traveling folk theater tradition of *Opera Batak*, and particularly in the early work of composers such as Tilhang Oberlin Gultom (1896-1970), one is likely to find examples of vocal music that reflect structural features of pre-Christian Toba Batak vocal genres. As mentioned earlier, Gultom, the central figure in Ritha Ony Hutajulu’s (1988) undergraduate thesis “*Analisis Struktural Musik Vokal Pada Opera Batak: Dengan Pusat Perhatian Pada Karya Tilhang Gultom*” (Structural Analysis of *Opera Batak* Vocal Music: A Central Focus on the Work of Tilhang Gultom), was a prolific composer of Opera Batak
songs, incidental music, dances, and dramas. He is credited with the composition of
132 songs, 23 instrumental music works, 15 dramas and 22 dances of various types
(Hutajulu 1988:47-56). Because Opera Batak made such extensive use of traditional
gondang hasapi instruments, the music associated with this genre is largely limited to
the scalar, formal, and other structural features of the gondang hasapi ensemble. In
her analysis of the vocal music found in Gultom’s Opera Batak, Hutajulu points out
that the scalar material and ambitus of Gultom’s vocal music tended to closely mirror
the gondang hasapi instruments (with a melodic range limited to a major sixth) used
to accompany the singing, and followed the structural characteristics of traditional
gondang hasapi music, particularly in his earlier compositions (during the 1920s and
30s). Later however (during the 1950s and 60s), the vocal ambitus of Gultom’s vocal
compositions expanded, becoming fully diatonic. Further, harmonic progressions and
cadential formulas reflecting the influence of western popular music from that era, as
well as tune borrowing from other folk or popular music traditions became more
common, reflecting the growing influence of western popular musical idioms on
traditional forms such as Opera Batak (Hutajulu 1988:79-83).

Protestant Christianity and Changes to the Ende Batak Tradition

The introduction of Protestant Christianity to the Toba Batak by European
missionaries whose modeling of Protestant Christianity in North Sumatra was
thoroughly European (including liturgical form, church polity, architecture,
vestments, and music), coupled with the influx of Dutch colonialism (and increased
access to European forms of education, commerce and exchange, health services,
language, government, etc.), introduced radical and rapid change within Toba Batak society. The introduction of Protestant hymnody, the practice of choral singing, the introduction of European musical instruments (such as the pump organ and instruments of the brass band), as well as the socio-political influence that these new musics conveyed (due to their association with European culture, modern thinking, and a rapidly expanding worldview) contributed greatly to the assimilation of new musical styles and practices within Toba Batak society. These new styles and practices (and the institutions which developed around them for their support and dissemination, i.e. brass band associations, choral groups, etc.) not only greatly expanded the generic boundaries of “Toba Batak music” but also played an important part in the development of a Toba Batak Christian identity.

**Mission Impact on Toba Batak Musical Expressions**

Early missionary records that mention hymn singing, harmonium playing, and the use of brass bands provide insightful information concerning the important role of this introduced music in the formation and maintenance of a Toba Batak Christian identity as well as insights into missionary perceptions of the musical sensibilities of the Toba Batak prior to European contact. One such source is found in the letters and journal entries of Hester Needham (1843-1897), an English missionary who was seconded to the *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* and worked for several years (1889-1897) in Sumatra, primarily as a teacher of young girls and women at the school run by missionary Johannsen in Pansur Napitu (see Figure 7). Needham’s letters and journals were published posthumously in 1899 under the title ‘God First’ or Hester...
**Needham’s Work in Sumatra.** Needham states that during her overland journey to Pansur Napitu she stopped at the mission station in the mountain village of Pea Raja (the present day headquarters of the HKBP). “Before seeing the house I heard the brass band playing a hymn in welcome, and a crowd of native Christian men were assembled to receive us” (Enfield 1899:32). The date of this journal entry is December 16, 1889 and it is, to my knowledge, the earliest reference to brass band music associated with the Toba Batak Protestant Church. What is evident from her statement is that the band was already accomplished at playing the hymn, indicating that the instruments had been taught and used by Toba Batak Christians for some time. What is not clear is whether the brass bands were introduced by the German missionaries or by the Dutch military, which already had a presence in the region by this time. Many times Needham writes of hymn singing, mentioning it as a regular part of her daily lessons with young students, as an evangelistic tool used to attract non-Christian Toba Batak to church services, and as a means for building social cohesion among new converts. She also reveals something of the missionary attitude regarding the musical abilities of the Toba Batak: “The musical capacity of the Battas is simply marvelous, considering they never sang a note till the Europeans came. Every Tuesday evening, Petrus [a Toba Batak Christian], the boys’ teacher, gives my girls a singing lesson. There are no picked singers, but all the forty odd are expected to sing; all the big girls are taught the alto, and all the others the soprano, and he conducts it all without any instrument. So far, however they know nothing of singing soft or loud; a correct ear, but no feeling” (ibid: 144-145). The perception of the
Toba Batak as vocally inept is expressed on several occasions. Elsewhere she writes: “Bartimeus and Konrad [Toba Batak Christian teachers], with twenty-eight of their new school boys and twelve men, came into this room and sang two Christmas hymns, and it was really beautiful to hear these young ‘heathens’ singing by heart the story of the birth of Jesus, and wonderful, considering that three months ago they had never even heard singing. The Battas never sang till the white men came” (ibid: 74).

**Toba Batak Music and Ethno-religious Identity**

Choral singing, and the use of brass bands were firmly established by the German missionary community as tangible expressions of Christian communal identity among the Toba Batak. They remain so to this day and Toba Batak Christians take great pride in their church choir and hymn singing traditions, with elaborately formal and highly competitive church choir festivals / competitions regularly occurring within the HKBP denomination. Church choirs are led by volunteer directors (TB: *dirigen*), with general oversight of all the church’s choirs falling to the preacher / teacher of the congregation (TB: *guru huria*). It is not uncommon for several choirs to sing an anthem during a Sunday service and it is entirely possible that each of the five or six choirs would sing. Add to this the seven congregational hymns that are sung during the liturgy for worship in the HKBP and it quickly becomes evident just how significant a role vocal music has in creating a sense of communal and ethno-religious identity among the Toba Batak. In addition to this, church-based brass bands are still commonly used at Church feasts and other

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37 Further discussion of hymn singing and choral music in the Batak Protestant Christian Church and community appears in Chapter Seven.
celebrations as an accompaniment for hymn singing, in processional parades, and to accompany tortor dancing at Church fundraisers and other celebrations (weddings, funerals, etc.).

**Toba Batak Music and the Growth of Popular Music Styles**

Toba Batak popular music early in the 20th century reflects at once the influence of the Protestant Church with its hymn singing, 4-part choral anthems, brass bands and pump organs (elements which, according to Martin Hatch, greatly influenced the growth and development of Indonesian pop music in general) (Hatch 1985:60), and the influence of exposure to early 20th century Anglo-American and Indo-European popular musics (particularly kroncong and the related stambul). This influence came largely via the practice of voluntary emigration by Toba Batak men to cosmopolitan centers for the purpose of educational and socio-economic improvement. One of the first Toba Batak to make a notable transition from the performance of Protestant church choral music to popular music was Romulus Tobing (1902-1964) who, in 1926 formed a kroncong orchestra known as *Orkes Kroncong Suka Jadi*. His band competed successfully in various competitions in Medan for several years, earning them a reputation as one of the first all-Batak kroncong bands. In 1936 he traveled to Singapore where he, and his newly formed band, Hot Stompers, recorded 40 kroncong songs that were sold throughout Indonesia. On his return to Indonesia he formed a Hawaiian-style band (made up of Toba Batak musicians) called the Jolly Syncopators that performed in the Medan area
for several years (Haeruddin 1990: 44-46). Like Tobing, many of the other Toba Batak popular music performers in the early 20th century focused on nationally accepted styles of popular music such as kroncong, singing in the Indonesian language and performing on instruments such as the guitar, ukulele, violin and accordion. The major exception to this trend was the music of Opera Batak, using the Toba Batak language as well as instruments and styles that were local and traditional. The music of Opera Batak was, by this time, more easily categorized as a “folk” or “local” (BI: daerah) music than as a popular music style.

The Advent of Radio and the Impact on Toba Batak Popular Music

The advent of radio broadcast in Indonesia, in 1925, brought the already popular sounds of kroncong, gambus, Hawaiian and similar styles to a much wider audience. Radio listeners were also exposed to popular music styles from other parts of the world, particularly Europe, America, Latin America and the Caribbean. In 1939 radio broadcast began in Medan, North Sumatra. The first Toba Batak band to be broadcast over the radio was the band Batak Hawaiian Tapiannaoeli, led by F. Toenggoel Hutabarat (Panggabean 1994:34). The report does not give particulars about the music heard on that first broadcast, but based on the group’s name, it is likely they performed Hawaiian, kroncong and similar music.

The principal Toba Batak composers of this era (1940s) include Sidik Sitompul (known popularly as S.Dis), Nahum Situmorang, Ismail Hutajulu, Marihot Hutabarat and Cornel Simandjuntak. The popular songs composed by these men

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38 See the article “In Memoriam” by Dede Haeruddin in the monthly magazine Bona Ni Pinasa, June 1990, no. 10: 44 – 46.
were sung in Toba Batak language and were stylistically referred to as “Tapanoeli Moderen” (ibid: 35). Much of their music has a melodic and harmonic structure drawing on the light classical / popular music of American films, musicals, and recording stars. As this was an era of tremendous socio-political upheaval and change (including the Second World War, the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia, Indonesia’s 1945 declaration of independence from the Dutch as well as the war for independence that followed, etc.), the popular songs of this time drew upon such themes as love, patriotism, sacrifice, nostalgia, sadness and longing.

Post-Independence—Popular Music, the Growth of Pop Daerah (Local Pop), and the Nostalgic Return to Traditional Styles

Beginning in the mid-1950s the music and rhythms of the Caribbean began to appear in Toba Batak popular music, as did influences from American Rock and Roll. One of the more popular Toba Batak vocal / instrumental groups of this era was Dolok Martimbang Melody, comprised of Toba Batak youth who had migrated out of North Sumatra and were living and going to school in Jakarta. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s the group, totaling 16 members, made numerous recordings and appeared in several films. They were well known for their Calypso style of singing and sang in a number of languages including Toba Batak (“A Sing-sing So,” “Mariam Tomong”, “Butet”, etc.) as well as in English (Sentimental Journey, Banana Boat Song, Come Back Lisa, etc.).

39 See the article “Nostalgia” by Dede Haeruddin in Bona Ni Pinasa, Jan. 1990; no. 5: 34 – 36.
In the late 1960s the cassette industry in Indonesia began and quickly blossomed as the primary mass media for popular music. Along with this new media and the emergence of local recording facilities came the enthusiastic development of regional pop music styles (BI: *pop daerah*). Pop Batak songs initially drew materials from earlier local popular styles, such as *Opera Batak*, though modernized with electrified instruments and a western pop harmonic structure (Yampolsky 1989:14). As the Toba Batak pop music industry developed through the 1970s, the former performance medium of large vocal groups (i.e. Dolok Martimbang Melody) was replace by the (predominantly) all-male vocal trio, beginning with Trio Golden Heart (including Star Pangaribuan, Dakka Hutagalung, and Ronal Tobing) in the early 1970s. The rise of the Toba Batak pop trio introduced a vocal harmonizing practice, involving harmonic movement in close parallel thirds and fourths, which was not present in earlier styles of Toba Batak pop music. Over time, groups began to add traditional instruments such as *sulim*, *hasapi* and *garantung* into the instrumental mix, with the intention of sonically grounding the music in a Toba Batak ethnicity. Also, because of the relative ease with which cassettes could be produced, and the lower cost of cassette players (compared with phonograph players), the purchase of Toba Batak pop music was economically within the means of many Toba Batak, both those living in urban as well as rural settings. Other important vocal trios from this period include Trio Friendship, Trio Rivera, Trio Martab, Trio Ambisi, Trio Relasi, Trio Maduma, Nainggolan Sister, and numerous others. The rising wave of commercial cassettes ushered in a new group of performers, including Star Pangaribuan, Dakka
Hutagalung, Firman Marpaung, Eddy Silitonga, Jack Marpaung, Bunthora Situmorang, Charles Hutagalung, and Hilman Padang, among many others. Many of these performers remain active in the music industry to the present day.

In the early 1980s, Trio Lasidos (including Jack Marpaung, Bunthora Situmorang and Jhonny Manurung) introduced a style of pop lament (TB: *pop andung-andung*) that made use of some of the requisite elements (vocal, instrumental and textual) of traditional Toba Batak lament singing. This new style became very popular among Toba Batak—particularly those who had migrated out of the homeland and for whom strong feelings of nostalgia for the imagined “homeland” existed – eventually becoming a defining genre of pop music for and about Toba Batak.

In the most recent years Toba Batak pop music has maintained many of the formal, stylistic, and instrumental practices introduced from the advent of the cassette industry. Additionally, there have been fusions between this older established Toba Batak pop music style and introduced styles of pop music from other areas of the world, such as disco, reggae, and rap, as well as attempts to produce and popularize styles of music that borrow instrumental sounds and formal features from several music traditions within Indonesia, combining them in new and innovative ways.

The subject of this chapter has been the music of the Toba Batak, with a specific focus given to traditional instrumental forms (*gondang sabangunan* and *gondang hasapi*) in their ceremonial and non-ceremonial functions as expressions of Toba Batak cultural identity (particularly with reference to the practice of *adat* ritual),
as well as vocal music forms. Additionally, the chapter has given attention to the introduction and development of musical forms which were introduced through contact with foreign cultures – particularly in the form of Protestant Christian hymnody and sacred choral music, as well as popular music genres. While a significant number of instruments, as well as instrumental and vocal forms of musical expression have faded from common practice, being replaced by those coming from outside Toba Batak culture (though many of these eventually became, themselves, a part of the Toba Batak music culture fabric), there remain, in the present day, important sonic and symbolic connections to past representations of Toba Batak cultural identity as evidenced in such popular music genres as Toba Batak pop laments. Many of the older, indigenous forms of instrumental music continue to thrive in Toba Batak society, largely through their connections to adat ritual practice. This is not the case with older, indigenous vocal forms of musical expression (such as lament singing in its connection to pre-funeral wake contexts). What follows in Chapter Five is an examination of death and death rituals in Toba Batak society as a setting for a deeper examination of lament singing in funerary contexts as well as Protestant hymn singing as a replacement for traditional laments (in Chapter Six and Seven, respectively).
Figure 7. Map of North Sumatra showing locations mentioned in Chapter Four.

- Huta Tinggi, p. 134
- Pansur Napitu, p. 149
Chapter 5
Death in Toba Batak Society

This chapter focuses on death in Toba Batak society, looking first at historic records of death, the treatment of the dead and the various rituals surrounding death as they appear in early documents from travelers, missionaries and Dutch administrative officers. The intent is to glean an understanding of the social construction of death for Toba Batak people from the earliest observations concerning it. Following this, I discuss Toba Batak concepts of death in relation to the spirit / soul (TB: tondi), examining Toba Batak concepts of the soul in life and in relation to the afterlife. This is followed by an examination of Toba Batak terminology related to death and dying as a way to further understand the social construction of death in the past as well as in the present day. Finally, the chapter discusses death in Toba Batak society from the perspective of the Protestant Christian Church, highlighting areas of potential conflict between what the Protestant Church teaches concerning death and the afterlife and what Toba Batak culture has traditionally understood to be the relationship between the living and the dead as well as the treatment of the dead at the occurrence of death.

Early Reports Concerning Death in Toba Batak Society

Reports by European travelers describing the funerary ritual practice of the Toba Batak are few and far between. Many of the descriptions that relate to death in Toba Batak society tend to be focused on the supposed practice of cannibalism among the Toba Batak. Travel writers, explorers, and missionaries made much of
this practice, beginning with the 15th century report by Venitian Nicolo di Conti. This section deals specifically with reports of funerary ritual practice and the behavior of the Toba Batak in response to a death in their community.

The earliest report of the funerary rituals of the Batak (most likely the Toba Batak) is that of the Englishman William Marsden in his, *The History of Sumatra*, first published in 1783. Marsden’s book is the earliest monograph with a specific focus on Sumatra (“The Government, Laws, Customs and Manners of the Native Inhabitants,” is the subtitle). In his account he devotes a chapter to the Batak and their culture. Marsden’s report is based more on secondhand reporting and hearsay than on firsthand observation, as Marsden stayed mainly along the west coast in the company of English residents involved in trade negotiation and oversight. Even so, his book provides an excellent early description of the Batak as well as some insight into the attitudes and biases of some of the island’s other peoples toward the Batak.

His description of Batak funeral ceremonies is based on information he gathered concerning the death of a *raja* or person of consequence. He mentions that the funeral activities usually occupied several months. The reasons for this lengthy period are several and are concerned with practical as well as cultural consideration: some mourners will have traveled a great distance in order to participate in funeral rites, so adequate time is given for such journeys; *adat* regulations restrict the performance of certain *adat* ceremonies in close proximity to planting and harvesting seasons; etc. During this period of time the corpse was left unburied and placed in a “coffin” made from the hollowed-out halves of a tree trunk that had been split.
lengthwise. When the body was placed inside the tree trunk, the two halves were reunited, tied together with rattan cords and sealed with a kind of glue (Marsden 1783:322). Marsden’s report does not name this particular rite. However, because a similar rite has existed until recent times (and in some areas still does), it seems evident, based on his description, that the practice he describes is known as *pangarapotan*, from the Toba Batak word *rapot* which is a kind of traditional glue used to join things together. The process was described to me by older Toba Batak I interviewed concerning Toba Batak burial rites, and is discussed in Richard Sinaga’s book, *Meninggal Adat Dalihan Natolu* (1999).\(^40\) The term *pangarapotan* also has an alternate meaning that is more commonly used in the context of present day funerary ritual. Because, in the present day, a western-style coffin (usually made of plywood or some other wood, such as pine or *ingul*—a fragrant, easily workable, local wood) is much more commonly used than a tree trunk, the word *pangarapotan* is alternatively used to describe a meeting of local leaders or elders (TB: *angka raja* / *raja adat* / *natua*) who gather to discuss matters related to *adat* and *adat* ceremonial practice. This meeting involves all the male members of the *suhut* group (the feast hosting group) as well as those from the *hula-hula* group (the wife-giving group) and the village leaders. It commonly takes place on the evening prior to the funeral feast and burial ceremony. Following a ritual meal, the leaders sit together to discuss and confirm that all the preparations are set for the next day’s events.

\(^{40}\) These interviews took place on numerous occasions. One such interview was at the pre-funeral wake of Bapak Manullang in Balata on January 22, 2003. Richard Sinaga’s description of the pangarapotan rite is found on page 62 of his book *Meninggal Adat Dalihan Natolu* (1999) published by Dian Utama, Jakarta.
Marsden’s description of Toba Batak funerary ritual continues with his description of the arrival of friends, relations and other guests for the funeral ritual.

Each of the men brings with him

“a buffalo, hog, goat, dog, fowl, or other article of provision, according to his ability, and the women baskets of rice, which are presented and placed in order. The feasting begins and continues for nine days and nights, or so long as the provisions hold out. On the last of these days the coffin is carried out and set in an open space, where it is surrounded by the female mourners, on their knees, with their heads covered, and howling (ululantes) in dismal concert, whilst the younger persons of the family are dancing near it, in solemn movement, to the sound of gongs, kalintangs, and a kind of flageolet; at night it is returned to the house, where the dancing and music continues, with frequent firing of guns, and on the tenth day the body is carried to the grave, preceded by the guru or priest, whose limbs are tattooed in the shape of birds and beasts, and painted of different colours, with a large mask on his face. He takes a piece of buffalo-flesh, swings it about, throwing himself into violent attitudes and strange contortions, and then eats the morsel in a voracious manner. He then kills a fowl over the corpse, letting the blood run down upon the coffin, and just before it is moved both he and the female mourners, having each a broom in their hands, sweep violently about it, as if to chase away the evil spirits and prevent their joining the procession, when suddenly four men, stationed for the purpose, lift up the coffin, and march quickly off with it, as if escaping from the fiend, the priest continuing to sweep after it for some distance. It is then deposited in the ground, without any peculiar ceremony, at a depth of three or four feet; the earth about the grave is raised, a shed built over it, further feasting takes place on the spot for an indefinite time, and the horns and jaw-bones of the buffaloes and other cattle devoured on the occasion are fastened to the posts” (Marsden 2006: 322-323).

While Marsden’s report is quite detailed and picturesque, it provides little insight into the socio-cultural or religious dimensions of the ceremony. Such information begins to appear during the late 19th century, when ethnographic observation was beginning to include elements of social inquiry in its discourse. The writings of German missionary Johannes Warneck (1867-1944), particularly in Die Religion der Batak (1909), provide a good example of this discourse. In his book he discusses at length
Toba Batak concepts about death and the dead – although his primary focus is not so much funerary ritual as it is the religious belief associated with death, the world of the spirits, and the spirit / soul of man (TB: tondi). In Warneck’s The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism (1909), an English translation of Die Religion der Batak, he gives some brief descriptions of the treatment of the dead, preparation of the body prior to burial, as well as information concerning laments which are sung for the dead and the intentions behind the lamenting. Much of what he has to say in this text is driven by a missionary zeal that sees the unconverted Toba Batak as in a state of perpetual fear of the consequences of improperly or inadequately catering to the whims of their ancestor’s spirits. The book, in the broadest sense, is an appeal to other Christian missionaries to bring the light of the Gospel into the darkened heathen world, and the Toba Batak are Warneck’s case study subjects. Beyond the rhetoric of Warneck’s particular religious worldview, the book provides some glimpses of the funerary ritual of the Toba Batak in and around the pre-Christian era. Additionally, Warneck’s study of Toba Batak religion provides insight into the socio-cultural and socio-religious world of the Toba Batak which earlier descriptions neglect. In addition to the descriptions of Warneck, the German medical missionary Johannes Winkler (1874-1958) also wrote briefly on funerary practices of the Toba Batak in his 1925 book Die Toba-Batak auf Sumatra in gesunden und kranken Tagen (The Toba Batak of Sumatra in Healthy and Unhealthy Days), describing the pangarapotan rite (mentioned above) as well as brief remarks regarding lament (TB: andung) singing.41

41 See Winkler 1925:55ff., 130.
Descriptive Terms for the Dead in Toba Batak Society

Toba Batak makes use of various terms to describe death and dying, in much the same way that the dead are variously described in English i.e. passed on, dead, passed away, deceased, expired, etc. Among the Toba Batak the most frequently used term in reference to death is *mate*, a fairly neutral term meaning dead or to die. Johannes Warneck, in his Batak Toba Dictionary: *Toba Bataks – Nederlands Woordenboek* (1905) lists numerous descriptive variations on the term *mate* including: *mate mogap*—death from weakness (failure to thrive); *mate gasing*—a term used to describe one who dies without anyone to care for the body (most likely due to extreme poverty or isolation); *mate onjap*—death in poverty; *mate mangkar*—dying with unfinished business / with work left uncompleted (here often figuratively referring to those who’s children are not yet all married—see *sarimatua*); *mate garam*—death through accident or unexpected, sudden illness; *mate so mangan*—death from starvation (also *mate molsap*); *mate maup*—drowning death; *mate marsak*—death because of sadness; *mate sumalin*—a woman who dies while pregnant and therefore without honor (in other words, she has not fulfilled her responsibility to extend the line of descendants and therefore is not honored in her dying). These expressions are still commonly used by Toba Batak, often as a way of giving further explanation about the cause of death or the situation in which a person has died.

Aside from these terms, which are largely descriptive additions to the term *mate*, there are other Toba Batak expressions used in reference to death. After the term *mate* the two most commonly used are *jumolo* a superlative “um” form of the
word *jolo*, meaning ‘first’. In this case the term *jumolo* means that the individual, dying, has ‘gone on ahead’ in a definitive way. The other common expression is *monding* which is a contracted form of the phrase *modom onding*, where *modom* means ‘sleep’ and *onding* means ‘closed’ or ‘covered.’ This term is often seen inscribed on the cross-shaped grave markers or painted on the “tugu” after secondary burial rites. An example being: *Tubu (born) 13 Desember 1944 – Monding 05 Januari 1998*. The term *maradian* is most commonly seen on grave markers (more so than *monding*), and is the verb form of the word *adi* meaning ‘rest’.

**Titles for the Dead and Connections to Toba Batak Adat**

The above terms relate to either the specific type of death a person experiences or just function as general terms and expressions for death. There is another vocabulary of death that describes the deceased and the manner of their death, and at the same time ascribes a level of status or honor to the deceased based upon the degree to which they have fulfilled *adat*-derived obligations to add honor, prestige and descendants to their clan and kin.42 These terms have more to do with a person’s condition (relative to their *adat* obligations) at the time of death than with the particular way in which they died. Following is a list of these terms.43

1. *mate di boritan*—derived from the word *bori* (and the related verb *mambobori*) meaning ‘not yet come into fruit’. The term describes a baby that dies stillborn in the

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42 See the discussion regarding the ‘3-H’ (*hagabeon, hasangapon, and hamoraon*) value structure in Chapter Three.

womb. According to Sinaga (1999:37) such a decedent is given no adat related ceremony. The body is merely wrapped in cloth and placed in the ground.

2. *mate poso-poso, mate dakdanak, mate bulung*—all three of these terms relate to the death of a child/young person. *Poso-poso* is a term that means ‘baby’ or ‘toddler’, *dakdanak* refers to a ‘small child’ and *bulung* refers to a ‘young person’ who is unmarried. In this category of decease, adat regulations are minimal and indicate only that a woven *ulos* cloth is used to cover the deceased at burial. The mourning period for these deaths is short though outward expressions of grief at the time of death are intense and deeply felt. Lament singing rarely, if ever, occurs at the death of a child. Instead of laments (TB: *andung*), a more commonly heard expression of grief in such situations is a bitter, anguished wailing (TB: *angguk*).

The parents of the deceased child are often referred to by the term *tilahaon*, an expression with connections to catastrophe and great tragedy. Parents who repeatedly lose children are referred to as *partilaha*—a term which carries significant weight, even fear, as there is the feeling often accompanying this situation that the parents are somehow cursed. This was the situation with Dewi boru Hutabarat, an acquaintance of our family and a staff member at the Theological College in Pematang Siantar where I’d taught for several years in the 1990s. She and her husband had four children, each of whom died only a few weeks after birth. Though the children seemed healthy at the time of birth they soon after developed an illness and died. It was strongly suggested that these deaths were the results of a curse that had been placed on the parents for some earlier offense against another individual. When Dewi
became pregnant a fifth time she was convinced by others in her family to give the baby to a relative to be raised. They followed this advice and the baby has survived.

3. *mate ponggol*—this term refers to a person who dies as an unmarried young adult. Such a death is referred to as *mate ponggol* or *mate matipul*, both terms relating to the concept of something being broken or snapped. Figuratively the image is of a young tree sapling that is snapped in two. The *adat* rituals associated with this type of death are minimal and the body is interred after only a day or so of lying in repose.

Responses to questions about lament singing in *mate ponggol* situations were sharply contrasting. Some suggested that there is no lamenting in this situation while others stating that there is a great deal of very emotional lamenting. My questions about this contradiction eventually led to an interesting clarification / distinction relative to lamenting—there are three Toba Batak terms which are associated with expressions of grief at times of death: *mangangguk*—which refers to loud wailing and the use of phrases / terms such as “*Among!*” or “*Inong!*” or “*Ompung!*”—these are *hata andung* names for the deceased and mean respectively “Father!” “Mother!” “Grandfather/mother!” An *angguk* response often takes place at times when feelings of grief are at their most intense. This may be in the moments immediately following the death of an individual, or when first receiving the news of a death, or when first entering a house where a pre-funeral wake is taking place. Aside from being an intense emotional release, this type of wailing (*mangangguk*) also serves as an audible signal for the neighboring community that tragedy has struck. At such a signal, those close at hand will stop whatever activity they are doing and seek out the
source of the tragedy, ready to give comfort and handle whatever any preparations
that need to take place, such as cleaning and preparing the body for the pre-funeral
wake period.

Another term associated with expressions of grief is the term *mangandung*, from the
term *andung* and referring to a lament as discussed in Chapter Six. The third term
that is used in reference to expressions of grief and sadness is *martangis*, which
means crying or weeping (tears). Gail Host-Warhaft, in her insightful discussion of
lament in cross-cultural perspective point out that in many cultures where lament
traditions exist (Greece, New Guinea, China, Saudi Arabia, Ireland, etc.) it is men
who cry (sometimes with tears, other times in silence) and women who turn weeping
and tears into structured laments for the dead. Women, in these cultures, are
understood to be the lamenters and men are understood to shed tears.44 This is very
much in keeping with Toba Batak cultural expressions of grief and sadness associated
with death, where lament (TB: *andung*) is understood to be a part of women’s culture
and men express grief through weeping and the shedding of tears. These three
responses to grief in Toba Batak society (*mangangguk*, *mangandung*, and *martangis*)
appear variously depending on the context and on the one who is grieving, and as
such, are connected to matters of gender and traditional expressions of grief in Toba
Batak society. While in the present day these three modes of expressing grief do not
appear with equal frequency (for reasons which will be explored in the following
chapters), the term most frequently used to describe the outward, public expression of

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20-27.
grief in the context of death is *mangandung*. Several Toba Batak whom I interviewed suggested that this was the reason for the seemingly conflicting responses relative to the expression of grief in the context of a *mate ponggol* death. While some described the outward expressions of grief as a lament (*andung*) in fact the most common emotional expressions in these situations were closer to wailing (*angguk*) because of the especially bitter feelings of loss (and possibly even shame) by older survivors and other clan members, as well as the shorter duration of pre-funeral wake period prior to burial. This suggests the possibility that the distinctions between lamenting and wailing have become more difficult to clearly distinguish in the present day – a possibility that will be more fully explored in later chapters.

4. *mate di paralang-alangan*. The type of death this term refers to is that in which the deceased is already a married person but does not yet have children. The term *paralang-alangan* refers to something that is begun but is not yet finished – a person who dies having already married but before having had children (situationally positioned but reproductively incomplete) is understood to have died with unfinished business. A death under these conditions is bitterly grievous and reflects the high social value placed on producing future generations.45 *Adat* regulations regarding funeral rituals in a *mate paralang-alangan* situation indicate that two woven *ulos*

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45 There is a great deal of pressure placed on Toba Batak married couples (primarily on the woman) by their extended family to increase the family line. If, after a year of marriage, no children have resulted, the woman’s integrity, health, honesty, etc. may be called into question by her husband’s family. After several years of marriage with no offspring, he may be encouraged to produce an heir with a woman other than his wife. In earlier times there were *adat* provisions for taking additional wives if needed. Now, however, the Protestant Church prohibits polygamy – a condition which has resulted in significant cognitive dissonance with regard to the *adat* injunction to produce descendants as well as the cultural value placed on *hagabeon* (fecundity).
cloths are given by the family of the deceased prior to the burial. One is used to cover the body of the deceased and the other, called *ulos tujung*, is used to cover the head of the bereaved partner. After the burial the *ulos tujung* is ritually removed from the head, signaling that the bereaved is ready to rejoin the community. If it is the husband who has died and if the deceased’s wife in not pregnant at the time of his death, her family may, following the burial, ritually buy her back from her husband’s family so that she may be free to marry again.

5. *mate mangkar*. This is the term used to describe the death of someone who, though married and having produced children, dies when the children are still quite young – too young to be able to care for themselves. The Toba Batak word *mangkar* has a meaning similar to *paralang-alangan*, and means “not yet finished, not yet fully developed, unresolved”. In the case of *mate mangkar*, if a man is the surviving partner his situation as a widower is referred to as *matompas tataring* which, in literal translation means ‘the cook area has been tipped over / upset’. Figuratively this refers to his wifeless (i.e. cookless) condition. By contrast, if a woman is the surviving partner her situation as a widow is referred to as *matipul ulu* which literally means ‘the head is cut off’. Figuratively this refers to her condition as being without a leader or head of household. Interestingly, both of these expressions may be seen as placing the woman in a position below or subservient to the man – a position that is largely reflective of much of Toba Batak society. The *adat* regulations which shape the funeral rituals in a *mate mangkar* situation nearly the same as those in a *mate paralang-alangan* death. The significant difference being that, because children
have already been born to the couple, the wife (if it is the husband who dies) remains connected to her husband’s family and must rely on them for support and the means to raise her children. Laments performed during the pre-funeral wake period become one of the important vehicles for the wife of the deceased to express her sadness about the loss of her husband (the source of her children’s future means) and may also serve as a means to communicate openly with her husband’s family about her future needs (and those of her children) and her expectations of the family to continue to provide for herself and her children now that her husband is gone. This dynamic use of lament for explicit as well as implicit communication is further discussed in Chapter Six.

6. *mate hatungganeon*. This term is used to describe the death of a married person with children that are now old enough to be married themselves. Some of these children may in fact be married but none of the deceased’s children have yet produced children of their own. The term derives from the Toba Batak word *tunggane*, a term of respect meaning ‘elder’, usually someone 40 years old and older. It is used most commonly with reference to males, however a man may refer to his wife by this term, adding the feminine *boru* to the expression i.e. *tunggane boru*.

With reference to funeral rituals and the *adat* regulations that determine them, a *mate hatungganeon* funeral ritual is similar to that of a *mate mangkar* funeral. Someone who is titled *hatungganeon* is considered to be a respected elder, even wealthy with regard to children or property. Nevertheless, because the deceased’s children have yet to produce children of their own, the family of the deceased is not permitted under
adat regulation to slaughter ritual animals for the distribution of specific portions of meat (TB: jambar) as part of the funeral feast.

7. mate sarimatua. This term is used to describe a deceased who has had children, some (but not all) of whom have married and produced children of their own. This term is used to describe those Toba Batak who, on having died, can demonstrate that they are responsible for two additional generations beyond their own. Particular to the use of this term, though, is the fact that not all of the deceased’s children have married and/or produced children—only some of them. The Toba Batak term sari means ‘to be responsible for/to think on/to ponder over.’ The word matua means ‘elder’ or ‘aged’ and is an honorific term. While the term sarimatua is considered to be a title of great respect and high regard, indicating that the one on whom the title is bestowed is to be held in high esteem, the term also carries with it the element of ‘unfinished business’ (one who dies while still bound to their responsibilities). This concept of being bound to one’s responsibilities is demonstrated visually in that the deceased, while lying in state during the pre-funeral wake, and at the time of internment, is placed on the bed/in the coffin with their hands folded together, fingers entwined, resting over their chest area. This symbolically represents one who, though greatly respected (they are accorded matua status), remains bound by unfulfilled responsibilities/obligations.

In contrast to the adat regulations described above, the family of one who dies with the title mate sarimatua is permitted—even obligated—to slaughter ritually prescribed animals (primarily lombu sitio—cow, or gaja toba/horbo—water buffalo)
for distribution and consumption by specific representatives of the *dalihan na tolu* group present at the funeral festivities.\textsuperscript{46}

8. *mater saur matua*. The Toba Batak term *saur* means ‘complete, arrived, fulfilled’. The title *saur matua* is reserved for those persons who, upon their death, have all their children married and also have received grandchildren from each of their children. This title indicates that the deceased has fulfilled their *adat*/*marga*/*dalihan na tolu* obligation to produce two following generations before the time of their death. Such a person is ‘complete’ – they are greatly honored at the time of their death with the pre-funeral wake lasting up to a week’s duration. The funeral feast may last more than a day, depending on whether or not additional death-related rituals such as secondary burials (TB: *mangongkal holi*) are carried out at the same time. It is not uncommon to combine rituals due to the fact that a *saur matua* funeral feast will draw family members from great distances, resulting in a gathering clan and kin well in excess of a hundred. *Adat* regulations with regard to ritual animals are similar to those for a *sarimata* feast however in the case of someone who is *mater saur matua* the animal is almost always a water buffalo and the meat for the ritual distribution

\textsuperscript{46} Toba Batak *adat* regulates how the animal is to be slaughtered, how the flesh is to be treated (the hair is generally burned off – *na tinutungan* – and the meat is boiled), how the meat is to be cut, to whom the various parts are to be distributed and in what particular order the distribution is to take place. Great attention is paid to these details. Such attention demonstrates: fidelity to *adat* regulations; the knowledge, care and skill with which the *suhut* (feast hosting family) carries-out *adat* regulations; honor and loving respect for the deceased and the ancestor spirits; a desire to avoid causing any offense by skipping over a guest who, by rights, should receive a portion of the meat or by distributing the wrong portion of meat to a guest. My personal experience at the wedding feast of my wife’s adoptive younger brother, during which I acted in the role of *parhobas* (servant / worker) as a member of the *boru* group (wife-receiving group) helping with the distribution of ritual portions of meat, allowed me to experience, firsthand, the great care that is taken to avoid any offense during the performance of this ritual.
(TB: *jambar*) is prepared with the hair still attached (TB: *na marimbulu*) and distributed uncooked. Additionally, for a *saur matua* feast the traditional *gondang sabangunan* ensemble is frequently played during which time the various *dalihan na tolu* group members, as well as clan, village, and other associations (work, church, etc.) join in celebrative rounds of *tor-tor* dancing. The atmosphere and general attitude of a saur matua feast is joyful and celebrative. A person who is accorded the title *saur matua* has brought prestige to the larger clan as well as the prospect for a prosperous future through the provision of at least two new generations. Laments which celebrate and recall the life of the deceased (TB: *andung riwayat hidup*) may take place, provided there is someone present who has the skills and knowledge to perform them, but they usually take place during the days soon after the death has occurred—during the pre-funeral wake period. By the time the burial feast takes place the singing of laments is largely replaced by more celebrative expressions such as dancing and the playing of *gondang* pieces that celebrate the life and fruitfulness of the deceased.

9. *mate saur matua na mauli bulung*. This is the highest, most honored title given to a deceased person in Toba Batak society. To be given the title *saur matua na mauli bulung* the deceased must have lived long enough to produce not only children and grandchildren (TB: *marpahompu*) but great grandchildren (TB: *marnini-marnono*) as well.\(^47\) There is great joy and celebration at the funeral proceedings for a Toba Batak who has lived long enough to be given the title *saur matua na mauli bulung*. I

\(^{47}\) The grandchildren (TB: *pahompu*) of the decedent’s sons are called *nini* and the grandchildren of the decedent’s daughters are called *nono*. 

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attended one such burial feast in 1997 in the village of Singkam near Limbong (see Figure 8). The pesta was for Ompung Washington Ompung Boru, the grandmother of Washington Limbong—my adoptive uncle (he is referred to as my Bapak Uda, meaning that he is the younger brother of my Toba Batak father). Ompung Washington Ompung Boru was considered to be 98 years old. At the time of her death she had several adult great grandchildren. The funerary feast and celebration lasted for more than 3 days and included not only her burial feast but the disinterment of the bones of her husband and son and their secondary burial in a recently-built cement monument (TB: *tambak*) commonly referred to by the Indonesian word *tugu* (monument). The secondary burial rite, known as *ulaon mangongkal holi*, is generally performed by family members two generations below the person being reburied. During the festivities in Singkam (1997) the *gondang sabangunan* was played from the upper balcony of a traditional Toba Batak house overlooking the festival area where *tor-tor* dancing was taking place.\(^{48}\)

This section has focused on titles for the dead and the varieties of *adat* ritual that are performed in association with them. What follows is a broader discussion concerning mortuary practices in Toba Batak society—the ways in which the body of the deceased is prepared for burial, the activities that take place during the pre-funeral wake period, the rites of consolation (TB: *ulaon pangapulon*) which take place in the home during the pre-funeral wake period and other related activities. My intention in

\(^{48}\) This was an especially memorable event for me as it was during this celebration that our family was officially adopted into the Limbong clan by the leaders of the seven Limbong ‘strands’ (*angka radja ni pitu tali Limbong*).
this discussion of the varieties of pre-funeral wake activities is to highlight those actions which have specific connections to adat regulations as distinguished from those which are not particularly adat related and may instead have connections either to Toba Batak Protestant Christian beliefs and practices or other non-adat related practices, in order to point out the range of variation which is present in Toba Batak funerary ritual in the present day.

**Scholarly contributions to the Study of Toba Batak Funerary Practice**

A number of Toba Batak anthropologists, theologians and scholars of adat have written on mortuary practices as they have occurred in the past as well as in the present day. Notable among them are works by Radja Patik Tampulolon (1964), Drs. Dj. Gultom Rajamarpodang (1992), Drs. Gens G. Malau (2000), Bertha Pardede, et.al. (1981) Dr. S.H.W. Sianipar, DL (1991), Helman Billy Situmorang (1983), Emma Panggabean (1991), and Drs. Richard Sinaga (1999). Among western scholars who have given particular attention to various aspects of the mortuary practices of the Toba Batak are Johannes Warneck (1904, 1909), Johannes Winkler (1925), J. C. Vergouwen ([1933] 1964), Jutta Meyer (1987) and Anthony Reid (2002). Much of the work by these scholars is descriptive in nature, with the primary focus of the writing on analysis of mortuary practice from the Protestant theological point of view – this is particularly the case in works published pre-1950. In contrast, Toba Batak writers tend to be more prescriptive and didactic in their work, giving particular attention to the proper order of ritual events, correctly determining the social status and title of the deceased, the types of adat rituals to be followed, the affinal members
to be included in these rituals and their particular roles, animals that should be
slaughtered for burial feasts and the proper distribution of ritual meat to family
members, etc. The intent of what follows is to provide a description of Toba Batak
mortuary practices gleaned from my observations in the field, interviews with Toba
Batak theologians, musicians and adat specialists, as well as from the works listed
above.

**Adat Ritual as a Reflection of Status in Toba Batak Funerary Practice**

As discussed earlier, there are numerous titles by which Toba Batak refer to or
categorize a person who has died. These titles refer at once to a person’s age at the
time of their dying and also to their status within the community, with particular
regard for the number of descendants they have added to their own clan (TB: marga)
and to the larger community. The greater the number of descent lines, the higher the
person’s status at the time of their death. This status is reflected in the level / amount
of adat ritual which is accorded them at their dying. A person with an exalted status
i.e. sari matua, saur matua or saur matua na mauli bulung, will be celebrated with a
level of adat festivity known as ‘full adat’ (TB: adat na gok). The particular
elements of adat na gok festivities are discussed below.

Among Toba Batak scholars writing about mortuary practices and the adat
ceremonies accompanying them, the vast majority make a distinction between the
adat ceremonies accorded a person who dies having achieved the status of sari matua
or higher (i.e. saur matua / saur matua na mauli bulung), and the adat ceremonies for
those who die with a status below sari matua (i.e. mate hatungganeon, mate
paralong-alangan, mate mangkar, etc.). For those who die with a status below that of *sari matua*, *adat* rites in connection with the death and burial proceedings are brief, some lasting only an hour or so, and may involve the presentation of woven *ulos* cloths, ritual speeches, as well as a shared meal (though not necessarily a ritual feast). In contrast to this, *adat na gok* rites include a week of pre-funeral wake mourning during which time extended family members arrive from distant locations, rites of consolation (TB: *ulaon pangapulon*) led by a variety of church and neighborhood groups take place in the home during the evening hours, hymns are sung, words of comfort and encouragement are shared and laments relating to the life of the deceased (TB: *andung riwayat hidup*) are performed (especially during the first several days of the pre-funeral wake). *Adat na gok* festivities conclude with an elaborate burial feast that lasts for an entire day or more. These burial feasts include the ritual slaughter and distribution of specified animals (water buffalo, horse, cow, pig, etc.), the playing of *gondang sabangunan* music and *tor-tor dancing*, ritual speeches and the exchange of specified gifts.

**Adat Rites for Those Below *Sari Matua* Status**

My conversations with Toba Batak associates point to two types of brief *adat* ceremony in connection with those whose status is below that of *sari matua*. The first is known as *adat partangiangan* (prayer *adat*). This type of *adat* ceremony is held for a person who dies after they have married and have had children but whose
children are still young and unmarried.\textsuperscript{49} In such a situation the family and guests who come for the burial are given a meal (usually a pig is slaughtered) provided by the immediate family of the deceased. Following the meal is a time of prayer, hymn singing, Bible reading, and words of comfort and encouragement. The prayers offered are predominantly requests to God that the children of the deceased will continue to be well raised, given an education and provided for in the ways necessary for them to reach adulthood and maturity. In the present day this ceremony is led by a church official, though not always by the ordained pastor of the parish (TB: pandita resort). More commonly the rite is presided over by either the congregation’s guru huria (a congregational teacher / preacher) or by a church elder (TB: sintua) from the local congregation. The second type of adat ritual mentioned was known as adat mangido tangiang (an adat rite for requesting prayer). This rite is used for an adult who dies but is perhaps not married at the time of their death (or who is married but doesn’t have children). While these two ceremonies share a number of common features, the main difference between them is that the decedent in an adat mangido tangiang is childless at the time of their death. The prayers offered are requests that God be close to the bereaved family so that they won’t be too sad or grieve too greatly over the death of their relative. These are particularly prayers for comfort and expressions of compassion for the family of the deceased. Because the context of adat mangido tangiang does not include concern over the need to provide support for young children, it is considered to be an adat ceremony of lesser consequence than

\textsuperscript{49} The young children of the deceased are often referred to in ritual speeches as “dakdanak na saksak mardum” (children unable to yet care for themselves) (See Sinaga 1999: 39).
that of *adat partangiangan*. That both of these *adat* ceremonies have prayers as a central focus, are conducted under the guidance of church officials, involve the singing of Protestant hymns and, in many ways, share similarities with rites of consolation (TB: *ulaon pangapulon*) that are connected to Protestant Christianity, opens the possibility that these *adat* ceremonies are more recently crafted formulations by the Protestant Church designed to replace an earlier, pre-Christian era, *adat* rite that was practiced under similar circumstances. Further research is needed to either confirm or refute this possibility.

**Considering the Spirits of the Deceased in Below Sari Matua Status Deaths**

Bertha Pardede, whose research involved the structures of ritual speech in Toba Batak *adat* ceremonies, used the term *mate satongkin* (a sudden, unexpected death) in connection to those whose death is accorded a status below *sari matua* (1981:38). The term *mate satongkin* refers to a death which is considered to have happened “before a person’s time”, before the decedent has reached an appropriate age. As such, the term carries within it negative connotations regarding the spirit of the deceased which may feel bitterness at having died too soon and which may try to bother, or in some way cause trouble for, the living family who are left. Rather than try to appease such a spirit through *adat* ceremonies and the offering of conciliatory gifts, the living tend to disassociate themselves from the spirit of the deceased and take steps designed to prevent the spirit from lingering around the home in order to

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50 Pardede’s book *Bahasa Tutur Perhataan dalam Upacara Adat Batak Toba*, reflects research carried out by the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture that focused on the forms and functions of formal language used in Toba Batak *adat* ceremonies, particularly marriage and death ceremonies.
bother the living in any way. Field research associates I spoke with made the point that such feelings regarding the spirit of the deceased were much more common in ‘earlier times,’ associating such feelings or actions with what they described as ‘pre-Christian’ (BI: *pra-Kristen*) times, or ‘dark times’ (BI: *masa kegelapan*), or ‘in the time of our ancestors’ (BI: *pada masa nenek-moyangnya*). The implication being that after Christianity had come to the area and taken root as the religion of the Toba Batak these feelings about the spirits of the dead ceased to be an issue. Fear of, or concern about, the spirits of the dead and their ability to interfere with the lives of the living was being replaced by a Protestant doctrine which insisted on a clear and permanent separation between the world of the living and the world of the dead. My observations at funeral rituals (and especially at the pre-funeral wakes that preceded the burial ceremony) suggest however, that many of these perceptions and behaviors remain an active and dynamic aspect of Toba Batak mortuary rituals and, as such, reflect something of the range of variation as to religious perceptions, beliefs, and concepts associated with Toba Batak funerary behaviors and practices.

**Funerary Practices Relating to the Status of *Sari Matua* and Above**

When a Toba Batak who is of a *sari matua*, *saur matua* or *saur matua na mauli bulung* status dies, the activities which follow their dying assume a greater level of complexity and detail than do those undertaken on behalf of an individual of a lower status. The greater level of complexity and detail associated with such activities is directly connected to the practice of ‘full adat’ (TB: *adat na gok*) accorded to decedents with a higher status.
During my field research I focused particularly on funerary rites that were of *sari matua* status or higher. I did so because the longer period of time allotted to these rites afforded me greater opportunity to observe and interview participants during the rites. I also chose these types of funeral rites because, as I learned, it was at these higher status rites that lament singing was most likely to occur—particularly, as mentioned earlier, in the first several days of the pre-funeral wake period.\(^{51}\) This research model permitted me to spend extended periods of time in and around the home of the decedent observing the range of activities, participating in wakes (particularly in rites of consolation) and interviewing guests, mourners and family members of the deceased. During these observations I became increasingly aware of what I perceived to be a distinction between activities / practices which seemed to be *adat*-related or *adat*-specified (i.e. that seemed to have a ritual quality to them), and other activities / practices that, although linked to the funerary context in general, seemed to be peripheral or outside of *adat* ritual altogether. And, at other times the distinction seemed much less clear.

\(^{51}\) When I queried Toba Batak about lament singing practices as they are found in the present day pre-funeral period I received an overwhelming response indicating that if lament singing were to occur at all it would not (or only very rarely) be heard in any context below the *sari matua* status. This was not to say that there were not outward, vocal expressions of grief or sadness in contexts below *sari matua* to be found. On the contrary, the expressions of sadness and grief at the loss of a young wife or husband, a child, or a new father or mother are very strong, often powerfully bitter and full of emotion. However, Toba Batak scholars and cultural tradition bearers do not classify these highly emotional expressions as *andung* (lament), which, though spontaneously created, are structured expressions of grief. Rather they are known as *angguk*, a term that refers to loud, unstructured wailing. That this distinction is particular to cultural experts and scholars (and not to the general populace) is a reflection of the waning of lament singing in present day Toba Batak society and the fading of some of the distinctive characteristics of lament. Many of the ‘non-specialist’ people I spoke with during my fieldwork did not make a clear distinction between the two, either by imitating a wailing sound and calling it *andung* or by omitting the term *angguk* entirely when discussing types of expressions of grief associated with death.
In order to better understand this range of variation between what was and was not adat-related in funerary contexts – and particularly with reference to activities like laments singing and hymn singing in pre-funeral wake contexts, I conducted a series of interviews with my primary research associate, Pdt. Waldemar Simamora, in order to learn from him about what happens when an older person dies in Toba Batak society – from the time of their death, through to the pre-burial wake period. I chose to interview Pdt. Simamora specifically, because he was very familiar with my research interests, and because he had experienced (in the previous few years) not only the death of his oldest child, Estomihi (which I describe in the Introduction), but also the death of his beloved wife, Nai Estom boru Samosir. Pdt. Simamora was also widely regarded for his knowledge of Toba Batak culture and adat practices, and he was much respected in the Toba Batak community as a clergyman with a pastoral spirit and keen understanding of Protestant theology. What follows are excerpts from our conversations, translated into English from Indonesian and Toba Batak. My reflections on our conversing are interjected throughout. The interviewer is indicated with “Me” and the subject is indicated with “WFS”.

Friday Nov. 8, 2002 interview with WFS

Me: So, I’m interested to know about what kinds of things happen in a Toba Batak community when a person dies? From what I’ve read and observed thus far there clearly seem to be some things that take place when someone dies which are related to adat and particular adat rituals, but I’m sure there are other kinds of things that happen which are perhaps thought of as ‘outside
adat’ or that aren’t particularly conceived of, or categorized, as adat rituals –
maybe things that happen prior to particular adat rituals after a person has
died. Can you tell me about what happens from the moment a person is found
dead (from heart attack, an accident, old age, etc.)? How is the body
‘prepared’ for the pre-funeral wake? What takes place from that time all the
way the period of the pre-burial wake?

WFS: Yes...well, first of all, there are several different types of death / dying
based on a person’s age and other things as well. There are words / titles or
categories used to describe those who die just after birth, there are those who
die as young children / toddlers, those who die when they’re just in puberty
(young adults), those who die after they’ve married but before they’ve had
children, those who die after marriage and after children though none of their
children are yet married. Then there are those who die after they’ve married
and after they’ve had children and after their children have married. Such a
person, when they die, is referred to as ‘mate sari matua’ and the adat that
informs the rituals related to such a death is called ‘adat sari matua’. The
term ‘sari matua’ means that the deceased still has unfulfilled obligations at
the time of their death i.e. those things which still need to be considered /
attended to. Now, if a person dies and at that time they are married and have
children, and if their children are married and have children of their own,
then such a person can be considered ‘mate saur matua’ and the adat that
applies in such a situation is referred to as ‘adat saur matua.’ Following
that, there is another title, higher still than ‘saur matua.’ This title refers to
someone who, at the time of their death, not only has grandchildren but also
great grandchildren. Such a person is considered ‘nunga gabe’ (already
complete) or more formally they are referred to as ‘saur matua na mauli
bulung.’ For these people, according to adat, the gondang sabangunan
should be played, a great feast should be offered, including the slaughter of a
water buffalo and the ritual distribution of the meat, etc. This is what is known as ‘adat na gok.’ Now, if it happens that someone dies – for example, a person dies at home or at the hospital or at some other place, the person’s immediate family is responsible to inform other family members that ‘A’ has died, the cause of death – accident, illness, etc., and the place where the death occurred. The one who does the informing is generally one who is considered a close relation to the deceased. After other nearby family members have been told of the death they will come and help take care of the body. Often bathing the body is one of the first things that happens. After the body is bathed the deceased is dressed and laid-out in the middle of the front room of the house. If the person dies in some accident on the road they may first be bathed at the hospital and then brought to the home. If they die in the fields they are most often brought to the home and then bathed and dressed.

Me: So then it’s the immediate family who cares for the body – the children or the spouse—they’re the ones that bathe and prepare the body for the wake?

WFS: Yes, the immediate family usually does this, but close friends or neighbors may be asked to help, too. For example, when my wife died here in the front room two years ago it was our neighbors who came over and cared for her body just after she died. She suffered a heart attack and died immediately so there was no need to take her to a hospital. The neighborhood ladies came over and bathed her and then asked for some clothes to dress her and get her ready for being laid out.

After this happens, after they’re dressed and laid out on a bed or mat in the front room of the house, then neighbors and close friend begin to arrive and greet the bereaved. They spend time there with the bereaved and ask them: “who are the members of your family that need to be informed of this death, where are they and how do we contact them?” So then the gathered
immediate family, the ‘suhut,’ will let the neighbors know who are the people with dalihan na tolu connections that need to be contacted so that they can come for the pre-funeral and funeral events. These include, first of all, members of the dalihan na tolu group: the dongan satubu, boru and hulahula—and this could be many people who will be informed. This is the first step in the process.

Me: Yes, I remember when Bimen Limbong’s father died in Aek Hahombu, in Tapanuli Selatan, Bimen was living with our family in Medan at the time. I had already been ‘adopted’ into the Limbong clan and as it was reckoned by the clan leaders, I was to be counted as Bimen’s father’s youngest brother—making me the Bapak Uda of Bimen. At around 10 or 11 o’clock at night an inter-city taxi pulled up and a neighbor from Bimen’s village came to tell us all that Ompung Harry had just died the day before and that we were requested to travel immediately to the village and prepare for the burial. We were very sad at his dying (though we knew he had suffered from kidney problems for many years) and additionally troubled too, because Bimen was supposed to fly to the U.S. the next day on his way to Alaska. We made some quick phone calls to friends at the consulate in Medan to arrange things so that he could delay his departure and not lose his visa, and then headed south to their village early the next day. We were one of the last of the immediate family to arrive. I remember, though, that the neighbor who had brought the news didn’t stay for more than a few minutes because he had many others to inform.

So, after the news of the death is passed along and while these people are being sought out, what is happening? Are there preparations being made for the gathering of all the family and others who are making their way to the home of the deceased? How do the people at the home occupy their time while they wait for the arrival of dalihan na tolu family and others to arrive?
WFS: For Batak people, the first thing is that we feel sadness over the death of this person and we need to express that sadness. We do this by crying or wailing loudly. The term for this is ‘mangangguki’. This is very loud crying. One could say it is hysterical crying because the person is so very sad at that moment. This kind of wailing doesn’t incorporate any singing nor is it thought of as singing in the way that a lament is. Besides serving to express the deep, initial sadness someone feels because of the death, this loud wailing works as a kind of signal to those nearby (perhaps working in their fields or those in nearby houses) that someone has died. The emotion contained within this wailing is one of utter heartbreak and the dashing of hopes concerning the one who has died. Even though the deceased may be quite elderly (already with grandchildren or great grandchildren), still, there is this strong initial sadness at their dying. After this, in the days that follow prior to burial, there may be no more crying for this elderly person because of their exalted status as ‘saur matua’ or ‘mauli bulung’—there’s no need to feel sad for them any longer—but initially it is important for the immediate family to signal grief in this way. And these strong outbursts of sadness will happen repeatedly (though briefly) as family members traveling from a distance arrive at the home. For the traveler, this is their first look at the deceased and it is important to show deep sadness in this way. Usually, this crying only lasts for a few moments but if they keep up their crying others may get concerned or upset and ask, “Why are you crying still? This person is already ‘mauli bulung’. There should be no more crying for them. We should celebrate their life.”

From Pdt. Simamora’s comments above it would seem that there is a general acceptance of outward (and emotionally profound) expressions of grief and sadness at the death of a person – even an older, highly honored person.
These expressions of grief are welcomed and even expected. There is also however, a point at which such expressions are perceived to be “too much,” and this perception relates not only to what is considered an appropriate level of grief at the death of an older person of high status but also, as will be shown below, what is considered to be “dangerous” in that it leaves the grieving person open and exposed to assault from malevolent spirits (TB: begu) who might cause them physical or emotional harm.

Me: So, once the deceased is dressed and laid out, where are they placed in the house and how are they situated...on a mat on the floor, on a bed, in a coffin?

W: Well there are a number of ways to situate the deceased, depending on the particular circumstances of the family. If the family of the deceased is economically struggling they may simply lay the body on a woven mat and after the body is dressed, place an ulos over the body, usually covering the lower half of the body, from the waist down. An ulos such as ulos sibolang—a black one—or another type of ulos such as ulos ragi hotang may be used. In other situations—if the family is economically stable or well to do—they may prepare a bed and place the body on it. The bed is brought to the middle of the front room and space is cleared around the bed in order to make room for visitors who will be stopping by over the next several days and will be sitting on the floor surrounding the body. Some place the body on the wooden slats of the bed directly, others may place a mattress on the bed with the body on top. There are many variations...some decorate the bed with flowers or a framed and enlarged formal, seated photo of the deceased. Some place a thin sheet or gauze over the body to keep flies away or place perfumed oils near the body. Some place blocks of ice underneath the bed to help keep the body cool. There is no fixed practice and variations on how the body is laid out
and cared for most often have to do with the financial means at the family’s disposal.

Pdt. Simamora’s description of how the body is laid out in the front room is a good example of a non-\textit{adat} related practice within which there is a large amount of acceptable variation. From his description, the meaningful act is that of laying out the body of the deceased in the front room of the house for the period of pre-funeral wake visitation and mourning. The particular way in which the body is laid out is, in this case, more a matter of family economics than it is a matter of adherence to a particular \textit{adat} regulation.

\textit{Me}: You mentioned the placement of scented oils to help with displacing odor, and it reminds me of experiences where I’ve seen the use of burned incense to mask the odor of decay as well as the use of flavored ice treats, sold by a local vendor, to help keep the body cool. I admit it was a very unusual sight—this particular man was lying there surrounded by brightly colored ice treats that were slowly melting inside their plastic wrappers. I guess you use whatever means are available. What about any kind of formal medical preparation of the body—the injection of formalin (formaldehyde) to help the body last the several days of the pre-funeral visitation period?

\textit{WFS}: Yes, someone from a health clinic or a mid-wife or a local government health official is usually called by one of the family members to come and administer an injection of formalin. This usually happens while the body is being prepared—the washing and dressing time. This is often what happens in the present day. Formerly there was no formalin and it is said that kapur \textit{sirih} (a white, paste-like chalk; an ingredient in the preparation of betel nut chew) was used. It was spread on the body of the deceased—on their torso and areas that tend to quickly swell up after death—and this would enable the
body to last for several days. Just like the Israelites used spices to preserve the body, or the ancient Egyptians made mummies, Bataks in earlier times had a similar way of preserving the body.

Now, after all these preparations have been completed, family and guests who have been summoned begin to arrive at the home. In earlier days, after a large number of guests had gathered it was not uncommon for someone who was gifted at lamenting to begin to lament. They would cry and express their sadness through their lament. The lamenting was almost always related to the life of the deceased in the room, however it also happened that the lamentor might, at that moment, recollect their own sad experiences (perhaps the death of a close relation such as a parent, spouse or child) and their lament would be focused on that experience. They would relive the memory and emotions of that experience through their lamenting. Such situations are often very nostalgic. When such lamenting occurs many of the people gathered there listening would cry as well—the emotion is very strong as they listen and remember their own experiences. This crying is a good way for the people gathered there to release the sadness they feel from the present situation. People feel that it is healthy to cry.

This comment is reflective of similar comments made by lamenters I recorded and interviewed during my field research. Crying, the outward expression of sadness and grief, was felt to bring a release and a relief to the one crying. Shedding tears is thought to be a healthy palliative to the tension and weight of grief. This is a subject that is discussed further in Chapter Six and Seven in relation to the benefits of lamenting and of singing church hymns in the context of pre-funeral wakes.

Me: When this happens, say on the first day that people have gathered, would there be other music happening, such as hymn singing, or musicians playing?
WFS: If there is other music happening, like instrumental music, it usually begins on the second or third day, not on the first. On the first day people are still gathering—coming by the house and staying to watch and wait with the family. There may be some formal speeches made to give comfort and encouragement to the family. These speeches are made by neighbors and close friends who are referred to as the ‘dongan sahuta’ (literally meaning ‘friends of one’s village,’ i.e. neighbors). This kind of speech-making, comfort-giving action is called, ‘mangapuli’ (a verb form of the word ‘apul’ meaning to give comfort). There is generally very open expression of grief and sadness in the form of weeping and wailing, a new wave of which begins with each arrival of a family member or friend throughout the day. In the present day, since most Batak are Christians, it often happens that when groups come to the house they hold a small Christian ceremony. These ceremonies involve prayers, a reading from the Bible, words of encouragement, and the singing of hymns. Now, it often happens that the hymn singing becomes the way for people to express their grief / their crying. They will ‘cry’ through the hymns. Not everyone knows how to lament—they can only make sobbing sounds, like this—iiihi…iiiih…iiiih. But people need to be able to cry with words too, for example: ompuuum…nunga borhat ma ho, ompuuum (TB: meaning grandfather/mother…now you have left us…). So if someone comes to visit at the home of the deceased and they don’t know how to cry like this and they feel embarrassed or ashamed, they can sing hymns as a way of voicing their grief. So, these groups or individuals will come throughout the day and into the evening and that’s pretty much how the first day unfolds. There may be times when some tea or coffee is served as people wait through the day, passing the time with the family. Men will step outside to smoke and talk together. And if the family of the deceased is economically capable, they may provide a meal—either lunch or supper—to
those who come to sit. This doesn’t happen always, only if the family is able to handle it financially. This giving of some kind of refreshment, such a tea or coffee, is considered an adat obligation—part of the hospitality of host toward those who are present.

Pdt. Simamora’s reference to hymn singing as a vehicle for expressing sadness and for crying is directly connected to the increasing lack of fluency in the specialized register of language used in lament, known as *hata andung*. For a variety of reasons that will be further explored in the next chapter, there are fewer Toba Batak in the present day who are fluent in *hata andung* and fewer still with sufficient knowledge of *hata andung* to be able to spontaneously create a lament. Instead, what is increasingly replacing this tradition is the singing of Protestant church hymns which use the non-specialized register of everyday Toba Batak language known as *hata somal*, thus enabling anyone fluent in Toba Batak to participate. One of the things which this linguistic register shift enables is the reinforcement of communal solidarity through participation in a shared body of songs—an aspect of community which was present in different forms when traditional laments were the primary expression of grief in such contexts.

Me: If someone comes to the house to view the deceased and sit with the family, and they want to lead a small ceremony of hymn singing, prayers, etc. such as we talked about, how do they go about it? Are they free to begin such a ceremony when they wish or is there someone who is overseeing the events in the house from whom they get permission?

W: Oh, well it’s important to look at the situation once you arrive and after greeting the family. It wouldn’t be appropriate to simply stand and begin a small ceremony like that. There may be others present who have the same
intention and it would be considered rude to jump ahead of them, especially if they have been there since before you arrived. If, after viewing the situation, it seems that there are not other small ceremonies waiting to happen then you would be free to approach the family and tell them you’d like to say some words / to address the gathering. You ask permission first.

Now, throughout the evening more and more people will begin to come to the house. People who’ve come home from work or come in from the fields. The evening will be filled with these small services of hymn singing, prayer and scripture reading, and short speeches of encouragement to the family. Led by various groups (from church, work, the neighborhood, etc.), each one will last about 10 minutes. This will continue until about 11 or 12 at night, after which time most folks have returned to their homes. Those that remain after that time are the immediate family members, and they will sit with the deceased through the night, catching short naps on the floor around the body. It is during this time—from midnight till the early morning hours just before sunrise—that people who have the ability, and who feel the need, will lament. During the night they may talk about the deceased with the family in order to gather information that they will later include in their lament. In Toba Batak the phrase which describes this is: “diputik-putiki ma riwayat hidup ni na mate on” (to pick out / select the events of the deceased’s life story). Or the lamenter may describe their own sufferings—the hard experiences and losses from their own life. This is especially the case when the person who is lamenting does not know the deceased well, or if they feel particularly moved to recall experiences from their own life. If the lamenter draws material from the life story of the deceased their lament may describe both positive and negative aspects of the deceased’s life—the good qualities as well as the bad. Everything is open and the lament expresses to the community that “this is the life story of this person.” There is an openness and honesty rarely expressed in other situations. These laments express ideas that convey the pain of the
lamenter over the death of the one being lamented, the good and positive things from the deceased’s life which will serve as an example for coming generations, and the bad qualities of the deceased’s character which will now be left behind.

This particular aspect of the lament tradition—the opportunity to speak openly and honestly about the deceased through laments is one which a number of Protestant clergy spoke very positively about, saying that, from the standpoint of pastoral counseling and caring for families in grief, the kind of openness and honesty they experienced through listening to traditional laments was of great benefit.

Me: So these laments have a teaching / advice-giving / didactic function to them. They’re given to the community to benefit the community in the days ahead—a kind of morality tale.

WFS: Yes. These laments are highly valued by those who listen to them—by the family of the deceased and by the larger community. And the lamenter is greatly respected and viewed as wise and knowing as they share these things through their lament. So the lament may be about the life of the lamenter or about the life of the deceased, but not only these things. Other things may be included in a lament...current events, social and political situations may come up, etc. It’s not strictly limited to the lamenter’s or the deceased’s life story. These laments can go on for hours at a time and it may be that the lament singer doesn’t shed any tears during the course of the lament. They may even laugh at times in the unfolding of the lament. If they’re thirsty they may ask for tea before they continue their lament. They are definitely given a ‘space’ through the act of lamenting. When someone is lamenting, the attention of others is strongly drawn to the lament. If people are sleeping in the early
morning hours, the sound of a lament beginning will rouse them from their sleep and they will give careful attention to the lament and the message it conveys from the experiences of the lamenter. Experience is the best teacher.

These comments by Pdt. Simamora point to one of the significant functions of lament in Toba Batak society—through laments important messages, lessons, advice, etc., from the life of the deceased as well as the life of the lamenter can be communicated to those listening. Further, through the process of lamenting in pre-funeral wake contexts a kind of social cohesion is created and reinforced—a sense of community solidarity, not unlike the solidarity resulting from the communal singing of hymns during pre-funeral wakes, though in a different form. This creation and maintenance of community solidarity through shared grief is further explored in Chapter Eight.

Me: I understand the important role that laments played in teaching and counseling the gathered community from the life story of the lamenter or the deceased. But are / were there other ways in which lament was used. For instance I have read and heard about laments being used to communicate with the ancestor spirits—this seems to be one of the strong objections of the church to lamenting. What is your understanding of this—especially in former times, either in pre-Christian times or when the church was just newly present here?

WFS: When someone is lamenting it is as though they are speaking with the deceased directly, even in the course of their recounting the life story of the deceased. And it happens that they will make requests of those who died long ago, using the deceased as the intermediary. In other words, they will ask the deceased to pass a message on to someone who has already died. In this way they may make a request or they may simply pass along information to an
earlier decedent through the deceased. For example, a woman lamenting her
dead husband may request that he inform her long dead parents that her
children are growing up nicely and doing well in school. In this way her
husband acts as an intermediary or as a conduit between the world of the
living and the world of ancestor spirits. He is standing in the gap between
those worlds.52

Me: It sounds like we’re talking about three kinds of ‘functions’ of lament:
First, to communicate the life story of the deceased; second, to give advice / to
teach the community from the life experiences of the deceased; and third, to
use the deceased as a conduit for communication with ancestor spirits. Were
all these present in earlier times and are they all still a part of people’s
perceptions of ‘what lament is about’ in the present?

WFS: In former times, I would say that the primary intention of lament was to
communicate the life story of the deceased, and then it was to communicate
with the ancestor spirits. Indirectly, laments served a didactic / advice-giving
purpose. In the present, with the pervasive influence of the Protestant Church
I would say that the use of lament as a conduit for communication with the
ancestor spirits has greatly diminished since this is a practice contrary to
church teaching. The other two ‘intentions’ still remain, with life-story
telling as the primary intention and teaching / advice-giving as an indirect
intention. And I think there could be a further use of lament in the present
day: filling the time or occupying the time in order to keep others from
sleeping—to keep people alert and awake as they sit together through the
night with the deceased. (This may have been a way lament was used in the
past, as well.)

52 For a related discussion in the context of Greek women’s lament see Caravelli-Chaves, Anna. 1980.
“Bridge Between Worlds: The Greek Women’s Lament as Communicative Event.” In Journal of
Me: Why is it important for people to stay awake and watch over the deceased? What’s the reason for this?

WFS: It may be that in the past people felt that during the night, and in the presence of a dead body, ghosts (TB: ‘begu’) would come and bother them if they slept. Therefore, it was a matter of safety and security to remain awake. They didn’t want to be bothered or perhaps even have their tondi (spirit / soul-stuff) taken or harmed by these ghosts. Nowadays I don’t know to what degree people still feel this way or to what degree people try to stay awake during the night just because it is part of our practice and tradition. Also, in former times people would watch over the body of a deceased in order to protect the body from those who would take it (especially if the deceased were a child or young person) and use the body in the making of magic powders or potions (TB: pupuk) which were then placed inside the small totem (TB: pangulubalang) carved on the sacred staff (TB: tunggal panaluan) of the spirit practitioners (TB: datu). Likewise the graves of those who died sudden, untimely deaths had to be guarded for seven days and nights in order to protect the body from grave robbers who would take the body for the same purpose.

So this lament singing and sitting with the body and the visitations by neighbors and friends and the small ceremonies…all of these things would continue for several days (especially in the case of an older person who was accorded the title ’sari matua’ or ’saur matua’) as family continued to gather and adat ceremony preparations for the burial were set in motion. During the daylight hours the body is simply left in the house. There are no special ceremonies taking place during this time. There really isn’t even someone who is appointed to watch over the body. If people come by to look at the deceased during the daylight hours that’s no problem, but they usually just
come by to look and then maybe they’ll stop by again in the evening when there is a crowd gathered and the situation is a bit more formal with rites of consolation taking place in the early evening and perhaps lamenting happening later into the night.

There are several kinds of laments that might be sung during the days of the pre-funeral wake. There are laments that tell the life story of the deceased, as we’ve mentioned, but they may not all span the entire life of the deceased. Maybe they’ll cover only a section of a person’s life. Perhaps a lament will only cover the period of a person’s childhood and another will cover their youth. Others will deal with their life as adults and others with their old age. And also, still in the context of funerary laments, there are laments that tell the story of the lamenter more than they do of the deceased. The subject shifts but the content / intent is much the same. The emotions of the lamenter and of the listeners are intensified by the nostalgic recollections of the lamenter. Other laments might focus on the life of the deceased in relation to particular friendships (TB: pardonganon) they enjoyed during their life. So, yes, there are numerous types of laments and these would be happening starting on the second or third day of the pre-funeral wake. By the seventh day, or the day prior to burial, the situation has changed and the lamenting has largely ceased. On the day before the burial people begin to dance. The lamenting has been replaced by dancing. There is a Batak proverb (TB: umpama) that states, in effect, that it is better to dance than to weep. (TB: ‘Tumigorma ni ronggoshon daripada ni ranggishon; tumigorma tinortorhon daripada tinangishon’) Then on the final night—the night before the burial was to take place—the elders from that village area / neighborhood as well as leaders (TB: raja) from nearby areas would be called together to meet in council (TB: marria raja / martonggo raja). At this gathering the host group / immediate family of the deceased (TB: hasuhuton) will formally make it known to the gathered elders that their family member has died and that
tomorrow the burial will take place. The hasuhuton will then ask for advice from these elders on the proper way to conduct the next day’s proceedings so as to be in accordance with adat custom. In other words, they seek advice / approval relative to the kind of ‘adat’ activities to be carried out. For example, if the deceased is already ‘sari matua’ or ‘saur matua’ the elders of the village / neighborhood will ask whether all of the family has been informed of the death or whether there are others who have yet to get the news: the tulang, bona tulang, hula-hula, bona ni ari, boru, ale-ale etc. All of these relations (or their representatives) need to be present for an adat burial that is of the level of ‘adat na gok.’ If this has been fulfilled, the hasuhuton will respond affirmatively. Once this is done, there will follow discussion about what kind of ceremony will take place the next day. In order to settle this there will be discussion as to whether the deceased has reached the level of ‘sari matua’ or ‘saur matua’. And, the decision needs to be ratified by all those participating in this meeting. Now, it might happen that someone who is technically ‘sari matua’ is raised to the level of ‘saur matua’. Such a change might happen if, for instance, the deceased has four children—2 boys and 2 girls—and three of the four are already married and have children of their own. The fourth child, though not yet married, is well into their adult life, is well established with a steady job and may be considered past marrying age. In such a case, the hasuhuton may make a request to the gathering of elders that the status of the deceased be set at the level of ‘saur matua’ (even though they are technically still ‘sari matua’ because not all of their children are married and with children of their own). If such a request is made and if the gathered elders (and particularly the hula-hula) agree to such a request, then the matter is settled.

Me: But wouldn’t the preparations for the following day’s feasting need to be set in motion several days ahead of the ‘marria raja’? I mean, from what I’ve
seen the differences between a ‘pesta sari matua’ and a ‘pesta saur matua’ are fairly significant. An animal would have to be selected and readied, the musicians ‘ordered’, etc., etc.

WFS: Yes, that’s true. The marria raja is more or less an official seal of approval on plans that have already been set in motion. It is not out of the question that important issues may be raised and debated only during marria raja, but for the most part those participating in the meeting know what will be discussed and agreed upon ahead of time. And, to be sure, the type of music to be used, as well as the musicians—whether musik tiup (a combination of instruments including brass band instruments, electric keyboard, drum kit, and the traditional Toba Batak bamboo flute, suling) or gondang sabangunan – would have been decided on and arrangements made 1 or 2 days ahead of time. This is especially true because at the conclusion of the marria raja the hasuhuton will begin dancing in the ceremony known as mangalap tua ni gondang (a ceremony designed to welcome and receive the blessing of / by the gondang ensemble). It is the hasuhuton group who opens this ceremony—those who are mardongan tubu (of the same flesh / womb)—as well as the boru group (those who have married into the hasuhuton group). They will dance the rounds that night—first together and then around the deceased. So then, after the marria raja takes place the hasuhuton will conduct the tua ni gondang ceremony during which sipitu gondang will be played as prayers and blessings, and the hasuhuton will dance around deceased. Following that the gathered crowd will eat an evening meal. Following the meal the raja ni huta (village heads / leaders) will dance and then anyone (any group) who wants to dance will be invited to engage in a round of dancing. This will continue for a number of hours and sometimes through the night – though this is less common nowadays. At some point during the night’s festivities – usually in connection with the meal – an
announcement is made which details all of the decisions ratified by the marria raja i.e. the title conferred on the deceased, the time and place of the burial festivities, animal to be slaughtered for the feast, and so forth.

After the martonggo / marria raja takes place and the following day’s events have been agreed upon, but prior to the evenings rounds of dancing there is another ceremony. This ceremony is known as mompo (TB: from the word ompo, referring to the ceremony which marks the formal entry into a new home). In the context of funerary rituals, the mompo ceremony marks the time when the body of the deceased is moved from the mat or bed where they have been lying and placed into the casket (their new home). A number of the men from the hula-hula group, hasahuton group and boru group will assist in this ceremony. The casket is brought into the front room and placed next to where the body is lying. Several men will then lift the body from the bed or mat and place it inside the casket while others will quickly remove the former resting place to the outside or back of the house where it will later be cleaned. Once inside the casket, the clothing of the deceased is ‘tidied-up’ by some of the women. Photos, flowers, and any other decorations are placed around the body in the casket. Items placed in the casket may include hymnals, Bibles, eyeglasses, new clothing, etc (see Figures 9, 10, 11).

Following the mompo ceremony, there is another ceremony known as pangarapotan. It is said that it former times the meaning of pangarapotan was different from its usage today. In former times, and especially in the Lake Toba region, caskets were made from the trunks of trees split lengthwise and scraped out so that there was a space in the center for the body. After the body was placed in the cavity of one-half of the trunk, the other half was placed on top of it, forming a cylindrical casket. This was then sealed shut with a kind of glue (TB: rapot) and rattan cordage, and this process of wrapping or sealing the casket was known as pangarapotan.
Figure 9. During the mompo rite the casket, ready to receive body of the deceased, is danced into the house to the accompaniment of the gondang sabangunan ensemble. Photo by the author, near Balata, June 2, 2003.
Figure 10. During the *mompo* rite the body of the deceased is transferred by the family from the bed to the coffin, symbolically taking up residence in the “new home.” Photo by the author, Pematang Siantar, December 24, 2002.
Figure 11. Having been placed in the casket, the deceased is then tended to by the family. Photographs, bibles, hymnals, glasses, and other objects are often placed in the casket with the deceased. Photo by the author, Pematang Siantar, December 24, 2002
The act of sealing shut the casket in the present day still happens but has shifted its timing and context, and is presently a part of the burial liturgy of the Church. At the appointed time, members of the immediate family will nail the casket shut as a symbol that the relationship between the living and the dead is sealed shut / closed off. In its liturgical context however, it is no longer referred to specifically by the term pangarapotan.

In current usage, the term pangarapotan refers to a meeting (from rapot, an alternate meaning of which is meeting or council) which takes place between the hula-hula group and the bereaved family. In the case of those who die with the titles ‘mate paralang-alangan,’ ‘mate mangkar,’ ‘mate hatungganeon,’ or ‘mate sari matua,’ the hula-hula approaches the closest bereaved (e.g. the wife of a deceased husband, the eldest child of a deceased parent, etc.) following the mompo and presents them with a special ulos – ulos tujung – which is worn as a head covering to show that the recipient is in mourning. In addition the hula-hula presents the deceased with an ulos – ulos saput – which is wrapped / draped around the body of the deceased lying in the casket. The hula-hula group will then give words of encouragement and support to the bereaved and immediate family, promising to stand by them and do all they can to fill the void left by the loss they’ve experienced through this death. If the deceased is given the title saur matua or mauli bulung, both the bereaved and the deceased are given an ulos sampetua – instead of an ulos tujung / saput. The bereaved wears this ulos sampetua not over the head but draped around the shoulders. This change of position signifies that the bereaved is not entering a time mourning prior to / in anticipation of remarriage after mourning but rather is recognizing that s/he will remain a widow/er until the end of their own life. The ulos sampetua is draped over the lower half of the deceased’s body in much the same way as an ulos saput.

So, getting back to the evening’s events...after marria raja is finished the musicians are called. In former times especially (but still today in some
places) the musicians would be called in to play and they would be fed first of all. Then once they were set up and ready to begin there would be a short ceremony in which they were given a basket with uncooked rice, some money, an egg, and some betel leaves. There would be some dialog between the leader of the music and the hasuhuton – questions about why they were called, what event was taking place, etc. The host would respond that the musicians were called and requested to play because those gathered there wanted to mangondasi (TB: dance in a circular procession around the deceased).

Nowadays it is customary for a church official such as an elder from the church or the guru huria (TB: the preacher / teacher of the parish) to begin the music and dancing time. This begins with a short liturgy of worship usually including a hymn and a prayer followed by a scripture reading and a brief reflection on the scripture text. The church official may also reiterate the purpose for the gathering and incorporate some words of warning to the family so that they don’t engage in ancestor spirit veneration or trance dancing. He may address the musicians directly and request that they play their music well, to the enjoyment of the gathering, so that they may honor the Lord and the memory of the deceased. This brief liturgy will end with a hymn and the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. Finally the church official will address the musicians and ask them to play sipitu gondang i (TB: meaning the seven gondang prayers) as an offering of worship to God, the elders, the memory of the deceased, etc. While the musicians play these brief gondang prayers there is no dancing. Those gathered stand reverently and listen to this musical offering. Following this, the church official will turn the festivities over to the hasuhuton who will begin calling the dances (TB: mangido gondang).

Me: So the playing of these seven gondang prayers is not a problem for the church members or church official? It’s not against church policy?
WFS: No, in fact the reason the church representative is officiating over this part of the evening is so that he can hear the way in which these seven pieces are played – as a kind of test – to make sure no inappropriate lines are being crossed. By this, I mean that he’s checking to make sure neither the musicians nor the guests are using the music for purposes of trance or to inappropriately worship ancestor spirits. He becomes a kind of judge and if he is satisfied then he turns things over to the hasuhuton to continue the celebration.

My discussion with Pdt. Simamora highlights two important aspects related to the initial question concerning the understanding of what is and is not taking place under the umbrella in Toba Batak funerary context in the present day. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, Toba Batak adat is not an immutable set of regulations and laws that must be adhered to with utmost fidelity. Rather, Toba Batak adat is a living and dynamic system which continues to flex and shift as Toba Batak society changes in response to increased modernization, changes in socio-cultural, religious and socio-economic patterns. As Toba Batak migrate out of their traditional homeland to other, more ethnically diverse areas of the country (and world) they are confronted with the necessity of adapting adat practices to these new environments. I have witnessed this process among expanding Toba Batak communities in the United States who grapple with the maintenance their cultural identity through their practices of adat far from their homeland. Pdt. Simamora’s comments also indicate that the borders separating adat practices from non-adat practices are both permeable and overlapping, again suggesting that ritual contexts are dynamic and shifting. This is significant in relation
to this study of lament singing in pre-funeral wake contexts and the replacement of laments with Protestant hymns because both of these expressions represent dynamic and complex ways of expressing grief, honoring both the living and the dead, and creating community while reinforcing cultural and religious identity.

In the section that follows I look at the Batak Protestant Church’s teachings on death and the afterlife as they are expressed through the official doctrinal statements of the Church as well as through the statements of church officials. In doing so, my intention is to position these statements as a kind of Batak Protestant Christian adat – regulations and guidelines for Toba Batak Protestants.

**Batak Protestant Church Teachings on Death and the Afterlife**

This section of the dissertation examines statements that reflect the official position of the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP) with regard to the guiding principles of their faith practice and religious identity, as well as the position of the Protestant Christian community with regard to the dead, the afterlife, and any ongoing connection between the living and the dead. Official documents dealing with church rules, regulations and matters of discipline, currently referred to as The Orders of Discipline (TB: *Ruhut Paminsangan*), date from the late 1860s with revisions in 1897, 1907, 1924, 1952, 1968, and 1982. I have been able to examine several of these revisions, including the current one, while the earliest I have seen dates from 1907. In my examination of these documents I have given particular attention to the sections dealing with death and burial ceremonies as well as secondary burial of bones ceremonies. In addition to the Orders of Discipline, the HKBP created a
Confession of Faith (TB: *Panindangion Haporseaon*) in 1951, just prior to their inclusion in the Geneva Switzerland-based Lutheran World Federation in 1952. This Confession of Faith is unique in that it was drafted by and for Toba Batak Protestant Christians as an expression of their Christian beliefs and their socio-religious identity as Toba Batak. The Introduction to the Confession of Faith, which was revised and updated in 1996, states:

“The Confession of Faith of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant stands in continuity with the three creeds which were confessed by the Church Fathers in the past, the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. It is the basis for what the HKBP is to preach, teach and live (Matt. 16:16), and is the summary of what we believe and hope for in this life and in the life to come. It is the authority in the HKBP for rejecting and opposing all false doctrine and heresy which is not in accordance with the Word of God” (HKBP 2000: 57).

While the Orders of Discipline give guidance as to the rubrics and components of various liturgical rituals within the HKBP community, they offer very little information on the beliefs that undergird those ritual acts. It is the Confession of Faith that, clearly and with authority, outlines what the HKBP and its members believe, teach, preach and live. Under the heading, “The Authority of the Confession,” the 1951 draft states:

“It is proper that the members of the church are subject to this authority, but there should be no forced subjection and the confession should not stifle conscience. People must be free to examine the confession. If anyone finds something in it which is not in accordance with the Holy Word, he may convey his objections to the leaders of the church” (ibid: 56).

The 1951 Confession of Faith was revised, updated, and ratified during the HKBP Great Synod assembly (TB: *Sinode Godang*) of 1996. In comparing the 1951
and the 1996 Confessions, the language of the 1996 draft is somewhat more direct on the matter of the authority of the Confession:

“All believers must commit themselves to obey the Confession of Faith; they must learn it with humbleness and love, because the Confession of Faith comes from a higher authority, namely the Bible itself. The Confession of Faith must be put into practice as the sign that believers live in God, who grants faith, hope, and love” (ibid: 123).

Further, it states: “The Confession of Faith of the HKBP defines the identity of the HKBP in all its ecumenical relations, its confession and its position in the world” (ibid: 124). The language of the 1996 Introduction to the Confession of Faith makes it clear that the Toba Batak Protestant community in the HKBP is to both define and anchor its belief and religious identity in the Confession of Faith of the HKBP.

On the matter of the HKBP’s beliefs concerning death and the afterlife, the two Confessions (1951 and 1996) differ slightly. The 1951 Confession of Faith discusses death under Article 16 titled, Remembrance of the Dead (TB: Parningotan di na Moning), which states:

“We believe and confess that men are destined to die, after which there will be the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Then they will rest from their work (Revelation 14:13). Jesus Christ is the Lord of the living and the dead. So when we remember death we think of our own passing and strengthen our hope in this life of struggle (Revelation 7:9 – 17, 24).

By means of this doctrine we oppose and reject the teaching of heathendom that the souls of the dead have a connection with the living or that the soul of the deceased remains in the grave. We also oppose and reject the Roman Catholic doctrine that there is a purgatory through which the dead must pass in order to purify their souls and obtain life. We deny that a Mass may be said or that prayers may be made in order that the dead are more quickly released from purgatory. We also reject the practice of praying to the souls of the deceased saints and the expectation that the power and holiness of
the dead may pass over to the living from their tombs, clothing, belongings or bones (ibid: 65ff.).

In the 1996 Confession of Faith, matters relating to death are contained in Article 15, under the same title, *Parningotan ni na Monding*. The language of this article has changed however, reflecting a shift in focus with regard to ideologies and practices perceived as heretical or threatening to the faith of the Christian believer. Article 15 of the 1996 Confession of Faith reads:

“We believe and confess: Death is the end of one’s life in this world. He or she quits from his work and all his activities. For all believers there is resurrection and salvation through Jesus Christ who raised from death. He is the Lord of the living and the dead (Romans 14:7 – 9). Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord (Revelation 14:13). The church observes “the remembrance of the dead” in order to keep our faith alive, to remember our death and to keep our hope alive to the victory of Christ to defeat death, and our hope for the everlasting life where all believers join together with God.

By means of this doctrine: We emphasize the hope for salvation of the dead who died in name of Jesus Christ. We oppose the view that people can receive blessings from the soul of the dead. We oppose the teaching that there is connection between the dead and the living through prayer (pray for the souls of the dead). We oppose the view that builds a statue to honor the dead, as a means for his or her descendants to receive blessings. Also, we reject all paganism’s teachings, particularly the teaching on “spirit” saying: the souls of the dead remains in the grave and that soul changes become ghost and “sumangot” (a “good” ghost who gives blessings to his descendants) (ibid: 142ff.).

These articles state plainly that, according to the official teaching of the Church, there is no possibility for ongoing interaction between the living and the dead, whether through prayers or some other form of communication. Further, there is no validity to the idea that the living descendants of the dead can or should hope for blessing from the spirits of the dead as a result of veneration through acts of worship.
or through the building of memorial monuments. Death, then, marks a final and complete separation between those living and those who have died. This idea is reinforced in the HKBP’s liturgy for the burial of the deceased. The liturgy ends at the gravesite with the casket being lowered into the ground. At that time the minister, addressing the deceased, charges the deceased with these words:

“Brother / Sister _________, from earth you have come and now you return to earth. But the Lord God who created you, the Lord Jesus Christ who saved you from sin, and the Holy Spirit who calls you to eternal life – this God will preserve and protect the dust of your body to the end of the ages. Amen!”

The sense of finality expressed through the minister’s words is clearly evident and in keeping with the sentiment of Articles 15 and 16 of the Confession of Faith. However, the minister’s charge embodies an interesting irony as well, being addressed directly to the deceased with whom, according to the Confession of Faith, there is no longer any possibility for communication. This irony finds its way into the lives of many Toba Batak Christians, for whom the possibility of ongoing interaction with (and the hope / expectation of blessing from) the dead continues to inform and guide both their perceptions and their actions with respect to death and funerary practices, resulting in a persistent degree of cognitive dissonance between these seemingly conflicting worldviews. This conflict / dissonance is recognized by HKBP leadership as one of the challenges they face in guiding the Church forward.

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53 My translation of this quote is taken from the liturgical book (Agenda) of the HKBP (1990), which exists in Toba Batak language as well as Indonesian language versions. It appears on page 30 of the Toba version and on page 37 of the Indonesian version.
After several months of fieldwork in North Sumatra, during which time I attended many funerals and pre-funeral wakes, I became increasingly aware that the underlying perception among many Toba Batak Protestants was that, despite the official teachings of the Church and the Confession of Faith, continued interaction with the spirits of the deceased was not only a possibility, it was in many respects, a necessity in pursuing the core cultural values expressed in *Hagabeon*, *Hasangapon* and *Hamoraon*, (discussed in Chapter Three) in order to bring prestige and honor to one’s clan as well as success and security to one’s immediate family for the present and future generations.

My questions about the possible contradictions between Protestant Church teachings and the practices of Protestant Christians relative to funerary practice and the interrelationship between the living and the dead brought me, in June of 2003, to the headquarters of the HKBP in Pearaja / Tarutung (see Figure 8), in order to interview the sitting Bishop (TB: Ephorus) of the HKBP, Pdt. Dr. J. R. Hutauruk. My family had lived next door to the Bishop and his family during the years I taught at the Theological College in Pematang Siantar. We were long-time friends and colleagues and so our conversation was comfortable and relaxed. After some discussion about my research experiences, I asked the Bishop about death and the afterlife for Toba Batak Christians, particularly regarding the contradiction I sensed between what the Church taught and what the people actually believed and practiced. A translation of our conversation follows:
Me: So, tell me about the Church’s position regarding people who have died and where they go. Is there some kind of communication still possible between those who are living and those who have died?

Ephorus: Yes, this is a central question and one that is difficult to answer. If someone comes to a pastor and says, “I just had a dream and in my dream I saw and spoke with my grandparent or my father who died last year and I feel very happy about it. I feel very much strengthened and encouraged by what they had to say to me”. What is the pastor supposed to say to that person? How should he respond? Should he tell them to stop having dreams? That’s not possible. This possibility of speaking with those beloved who have already died…it’s a mystery. What we can say as counselor to such a person in this situation is very limited.

Me: So…the position of the Church regarding those who have already died is…?

Ephorus: Well…if someone has died, they’re dead. That’s it. Case closed. There is no more relationship. But if someone dreams it, if they hear voices…that’s an individual matter. But as far as the collective Christian community, the Church…there is no ongoing connection with the dead.

Me: So, if I understand…the Church is not saying that the spirits of the dead don’t exist. Rather, the Church’s position is that we should not be actively pursuing a connection with the spirits of the dead. Is that correct?

Ephorus: Yes. What I mean is that we don’t have the power / right to pursue a relationship with the spirits of our beloved departed. And, we shouldn’t be looking for that relationship. To go beyond that is to go beyond the bounds of
Church authority, and our authority and rights as Christians. It does raise questions about connections with neo-orthodox theology, where there is the perception that the world of the spirits is always with us, and a part of our own world.

Me: I have heard that neo-orthodox Christians believe that when they gather for worship, not only are they present, but also gathered there with them are the spirits of those who have previously died. Their community of faith includes both the living and the dead.

Ephorus: If that community includes the spirits of all believers from the beginning of the Church, I have no problem with it. So long as we don’t strive or hope to be in communion only with the spirits of our clan members or the spirits of our tribe – that idea does not square with the idea of the larger Christian Community, the Universal Church.

Me: So, I want to ask you...if, for example, my father dies and he is a Christian, where – according to the Church’s teachings – does his spirit go? What does the Church say?

Ephorus: Well, not just his spirit. His whole body and his whole soul are in the Lord’s hands. All of it. Completely. We shouldn’t be influence by Greek philosophy or Batak philosophy or any philosophy that wants to divide humans into various parts.

Me: I recently read and article from the HKBP’s journal, Immanuel, from 1975, written by A. Simarangkir. The article was titled, “Is it True that the Spirits of the Dead are Dead?” (B.I.: Benarkah Jiwa Orang yang Mati itu Mati?). In the article he explained that when a person died it was as if they
were split apart. Their body returned to earth. Their spirit, based on their relationship with Jesus, would either die (if they didn’t have a connection to the Lord) or would live in the hands of the Lord. So, it would seem that the spirit continues to exist, but with the Lord... "resting in the Lord” was his phrase, I think. For Simorangkir, then, a person is divided at death – body and soul.

Ephorus: Several years before that there was a fairly polemic discussion on this issue, involving F. H. Sianipar (Secretary General of the HKBP from 1974-1978), and Justin Sihombing (the first Toba Batak Ephorus of the HKBP). Sianipar was of the strong opinion that when a person died, everything died – nothing continued. Sihombing took a position similar to the one you just mentioned in the article: when a person died their body returned to earth and their spirit rested in the Lord. This polemic continued for only a short time and I don’t think there was ever much interest within the HKBP in pursuing the question any further. I have to say, though, that, from a theological angle, I feel that Justin Sihombing’s perspective was probably more accurate and Biblical.

Me: From my perspective as a researcher, and based upon what I have been able to observe during this past year, this is one of the most pressing and relevant questions for the HKBP community today, at least in its connection to my particular research topic. There is significant confusion (and, it seem, a resulting conflict – or at least some cognitive dissonance) about the answer to this question. What happens to our spirits when we die? The Church points to one kind of answer but someone’s personal beliefs, customs and traditions as a Toba Batak might point to another kind of answer. So, there are different answers depending on who is the one speaking at a given time or in a given situation. There are many answers and many perceptions about what happens
when a person dies, as well as what responsibilities the living have toward the dead, depending on ones position: as a fellow clan member, in relation to the dalihan na tolu, in relation to one’s sense of cultural identity or Christian identity. I think this is a very relevant question for the Church.

Ephorus: Yes, and I think that Justin Sihombing’s position on the question is closer to the aspirations of Toba Batak people, as well as to Batak philosophy, perhaps. The body dies and the spirit lives in communion with the Lord. But if this is the case then I don’t think it is important that people continue to look for or expect any help or blessing from the spirits of their ancestors – if they are indeed resting in the Lord. (p.c., June 10, 2003, Pearaja-Tarutung.)

My interview with Ephorus Hutauruk touches on one of the central issues of this dissertation: The dialectical nature of holding on to coexisting, but often conflicting, beliefs. Pivotal questions are raised but seldom answered conclusively. Rather, a dialogue between ideologies ensues, with weight shifting from one side to the other as context or conscience dictates. My conversation with the Ephorus also served to confirm my observations in the field and the questions they generated in relation to the singing of traditional laments and the singing of Protestant Christian hymns as the musical manifestations and ideological voices of grief and loss for Toba Batak in the context of funerary ritual. In the next chapters I explore, in detail, the singing of traditional laments for the dead (TB: andung ni na mate) and the singing of Protestant church hymns in the context of the pre-funeral wake. Included in my examination of these two forms of expression are aspects that focus on socio-cultural features, musicological features, and performative features of both laments and
hymns. A common perception among Toba Batak regarding laments and hymns is that the practice of lament singing in pre-funeral wakes is fading away (I explore some of the reasons for (and evidence of) this perception, and that the lament tradition is being replaced with the singing of Protestant hymns. This perception is encapsulated in the oft-heard expression: “Ganti andung, gabe ende” (Replacing laments, becoming hymns). My examination of socio-cultural, musicological and performative features in laments and hymns highlights those elements that appear to make the process of replacing laments with hymns more easily negotiated by Toba Batak Protestants.
Figure 8. Map of North Sumatra showing locations mentioned in Chapter Five.
Part III
The Voicing of Grief in Toba Batak Pre-funeral Wakes

Chapter 6
Funeral Laments (Andung tu na Mate)—Origins and Present Practices

Introduction

Scholarly studies of lament cover a variety of lament genres (including funerary lament, laments of emigration, wedding laments, and military recruitment laments, among others) and reflect a broad geographic distribution, including studies of lament in Greece (Alexiou 1974; Auerbach 1987; Caraveli-Chaves 1980; Danforth 1982; Dubisch 1986; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Seremetakis 1991), Finland (Nenola-Kallio 1982; Honko 1980; Tolbert 1988, 1990, 1994; Vaughn 1990), Egypt (Abu-Lughod 1986), India (Tiwary 1978; Clark-Decès 2005), New Guinea (Feld 1982, 1990; Chenoweth 1968), China (McLaren 2008), Brazil (Urban 1988), Africa (Ajuwon 1981; Nketia 1969), Australia (Magowan 2007), and Ireland (Lysaght 1997), among others. Methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of lament include those which are primarily historic and philological (Kozok 1993, 1994), those focused on issues of gender and power (Dubisch 1986; Briggs 1993), those examining the emotive characteristics of the lamenters voice through computer assisted analysis (Vaughn 1990), and those which are more broadly interdisciplinary and cross cultural (Alexiou 1974; Feld and Fox 1994; Kaufman 1990; Wilce 2009).

Lament studies with a specific focus on the cultures of Indonesia are few. While a number of ethnographic studies make passing mention of lament and its connection to funerary ritual, among those with a more detailed focus on lament
traditions are Toby Volkman’s study of highland Toraja ritual in Sulawesi (1985), including funeral ritual and accompanying lament practices. Also notable is the study of ritual speech traditions, including narrative lament and wailing, conducted by Joel Kuipers (1998) among the Weyewa on the island of Sumba in Eastern Indonesia. Published studies of lament traditions among the Batak of North Sumatra are almost exclusively represented in the works of philologist Ulrich Kozok, whose 1994 Ph.D. dissertation on the lament traditions of the Batak of North Sumatra (published electronically in 2002), examines in detail the literary representations of Batak lament genres such as love laments, wedding laments, and funeral/death laments. Kozok’s study is largely historic and is particularly focused on the lament traditions of the Karo Batak and, to a lesser extent, the Simalungun, Mandailing and Angkola Batak, primarily because it is among these Batak groups that laments have existed as a literary tradition, being carved onto various types of bamboo tubes as well as other materials (Kozok 1993:58). Kozok’s interest is in lament texts and his study documents many Batak lament texts collected and preserved in European museums and archival collections. As such, his commentary on the lament traditions of the Toba and Dairi Batak groups is minimal, as lament practices among these groups are exclusively oral.

In this dissertation my focus is particularly on Toba Batak laments—specifically on the funerary laments of the Protestant Toba Batak community from the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP)—and the processes that mark the replacement of laments with the singing of Christian hymns in the context of Toba
Batak funerary rituals. In this chapter I begin with a series of “vignettes” from my fieldwork in North Sumatra – descriptions drawn from opportunities I had to sit with lamenters, record their laments, and talk with them about their experiences as lamenters and as Protestant Christians. The resulting descriptions are positioned within a set of theoretical frameworks. The first of these I refer to as

**Conceptualizing Lament.** Within this framework are my interpretations of statements by Toba Batak lamenters about the nature of lament, the intent and content of lament, ideas about markers of authenticity in lament, its place in funerary ritual, the perceived connections between the living and the dead, and lament as a communicative mode of expression in the community of the bereaved. Following this, I move to a second theoretical framework, **Situating Lament.** Here I discuss aspects of the origins of lament in Toba Batak society as found in folk tales (TB: *turiturian*) that I encountered in print sources as well as through my conversations with lamenters. Also discussed is the specialized lexicon of lament (TB: *hata andung*) and its connection to folk tales, both published and in oral tradition. This is followed by a brief taxonomy of lament genres in Toba Batak society, of which funerary laments (TB: *andung tu ni namate*) represent the largest portion in the present day. The section concludes with a discussion of the Batak Protestant Church’s position relative to lament as expressed historically in several of the HKBP’s regulatory and disciplinary documents, such as the Guide for Discipleship and Discipline (TB: *Ruhut Parmahanion dohot Paminsangon*) as well as through the statements of Toba Batak Protestant Christians. The third and final framework in this
chapter is *Performing Lament*. Within this framework are detailed descriptions of my analysis of specific musicological features as well as performative / stylistic features present in the performance of laments recorded during my field research. Included in this section are descriptions of melodic shape and range in laments, phrase shape, cadential patterns, rhythmic motifs, the use of crying and other performed representations of grief, as well as the use of gesture in lament as a communicative device with connections to blessing.

**Conceptualizing Lament**

**Vignette 1: February 6, 2003. Medan, near Amplas Bus Terminal.**

I was introduced to Ibu boru Panjaitan54 through her cousin, Ibu boru Tampubolon, who lived near us on the campus of the HKBP Theological College in Pematang Siantar. Our families had become acquainted and, after learning about my research interest, Ibu boru Tampubolon suggested that I meet with her cousin who was from a village area and was a fine lamenter. The cousin, Ibu boru Panjaitan, was a widow of several years. She had moved from her home in the village of Sipahutar, near the mountain town of Tarutung, and was now living with family in Medan, the provincial capital (see Figure 12). We are sitting together in the front room of the family’s

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54 “Ibu” is an Indonesian term of address for a grown, married woman and is commonly used throughout the country. The Toba Batak equivalent term is “Inang.” “Boru” is a Toba Batak term that refers to a woman’s birth clan and is also a general term for ‘female.’ As used here, “Ibu boru Panjaitan” indicates that the subject is married and was born into the Panjaitan clan. Generally speaking, a married Toba Batak woman will be referred to either by the name of her first born, e.g. Nai Clara (mother of Clara) in less formal situations, or more formally as Inang Limbong boru Simamora, indicating that she is married into the Limbong clan but was born into the Simamora clan. In the case of Ibu boru Panjaitan, her husband (from the Sipahutar clan) is deceased and for that reason she chooses to use her birth clan name. In the case of Ibu boru Tampubolon, her husband is not a Toba Batak and is therefore outside the Toba Batak clan system. For this reason she is called by her birth clan name.
modest board-and-batten home, sipping coffee and chatting. In the room, seated
around a small table, are (besides myself) boru Panjaitan, boru Tampubolon, the
Bapak and Ibu of the house (that is, the Mr. and Mrs. He is from the Nababan clan
and she is the sister of boru Panjaitan), and Ibu Sitorus, a close friend of this family,
who lives nearby.

After visiting for a while, we manage to talk our way around to the subject of
lamenting and my research interest in Toba Batak laments. Ibu boru Panjaitan, who
is 57 years old, explains that she is willing to lament but hopes that I don’t need her to
do a lot of lamenting, saying that she will get too sad and cry if she laments for too
long. I’m interested in her statement, gleaning from it that, although her lamenting
would not be in the actual context of a pre-funeral wake but would instead be a kind
of performed lament for the purpose of my documentation, the very act of her
lamenting would likely result in a strong emotional response reflecting a level of
genuine emotional engagement. I wonder, but do not yet ask her, about her emotional
state of mind when she is lamenting “out of context” – does she, I wonder, recollect
the original context, re-imagining it as she performs her lament? And if so, is her
recollection of the original context a necessary condition for the resulting emotional
response? I wonder this, in part, because during my fieldwork experience I did not
have the opportunity to witness and record any lamenting in situ. While I met with,
interviewed and recorded a number of women who were noted lamenters, and while I
attended many pre-funeral wakes, funeral rituals and secondary burial rituals, I never
managed, during my year of field research, to attend a pre-funeral wake where lament (TB: *andung*) was happening *in situ.*

Ibu boru Panjaitan asks me what type of lament I am interested in recording. I respond that I am interested to hear a lament that would happen on the occasion of someone’s death. I suggest that she could sing a “life story” lament (TB: *andung riwayat*) or a “poor fate” lament (TB: *andung parsorion*). Both of these lament types are typical of Toba Batak pre-funeral wake contexts and will be discussed in greater detail in the section on lament taxonomy to follow.

In response, Ibu boru Panjaitan casts her gaze downward momentarily, as if in thought. She then announces that her lament will be an *andung parsorion* in connection with the death of her mother (BI: “*yang melahirkan kita*”—who gave us birth). The general Toba Batak term to describe this type of *andung parsorion* is *Andung tu Inong Pangintubu* (lament for our mother). Before she begins she asks that the window shades be drawn together to darken the room and guard against distractions from the busy side street just the other side of the room where we’re gathered. Her gaze again moves downward and she pauses silently for several

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55 In 1993 I attended a pre-funeral wake in Pematang Siantar during which the widow of the deceased was lamenting. (This is described in the introduction of the dissertation.) My difficulty in encountering lament *in situ* is, I believe, a reflection of the declining use of lament in Toba Batak society, a situation I will discuss further in chapter eight. On one occasion during the 2002 – 2003 year of my field research, my wife, who is adopted as a *boru* (daughter) of the Simamora clan, encountered a woman lamenting at the grave of her husband during a New Year visit she made to the burial plot at her Simamora family’s home village of Sait Ni Huta, near Dolok Sanggul in the Humbang region southwest of Lake Toba. Ironically, I was in another part of the province at the time and missed this encounter.
moments, her eyes appear to fix on a spot just in front of where she is sitting. I wonder if, in her mind’s eye, she is recollecting her mother lying in repose before her as she begins her lament.

“Inong, na nunga ro be ahu, da Inong
Sian tano parjalangan i, Inong,
Ai laho mangeahi ho, Inong
Tu siagalanganmi, Inong na lambok malilung.
Hansit na i di ahu da Inong
Dipaninggalhonmon, Inong. Ei, ei, ei….”

Translation: Mother, already have I arrived, oh Mother
From the place of my sojourn, Mother.
To meet with you, Mother
At your home here, Mother who speaks sweetly.
It hurts me, oh Mother
Your leaving of me, Mother. Ei, ei, ei…..

As her lament continues she addresses her mother directly throughout, telling her of her difficult circumstances, the lack of adequate food for herself and her children, her need for comfort and encouragement in the difficult days she faces, the struggles she faces daily as she labors to provide for herself and her children. The tenor of her lament is one of complaint about her situation and of her longing to speak with her mother—for advice, consolation, and encouragement. There is frequent repetition of textual material in the 10 minute-long lament, including terms of address such as Inong Pangintubu (Mother who gave birth to me), Inong na lambok malilung (Mother who speaks sweetly), and ahu, sinuanbeumon / ahu, sinuanbeumi (me, your daughter). These terms are drawn from the specialized language of lament known as
hata andung (lament language). This specialized linguistic register is comprised of some 500 metaphoric terms for individuals, kin and sib relations, parts of the body, food, animals, and other elements in the Toba Batak material and relational world. (Further discussion on the origins and uses of hata andung appears later in this chapter.)

Markers of Authenticity – Knowledge of Hata Andung

Beyond the terms of address mentioned above, I become aware of other phrases that regularly recur during Ibu boru Panjaitan’s lament. Phrases such as: “Dang adong na mangapul ahu Inong” (There is no one to comfort me, Mother); “Ai nunga ro be ahu da Inong” (I have already arrived, Mother); “Laho mandapothon ho, Inong” (I want to visit with you, Mother); “Dang adong na memandapothon ahu da Inong” (There is no one to visit with me, Mother); and “Nunga marobur ho, Inong” (You have died, Mother) are among the more frequently recurring phrases. These phrases reflect aspects of the lamenter’s complaint and longing for comfort from the deceased. As I listen I am aware that many of these recurring expressions do not include hata andung terms. Significant portions of the text make use of the common register of Toba Batak language known as hata somal (ordinary language), and as the lament progresses I note that her lament text is a weaving together of the hata andung and hata somal language registers.

In my various conversations with Toba Batak regarding their conceptualization of lament (i.e. how they define lament, what requisite features make a lament authentically a lament, etc.), the inclusion of hata andung was a
consistently referenced marker of authentic lament. The inference being that in order for a lament to be perceived as a genuine lament there needed to be some inclusion of *hata andung* in the text of the lament.\(^{56}\) Additionally, the use of *hata andung* in a lament reflects not only that individual’s fluency in the language of lament but also serves as an indicator of their competency as a lamenter. Often when discussing a particular lamenter, other Toba Batak would reference the lamenter’s competency by stating, “Oh, she’s a fine lamenter – she knows many *hata andung* words.”

**Markers of Authenticity – Style, Context, and Content of Lament**

Beyond the use of *hata andung* as a requisite element in authentic lament, I learn, through further discussion with Ibu boru Panjaitan’s relatives, that the style of delivery, the context in which the lament occurs, and the content of the lament itself are also important considerations in the representation of authentic lament. As we visit in the front room of their home, Bapak and Ibu Nababan share with me their experience of attending a pre-funeral wake for a young father who had unexpectedly died. One of his daughters was in the room seated beside his casket. She was lamenting (TB: *mangandung*) and her lament was addressed primarily toward her deceased father. She was reminding him, through her lament, of certain promises he had made to her about providing for her future education. Now that he was dead however, all of his plans and all of her hopes were shattered. The Nababans then tell

\(^{56}\) This was true not only with reference to more traditional laments heard in the context of funerary ritual but also in the context of “pop laments” (TB: *andung-andung*), a genre of Toba Batak popular music. In an interview with Toba Batak pop music star Jack Marpaung (one of the early performers of *andung-andung*), he mentioned that his grandmother was an important source of *hata andung* words which he would then incorporate into the lyrics of his compositions in order to strengthen the song’s connection to the world of traditional lament (personal communication, May 10, 2003).
me that the girl’s lament was done entirely in the national language of Bahasa Indonesia. Not only was she not fluent in hata andung, she also lacked sufficient fluency in hata somal, the common Toba Batak language, to incorporate either of them in her lament. Despite her lack of facility in these Toba Batak language registers, the Nababans explain that, because of the style in which she lamented (that is, her expression of complaint and disappointment), the context in which the lament occurred, and the contents of the lament itself, they had no difficulty accepting her lament as a genuine lament. The Nababan’s recollection of this event suggests that, in addition to fluency in hata andung, the style in which a lament is delivered, context in which a lament takes place, and the content of the lament itself are also important elements in the construction of Toba Batak perceptions of authentic lament.

Markers of Authenticity – Structural and Performative Features of Lament

The Interplay of Spoken and Sung Text

As Ibu boru Panjaitan’s lament for her mother continues I note the inclusion of spoken phrases interjected within the sung phrases of the lament (see Figure 13). These spoken portions make repeated use of the phrase: “Alusi jo ahu, Inong” (Answer me, Mother), and are delivered with a strong emotion that I interpret as insistence. Her use of spoken phrases also includes questions for her mother: “Aha do tonam tu ahu da Inong? Paboa ma Inong. Pulut ni roha ma ham, Inong” (What is your request of me? Speak it, Mother. I am heavy hearted, Mother.) As the lament progresses I note what I perceive to be a steady increase in the emotional tenor
of her voice. This increase is marked by a fluctuating pitch center as she moves through the various sections of the lament. Further discussion of the interplay of

Figure 13. The lamenter Ibu boru Panjaitan during the lament for her mother. Photo by the author. Medan, February 6, 2003.
spoken and sung text in laments, as well as melodic features in laments appears below in the section titled Performing Lament.

**Metasignals of Grief**

The sections of her lament are demarcated by the use of what anthropologist Greg Urban, in his study of metasignals in the ritual wailing in Amerindian Brazil, refers to as “icons of crying.” These include the incorporation of cry breaks, voiced inhalation, creaky voice, and the falsetto vowel (Urban 1988:389). Similarly, Elizabeth Tolbert, writing on lament in the Karelian region of Finland notes the common use of “performative elaborations and stylizations of natural crying” (Tolbert 1994:180). Specifically, Ibu boru Panjaitan concludes each section of her lament with the high falsetto vowels “eii” or “ehh,” the melodic shape of which glides initially upward and then descends in a smooth, step-wise descent. Following this falsetto vowel, Ibu boru Panjaitan draws a deep and audible breath before proceeding with her lament.57

Increased emotional engagement is marked not only by a gradually rising pitch center but also is visibly demonstrated through her flowing tears and dripping nose. These features are incorporated into the lament as further “crying signals” – visual and sonic representations of lament in Toba Batak society. In every instance of

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57 In his entry on ‘Lament’ in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, folklorist Albert Lloyd describes the remarkably consistent form of funerary lament as “an interplay between the cry of grief (‘planctus’) and the framing of a message (‘discourse’). The ‘planctus’ and ‘discourse’ may be said to represent moments of crisis and order respectively, the planctus being a paroxysmic utterance, whereas the discourse is a relatively rational communication…By turning the planctus into a refrain that punctuates the discourse at fairly regular intervals…a shapely composition evolves” (407).
lament I encountered during my field research the performative acts of loudly
sniffing-up a dripping nose, wiping a dripping nose on cloth, and wiping the eyes
were consistently present and frequently referenced as markers of authenticity. This
was true not only when I recorded lamenters such as Ibu boru Panjaitan but also when
people feigned lament in the course of a casual conversation about my research
interest. These performative actions are also visible in many of the video disc
versions of Toba Batak pop music laments.

In discussion following boru Panjaitan’s lament she explains that her mother
passed away four years ago in her home village of Sipahutar while boru Panjaitan,
already a widow of 2 years, was living and working in the provincial capital of
Medan in order to support her nine children, some of whom lived with her in Medan.
When word of her mother’s death reached her she returned to the village for the
funeral ceremony. However, arriving in the village after her mother had already died
meant that she did not have the opportunity to hear her mother’s final wishes – an
important moment for Toba Batak, connected to a deep sense of obligation to receive
and attempt to fulfill the final requests of the dying. To miss such a moment
produces strong feelings of guilt and the fear of disappointing the spirits of the
deceased. It was this situation that was being recounted in her lament and, in
particular, through the spoken questions she directed toward her mother.

58 On numerous occasions a person would perform an impromptu lament (lightheartedly) in response
to my descriptions of my research interests. Such impromptu laments served as a way of signalling
that the person understood something of the tradition to which I was referring.
59 A good example of this is the video CD performance of the pop lament “Andung Anak Sasada”
(Lament of an Orphan Child) sung by Sarudin Saragih on the VCD “Lagu Pop Batak” (no publisher,
no date).
Learning to Lament

When I ask her where she learned to lament, she explains that it was through her own suffering and the difficult experiences of her life. The meaning and use of hata andung in the creation of her own laments she learned from listening to her mother and other women lamenting in her village. When someone was lamenting, she listened intently and tried to figure out what was being expressed. Her comments confirm what other women lamenters had told me previously – the learning of lament (especially lament language) is an inductive process. The ability to lament is “caught” rather than “taught,” and the knowledge of and ability to lament is developed through experience in contexts where lament is happening.

Later that afternoon Ibu boru Panjaitan performs another lament, this one for her husband who passed away 6 years ago. This lament is known as an andung mabalu (widow’s lament) and is another type of lament within the broader category of andung parsorion (poor fate lament). Prior to the start of this lament, boru Panjaitan again directs her gaze downward as she begins:

“Amang hansit ma i, Amang Siadopan
Dipaninggalhonmon di ahu da Among na lambok malilung,
Among Siadopan.
Among nunga ditinggalhon ho di ahu Among
Marsiak bagi da Among
Patura-tura sinuanbeu i dohot sinuantunas i, Amang.
Marsada-sada bulung ma Among ditinggalhon ho, Among
Di tano parjalaran i Amang ditinggalhon di ahu, Amang
Marsiak bagi da Amang. Ei, ei...”
Translation: Husband, it hurts, my husband
Your leaving of me, husband who speaks sweetly, my husband.
Husband, now you have left me, husband
Poor fate, oh husband.
It has pierced our daughters and sons, oh husband
Each of our leaves [children] have been left by you, husband.
In the place of my sojourn, husband, I have been left by you, husband.
Poor fate, oh husband. Ei, ei…

Soon after beginning her lament she begins to weep. Tears roll down her cheeks and become incorporated, along with the sniffing of her nose, into the performative texture of her lament. She uses metaphoric imagery as she addresses her husband through the lament, for example: Songon anak ni manuk i, Amang, siok-siok ma i, Amang, siunantunas i dohot sinuanbeu i. (Like chicks peeping for their mother hen, husband, are your sons and daughters [crying for you]). As in the earlier lament, she speaks to the deceased in, at times, exasperated tones: “Hape, terlaho ate. Dang ditinggalhon ho atap tu ham. Maningapa lah itu tu boruta siampudan i? Janjim na godang tu si.” (So, you left us. And you left us with not even so much as a cook pot. What is there for our youngest daughter? You made her many promises).

As the lament progresses the tone of her speaking intensifies (see Figure 14). Her frustration at having been left to care for herself and their children is notable, and the lament ends with:

[sung] “Ai dang adong na apul ahu da Among
‘Nga sae itu martangis i Among. Among na lambok malilung.”

Figure 14. The lamenter Ibu boru Panjaitan during the lament for her husband. Photo by the author. Medan, February 6, 2003.
Translation: Oh there is no one to console me, husband. That’s enough of crying, husband. Husband who speaks sweetly.

Oh, I’m tired now. Tired out! I don’t receive any consolation. That’s it. It’s finished. You’ve left us. You are dead and we can’t see you. It’s finished.

Structurally, her use of speech in the lament is much the same as in the first lament, i.e. both laments contain seven spoken interjections. In the andung mabalu however, she makes use of the high falsetto crying icon, ei / eh, only after the opening statement – a marked contrast from the earlier andung tu Inong pangintubu, with 9 instances of the high falsetto cry described above.

Rhythmic Accent in Lament

There is also a great deal of rhythmic similarity in the presentation of the text in the two laments. The predominant rhythmic device is an iambic foot pattern (a short – long or unstressed – stressed syllabic pattern) where terms such as Inong pangingtubu are rendered as: i-NONG pang-I(T)-tu-BU and a phrase such as Dipaninggalhonmon di ahu da Among na lambok malilung is expressed as: di-PA-ning-GAL-hon-MON di A-hu DA a-MONG na LAM-bok MA-li-LUNG. My field research indicates that this use of iambic rhythmic patterning is idiomatic in Toba Batak laments. Responses to my inquiries concerning its prevalence suggest that this rhythmic feature represents a means of performatively mirroring the sound of the quick ingress and egress of breath that is typical of sobbing. Further discussion of the rhythmic features of lament appears later in this chapter.
Positive Benefits and Emotional Release

At the conclusion of both of her laments boru Panjaitan throws her head back in laughter, her countenance brightening immediately as she wipes her eyes and looks around the room at the other seated there, some of whom are also wiping tears away. I ask her if, even after six years since her husband’s passing, she finds it beneficial to lament. She responds that after she finishes lamenting and crying she feels relief and release in her heart (BI: longgar di hati kita) and that by holding grief and sadness inside, a person might become ill. She continues, saying that from time to time when she thinks about her husband, his work, the sound of his voice, his face, she feels the sadness welling up inside her and she laments for him in the privacy of her home. But, she says, “I have to do it quietly so the neighbors don’t hear—if they hear my lamenting they’ll think, ‘oh, she’s worshiping his spirit and making requests of her ancestors in there (TB: “ahh, sipelebegu di i”). All she does is cry and lament.’” I ask her if, through her laments, she feels that somehow the deceased are able to hear what she expresses—whether she is able to communicate with the deceased through her lament. Her response is emphatic: “That’s the reason we do these laments—because we can’t talk together anymore face-to-face. That is what I was saying in the lament to my husband earlier—Dang marsituria ma hita muse (we can’t talk together [tell stories] any longer).”
Negative Associations and Connections to Suffering

For boru Panjaitan, the act of lamenting brought a sense of release and relief from what she described as the tension and tightness associated with grief (TB: *ponjot ni roha*). Other women I spoke with told me that for them, lamenting was primarily connected to suffering, poor fortune, and the fear of further suffering. On more than one occasion I had the opportunity to meet with Toba Batak women who were noted for their ability to lament but who chose not to lament and be recorded because, they explained, they feared that by lamenting, by outwardly expressing their sorrow and suffering through their lament, they might possibly invite further suffering on themselves or on their loved ones. A person skilled at lamenting was also, by association, a person well acquainted with grief, who had experienced a great deal of suffering in their lifetime. The perception, as expressed to me by one lamentor and later confirmed by others, was that lamenting about one’s suffering might somehow predispose the lamentor to the possibility of bringing further suffering into their life or the life of someone close to them (p.c., March 13, 2003, Lumban Nabolon). This idea is expressed through the following vignette.

**Vignette 2: March 26, 2003. Lumban Nabolon Village, near the town of Porsea.**

The following month, in March of 2003, in the village of Lumban Nabolon which is situated close to the town of Porsea near the southeastern shore of Lake Toba (see Figure 12), I met with the HKBP pastor in that area, Pdt. Ujung boru Naibaho, a former student of mine from the HKBP Theological College in Pematang
Siantar. She had contacted me some time previous to tell me that there was an elderly woman in her parish who was noted as a fine lamenter and that if I was interested to meet her she would arrange a meeting in Lumban Nabolon. On the agreed upon day I traveled by bus from Pematang Siantar toward Porsea, exiting at an intersection a few kilometers before the town. From there I was met by a man who brought me by motorbike to Pdt. boru Naibaho, who was waiting just outside the village. She informs me that she has arranged meetings with several elderly widows in the village, thinking that perhaps some of them might be willing to perform laments prior to our pre-arranged meeting with her elderly parishioner. We spend much of the afternoon in conversations with these women, visiting them in their homes. They recount the deaths of loved ones young and old, husbands, children, and parents. A few of them do know how to lament and they punctuate our discussion with brief examples of laments for the dead that I am able to record. Late in the day we make our way to the home of Ompung Si Riana boru Sitorus. Her husband, long since dead, was from the Hasibuan clan. She is 89 years old and has lived all of her adult life in Lumban Nabolon. Ompung Si Riana lives in a traditional Toba Batak house (TB: jabu) set about six feet above ground on large wooden pillars. The interior of the house is reached by a stairway leading from the ground to an opening in the wood-plank flooring of the house’s single room. As we take seats on the floor I glance up at the framework supporting the massive saddleback-roof structure, typical of traditional Toba Batak homes in the region. Seated near the entrance into the house are several

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60 In the course of our conversation she mentioned that the village of her birth and childhood is that of Sorsor Silobu, located near Lumban Nabolon, the village of her deceased husband.
of Ompung Si Riana’s children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, as well as a number of curious neighbors peering in from the entryway opening in the floor. With the light quickly fading, a pair of small kerosene lamps are lit and set on the floor on either side of Ompung Si Riana, who is seated directly across from me. We visit together and I explain to her family about my research interest in Toba Batak laments. Pdt. boru Naibaho interjects from time to time, lending clarity and depth to my own awkward explanations. That she is the parish pastor for this family helps, I believe, to reassure them about the motives and intentions of this stranger and foreigner sitting in their house. Finally, attention is directed toward Ompung Si Riana who has been quietly listening to our conversation.

Affective Power of Laments on the Living-Though-Distant

With the light of those two flames flickering in the near-dark, and at the urging of her family, she begins her lament. Through her lament she tells the story of her daughter-in-law (TB: parumaen) who had traveled to Jakarta\(^{61}\) to visit a son and daughter (grandchildren of Ompung Si Riana) living there. While in Jakarta the parumaen fell ill and died. Shortly thereafter the son also died from stress and grief related to the sudden death of his mother, leaving only the daughter (the grandchild of Ompung Si Riana). Ompung Si Riana’s lament touches on all three of these individuals, two of them deceased and the third left motherless (see Figure 15). After her lament ends the conversation starts up again, providing explanations about the

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\(^{61}\) Jakarta, the national capital, is located on the island of Java and, as part of the metropolis Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depak, Tangerang, Bekasi) has a total population of over 23 million, making it the second largest metropolis in the world.
contents of the lament and further details about the family. Our evening ends roughly an hour later with the promise that we will return the next morning to record other laments. On our arrival the next day, Ompung Si Riana pulls me aside and asks that I pray fervently for her granddaughter, the one left motherless. She seems quite

Figure 15. The lamenter Ompung Si Riana during her lament for family living far from her village. Photo by the author. Lumban Nabolon, March 26, 2003.
anxious in her request, saying that she has spent a troubled night, fearing that because of her lamenting for the granddaughter, some suffering or misfortune will visit her. I assure her of my prayers and am moved by her seemingly very genuine concern for her granddaughter’s safety. It brings to mind other conversations I’d had about the power of laments to affect the lives (fortunes) of those living in close proximity to, and at some distance from, the lamenter. Specifically, I am reminded of a conversation I’d had with a member of the gondang music group Dame Nauli (Beautiful Peace) with whom I had been playing with during my research. I had been studying traditional instrumental music with the group’s leader, Kalabius Simbolon, focusing my study on instrumental laments while working on developing my playing technique on several instruments. On one occasion, Amang Sitindaun, a sarune bolon player in his late 60s, and I were discussing Toba Batak instrumental laments. Our conversation centered on the playing of the sordam, an edge-blown vertical bamboo flute that had nearly passed out of use, being replaced in the present day by the transverse bamboo flute known as the suling or seruling. The sordam was frequently used in the performance of instrumental laments (the playing of which mimicked the sound of a lamenting woman’s voice) which, according to Amang Sitindaun, was used to call out to those loved ones who were far off. He told me that, for example, if a person had a child who had out-migrated to Jakarta or Surabaya (on the island of Java) and the longing for that child was overwhelming for those remaining at home, they would have a sordam player express their longings through
the playing of the sordam, and that expression would speak to the heart of that child in order to call them home (p.c., March 17, 2003, Pematang Siantar). The affective power of this instrumental lament type (as well as that of Ompung Si Riana’s sung lament), with its perceived ability to impact the lives of those living far away, is one of several additional kinds of Toba Batak lament that are discussed later in this chapter.62

Affective Power of Lament on the Living – Cursing / Accusing

There are two additional types of Toba Batak funerary context laments that warrant discussion. Both of these lament types are focused particularly toward the living. The first of these I learned about through follow-up discussions with lamenters as I asked them to describe their perceptions of the HKBP church’s attitude regarding lamenting. As boru Panjaitan had mentioned during our visit, the connection between lamenting and hasipelebeguan (ancestor spirit worship) was frequently inferred, though usually, she said, the inference was on the part of those listening and not by the lamenters themselves. Most of the lamenters I spoke with felt strongly that there was no conflict between their practice of lamenting (despite its perceived connections to ancestor spirit veneration) and their practice of Christianity. As Ompung Si Riana expressed it, the two were not maralo (enemies, in conflict) as

62 A similar type of lament for the still-living-though-distant existed in the Baltic-Finnish region of Ingria and is described by Nenola-Kallio (1982) as a sub-genre of occasional lament known as a “recruit lament.” Such laments were “performed by the mother, wife, sister, or some other relation of a man or boy departing for military service” or “by a mother yearning for her son absent in war” (Nenola-Kallio 1982:205).
long as the lamenter did not use their lament as an opportunity to curse (TB: *mamurai*) or accuse another of some wrongdoing through their lament (p.c., March 27, 2003, Lumban Nabolon). Such hurtful, accusatory laments were sometimes referred to as *andung salik* (harsh, accusatory laments) and were believed to occur in situations where a lamenter was getting emotionally “carried away” in her lament, causing her to be vulnerable to the possibility of a spirit (TB: *begu*—in this case a malevolent spirit) possessing and speaking through her lament to or about another person. Such occurrences were rare, I was told, though they did occasionally happen. When they did occur, the results might potentially turn violent as the one accused (or cursed) might, in retaliation, lash out at the lamenter. It might also result in the accused being attacked by a family member of the injured (deceased) party as an act of vengeance.⁶³ To protect against such possibilities, those attending pre-funeral wakes would be vigilantly ready to “interfere” in a lament that was becoming too emotional either by insisting that the lamenter stop the lament or by countering the lament through the singing of a church hymn as a means of both taking control of the sonic space and altering the emotional tenor of the moment. According to Amang Sitindaun, the overriding concern was the maintenance of social harmony and communal homogeneity (p.c., March 17, 2003, Pematang Siantar).

⁶³ In my conversation with Amang Sitindaun concerning *andung salik* he mentioned an article that had appeared in the local newspaper, Suara Indonesia Baru (SIB) some months previous which described how a suspect in a foul-play death had been named through just such an accusatory lament. Though I attempted to locate the article, I was unable to do so (p.c., March 17, 2003, Pematang Siantar).
Affective Power of Lament on the Living – Making Needs Known

The other situation where funerary laments are used to address the living is one in which the lamenting woman indirectly speaks to the male relatives of her deceased husband’s family, letting them know what her expectations of them are regarding her future and that of her children now that her husband / provider is no longer living. Through her “poor fate” lament (TB: *andung parsorion*), sung during a pre-funeral wake, she can express, in a public setting, details concerning the hopes and plans for the future education of their children, her own economic needs for food and finance, etc. which have now been threatened due to the loss of her husband. Although her lament might be addressed directly toward her husband, she knows that his male relations are there listening intently and she can use the situation to, indirectly, express her concerns and expectations to them (and others gathered there). Because laments are highly valued as an aesthetic expression and as a means of honoring the deceased, the lamenter, in this context, has the full attention of her audience and is in a position of power (with regard to her voice, her words) that is otherwise seldom available to a woman in Toba Batak society, where customary laws (especially with regard to inheritance) are strongly biased in favor of males.

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64 See, for example, the entry (pg. 82) on Toba Batak laments in: *Pemetaan Tradisi Lisan di Sumatera Utara* (The Mapping of Oral Traditions in North Sumatra). Dr Robert Sibarani, ed., published by Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan, Medan, 1999.
65 This is similar to what Marina Roseman (1993) describes in Malaysian Temiar healing rituals, where the male role of gentle-spoken spirit medium is countered by that of his wife acting as a critical haranguer. Her loud, vocal harangues representing “things that ordinarily don’t fit in, inappropriate behavior made appropriate through stylized presentation” (Roseman, 1993: 78). The theme of gender and power is further explored in Jill Dubisch’s edited volume, *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*.
Situating Lament

Origins of Toba Batak Lament

In this section I begin by introducing a number of legends or folk stories (TB: *turiturian*) that relate to the origins and development of lament and particularly the lament vocabulary in Toba Batak society. Among the stories I encountered during my field research are those that describe the origins of lament singing, those that describe the creation of the lament lexicon (TB: *hata andung*), as well as those that describe supernatural events associated with lament. Most of these folk stories exist as part of an oral tradition of legends and folk histories (TB: *turiturian*) though a few have been collected and published, most often by Toba Batak folklorists and educators. One tale which was frequently referenced in interviews is recounted in the book *Filsafat Batak: Tentang Kebiasaan-kebiasaan Adat Istiadat* (Batak Philosophy: Regarding Adat-related Traditions / Customs), written by educator and Toba Batak folklorist T. M. Sihombing, Op. Marhulalan, and published in 1986. In his account of the origins of lament singing in Toba Batak society, Sihombing states that his information comes by way of a very elderly person. (BI: *seorang tua-tua*) (Sihombing 1986). Anna Caraveli (1986) describes the power position of women lamenters in patriarchal societies, stating: “It is through the active voices of lament performers that creative strategies develop and are handed down traditionally, transforming laments into instruments of protest and social commentary. Thus, while they are engendered by the occasion of death, laments become instruments for voicing the concerns of the living” (Caraveli, 1986:171).

“In earlier times there was a king who, as the time of his death drew near, gave instructions to his family, ‘When I die, don’t merely weep for me, but when you weep also tell of my deeds – those deeds which have made me famous in the land.’

Upon the king’s death, then, his wife, his male and female children, his extended family and all those close to him gathered to weep at his passing. For that purpose they gathered together and discussed the deeds of his life. At the same time all of the king’s belongings – his weapons of war and tools for hunting – were brought out of their storage place and put on display. As the people looked over the vast array of items they asked his wife – she who was closest to the king and who had always faithfully served him – which things the king had used during his life. With great interest and enthusiasm they would ask her: ‘On dung?’ (meaning: ‘And this one, was this one used by the king?’) Then they would point to another item and ask: ‘An dung?’ (meaning: ‘And that one?’) In this way the questions continued, over and
over: ‘On dung? An dung?’ And because these words were so often repeated, it happened that when a king died and was mourned over, the term ‘ondung-andung’ was coined as a way to describe it. Over the passage of time, the sound ‘o’ in the word ‘ondung’ was changed to the sound ‘a’ so that the expression became ‘andung-andung’. The verb form of the expression is ‘mangandung’. From that time onward has existed the tradition to ‘mangandungi’ a person who has died as a way to express feelings of grief and also to tell about their deeds – both the good and the bad.”

Sihombing continues by stating clearly that lamenting in Toba Batak society has been, from early on (though he does not give a specific date), regarded as an important part of keeping adat custom / practice. A person who does not want to, or does not know how to, lament their parents at their dying is referred to as a person who does not know adat (TB: na so maradat), a strongly negative expression which hints at being uneducated, without a sense of etiquette, and uncivilized. Sihombing distinguishes between lamenting (TB: mangandungi) and crying (TB: manangisi) by stating the maxim: “Dakdanak do sitatangisan, natuatua siandungan.” (“Children are to be wept over, elders are to be lamented). Here, the term ‘elders’ (natuatua) refers to those who are married and with children (Sihombing 1986:123).

Sihombing’s perception of what characterizes lament moves beyond the boundaries of language and even music when he states:

“And the expression ‘mangandung’ also entered the world of Batak art at that time and the Batak people no longer only pay attention to the words but to the feeling of sorrow and the story of what that person did both before and after they had left. Also to notice the posture of the ‘mangandung’ performer, and the way her nose is always dripping and the breathing that is fast (it is known at that time the people were not familiar with nose drops) which must harmonize with the tears that are shed.” (Sihombing 1986:124)
Finally, ‘lamenting’ became one of the arts of the Batak of former times and people didn’t only give their attention to, and evaluate, the words conveyed in the process of expressing grief through their telling of the character and deeds of the one deceased – they also considered the body movements / posturing of the lamenter. Also, the way in which the lamenter ‘took care of’ / ‘made use of’ their nose, which was always wet, was given attention / evaluated by those observing the lament, and also the sniffing sounds the lamenter made with their nose – when they had to sniff the liquid back up inside (understandable in the days before handkerchiefs) – it had to be done in a harmonious fashion along with their weeping / sobbing.

Sihombing’s recounting of the origin story focuses particularly on the situation surrounding the beginnings of lament singing in Toba Batak society.

**Origins of the Lament Language (Hata Andung)**

An early published story, this one collected by Arsenius Lumbantobing, an educator and author of school textbooks, focuses particularly on the origins of the language of lament (TB: *hata andung*), the specialized lexicon that lamenters draw upon in the creation of a lament. The story, titled *Si Adji Donda Hatahoetan dohot Pangulubalang* (The Magic Staff of Hatahoetan and the Guardian Statue) was published by Lumbantobing in 1920. An abbreviated version of the text and translation follows:

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"'Gantung ma na sabitis, mambal na sabotohon,
Hata ni toeri-toerian, pagodang-godang dohonon'

Asa adong ma na sai ingan, sahalak na margoar Pambabar na Soemoeroeng, pande na loemobi, noenga leleng nasida doeng marbagas, laos so hea do toeboean poso-poso djolmana. Doeng i sian arsak ni rohana, didok ma toe djolmana i: "Oe ale inang, boroe ni radjanami, porsondoek bolon! Dia na ma pangalahona, taringot toe portondionta on? Djoemolo pinggol toeboe, djoloan tandoek magodang; soeda dongantorbangta toeboe, noenga mordoea goar. Geha ma hita on, songon hoenik na halaosan, songon siboengkoek tanggoeroeng, na so olo morhasoan. Oea taalapi ma datoe, asa disoerirang djolo manang na songon dia do portondionta."

Doeng i didok djolmana i ma mangaloesi: "Ba molo i ma, nimmoe, ale radjanami, si anak namboreo, ba taalapi: ai ahoe pe, toeng mansai marsak do rohangkoe soemarihon na soada i anakkonta", ninna.
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Long ago there was a man named Pambarbar na Sumurung. He was a skilled craftsman. Although he had been married for quite some time, he and his wife did not yet have any children. One day, the man approached his wife and, feeling very distraught at their childlessness, said to her: “O my wife, what can be the reason we find ourselves in this situation? All of my friends already have children of their own – what can be our problem? This is like an ache that won’t be calmed, like an itch that can’t be scratched. Why don’t we call a datu [spirit medium] to discover what is the cause of our situation and how we might overcome it?”

Then his wife answered him saying: “If that is your intention then I agree. My heart, too, is sad because we do not yet have a child.”

So, they called a datu and shortly thereafter he came to them in order to discover what was behind their condition. Finally the datu made his pronouncement: “O Pambarbar na Sumurung the time has now come for you to have descendants of your own. But here is what you must do—you must change the carved naga-naga ornament on the front of your house. Once you have done this you will have your descendants,” he said.

Lumbantobing continues the story stating that Pambarbar na Sumurung went into the forest looking for the wood he would carve into the new naga-naga, as ordered by the datu. He searched diligently for the right piece of wood but was unsuccessful. Finally, he was approached by a bird, which could speak and which directed him to the wood he was looking for. Pambarbar na Sumurung cut down the tree but, for some reason, was unable to bring the piece he needed back to his house. It remained stuck in the ground. No matter how hard he tried he could not remove it from the ground. In great disappointment he left it there in the forest and returned
home. Some time later there passed through the forest a group of women traveling to
a market in order to sell some ulos (sacred woven shawls) they had made. While on
their way they spied the tree branch stuck in the ground (in Lumbantobing’s story the
branch has been given the name Hau Jongjong Anian Hau Tibal Tudosan, which
translates as “standing wood which is left like an offering”). On seeing this branch
the women decorated it by wrapping their ulos around it. After admiring the way the
decorated tree branch looked the women moved to take back the ulos from the branch
but found that the ulos were stuck fast and could not be removed. Frustrated and
disappointed, the women left and returned home, telling their neighbors about what
had happened. Upon hearing the news from the women, Pambarbar na Sumurung
entered the forest and returned to the place where he’d left the branch. On his arrival
there he found instead a beautiful young woman to whom he gave the name Si Boru
Jongjong Anian Si Boru Tibal Tudosan Hau Jadi-jadian Hau Jadi Mamora (“standing
girl left like an offering made from precious / costly wood”). He brought the girl
back to his home and, with an adat ritual, made her his daughter. After his daughter
was grown to maturity she was a noted beauty in the land. Many young men came to
court her but she refused them all. Finally, one day a young man named Guru Satia
Bulan came to court her hand. She presented many challenges / tests to him but he
overcame them all. Having done so, he found favor in her eyes and he was permitted
to court her. Her father, Pambarbar (Sipataoar) na Sumurung, had one more task for
him to complete however, before he would agree to let his daughter be courted.
Lumbantobing’s account continues:
After this Portaoar na Sumurung spoke, saying: “If that is the case, my son, hear what I have to say to you now—there are many words used to describe something which cannot be spoken in any carefree manner by you (someone in your position / of your status). Hear me well so that you do not forget: Go and find / create words which will substitute for these unspeakable words and do not use the original words any longer. Use the newly created words from hence forth as a sign that you honor and respect me. Here are the words: head, hair, ear, eye, and all other words to describe the parts of the body. Then, grandfather, father, mother, wife, in-laws, and all other words used to describe familial relations. Then, ulos, clothing, gold, money, rice, salt, water, and all other words used to describe things. If you can create words to replace all these words you will surely become my son-in-law and my daughter will be yours. But, if you fail to fulfill this task of mine I will return to you all that you have given to us, and you must go and find another young woman to be your partner,” he said.

The story continues, stating that Guru Satia Bulan set out to fulfill the task he had been given by the father of Si Boru Jongjong Anian. He found the task to be a daunting one and was very discouraged. Finally, sitting alone and weeping, he was approached by an old woman who asked him why he wept. After explaining to her his seeming impossible task, she replied: “There’s no need to weep over such an easy task. These are the words you should speak to Portaoar (Pambarbar) na Sumurung….” And she spoke to him the list of words he had been questing for.
After some time he returned to the home of Si Portaoar (Pambarbar) na Sumurung.

The story continues as Guru Satia Bulan meets up with Si Portaoar:

“Djadi didok Goeroe Satia Bulan ma mangaloesi: ‘Na maol do i nian patoepaon, soede na nidokmoena i, ale toelang natoeatoea; alai asal ma saoet boroemoena i di iba, ba hahoean, nioloan, nama pasilihon soede goar na nidokmoena i. Antong tangihon hamoema, asa hoepadjodjor!’” ninna.

Doeng i dipadjodjor ma antong songon on:

Translation: Then Guru Satia Bulan spoke to him (Pambarbar na Sumurung) saying: “This is a very difficult task for me—that which you charge me with, my uncle (elder)—but if your daughter becomes mine I will not refuse your request and I will carry it out—I will now explain / give the new words for the words you gave me. So, listen now, I will explain them!” he said.

Then he explained them in the following way: (The English translation of the *hata andung* is attached)

\[
\begin{align*}
oeloe &= \text{simadjoenjoeng} \quad \text{[head]} \\
ooboek &= \text{sitaroepon} \quad \text{[hair]} \\
pinggol &= \text{simanangi} \quad \text{[ear]} \\
mata &= \text{simalolong} \quad \text{[eye]} \\
pamangan &= \text{simangkoedap} \quad \text{[mouth]} \\
abara &= \text{porsitangkongon} \quad \text{[shoulder]} \\
mangompa &= \text{morsitangkingon} \quad \text{[carry on the shoulder]} \\
soesoe &= \text{sitairon} \quad \text{[breast]} \\
tangan &= \text{simangido} / \text{simanginon} \quad \text{[hand]} \\
boetoeha &= \text{sioebeon} \quad \text{[stomach / womb]} \\
pat &= \text{simandjodjak} \quad \text{[foot]} \\
porhohom &= \text{posoara igilon}. \quad \text{[quiet / subdued]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Doeng i: [Following that:]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hinamoelian, na nioli} &= \text{siadopan} \quad \text{[spouse / life partner]} \\
\text{ompoe / pahompoe} &= \text{sisoebaon} \quad \text{[grandparent / grandchild]} \\
\text{ama} &= \text{na soemoen} \quad \text{[father]} \\
\text{ina} &= \text{na mangintoeboe (ia baoa mandok)} \quad \text{[mother – if spoken by male]} \\
\text{ina} &= \text{na oembeoe (ia boroe-boroe mandok)} \quad \text{[mother – if spoken by female]} \\
\text{anak} &= \text{sinoean toenas} \quad \text{[male child]} \\
\text{boroe} &= \text{sinoeoboe} \quad \text{[female child]} \\
\text{toelang / nantoelang / bere} &= \text{sibidjaon} \quad \text{[uncle, aunt, nephew]} \\
\text{amang boroe / namboroe} &= \text{sioenoebane / siloembane} \quad \text{[male / female cousin]} \\
\text{lae / eda} &= \text{silansapen} \quad \text{[brother-in-law / sister-in-law]} \\
\end{align*}
\]
haha / anggi = siadosan / sialosan [older / younger siblings]
iboto = ibot [sister / brother – across sexes]
ibotona = sitoean ni ibotna [their sister / brother – across sexes]
ibotongkoe = pinaribothoe [my sister / brother – across sexes]
simatoea baoa = amang na oembalos [father-in-law]
simatoea boroe = inang na oembalos [mother-in-law]
hela = amang na binalos [son-in-law]
paroemaen = inang na binalos [daughter-in-law]

Doeng i: [Following this:]
oelos = siteboeron [ulos – woven shawl with ritual / sacred meaning]
badjoe = saem sipoholon [clothing]
mas = sigoemorsing [gold]
hepeng / ringgit = sihoemisik [money / coins]
eme / indahan = paiogon [rice]
sira = siloemangsaidjoer [betel leaf]
aek = aek siloemanlan [water]
dengke = oerat ni hapongkion [fish]
soloe = sirinsiron / sieroeminsir [dugout canoe]
hole = hole siboeoengbira [canoe paddle]
roema / djaboe / bagas = isian ni agalangon [house]
sopo = isian ni hatoengkolon [ritual / ceremonial house]
api = sigoemorgor / sihoemilas [fire]
horbo = siloematahon [water buffaloes]
hoda = sidjoemambe ihoer [horse]
lomboe = silomlom di robean [cow]
babi = simomangkat ni namboer [pig]
asoe / biang = siteoeon [dog]
hatoban = haloeng ni na maoeli boeloeng [slave / servant]
haoema = tonga ni lobangon [field / rice field]
tahoe-tahoe = siantoek na ris [ladle]
napoeran = siroemata boeloeng na opat sada haroboeran [betel chew preparation]
mornapoeran = morsiroemata boeloeng [to chew betel]
doehoet-doehoe = siloemoehoet [grass(es)]
bodil = sitenggar ni banoea [firearm / musket]
hoedoer / giringan / raoet / piso (dohot na soeman toe si) = siroemantos [knife]
tonoen = sitipahon [weaving (noun)]
mortonoen = morsitipahon [to weave]
manoek = simorhoeroek [chicken]
bagot = siloemambe hodong [enau palm (Arenga pinnata)]
toeak = hoea ni siloemambe hodong [palm wine]
haoe = sinaiton [wood]
dolok = dolok simanaboen [mountain]
lombang = lombang siroereoson [valley / ravine]
boeloe = sitioelison [bamboo]
onan = onan porsinggoeran / nantiga porsaoran [open market]
halang oeloe = porpidoan [head rest / pillow]
hoendoel = morsidjoe-goehon [sit]
na soesa (so morhasoan) = hoendoel poeal-poealon / tindjang panalaloone [unrest]
anak sasada na mate = songon sagak di panabian [death of only child]
anak sasada = songon halak-kalak na tarpoendjoeng / songon tandiang na
hapoeoan [an only child / son]
tali = sipoedoron [rope / cord]
hatoropan = mangadjana [many people / crowd]
halak dongan sahordja = simardoeng ni boeloenta [work partner / colleague]
mornonang = morsimangkoedap [speak together / conversation]
mangkatai dohot dongan sahordja = morsimangkoedaphon simardoeng ni boeloenta
[to talk with work companions]
leleng = maoedja matoga [long (time)]
hoeta = tonga ni asean [village]
halak = simardoeng [person / people]
sada halak = sada simardoeng [a person]
doea halak = doea simardoeng [two people]
borngin = sihabornginan [night]
arian = siharianan [day]
porsoro ni ari = loebang-loebang panarean / talaga pandoedoeran [ill luck / poor fate]
soeroet pangabahan = maetek panagoean [to suffer loss]
aek pangabahan = magodang panagoean [to experience gain]
sahit = siaginon [sick / ill]
tanoman = sitoemandok / sitoemalin [grave]
lagoe = palilung [song (though not necessarily sung)]
hamatean = padang siloengoenon [death]
mate = maroboer [to die]

Doeng sidoeng dipadjodjor Goeroe Satia Bulan i saloehoetna, didok ma toe simatoea
na i: 'Paborhat ma hami dohot boroem, ale toelang, asa laho hami to loemban nami,'
ninna.

Translation: After he had finished explaining the new words he said to his father-in-
law: ‘I now take my leave, together with your daughter, O my uncle (elder). We
return to my village together,” he said. (Excerpted from Loembantobing, Arsenius.
1920. *Si Adji Donda Hatahoetan dohot Pangoeloebalang*. Weltevreden: Com. Balai-
Poestaka.)

This story, transcribed by Lumbantobing, represents one of the earliest
published accountings of the origins of the Toba Batak lament lexicon. In addition to
Lumbantobing’s listing of *hata andung* vocabulary, one of the most important published collections of *hata andung* words is found in J. M. Hariara’s *Hata Batak Maninggoring: Bagian Rangsa ni Andung dohot Hadatuon* (Batak Language Dictionary: Covering Explanations of Lament Words and Divination Words) published by Balai Pustaka in 1987. Hariara lists some 330 *hata andung* words along with definitions and derivations.\(^\text{66}\) Beyond the *Aji Donda* story recounted above, other such stories (TB: *turiturian*) speak more to the way that lament singing was, in some way, connected to some type of supernatural activity. In most of the examples of such stories I heard during my field research, lamenting was not necessarily the direct cause of the supernatural phenomenon that followed but it did play an indirect role in the unfolding of events. One example of this type of story I heard during an interview with the lamenter Ibu boru Panjaitan in February of 2003. The story, recounted by Bapak Nababan (in whose home we were meeting), is a part of a larger collection of stories that exist in oral tradition related to the birth and early childhood of the first Sisingamangaraja, the legendary Toba Batak priest-king. This particular story takes place prior to the birth of Sisingamangaraja. As Bapak Nababan told it, the story concerns the mother of the first Sisingamangaraja who was left to care for the home as her husband had temporarily migrated out of the area to do some trading. One day she went into the forest in search of firewood. As she was searching she was singing a lament. The type of lament she sang was an *andung*

\(^\text{66}\) In his dissertation, published online, philologist Uli Kozok makes reference to some 500 *hata andung* terms gleaned from various archival sources in Europe and in Indonesia. It is not clear, however, what percentage of these terms remain in use in the present day (Kozok, 2000: section b., 51).
parsoban (a wood gatherer’s lament). These laments are frequently addressed to a deceased family member (e.g. mother, father, grandparent) and express the hard circumstances of the lamenter. According to the story, on this particular occasion the lament sung by the mother of the first Sisingamangaraja caused a spring to spontaneously erupt from the ground and flow through her village of Bakara on the shore of Lake Toba (see Figure 12) where no spring had previously existed. It is not clear from the story whether a supernatural force caused the spring to erupt specifically because of the lament, although this is implied in the tale, and the implication is reinforced by the association of lamenting with the flow of tears as well as mucus.

**Another Origin Story – Palm Wine Tapper’s Lament (Andung Paragat)**

Similar stories describe how laments were the cause of natural springs erupting from the ground, the cause of rainfall on the fields, or, as in the case of andung paragat (the palm wine tapper’s lament), the flow of sap (TB: aek bagot) from the sugar palm (Arenga pinnata) which is then collected for producing palm wine (TB: tuak). This particular lament practice (andung paragat) is one of the few Batak lament types predominantly sung by men, and is connected to a turiturian known as Puang Panak Boru Saboh (The Beloved Daughter of Saboh). The source of this legend is said to be from the Simalungun Batak area bordering on the northeast of the Toba region (see Figure 12). My conversations with Toba Batak lamenters, however, indicate that the legend is known in the Toba Batak region and has been

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67 This, as well as other genre of Toba Batak lament, will be discussed in further detail below in the section on lament classification.
incorporated into Toba lore. The story\textsuperscript{68} concerns a brother and sister who are orphaned and whose parents have left them with considerable debt and a steep interest, which the two were unable to pay back. Finally, the sister – the younger of the two – told her brother that he needed to bury her in the ground up to her waist. She had had a dream which revealed to her that if this were done then a miracle would occur which would enable them to repay their debt. The older brother at first refused but after continued pleading by the sister eventually agreed to carry out her wishes. After seven days the brother returned to the area where he had buried her to discover that her body had changed and she had become a sugar palm tree. Her feet had become roots, her hair had become the black fibrous covering of the trunk (TB: \textit{ijuk}), her body had become the trunk, her shoulders had become the mature fronds, her left hand and arm became the mature fruits, and her breasts and right arm had become the new fronds and fruit buds. From these buds flows the palm sap – which, in the legend, represents breast milk. (The Toba Batak word for the sugar palm is \textit{bagot}, the same word that is used for ‘breast’.) The younger sister then told her brother to take the sap / milk which she produced and make it into palm wine which he could sell in order to pay off their remaining debt. The brother was filled with grief and remorse as he began to collect the sap (a process which involves binding the fruit buds tightly near the tip and cutting the tip with a knife (TB: \textit{agat}—from which derives the name \textit{andung paragat}) so the sap can flow. Also, the brother began to

\textsuperscript{68} My source for this version of the story comes from the unpublished undergraduate thesis research on Simalungun Batak palm wine tapper’s laments undertaken by Kepler Manik in 2002, as part of his final project in ethnomusicology at the University of North Sumatra, Medan.
beat the trunk of the tree repeatedly so that the trunk would release its sap. As he did these things he danced (TB: manortor) and lamented as he went about his task. And each day he returned and lamented before the tree so that the sap would flow in great abundance. Over time he collected and sold enough palm wine to release himself from debt (translated from Manik, K. 2002:4-5).

In the present day, though many palm wine tappers in the Toba region are familiar with this legend, there are few who continue the tradition of lamenting as a part of the process of collecting the sugar palm sap for making tuak. In my discussions with lamenters about this legend I was told that it is mainly the older men who know how to do this lamenting and that it was a practice they followed in the days of their youth. Now many are too old to continue this labor-intensive tapping process and they have therefore not transmitted the andung paragat lament practice to the present generation of palm wine tappers. Instead, I was told, many present day palm wine tappers will put on old, worn-out clothing in order to give the appearance of abject poverty while they go about the process of collecting the sap. The intention behind the use of old clothes and the appearance of poverty was to elicit sympathy from the palm in the form of flowing tears or milk (sap) in order to collect the sap and produce the tuak. Although the singing of andung paragat has significantly faded in the past generation or two of palm wine tappers, perceptions about the supernatural aspects of palm wine tapping and tappers persists. Several times while discussing andung paragat I was told that if a palm wine tapper refused to share a cup of his palm wine with a person who requested earnestly, the person might retaliate against
him by approaching the palm and cursing / scolding the tree while beating it about the trunk with an ulos (traditional woven shawl). Such an action would cause the palm to stop producing sap, thereby cutting off the palm wine tapper’s source of livelihood.

**Taxonomy of Toba Batak Lament Types**

While the particular focus of this dissertation is Toba Batak laments for the dead (TB: _andung tu ni namate_) sung in the context of pre-funeral wakes, not all Toba Batak laments are found in this context. As mentioned earlier, there are laments sung by wood gatherers, laments sung by palm wine tappers, laments sung by women working in the fields, as well as other types of lament.

**Modes of Lament Classification**

My field research indicates that lament types are divided principally by context (the setting in which the lament is sung / the activity which the lament accompanies), by content (the one to whom the lament is directed, i.e. the subject of the lament), and by intent (the function or purpose of a particular lament). Studies focusing on Toba Batak laments are few (Hutagalung 2001; Kozok 2002; Simanjuntak 1999; Simbolon 1990; Silaen 1990; and Hariara 1987). Among these studies, fewer still are concerned with establishing a taxonomy of lament types. One study with a particular focus on the various classifications of Toba Batak lament is that of Achirani boru Hutagalung (2001) who, for her undergraduate thesis (_skripsi sarjana_) in Ethnomusicology at the University of North Sumatra (USU) in Medan, wrote on the classification of Toba Batak lament types as revealed through fieldwork.
she conducted in Pintu Bosi, a village in the Laguboti regency of the Toba Samosir
district (see Figure 12).

**Ethno-Classification of Toba Batak Lament**

Through her research, Hutagalung identifies 10 types of lament in the Pintu
Bosi area. These ten types of lament form what Hutagalung calls an “ethno-
classification” (Hutagalung 2001:1) that is, a system of classification that arises from
the local society (BI: *masyarakat lokal*) of Pintu Bosi (ibid: 1). The ten types of
lament she identified include: *andung ni namate* (lament for the dead); *andung salik*
(accusatory lament); *andung parsoban* (wood gatherers lament); *andung ni doli-doli*
(young man’s lament)—this is often thought of as a love lament; *andung paragat*
(palm wine tapper’s lament); *andung parmahan* (shepherd’s lament); *andung tu
natua-tua na di ajal ni jolma* (lament for an older person who is close to the time of
their death); *andung parbabo* (field worker’s lament); *andung martonun* (weaver’s
lament); and *andung mangongkal holi* (secondary burial lament) (Hutagalung
2001:29-38). Hutagalung, thus, structures her classification lament types
predominantly by context (the activity / occupation of the lamenter at the time of
lamenting). The exception is found in those laments classed as *andung salik* which
are laments of intent, designed to permit the lamenter to publicly air grievances,
speak harshly, or directly accuse another through a lament. Hutagalung further points
out that, although the lament types she lists are predominantly associated with
particular kinds of labor (contexts), the content of the laments themselves may not
necessarily relate to the specific task by which the lament is named (ibid: 32). The
textual content of the various laments researched by Hutagalung was most commonly related to those who had previously died (*andung tu ni namate*). This was the case whether the lamenters themselves were engaged in collecting wood (*andung parsoban*), weaving ulos (*andung martonun*), or working in the fields (*andung parbabo*) at the time of their lamenting. This apparent disjunction between the lament context and the lament content suggests that there is a significant measure of flexibility in Toba Batak conceptualizations of lament types that are classed by context (i.e. type of labor) and those classifications connected to content or intent. In my conversations with lamenters responding to questions about types of laments and the content of those laments, it was made clear to me that a person might lament about any situation whatsoever if they feel burdened by circumstances, if they are heartsick about something, or if they are grieving. They can express this through a lament—any type of lament—regardless of the content of the lament or the context in which the lament takes place.

**Other Taxonomic Models**

Beyond the lament types documented by Hutagalung in Pintu Bosi, there are several additional types of laments that have appeared in other scholarly publications. One of the most thorough recent examinations of Batak laments is the dissertation of philologist Uli Kozok (2002) who currently teaches in the Department of Indo-Pacific Languages and Literatures at the University of Hawaii, Manoa. Kozok looks at lament traditions in all of the Batak sub-groups (Toba, Karo, Angkola, Simalungun,
Kozok’s examination of laments in oral tradition includes those of the Toba, Angkola and Mandailing Batak. His research highlights several larger classes of Toba Batak lament including death laments (Ger.: Totenklage; TB: andung ni namate), poor-fate laments (Ger.: Schicksalsklage; TB: andung parsorion), love laments (Ger.: Liebesklage; TB: andung ni doli-doli), and wedding laments (Ger.: Hochzeitsklage; TB: andung mangalebat / sanghalebat) (Kozok 2002:section b., 7-51). Kozok’s research is extensive and includes information relating to laments in the present day as well as the examination of Batak laments collected since the late 19th century, housed primarily in European archival collections.

Changes to Lament Practice

Although my research is focused particularly on Toba Batak death laments performed in the context of pre-funeral wakes, my general field of research inquiry was expansive enough to include information on all types of Toba Batak laments in the present day. Even so, I found no examples of the love laments or the wedding laments described by Kozok during my field research. Jepperson Silaen suggested, in his 1990 undergraduate thesis from the University of North Sumatra in Medan, that the wedding lament, sung by the bride-to-be to her family just prior to her marriage as an expression of sadness at leaving her village, family and friends, no longer exists in the present day (Silaen 1990:41). Current practice suggests that these traditional love

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69 Kozok focuses his research predominantly on the Karo Batak, with a rich and generations-long tradition of scribing laments on various bamboo containers.

70 Under the broader category of death laments Kozok includes a discussion palm-wine tapper’s laments (Ger.: Palmweinzapfer Klage) as a sub-class of death laments (ibid: 20 ff.).
and wedding laments have been replaced by a genre of regional pop lament (TB: *andung-andung*) that, although grounded in the structural form and instrumentation of western pop music, contains sufficient melodic, thematic, and textual materials to form a connection with traditional lament forms.  

**Situating Lament and the Protestant Church Historically**

The final portion of this section addresses the Protestant Church’s attitude toward lament in Toba Batak society from an historic perspective. Generally speaking, studies on lament traditions indicate that the historic position of the Church and State toward lament practices were, at best, ambivalent. More commonly however, the attitude and action was one of open hostility and repression toward lament and its practitioners. Historically speaking there is little documented evidence to indicate the Protestant Church’s specific position relative to lament in Toba Batak society. One early missionary statement regarding Toba Batak lament comes from Rheinishe Missionsgesellschaft (RMG) superintendent Johannes Warneck, writing in *The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism: The Experiences of a

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71 A commonly performed wedding pop lament is the song “*Borhat ma Dainang*” (Depart Now, My Daughter) composed by Sidik Sitompul during the 1930s. In present day weddings this song is sung following the official church ceremony and during the wedding feast, most commonly at the moment when the parents of the bride are wrapping the bride and groom in a ceremonial shawl (TB: *mangulosi*), marking their union as a newly married couple and their release of her as their daughter. Often the song is sung repeatedly as the parents, holding the ceremonial shawls in their hands, dance slowly around the bride and groom until such time as the bride and her parents have begun to weep openly as a public expression of their grief and loss at the parting their daughter through marriage.

Missionary in Animistic Heathendom (1909), an English translation of his Die Religion Der Batak (1909). In his description of laments he states:

“The spirits of the newly dead must be specially shunned; they are soothed by lamentations, which, in some cases, may spring from genuine grief, but which, for the most part, are recited from fear and custom. They are means employed to show the departed soul how dearly it was loved. The Battaks have a special dialect for lamentations sung at the grave. It differs from ordinary idiom in that the names of all things are paraphrased. That is manifestly caused less by poetic taste than by fear, fear lest the begu 73 may obtain power over the things and persons if called by their right names” (Warneck 1909:65-66).

Although Warneck’s description of Toba Batak laments for the dead is scant, it reveals his sense of a connection in Toba Batak society between lamenting and ancestor spirit beliefs, the perceived need to appease the spirits of the deceased through the performance of laments, and the fear that malevolent spirits may cause harm to the living if care is not taken to make use of a specialized register of language (i.e. hata andung) in lament practice. There is no specific mention in this publication of any church or mission prohibition against lamenting. Of the official church documents which mention the practice of lamenting, only the 1987 Ruhut Parmahanion dohot Paminsangon di Huria Kristen Batak Protestan – HKBP (Regulations for Discipleship and Discipline of the Batak Protestant Christian Church) specifically mentions lament. In this case, it mentions lament that takes place in the context of secondary burial rites (TB: mangonkal holi) stating that during secondary burial rites participants may not practice rites which have connections to ancestor spirit veneration (TB: hasipelebeguon). These rites include dancing with the

73 This term refers to the spirit of a deceased person, often (though not always) thought to be malevolent.
bones, offering food to the bones, lamenting over the bones, placing them in an ulos, ritual plate (TB: pinggan), or basket (TB: ampang), etc. (HKBP 1987:27). The indication from this prohibition is that, from the point of view of the HKBP leadership, the practice of lamenting is, to some degree, associated with ancestor spirit veneration and is not to be practiced by Toba Batak Protestant Christians. My examination of earlier publications of the HKBP’s Regulations for Discipleship and Discipline and similar doctrinal statements (1907, 1924, 1952, and 1982) make no mention of lamenting. What is often discussed in these regulatory statements is the necessity of avoiding practices with connections to ancestor spirit veneration (TB: hasipelebeguon) by Protestant Christians. In the context of funerary ritual the practice that is consistently mentioned is the playing of the gondang sabangunan (the traditional drum-chime ensemble of the Toba Batak) in conjunction with traditional dance (tortor) with the intention of worshipping ancestor spirits and making requests of blessing from them.74 Further discussion of the HKBP’s position on lament in the present day will follow in Chapter Eight.

Having discussed aspects of the origins of lament in Toba Batak society, the development of the lament lexicon, various ideas relating to a taxonomy of lament types in Toba Batak society as well as the HKBP Church’s historic position regarding lament, I turn now to a discussion of lament in performance, focusing on specific

74 For a detailed, historic discussion of the HKBP’s stance in regard to traditional music and dance (gondang sabangunan and tortor) see Mauly Purba’s 2005 article in Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, “From Conflict to Reconciliation: The Case of the Gondang Sabangunan in the Order of Discipline of the Toba Batak Protestant Church” (36: 207 – 233).
musicological and performative features present in Toba Batak laments for the dead performed in the context of pre-funeral wakes.

**Performing Lament**

In my analysis of Toba Batak funerary laments I focus my attention on particular musicological and performative features in the performance of laments that appear with marked regularity in the recordings made during my field research. These features, examined below, include discussions of melodic ambitus (the spectrum of melodic range utilized in lament melodies), the melodic shape / contour of laments, the contour of phrases within a lament, the use of melodic features such as a reciting tone, the rhythmic characteristics of laments (specific rhythmic patterns), cadential patterns / forms, as well as stylistic or performative features including the interplay of sung and spoken text, the use of kinesthetic gestures, and the inclusion of what have been termed “icons of crying” (Urban 1988:389) including falsetto vowels, cry breaks, ingressive breaths, and other signifiers of crying.

I begin by discussing the sources of the data collected, introducing the three lamenters focused on in this portion of the study. This is followed by a brief discussion of the typology of the laments collected and analyzed. Finally, the discussion moves to the examination of musicological and performative features themselves, as described above.

**Lament Sources and Data Collection**

The data I gathered for the purpose of examining the formal characteristics of Toba Batak lament melody and rhythm came from three lamenters whom I recorded
during my field research. All three women are widows and all three are noted for their skills in lamenting and their knowledge of the lament language (TB: hata andung). Two of the three women (the second and third) were introduced earlier in chapter six. What follows are brief introductions of all three lamenters as well as information concerning the contexts of our working together.

The Lamenters

The first of the three is A. boru Togatorop.75 She was 54 years of age at the time of our recording on January 6, 2003. Her village is Huta Parbagotan, a small hamlet situated near the village of Panombean where the recording was made (see Figure 12). She is a mother and grandmother and was married to a man from the Samosir clan (TB: marga) who died several years earlier at the age of 56. She informed me that she learned to lament by listening to her mother and grandmother practice the tradition in the course of daily life. I became acquainted with Ibu boru Togatorop through a visit to the HKBP church in Panombean several weeks prior to our recording session. I was accompanying my close friend and associate Pdt. W. F. Simamora who was scheduled to preach at that church on a particular Sunday. He had injured his back earlier in the week and I was going along to Panombean to be of assistance and to enjoy his company. Ibu boru Togatorop was an elder in the Panombean church and as Pdt. Simamora and I met together with the elders and the vicar prior to the start of the service, the conversation worked around to my research interests. At one point in the conversation someone mentioned that I should record

75 The term boru refers to a woman’s natal clan name – she is a boru / daughter of the Togatorop clan.
Ibu boru Togatorop, as she was a fine lamenter. Pdt. Simamora and I asked her whether she would be willing and, as she was, we set a date to return to the vicar’s house for the recording session.

The second of the three lamenters is Ompung Aria boru Panjaitan. She told me she had learned to lament from her mother and other women in the village where she grew up. When someone was lamenting, she would listen carefully and try to figure out what was being said. In this way her comprehension of and fluency with hata andung grew over time. She and her husband raised nine children (five of whom were married) in the village of Sipahutar near the town of Tarutung (see Figure 12). She was 57 years old at the time of our recording on February 6, 2003 and was currently living with relatives in the provincial capital of Medan. She had been widowed for six years prior to our meeting in Medan. We were introduced through her cousin who was living on the campus of the Theological College in Pematang Siantar where my family and I were based during my field research.

The third lamenter I met through a former student of mine, Pdt. boru Ujung, who is serving a parish of churches in the area around Lumban Nabolon village located near the town of Porsea (see Figure 12). The lamenter, Ompung Si Riana boru Sitorus, was 89 years old at the time of our recording on March 26 and 27, 2003. She lived in the hamlet of Sorsor Silobu (where she had been born and raised), situated near Lumban Nabolon. She was greatly admired for her knowledge of hata.

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76 The term Ompung – often abbreviated as Op. – is an honorific title given to grandparents and precedes the name of their firstborn grandchild. In this instance, the lamenter is the grandmother of Aria and is a daughter of the Panjaitan clan.
andung and her skill as a lamenter – a tradition she had learned as a child by listening to other women lament and had practiced throughout her long life. Her husband, long since deceased, was from the Hasibuan clan.

The Laments

The laments I recorded from each of these three women were varied in terms of subject matter. Most laments were related to death. Some were addressed to the deceased and named accordingly, including laments for mothers (TB: Andung tu Inong Pangintubu), laments for parents-in-law (TB: Andung tu Simatua) and laments for children (TB: Andung tu Anak na Mate). Other laments were also addressed to the deceased but named according to the one lamenting. Among these are included the widow’s lament (TB: Andung ni na Mabalu), and the lament of a youngest male child for his deceased parent (TB: Andung ni Anak Siampudan).

Not all of the laments I recorded were specifically addressed to the deceased. One example was a lament for grandchildren who were living in the national capital city, Jakarta, and for whom the lamenter felt a deep sense of longing since she had not seen them for many years. While not dealing specifically with death, this type of lament could be categorized together with the death laments under the broader heading of “laments of loss and separation”—whether lamenting a separation because of death or because of geographic distance and the passage of time. This is similar to Margaret Alexiou’s important study of Greek ritual laments (moirosologia), including laments for those who have died as well as those who have departed home for a distant land—a concept described by the Greek term Xenitiá (Alexiou 2002:118).
is also reflected in Elizabeth Tolbert’s discussion of Karelian (Finland) refugee laments which share many structural commonalities with Karelian funeral laments (itkuvirsi) (Tolbert 1994:184-186). Toba Batak lamenters I spoke with supported the concept of lament that included loss and separation not only to death but also because of out-migration from the homeland region. Finally, one lament I recorded dealt with a specific and immediate social concern. The family of Ompung Si Riana boru Sitorus urged her to perform a lament dealing with the local paper pulp and rayon industry, Indorayon, which is located in the Porsea area. Livestock death and human illness had been blamed on the effluent discharged by the industry into the local rivers and streams. For several years local citizens had protested the company’s seeming disregard for health and safety, though to little avail. At her family’s urging Ompung Si Riana boru Sitorus launched into a lament of social protest against Indorayon and the damages inflicted upon the local community and environment by the company. While this was the only example of a lament of social protest encountered during my field research, such laments bear witness to the flexibility of Toba Batak laments as well as their function and value as vehicles for performed complaint and protest in Toba Batak society.

**Musicological Features of Toba Batak Laments for the Dead**

As discussed above, the laments I collected during my field research were varied as to subject matter, addressee, and addresser. My analysis of musicological

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77 This concept is further supported (and reflected back) by the prevalence in Toba Batak pop laments (andung-andung) of texts relating to the nostalgic longing for the village homeland and lifeways by those who have migrated out of the region.
features such as ambitus (melodic range), melodic shape, phrase shape, the use of reciting tones, rhythmic patterns, and cadential forms, as well as the incorporation of stylistic features such as crying, the interplay between sung and spoken text, and the use of gesture, reveals significant stylistic and functional consistency in Toba Batak funerary laments.

In contrast to this, an analysis of similar musicological and stylistic features in the hymns commonly sung at pre-funeral wakes (to be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven) reveals noticeably less stylistic consistency among the hymns, instead showing a wide range of variation regarding many of the above-mentioned musicological and stylistic features. When comparing the musicological and stylistic features of laments with the same features in funerary hymns, there appear to be significant similarities (or points of contact) between them. I propose that these similarities play a role in hymn-choice consideration and the aesthetic appeal of particular hymns for Toba Batak Protestants in funerary contexts. A discussion of musicological features in laments follows, and a similar examination of musicological features of funerary hymns is found in Chapter Seven. A comparative discussion of funerary laments and hymns, highlighting similarities in the musicological features of laments and hymns, appears in Chapter Eight.

Musical Ambitus in Laments

The five examples from laments that appear below are excerpts from field recordings made of the three lamenters mentioned above. Examples 1 and 2 are of
the first lamenter, Ibu boru Togatorop. Examples 3 and 4 are of the second lamenter, Ibu boru Panjaitan, and Example 5 is of the lamenter Ompung Si Riana boru Sitorus. As part of my examination of particular musicological features in the lament examples, I made note of the ambitus (the pitch range) of each example to determine the range of variation that presented among them. The ambitus of each of the five lament examples, shown below, is between a 3\textsuperscript{rd} (the narrowest, Examples 3 and 4) and a 5\textsuperscript{th} (the widest, Example 5). My determination of these intervals is based on my listening to, and transcription of, the recordings made of the three lamenters. As such, the resultant determinations of melodic range are approximate.

The pitch range of each example is as follows:

Example 1 = melodic range of a 4\textsuperscript{th}
Example 2 = melodic range of a 4\textsuperscript{th}
Example 3 = melodic range of a 3\textsuperscript{rd}
Example 4 = melodic range of a 3\textsuperscript{rd}
Example 5 = melodic range of a 5\textsuperscript{th}.

These ranges are representative of other laments recorded during my field research (though not presented here), and suggest that the normative ambitus for Toba Batak laments is narrow, lying within the range of a 5\textsuperscript{th}.

**Melodic Shape in Laments**

The melodic shape of the lament examples shows minimal modulation in the melodic line contour, as singers make significant use of repeated pitches (discussed below). Where ascending or descending movement occurs, it is predominantly
conjunct, moving step-wise, and rarely more than two notes in any one direction.

This is evident in the following example (Figure 16) taken from the beginning moments of a lament for a deceased mother (TB: *Andung tu Inong Pangintubu*). This transcription is from Lament Example 3, performed by Ibu br. Panjaitan.

**Figure 16. Lament Example 3, showing the melodic shape of lament.**
Phrase Contour and the Use of Reciting Pitches in Laments

Laments commonly make use of antecedent and consequent phrases. In the examples below (Figure 17), these antecedent / consequent phrase patterns are indicated as ‘A’ and ‘B’ respectively, and are demarcated within brackets.

Figure 17. Antecedent and consequent phrase contours in three lament examples.

The antecedent and consequent phrases are similar in contour, with the consequent phrase typically being pitched a step below the antecedent. Often antecedent phrases begin with an ascending step or a leap of a 3rd. This initial melodic movement corresponds to the lamenter singing (“calling out”) the name of the one to whom the lament is addressed. This can be seen in the examples below (Figure 18), showing...
the initial moments of laments for a deceased mother (Example 1) and a deceased husband (Example 2).

Figure 18. Initial phrases of two lament examples, showing characteristic melodic movement.

Both antecedent and consequent phrases make use of repeated pitches that appear to function in a manner similar the use of a reciting tone in certain chant traditions. These reciting pitches are indicated in the examples as stemless notes set within parentheses. The endings of both antecedent and consequent phrases often employ a lower neighbor tone prior to the final tone of the phrase. This lower neighbor tone is then, in the cadential patterns of consequent phrases (discussed below), extended melismatically and sung over the final vowel from that line of text (often the vowel /i/). This is shown in the following two examples from Lament

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Example 1 below (Figure 19). The cadential pattern seen in the upper example is realized in the transcription of the ending of the lament shown in the lower example.

Figure 19. Phrase ending example showing cadential pattern—two iterations.

Rhythmic Features in Laments

As mentioned earlier in chapter six, the predominant rhythmic device found in Toba Batak laments (and visible in these examples) is the use of an iambic rhythmic stress (a short – long or unstressed – stressed syllabic pattern) in the presentation of lament texts. In the examples provided (Figure 20), I have notated this feature using a sixteenth note followed by an eighth note pattern. This is clearly visible in the beginning portions of Examples 1 and 3.
Figure 20. Rhythmic patterning common in Toba Batak laments for the dead.

While this iambic rhythm is not the only rhythmic pattern appearing in laments (there are phrases which use a steady, even rhythm such as the rhythm at the beginning of Example 4 shown below—Figure 21), the predominance of the iambic rhythm strongly suggests the possibility that this rhythmic feature is a normative feature in the creation of Toba Batak laments for the dead.
This idea was further confirmed for me through conversations with Pdt. Simamora, my primary research colleague, as well as through discussions with my Toba Batak music instructor, Kalabius (Sampeltek) Simbolon, with whom I studied instrumental laments that form part of the repertoire of Opera Batak (a form of traveling musical theater production popular in North Sumatra from the 1950s through the 1970s).78

As part of his explanation of rhythm features in instrumental laments, Simbolon demonstrated, both vocally and instrumentally (using the single-reed aerophone, sarune etek), rhythmic patterns making prominent use of the sixteenth – eighth note iambic pattern described above. Simbolon’s hypothesis concerning rhythmic similarities between vocal and instrumental laments was connected to his

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understanding that the vocal lament tradition preceded that of instrumental laments (with instrumental laments being modeled after the vocal practice). 79

**Cadential Patterns in Laments**

Cadential material with respect to phrase endings has been mentioned above. These passages occur most commonly at the end of a strophe as well as at the end of the lament. As mentioned earlier, the final vowel is almost always the vowel / i /, as in: “simangarudok i” (a hata andung term for “body”) and “di pudi-pudianmi” (a hata andung expression meaning “your ending / death”), both of which appear in Example 2, shown below (Figure 22).

**Figure 22. Three examples of cadential ending patterns from Lament Example 2.**

![Figure 22](image-url)

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These cadential patterns are followed, in this case, by another type of ending marker common in Toba Batak laments – a high falsetto cry which glides sharply upward and then slowly descends. This type of high falsetto cry represents one of several distinctive stylistic features that were consistently present in examples of laments recorded during my field research. Many of these features are linked to expressions of grief and sadness and may include sobbing, wailing, loud ingressive breaths, sighs, and the audible sniffle of a wet nose – features which ethnomusicologist Elizabeth Tolbert, writing on the lament practices of Karelian (Finland) women describes as “performative elaborations and stylizations of natural crying” (Tolbert 1994:180). In Toba Batak laments such stylistic features appear to function in several ways within a lament: structurally they serve to mark the end of a section in the lament as the lamenter completes an idea or finishes a portion of the larger message being expressed through the lament. Because Toba Batak laments are spontaneously composed, lamenters may use crying breaks, voiced inhalations, the wiping of a runny nose and other sounds and behaviors associated with crying as a way of mentally “composing” in preparation for the upcoming strophe as the lament proceeds. I suggest this possible function based on my observations of lamenters as well as on discussions with Toba Batak colleagues regarding the stylistic features in
lament. I was not able, however, to get independent confirmation of this directly from a lamenter. Further, such “icons of crying” (Urban 1988:389) fulfill an important function in laments in that they signal a release of emotions connected with grief or feelings of sadness. This release, conveyed through the stylized crying, is both visible and audible to those who are present with the lamenter, and may serve to trigger the release of tears and other expressions of sadness on the part of those who are listening to the lament.

**Shifts Between Spoken and Sung Text in Laments**

One other stylistic feature that appears in Toba Batak laments is the use of spoken phrases of text intermingled with the sung phrases of the lament. This was described earlier in chapter six but bears restating here. In lament examples 3 and 4 the lamenter makes frequent use of speech in her lament. When so doing, she addresses the one being lamented in a manner that is sometimes relaxed and conversational while at other times seems quite stridently insistent. In Example 3, a lament for her mother, she repeats the phrase “Alusi jo ahu, Inong” (“Answer me, Mother”) on several occasions throughout the lament. In Example 4, a lament for her husband, the lamenter alternates sung portions of the lament with spoken fragments that are directed at her deceased husband. The tenor of her voice and the meaning of her words might best be described as impatient, exasperated, or reluctantly resigned. In the moment immediately following what is shown in the musical transcription below (Figure 23), she ends her lament with a shift to spoken text, saying, “Ai nunga loja be ate. Loja ei bah! Ai jorong mangapuli be. Nunga sae be. Nunga be. Nunga
I’m tired now. Tired out! I don’t receive any consolation. That’s it. It’s finished.

You’ve left us. You’re dead and we can’t see you. It’s finished.”

Figure 23. The ending of Lament Example 4, showing the shift from sung to spoken lament.

What is particularly noteworthy (and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight) is that throughout the lament her words (both sung and spoken) are not in the third person (that is, \textit{about} her husband) but rather are in the second person—they are addressed \textit{to} her husband directly, as though in a conversation with him.

This particular aspect of the nature of Toba Batak laments for the dead—this second person directionality—is significant in that it reveals something of the perceived connections between the living and the dead and the ways in which laments might serve to facilitate those connections, thereby reinforcing such perceptions. It is this perception which has raised (and continues to raise) questions and concerns for many Protestant Toba Batak (particularly those in positions of leadership in the Batak
Protestant Church) about the viability of Toba Batak laments as an acceptable means for expressing grief in funerary contexts and as a representative expression of Toba Batak socio-religious identity in the present day. Those voices which run counter to the idea of lament as an appropriate expression of grief have for a considerable length of time suggested the replacement of laments with Protestant hymns as a more fitting way for Christian Toba Batak to express grief and reaffirm communal solidarity and support. This suggestion and its resultant practice have, over time, given rise to the Toba Batak expression: *ganti andung, gabe ende* (replacing laments, becoming hymns), an expression which serves as a grounding trope for this dissertation. In the chapter that follows I look closely at Protestant hymns in the Toba Batak Christian community, particularly those hymns that are sung in pre-funeral wake contexts, often as replacements for laments.
Figure 12: Map of North Sumatra showing locations mentioned in Chapter Six.
Chapter 7

Protestant Hymns in Funerary Practice (Ende Huria na Mangapuli)

In this chapter I discuss the hymnody of the Toba Batak Protestant community, giving particular attention to the use of hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts as a means for the communal expression of grief, for expressions of hope and consolation in times of sadness and loss, and for establishing and reinforcing communal solidarity within the gathered community of mourners. The chapter opens with a vignette—my recollection and interpretation of an experience at a pre-funeral wake in which hymn singing played a significant role in a brief rite of consolation (TB: *ulaon pangapulon*) that took place during my visit. I present the vignette, along with some commentary, as a way of establishing a context for the discussion to follow. This is followed by a discussion of the origins and development of Protestant hymnody in Toba Batak culture in association with the mission work of the *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* (RMG) beginning in the mid-19th century. I trace the creation and development of the Toba Batak hymnal (TB: *Buku Ende*), including discussion of its structure, some comments on the musical notation used in the hymnal, and discussion relating to the use of hymns in the liturgy of the Batak Protestant Christian Church (TB: *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* – HKBP). Following this, discussion turns to the use of hymns in the day-to-day life of Toba Batak Protestant Christians, giving particular attention to their important role in encapsulating and expressing abstract concepts related to Protestant Christian theology as well as Christian lifeways. This is followed by a discussion of Protestant hymns that have a particular association with
funerary and pre-funeral wake contexts in the life of Toba Batak Protestants. From those hymns with funerary associations I select five as representative examples, based on their high frequency of recurring use in pre-funeral wakes, as well as on interviews with Toba Batak clergy and lay people. These five hymns serve as examples in an analysis of musicological and performative features present in the hymns commonly sung in pre-funeral wakes. My analysis follows the form of the musicological and performative features discussed in relation to laments for the dead that appears in Chapter Six i.e. a discussion of musical ambitus, melodic shape, phrase patterns and rhythmic features present in the examples. The intention of this analysis is to highlight features that indicate structural connections between laments for the dead and the Protestant hymns which are commonly sung in pre-funeral wake contexts and that are currently perceived to be replacing laments as the means by which Toba Batak express their grief, console the grieving, and manifest communal solidarity among the bereaved.

While the focus of this chapter is on the use of Protestant hymns in Toba Batak pre-funeral wakes, some understanding of the historic background and context of these hymns and their place in the lives of Toba Batak Protestants can be helpful in understanding the breadth and depth of the role that these hymns play in the formation and maintenance of religious identity for Toba Batak Christians. Toward that end, what follows is a brief review of selected literature on Protestant missions and the impact of Protestant Christianity on traditional religious belief systems in various areas of the world. This is followed by a review of literature focusing on the
introduction of Protestant hymns in connection with missionary activity, the role of hymnody in the life of the Christian communities that result from such mission efforts, and the impact of the introduction of western Protestant hymns on indigenous musical forms and the rites and religious practices with which they are associated. This review is in no way exhaustive. The breadth of literature addressing Protestant Christianity, missions, and Protestant hymnody is geographically expansive and theoretically complex. In what follows, I focus on examples that have particular relevance to the present study in both geographic and theoretical terms.

**Review of Literature on Protestant Mission Activity and Religious Encounter**

Much of the literature on Protestant missions and the acculturation of Christianity is focused on Africa, a continent subjected to a great deal of colonial era Protestant mission activity. T. O. Beidelman (1974, 1981, 1982) and George Bond (1979 and 1987) have contributed significantly to the literature on Christian missions, the growth of the African church, and the acculturation of Christianity in this region of the world. Other works dealing with processes of the acculturation of Christianity in Africa are those of Mudimbe (1997), Githieya (1997), and Donovan (1992), a Roman Catholic priest who describes the indigenization of Christianity among the Maasai in East Africa. Similar themes in other regions are explored in the volume edited by Boutilier, Hughes, and Tiffany (1978), set in Oceania, as well as in the Ph.D. dissertation of Hayward (1992), whose research was among the Dani in Irian Jaya (West Papua) Indonesia.
The encounter between Christianity and other religions, the processes of conversion to Christianity, and indigenous responses to the introduction of Christianity are themes explored in the works of Carson and Woodbridge (1993), Hawley (1998), Hefner (1993), Kaplan (1995), Klass (1999), Saunders (1988), and Van der Veer (1996). Studies addressing these themes in the context of Indonesia and specifically the Batak of Sumatra are fewer in number. They include among them Davis (1938) and Kraemer (1958) who discuss the Toba Batak Christian community’s movement toward independence from the German mission; Kipp (1990, 1995), whose focus is primarily on the work of Dutch missionaries among the Karo Batak; Müller-Krüger (1968), who looks at the history of Protestant Christianity in Indonesia as a nation; and Vajta and Weissgerber (1963), whose book traces the variety of confessional statements found in the Lutheran Church and includes a chapter by Toba Batak church historian Andar Lumbantobing on the development of the Batak Confession, a defining statement in the Batak Protestant Church’s movement toward independence and self-actualization.

**Review of Literature on Protestant Hymnody in Missions**

The subject of Protestant hymnody, its introduction and establishment as the musical practice of the mission church and Christian community, as well as the accompanying processes of accommodation, acculturation, coexistence, appropriation, and representation are topics explored in studies by Kidula (2005), King (2008), McNally (1997), Bohlman, Blumhofer, and Chow (2006), Charter (1998), Stillman (1993), Morehouse (2006), Eskew and McElrath (1980), and Titon.
Among others. Those studies of Protestant hymnody, cultural and religious identity, and indigenous expressions of Christianity that also have a particular geographic orientation to Indonesia include Adams (1993), Aragon (1996, 2000) and Rappoport (2004), who locate their discussions in the Tana Toraja region of Sulawesi; Erb (2006), whose study area is Western Flores; and Duncan (2003), who studies religious change and identity in Halmahara. Those oriented toward Sumatra and the Batak region include studies by Kipp (1995), in her study of the history of the Karo Batak Protestant Church, and Okazaki (2004), who looks primarily at Christian hymnody among Toba Batak Roman Catholics. There are, to the best of my knowledge, no published detailed studies of the development and use of Protestant hymns in the life and religious practice of the Toba Batak Protestant Christian community to date. These lacunae represent research opportunities of substantial scope and, considering the history of the Batak Protestant Christian Church, its current size and impact on Indonesian religious identity, significant value to scholars of Toba Batak culture and religious practice. It is my hope and intention to begin to address them in what follows and in future research opportunities.

**Vignette: Opportunities to Join-in**

It was late in the evening, long after dark, when we stepped carefully through the gathered crowd of quietly chatting neighbors and family, seated on the front porch of the Manullang home, and made our way into the crowded front room. The Manullang’s home, in the village of Tiga Balata (see Figure 24), was situated just a few yards from the main road heading out of Pematang Siantar toward Lake Toba.
Across the road lived the in-laws of my colleague Pdt. Simamora. They had called on him to make a pastoral visit to the Manullang family, as the husband had died a few days before. During the several days prior to his burial the evenings would be filled with gatherings of neighbors, church friends, and family who would sit through the evening and into the early morning hours to lend support and comfort to Bapak Manullang’s grieving widow and family. Most of these evening hours would be filled with quiet conversations reflecting on the life of the deceased. Plans for the burial and funeral feast would be discussed, lists of guests to be invited to the funeral feast would be compiled as well as other practical details related to the preparation and execution of funerary rites (TB: *ulaon di na monding*), which, in the case of an older person, could become particularly complex (TB: *ulaon adat na gok*). These evening discussions and plans were punctuated by brief rites of consolation (TB: *ulaon pangapulon*) led by various groups of friends or neighbors (TB: *dongan ni huta*), colleagues from work (TB: *dongan harejo*), church affiliated groups such as choirs or a group of church elders, etc. The intention of these rites was to bring comfort to the family of the deceased through a show of solidarity and public, communal grieving. Rites of consolation involved the communal singing of hymns, the reading of Biblical texts, and the recitation of prayers.

Immediately as we entered the front room of the Manullang home it was evident that there was a rite of consolation in progress. We quietly made our way toward the edge of the gathered mourners and sat down until the rite was completed. I focused my attention on the woman leading the rite as she finished a reading from
the Bible. She was standing with a group of women on the edge of the crowd, with their backs up against a wall. The women were dressed in sarongs tied at the waist and wore sweaters or jackets over their blouses. Each of them wore a woven ulos cloth, either draped over their left shoulder or wrapped around their necks like a scarf to protect against the cool night air. There had been a heavy late afternoon downpour that day and so the night air was especially chilly. The woman who led the rite was addressing the widow and family of Bapak Manullang, seated in a close circle around his open casket. Following her reading from the Bible, she addressed the family with words that were empathetic toward the pain of their grief and loss. She acknowledged the shock of suddenly losing someone and the unfulfilled expectations that accompany death. While she reminded the family of the mystery of God’s ways and plans, she also talked about the hope and promise of eternal life that Christians have in Jesus. Her tone seemed direct, full of confidence and spoken in a firm manner, leaving me wondering whether she was perhaps speaking, in part, from her own experience of grief and loss that accompany death. After several minutes she concluded her remarks and began to line out a hymn, saying “Marende ma hita sian Buku Ende nomor dua ratus ualu pulu: ‘Tongtong tutu na denggan do Pambaen ni Debatanta’” (translation: Let us sing from the Buku Ende number two-hundred eighty: ‘All good things are eternal They are from our God’). The hymn title she gives is also the first line of the hymn text and as soon as she finishes lining it out she begins to sing. Other voices immediately begin to filter in so that by the time the first
line is completed the room is filled with singing. The first verse of this hymn is as follows:

\[\text{Tongtong tutu na dengan do} \\
\quad \text{Pambaen ni Debatanta.}\]

\[\text{Matua so solsolan do} \\
\quad \text{Sude do i marhata.}\]

\[\text{Pos ma roham} \\
\quad \text{Di Debatam,} \\
\quad \text{Ihuton ma Ibana,} \\
\quad \text{Na bonar do rohana.}\]

Translation:

All good things are eternal \\
They are from our God.

For so long (you) have not confessed \\
Speak all of it.

Set your heart firmly \\
On your God, \\
Follow Him \\
Whose heart is true.

The singing is full-bodied and harmonized with deep bass and alto voices added to the melody. No one is singing from a hymnbook. All seem either to know the words from memory or to be catching them from her lining out of the text. As the crowd of mourners sings I notice that the widow is standing and singing beside her husband’s casket (see Figure 25). With a steady rhythmic accompaniment to the hymn singing she moves her hands, palms downward-facing, in a gentle, sweeping movement over the body of her husband. Joining her in this action are the women seated most immediately around the casket—relatives of the widow and the deceased. Their
Figure 25. Hymn singing at the pre-funeral wake of Bapak Manullang. Photo by the author. Tiga Balata, January 22, 2003.
hands move with a downward “push” for each syllable of the hymn text, their movement matching the slow pace of the hymn’s tempo. This steady rhythmic “pushing” movement is a common accompaniment to the singing of hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts. I had observed it on many other occasions and, when inquiring about it, had been told that it represented a way of pushing the power and blessing of the words of the hymn into the body of the deceased. As such, it mirrored a similar hand movement, often practiced in adat ritual contexts as a way of bestowing blessing on one’s kin relations.80 The hand gestures of the women seated around Bapak Manullang continue throughout the singing of the hymn as the leader of the rite of consolation continues lining out the verse. After the singing of the first verse, the hymn concludes and in the brief quiet moment following the singing, the widow re-takes her seat near the head of her husband. The sound of weeping soon fills the silence. In particular, a woman seated at the foot of the casket is sobbing loudly and speaking to the deceased. She calls him “ito” (brother), a kin term that may reflect their blood relationship or may be a term of endearment for an old, close friend. In her sobbing she asks him repeatedly why he left them and implores him not to go away. She rubs the feet of Bapak Manullang as she sobs. Those seated nearby or standing merely listen and wait for her grief to subside. After a few moments pass,

80 The act of blessing in adat ritual contexts, in which the one giving the blessing places their hand (palms downward) on the head or shoulders of the one being blessed, is expressed in Toba Batak as mamasu-masu. The hand gestures in hymn singing contexts is discussed in greater detail below as well as in Chapter Eight.
the parish teacher (TB: *guru huria*\(^{81}\)) calls for a communal recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. In response, all of those gathered in the room as well as a number of those sitting out on the porch join together in saying the prayer. With the final, emphatic “*Amin*” of the Lord’s Prayer the room again falls silent. Slowly the members of the group leading the rite make their way forward toward the place where the widow of Bapak Manullang is now standing. One by one they shake her hand and turn toward the front door, making their way out onto the porch. As the last of the group leaves the front room the quiet conversation begins anew, continuing until the next group stands to offer a rite of consolation. It is a pattern that is repeated several more times during the evening.

**Origin of Protestant Hymns in Toba Society.**

“*Usere Batak Kirche eine singende Kirche ist*” (translation: Our Batak church is a singing church) was an expression often used by the German-speaking missionaries of the *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* (RMG) when describing their work among the Toba Batak and the church traditions which developed as a result. Though the exact date remains unclear, an article by Ernst Quentmeier (1875-1962), a missionary with the RMG who worked in Sumatra from 1904 to 1938, in the news bulletin “*Berichte der Rheinische Mission*” (Rhenish Mission News) from 1941 describes the development of the Toba Batak hymnal, stating that missionaries Nommensen and Johannsen were the first to set about introducing Christian hymns to

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\(^{81}\) A common variant of this term is *vorhanger*, derived from the Dutch term *voorganger*, meaning a representative. These parish teachers are ordained to perform many, though not all, of the rites of the ordained clergy (*pandita*) of the HKBP.
the early converts. Initially, nine German chorales were translated into the vernacular to be sung by the Batak Christians (Quentmeier 1941:52). This would have taken place during the late 1860s or early 1870s. The next reference to a hymn collection comes through personal correspondence with Wolfgang Apelt, the archivist at the Wuppertal Archives and Museum Foundation for the RMG (now known as the Vereinigtes Evangelische Mission—United Evangelical Mission), located in Wuppertal, Germany.82 Their records mention a hymnal containing 90 hymns without tunes, titled “Ende-ende ni Halak Kristen na di Tanobatak, angka na morhatatoba” (Hymns of the Christian people of the Bataklands, all in Toba language). This hymnal was published in Bielefeld, Germany though no publication date is given. The Quentmeier article next mentions a hymnal, printed in Germany, celebrating the 20th anniversary of missionary work in North Sumatra and containing some 98 hymns. This would place the publication date of that hymnal in the early 1880s, which seems to match a reference from the Wuppertal archives that mentions a hymnal published and printed in Gütersloh, Germany in 1881.83 The archival information states, however, that this 1881 hymnal contained 121 hymns without tunes (not 98 as mentioned by Quentmeier). The hymnal was titled “Ende-ende ni Halak Kristen na di tano ni halak Batak di pulau Sumatra (Toba)” (Songs of the Christian people in the land of the Batak people on Sumatra island (Toba)). The 1941 article by Quentmeier states that many of the hymns contained in this hymnal

82 p.c. (electronic mail), March 11, 2005.
83 I suggest the early 1880s as the date for the 20th anniversary hymnal because the Batak Protestant Church marks its Dies Natalis as October 7, 1861.
were “recht holperig und stolperig” (quite bumpy and stumbling), though it is unclear whether this description refers to their performance by Batak Christians or their translation from German into Toba Batak (Quentmeier 1941:52).

The next reference to a hymnal following this is of a 1901 hymnal, edited by missionary Meerwaldt, containing 278 hymn texts and tunes. This was also published and printed in Germany (Bielefeld) and was again titled “Ende-ende ni Halak Kristen na di Tano Batak, angka na morhata Toba” (Songs of the Christian people in the Batak land, all in Toba language). The Meerwaldt edited hymnal was reissued in 1923 with an additional 53 hymns (though without tunes). This time, however, the reissue printing took place in North Sumatra, in the small mountain town of Laguboti on the shores of Lake Toba, where the RMG had established a printing house (see Figure 24). Finally, in 1935, a version of the hymnal was produced in Laguboti containing, according to the archival records, a total of 375 hymns with tunes. This hymnal, titled “Boekoe Ende ni Halak Kristen na di Tano Batak” (Song book of the Christian people in the Batak lands), appears to be the version which has become the standard for all the succeeding hymnal printings of the HKBP. An initial run of 6,000 hymnals was produced and completely sold out in the first year after issue.

Quentmeier, who worked in Sumatra from 1904 to 1938, was principle editor for this hymnal. He states in his article, that 2 years later an additional 10,000 copies were printed in order to keep up with demand. This 1935 version of the hymnal has remained virtually unchanged throughout its successive printings. It is presently

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84 RMG file 1.983, letter 17.8.1937 by E. Quentmeier
titled “Buku Ende di Huria Kristen Batak Protestan” (Song book of the Batak Christian Protestant Church). My most recent edition (the twentieth edition) was printed in 1992 in Pematang Siantar, the second largest city in North Sumatra, where the HKBP maintains an active printing establishment. The hymns are translated from German, Dutch and English sources and many reflect the Pietistic theology that characterized the RMG in its work in Sumatra during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Of the hymns included in the Buku Ende, 3 are chorales attributed to Martin Luther (1483-1546) – “Ein feste Burg”, “Vom Himmel hoch”, and “Aus tiefer Not”; 17 are compositions of Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676); 7 are works of Gerhardt Tersteegen (1697 – 1769); 3 are hymns of Joachim Neander (1650-1680); and 7 hymns belong to Count Nicholaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) the founder of the Moravian church. The hymnal contains approximately 250 chorales, 10 psalm settings, and 60 spiritual folk songs (Ger.: geistliche Volkslieder) (Quentmeier, 1941:54). At some point in its history the total number of hymns in the hymnal was reduced to 373. To this total of 373 hymns an additional 232 hymns were appended at some time during the middle of the 20th century. These additional hymns were compiled by German missionary Süster Elfriede Harder (1896-1971), who worked with the RMG in Sumatra from 1925 to 1940 and founded the Sikola Bibelvrow (Biblewomen’s School) in Narumonda, a small town in the Batak highlands (see Figure 24). Correspondence with the RMG archive indicates that in 1937 a hymnal was published at Narumonda, presumably for use at the school and by the Biblewomen in their work. The hymns are in Toba Batak language and include both
texts and tunes. The hymnal, titled: “Ende taringot toe Haloeaon na gok pinatoepa ni Toehan Jesus Kristus” (Songs of Full Salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ), was compiled from a broad range of sources, both European and American. Indexed in the back of the hymnal, they include such sources as: Evangelischer Psalter, Evangeliumssängen, Fellowship Hymns, Jungendbundlieder, Missionsharfe, Reichslieder, Sankey Lieder, and others. Both thematically (with reference to the theology expressed in the hymn texts) and stylistically (with reference to the formal structure of the hymn tunes) the hymns in the Elfriede Harder collection are significantly more evangelical and gospel oriented than the earlier Pietistic hymns found in the Buku Ende. I recognize many of the tunes from my childhood experience growing up in a Baptist church environment in the mid-western United States. I believe these musical and thematic shifts may reflect, in part, the changing theology of the RMG from the beginnings of their work among the Toba Batak to the time Elfrieda Harder was working with the established and growing Batak church some 60 years later. The hymns in the Harder collection also point to the style of hymns in popular use in Europe and America for the kind of evangelistic and pedagogic work in which the Bibelvrow were engaged among the Toba Batak. For many years these two hymnals remained separated – the Buku Ende being used in the HKBP liturgy of worship and the Haluaon na Gok being used for Bibelvrow activities. Eventually, at some point after the establishment of the independent HKBP in 1930, the two were brought together within the context of the liturgy of worship, with the Haluaon na Gok acting as a supplement to the Buku Ende.
Hymn Use in the Liturgy of the HKBP

The official liturgy for worship of the HKBP (TB: Agenda di Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) lists seven places where a hymn is to be sung during the Sunday service. Of those seven hymns, usually only one is drawn from the *Haluaon na Gok*, usually the hymn immediately following the sermon. On chalkboards, hung on the walls near the front and on either side of the church, hymn numbers and scripture texts are written each week. In past practice, the hymn number for any *Haluaon na Gok* hymn was preceded by the letters “HG” to distinguish it from the *Buku Ende* hymn numbers. At some point, most likely in the 1970s (though I have been unable to establish the exact date), the two hymnals were brought together under a single binding, though with separate numberings (i.e. *Buku Ende* 1-373, *Haluaon na Gok* 1-232). More recently the numbering of the two hymnals has been combined, running straight from 1 to 556 (apparently some 49 hymns in the *Haluaon na Gok* were edited out, reducing the total number of *Haluaon na Gok* hymns to 183 hymns, though the reasoning and timing for this remains unclear).

Hymn Notation

The notation system of the *Buku Ende* reflects another important aspect of its historical development. Presently there are two notation systems in use: Western staff notation (BI: *not balok*) and a moveable ‘do’ number or cipher notation system (BI: *not angka / nomor*), though there is no definitive record to indicate which of the systems was the first to appear in the Toba Batak hymnal. While Toba Batak

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85 This practice has changed somewhat in recent years, and now it is not uncommon to find that two or three of the seven hymns are drawn from the *Haluaon na Gok*. 

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Christians can read either system, there seems to be a higher level of familiarity with the cipher system than with the western staff system, pointing to the possibility that the cipher system may have been the earlier of the two in use among Toba Batak Protestants. While the cipher system may be the most commonly used for hymn and choral singing, historic records indicate clearly that the German missionaries had introduced brass choirs (*Posaunenchor*) and pump organs (TB: *poti marende*) to the Toba Batak by the 1880s, both of which make use of the western staff notation system. In all likelihood both systems were introduced at roughly the same time but developed independently in context specific situations.

**Hymnal Structure and Indices**

The *Buku Ende*, in its present form, contains three indices. The first is a thematic, seasonal, and generic index, listing groups of hymns numerically by theme, by liturgical season, and by type (e.g. psalm, canon, etc.). For example hymns 1-17 are *Ende Pujian* (Hymns of Praise), hymns 18-37 are *Ende di ari Minggu* (Hymns for Sunday), hymns 38-45 are *Ende Adventus* (Hymns for Advent), hymns 46-62 are *Ende di Hatutubu ni Tuhan Jesus* (Hymns for Jesus Birth / Christmas) and so forth.

The second index is an alphabetical listing of hymns by title / first line. This index lists the number of the hymn in the *Buku Ende* as well as in the *Buku Logu* (song book) which contains the keyboard accompaniments, written out in chorale style, to all the hymns in the *Buku Ende*. The third index is a listing of the original sources.

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86 Based on descriptions contained in the journals of missionary Hester Needham, who arrived in Sumatra in 1889 and had her first of several encounters with Toba Batak brass band groups in December of that year (Enfield 1899:32).
from which the hymns found in Haluaon na Gok are taken. It gives the abbreviation of the source as well as the full title of the source. For example, hymn 449 in the Buku Ende is the hymn “Sai solhot tu silangmi.” The heading at the top left of that hymn is “Logu No. 300: Sai solhot tu silangmi,” and at the top right, “F.H. No. 72.” The third index in the back of the Buku Ende indicates that “F.H.” is the abbreviation for “Fellowship Hymns,” the source from which this 1869 hymn by Fanny Crosby and William Doane, titled originally “Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross,” is taken.

**Hymn Use in the Daily Life of Toba Batak Protestant Christians**

As mentioned earlier, the 1935 Buku Ende and the 1937 Haluaon na Gok have, since the 1970s, been joined as a single volume forming the hymnal of the Batak Protestant Christian Church. This hymnal has remained essentially unchanged since the mid-1930s, serving as the sole source of congregational hymnody for the several million members of the HKBP. For many Toba Batak the hymns of the Buku Ende play an important role in the creation and maintenance of their sense of religious and cultural identity as it develops and is expressed not only in the context of corporate Christian worship but also in the day-in and day-out experiences of life and death for many Toba Batak. Though this is particularly the case for Protestant Toba Batak members of the HKBP, my observations indicate that Toba Batak from other Protestant churches as well as many Roman Catholic Toba Batak also identify strongly with the hymns contained in the Buku Ende. The significant role of Protestant hymnody in the lives of Toba Batak Christians was made clear to me when, in 1993, I participated in a several-days-long seminar in Pematang Siantar,
involving a gathering of Toba Batak women who were not members of the clergy (that is, they had received no formal theological education) but who regularly attended church and participated in church activities as members of various Batak Protestant churches, including the HKBP. The seminar dealt broadly with the women’s processes of developing and expressing their understanding of Christian faith and theology. Those leading the seminar were interested to learn how these women, born and raised as Christians, but not formally trained in theology, understood and articulated their Christianity in the day-to-day of their lives. As the seminar progressed over the week, the discussion facilitators noted that the vast majority of these women struggled repeatedly to put into words their understanding of Christian concepts regarding God as creator, the work of Jesus on earth, salvation, sin, grace, hope in eternal life, and so forth. It was also noted that, while many participants struggled to verbally articulate these concepts, nearly all of the women could sing about their understanding of discussion topics using hymns from the *Buku Ende*. These women found that there were particular hymns that enabled them to formulate and then communicate their understanding of Christianity as they lived and experienced it in the day-to-day of life. Singing hymns enabled them to express their faith understanding with ease and a depth of meaning that far surpassed any verbally articulated concept. There were powerful associations between particular faith-defining events and the hymns sung during those events, which created strong and meaningful connections between the hymns, the events, and the life-lessons associated with them. For these women, the singing of hymns took on a power of
meaning and telling which surpassed the meaning of the hymn texts alone. That 1993 seminar indicated clearly that the role of hymns from the *Buku Ende* in the life of Toba Batak Protestants extends well beyond their use in the liturgy of worship during a Sunday service. For Toba Batak Protestants, these hymns were used to accompany and infuse celebrations of birth, marriage, migration, the New Year, a new home, a productive harvest, etc.—life activities that take place both inside and outside the walls of the church.

**Hymns Associated with Funerary Contexts**

A number of these hymns have strong connections to funerary contexts. These hymns are frequently sung at pre-funeral wakes and are included in church rites associated with death and burial as well as the small gatherings of those who wait and watch with the bereaved in the days and nights before burial. Throughout my fieldwork I noted which hymns were sung at pre-funeral wakes and at church and *adat* rites associated with death and burial. Over time it became evident that certain hymns were sung with greater frequency than others—some being sung repeatedly during the course of an evening’s pre-funeral wake. The data gleaned from these observations in the field as well as from interviews with Toba Batak funeral-goers indicates that of the 556 hymns contained in the *Buku Ende* roughly 10% are used in, or have some connection to, funerary ritual for Toba Batak Protestants.

As mentioned above, there are three indices in the back of the *Buku Ende*. The first, the thematic index, contains four thematic categories from which, it was pointed out to me, many of the hymns associated with death and dying are drawn.
The four themes are: *Ende di bodari(na)* (Hymns for the Night), including hymns 314-328; *Ende taringot tu ajal ni jolma* (Hymns relating to the Ending of Life), including hymns 329-340; *Ende taringot to masa sogot* (Hymns about the Future Time / Afterlife), including hymns 341-355; and *Ende Puji sihophop ho* (Hymns of Praise for Your [Jesus] Sacrifice), including hymns 435-460. Of the 56 hymns indicated as having some association with death and dying, 20 of them appear in the listings of these four themes. The remaining 36 are found under thematic listings such as: *Ende taringot tu haporseaon* (Hymns about Faith / Belief), *Ende taringot tu parungkilon* (Hymns about Suffering), *Ende Pangapulon* (Hymns of Comfort), and *Ende Na di ginjang i ma lului* (Hymns about Looking to / for the Heavens). A listing of the 56 hymns from the *Buku Ende* with associative connections to funerary ritual follows:

#86    Silang Na Badia i  
#119  Martua Do Dohonon  
#174  Torop Dope Na Siat i  
#195  Holong Do Roha  
#219  Ise Do Ale-alenta  
#222  Tu Jolo Ni Tuhanku  
#223  Husomba Ho Tuhan  
#227  Jesus Ngolu Ni Tondingku  
#236  Jotjot Do Marsak  
#258  Sai Hutuju Hangongolu  
#259  Sai Beta Ma Tondingku  
#266  Tu Banuaginjang Do  
#269  Mardalan Au Saonari  
#279  Pasahat Ma Sudena  
#283  Nang Sipata Pe Idaon  
#286  Unang Ma Tangishon  
#287  Goar Pe Sude Humaliang  
#289  Pos Ma Ho, Rohaku  
#293  Habot Pe Roham
As mentioned above, some of these funerary hymns are selected and sung more commonly than others. Based upon my field observations at pre-funeral wakes
(including observation and participation in rites of consolation), burial ceremonies, and the church services held prior to burial, as well as conversations with Toba Batak colleagues and church musicians, I have selected five hymns commonly sung in funerary contexts to serve as representative examples of the variety of textual, musicological, and performative features present in the funerary hymns favored by Toba Batak Protestant Christians. Below I have supplied information regarding the original source for the hymn, including the first line of the original text, the author’s name, the source of the text from which the Buku Ende translation into Toba Batak came, the tune composer’s name, and the source of the tune as it appears in the Buku Ende. This source information comes primarily from an unpublished research document compiled in April 1981 by Dr. H. A. van Dop, a hymnologist working with the Church Music Society (BI: Yayasan Musik Gerejawi), the primary publishing house of hymnals and church music resource materials for the Protestant Church community in Indonesia.

B. E. #219 Ise Do Ale-alenta
First line: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus;” author: Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1820 – 1886); text source: Methodist Hymn Book (London, 1933) no. 538; tune composer: Charles Crozat Converse (1832-1918); tune source: Hymns of the Christian Life (Harrisburg, 1936) no. 538.

B. E. #289 Pos Ma Ho, Rohangku
First line: “Harre meine Seele;” author: Friedrich Räder (1815-1872); text source: Evangelischer Psalter no. 474; tune composer: César Malan (1787-1864); tune source: Evangelischer Psalter no. 474.

B. E. #335 Laos Au Asa Lao
First line: “Lasst mich gehn;” author: Gustav Friedrich Ludwig Knack (1806-1878); text source: Evangelischer Psalter (1921) no. 605; tune composer: Karl Voigtländer (1827-1858); tune source: Evangelischer Psalter (1921) no. 605.
Hymns in Pre-funeral / Funeral Contexts

Hymn singing figures significantly into both pre-funeral and funeral contexts for Protestant Toba Bataks. Hymn singing in these contexts represents both communal and individual expressions of religious belief and identity, serves as a source of comfort and hope, and plays an important palliative role, enabling mourners to release their sorrow and the weight of grief that often accompanies death. A number of these features are represented in the scene recounted above in the opening vignette, and they were clearly evident during each opportunity I had to attend pre-funeral wakes in which the singing of lined-out hymns framed the opening and closing moments of the brief rituals of comfort and support (TB:  ulaon pangapulon) conducted by various groups of mourners who would stop by the house of the bereaved in the evenings (TB:  maningkir tu jabu ni na monding) during the pre-funeral wake period. Groups might represent a gathering of neighbors, some colleagues from work, school friends of the deceased’s children, a choral group from church, a group of church elders, etc. Their intention was to bring some comfort and encouragement to the grieving family by way of a formal rite of consolation most often consisting of prayers (always concluding with the Lord’s Prayer), a Scripture
reading, some words of sympathy and encouragement, and the communal singing of hymns. During these rites, a space would be cleared in the front room where those conducting the rite would assemble and stand together, usually near the foot of the deceased. As mentioned above, hymn singing would begin and often end these rites of comfort, bringing a tangible feeling of solidarity as voices united together in song. In pre-funeral wakes the hymns are sung slowly and deliberately. The tempo of the singing is markedly slower than it would be in the context of a Sunday church service. Often the singing is accompanied by sounds of weeping and expressions of grief as singers use the singing of hymns as a vehicle for individual and communal expressions of sadness and the shedding of tears, thereby letting go of, and finding some relief from, the burden of their grief.

The hymn is sung line by line as the one who selected and then announced the hymn, also lines out the text for the gathered community of mourners. The lining out proceeds at a quick pace. It is not intended to teach the text but rather to remind singers of the hymn’s text (and perhaps provide them an opportunity to catch a breath, reflect on the text just sung or call to remembrance the memories of loved ones already passed). As described above, hymn singing often includes the visual accompaniment of arms and hands moving in steady, rhythmic sweeps over the body of the deceased. Palms are open wide and downward-facing, as if (as it was explained to me) the singers seated around the body are rhythmically pushing the
words they sing (their meaning and benefit) into the body of the deceased as a visual seal, bestowing upon the deceased the hope and the expectation of eternal life.  

**Hymn Singing and Solidarity: Sharing Tears, Memories, Comfort**

The importance of hymn singing as an enactment of solidarity, and a vehicle for both releasing sadness (TB: *arsak ni roha*) and as a way of regaining hope (TB: *panghirimon*) was further confirmed through discussions with women lamenters during interviews and recording sessions when our talk would turn to questions concerning people’s perceptions of lament singing and hymn singing in funeral contexts. At one such discussion in the village of Panombean near Tiga Bolon (see Figure 24), I asked the women about whether they felt that there was a particular kind of value or benefit to be gained by hymn singing at pre-funeral wakes: “Wah, memang. Banyak!” (BI: Oh yes, definitely. Much benefit!), several of them replied. Rather than elaborate further on her comment, one of the women immediately began

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87 This movement is also a reflection of one type of hand motion that Toba Batak use when bestowing blessings in *adat* ritual contexts. For example, in the context of ritual *tor-tor* dancing, those who are bestowing blessing dance with their arms extended outward and the palms of their hands facing slightly downward, moving rhythmically in synchronicity with the *ogung* pattern of the *gondang* ensemble. In contrast, the ones who are receiving the blessing dance with their arms extended and the palms facing upward in order to receive the blessing being given. The rhythmic movement of their arms and hands represent a “gathering-in” of the blessing. In the context of funerary ritual, these blessing giving-and-receiving gestures are most often associated with the dancing that takes place on the evening before the burial feast and rites. Family members gather in the front room of the house for the rite involving the placement of the deceased into the casket. This rite, known as *mompo*, is followed by music and dance as a way of acknowledging, affirming, and strengthening kin bonds through the giving and receiving of blessing. At times there is also dancing around the deceased (TB: *mangondasi*) during which both blessing giving and (more commonly) blessing receiving gestures are used. The concept connected to the gathering-in of blessing from the deceased is expressed in the Toba Batak phrase “*mangalap sahala ni tondi ni na mate*” (to take / greet the soul strength of the dead). This is a practice that is most often associated with the funerals of the aged – those accorded the title of *sari matua*, *saur matua*, or *saur matu na mauli bulung*.

88 A comparative look at lamenting and hymn singing in pre-funeral wake contexts represents the primary focus of Chapter Eight and will be discussed in greater detail there.
to sing a hymn—“Pasahat ma sudena, na hinosolhonmi, tu Debata Jahowa, Pardenggan basa i” (from the Buku Ende, hymn 279). The hymn is the first one in the section called “Ende Pangapulon” (Hymns of Comfort). The first line, quoted above, translates as: “Give over all your worries now – give them all to God the merciful-hearted one” (my translation). As she sang her way through the first verse, other women joined in, some adding an alto harmony to the melody. They sang from memory. No one was lining out the text. And as they sang, tears soon filled their eyes and began to roll down their cheeks. Their voices and their tears seemed to be linked to the memories of past grief and the painful ache that accompanies death. As the verse ended and their voices quieted, the women wiped away their tears, and smiled at one another, seemingly having just shared a collective memory of loss and sadness they have lived and relived, at a crossroads where grief and hope, loving and longing meet together and embrace. Listening to the women singing as a way to elaborate and clarify their reply to my question reminded me of my earlier experience with Toba Batak women at the workshop on theology and hymns several years before. For the women in Panombean (as well as those at the workshop), hymn singing served to demonstrate their comprehension of ideas, feelings and emotions that connected them to one another by some common thread of lived experience. Hymns both contain and facilitate the expression of a communal experience through their voicing, and in so doing they reaffirm and reinforce notions of a shared history, identity, and belief.89

89 This corresponds with Michael McNally’s examination of Ojibwa hymn-singing as practiced by the
Hymn Singing as a Palliative

Later in our discussion, Pdt. Sihite, the vicar of the Panombean church, commented that in the present day, many Bataks use the hymns of the church as a means to bring out tears, to get them flowing and therefore release some of the sadness and emotional weight from grieving over the death of someone (see Figure 26). He continued, saying, “When a person dies we need to be free to weep for them and show our sadness. If the church steps in and says ‘let’s replace these laments with hymns – these hymns are now our lament,’ then the people will sing hymns and as they sing their tears will flow.” He followed this comment by singing a portion of the hymn: “Pos ma ho, Rohangku” (Be Sure / Steadfast, my Soul) from the Buku Ende hymn 289, which he performed in a sobbing style intended to demonstrate how a person might weep through a hymn. At the conclusion he stated, “This crying is good. It is helpful and we need it. But it’s important to remember that using hymns in this way is not truly ‘lamenting’ (TB: mangandung), rather, it is ‘crying / sobbing’ (TB: tumatangis).”

Some time later I asked the women gathered in the room about their perceptions of the church’s discouragement of lamenting and perceived efforts by the church to encourage the replacement of laments with church hymns, quoting the

White Earth community in Minnesota. McNally states that “what stands behind each performance of Ojibwa hymns…is the shared values of community that the White Earth singers try to call forth in their songs. As Thomas Turino observes in his study of the complex social world of Andean panpipe music, ‘the sound object may not be the most important thing about music and it cannot be abstracted from the ethics, processes and occasions of communal life’ [Turino, Moving Away from Silence, 241]” (McNally 1997: 136).

Figure 26. Hymn singing in pre-funeral wake contexts enables the flow of tears and the outward expression of grief. Photo by the author. Panombean, January 6, 2003.
axiom, “Ganti andung gabe ende” (replacing laments, becoming hymns). In response to my question, Inang br. Togatorop, a church elder (TB: sintua) and the woman who had sung the lament examples that evening, replied that the church discouraged lamenting if the lamenters made requests for blessings from the spirits of the deceased through their laments. This was contrary to the church’s teaching that God alone is the source of life and should be seen as the provider for all of life’s needs. Pdt. Simamora followed up on her comments, pointing out that this was particularly the case in the early days of Christianity in the Batak area, when many Batak still held to their former beliefs, looking to the spirits of their ancestors for blessing and success. However, he continued, not all laments are focused on requests for blessing from the ancestor spirits. The laments we’d heard earlier in the evening from Inang br. Togatorop contained no such requests but were instead filled with expressions of sadness and grief at the loss of the one lamented. This type of personal expression of sadness was common as a lament genre known as andung parsorion (poor fate laments). Pandita Simamora continued, saying that what the church discouraged were situations where the lamenter was seeking to speak with or communicate a message to, or through, the deceased. In other words, the lamenter held a belief that communication between the worlds of the living and the dead was a possibility and that laments were vehicles for such communication. This belief was not in keeping with the church’s position that there was no relationship of any kind between the living and the dead.
This position is expressed in the HKBP’s Confession of Faith (TB: *Panindangion Haporseaon*) Article 15, which states:

“Taalo do pingkiranan na mandok boi na mangolu manjalo pasupasu sian na mate. Taalo do pingkiranan na mandok paboa na adong pardomuan ni na mate dohot na mangolu, marhite tangiang.”

(translation)

“We oppose the view that people can receive blessings from the soul of the dead. We oppose the teaching that there is connection between the dead and the living through prayer.”

(Kantor Pusat HKBP 2000:91; 142).

Pandita Simamora then pointed out that another, and more practical, reason laments were being replaced with hymns was that there was a steady decline in people’s knowledge of, and fluency with, *hata andung*, the language of lament. This decline in fluency related not only to those who might be spontaneously composing the laments as they performed them but was also related to a declining fluency on the part of those who were listening to the lament. As listeners gradually lost the ability to understand what was being communicated through the *hata andung*, the lament lost much of its cultural and social efficacy and was therefore relegated to the status of cultural icon or relic. Another woman seated nearby responded to Simamora’s comment, saying that because the hymns used common, everyday Toba Batak language (TB: *hata somal*), everyone was able to participate in the singing and listening, making it much easier for them to use the hymns as a way of communally expressing their sadness.91

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91 p.c. January 6, 2003, Panombean. The discussion concerning the replacement of laments with hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts is taken up in greater detail in Chapter Eight.
Pdt. Sihite’s suggestion that hymns are sung with the intention of releasing or “getting out” the pent-up feelings of sorrow and grief that accompany death, was picked up and expanded upon during an interview and recording session the following month with Inang br. Panjaitan and her family in Medan. We were discussing the use of hymns in times of mourning as a replacement for traditional Toba Batak laments. The man who was hosting our gathering that day, Amang Nababan, agreed that hymns often replace laments in mourning situations but added that people will consciously choose hymns which “berbau andung” (to smell, or have the aroma, of a lament). I suggested the hymn, “Ise do Ale-alenta,” (“What a Friend We have in Jesus”), number 219 in the Buku Ende, as a possible lament-like hymn (based, in part on the frequency of its use at pre-funeral wakes as well as on the strong emotional responses I’d noticed whenever it was sung). Amang Nababan agreed but suggested that in order to make it more like a lament it needed to be sung with a very slow tempo – slow enough that the tears would be able to flow. I asked for another example of such a “lament-like” hymn and Inang br. Panjaitan, the lament singer, began to sing, “Sai Solhot tu Silangmi,” (“Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross”) number 449 in the Buku Ende. This hymn is very commonly sung at pre-funeral wakes or as a part of burial ritual (see Figure 27). What struck me about these hymns in the context of our discussion was that, while the texts were appropriate to mourning and death situations, it was the mention of musical factors, i.e. a slow tempo and a tune that somehow bore the fragrance of a traditional lament, which
Figure 27. A grave marker outside the house on the day prior to burial. Inscribed on the upright is “Ende 449” (hymn 449: “Sai Solhot tu Silangmi”), a very popular funeral hymn. Photo by the author. Near Balata, June 2, 2003.
seemed to influence the singers’ choices as much as (if not more than) the text. This idea was strengthened by what Amang Nababan said following our discussion of the second hymn, *Sai Solhot tu Silangmi*: “If someone dies and their body is laid out there in the home, and no one is crying for them, it is not good (TB: “*dang tabo do i*”). We sing hymns together so that we are able to cry and we cry together so that those who are grieving don’t keep their sadness inside themselves for too long. We also cry so that those who have died know that they are loved and missed.”92 Amang Nababan’s statement is significant in that it indicates that, for some Toba Batak Protestants, the question of the possibility for communication or interaction between the living and the dead remains open, despite the statement found in Article 15 of the Confession of Faith. Further, it suggests the possibility, as discussed by ethnomusicologist Amy K. Stillman, of the absorption of western Protestant hymns into the “indigenous conceptual frameworks of musical repertory and practice” as found in the context of Toba Batak pre-funeral wakes (Stillman 1993:93).93

My discussion in Medan with Amang Nababan and others indicated that not only were particular hymns selected because of familiarity through frequency of use or through association with previous experiences of loss and mourning but that musicological features in the hymns themselves and in their performance were important factors in the hymn choices of Toba Batak mourners, impacting the manner of the hymn’s performance as well as the ways in which hymn singing facilitated the

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92 p.c. February 6, 2003, Medan
93 This article by Amy K. Stillman is a comparative investigation of Protestant hymnody in Polynesia structured around a conceptual framework of coexistence and absorption as strategies for “accommodating, appropriating and absorbing Western hymnody” (ibid: 89).
flow of tears and the release of grief, expressed and affirmed communal solidarity, and reinforced concepts of both religious and cultural identity. What follows is a discussion of important musicological features and performative characteristics present in Protestant hymns commonly sung in Toba Batak pre-funeral wakes.

Musicological Features and Performative Characteristics of Funerary Hymns

Having discussed, in the previous chapter, a number of significant musicological and stylistic features present in Toba Batak funerary laments, I turn now to a comparative discussion of related musicological features in five Protestant hymns that are commonly sung in pre-funeral wakes.\(^{94}\) My examination of these musicological features is intended to highlight those features in these five hymns that position them not only as representative examples of funerary hymns but that also predispose them toward selection by Toba Batak Protestants as the hymn replacement for traditional laments in pre-funeral wake contexts. The five hymns I have selected are frequently sung by Protestant Toba Bataks and were chosen based on my observations at pre-funeral wakes, as well as on the frequency with which they were specifically mentioned during conversations with clergy, lamenters, mourners, and others concerning the hymns that Toba Batak felt were best suited as replacements for traditional laments in pre-funeral wakes. These five hymns are part of a larger list of hymns associated with death, grieving, and funerary ritual, a complete listing of which appears in Appendix B. The five hymns that serve as examples in this section are:

\(^{94}\) Source information for each of these five hymns appears earlier in this chapter.
Musical Ambitus in Hymns

With regard to musical ambitus, melodic shape, and phrase shape and form, the five hymn examples show little similarity to the lament examples discussed in Chapter Six. The average musical ambitus of the hymn examples is the interval of a 9th—greatly expanded from that of the laments, where the average ambitus is the interval of a 4th.

Melodic Shape in Hymns

The melodic shape of the hymn examples appears to be much more dramatically contoured than the lament examples, where the melodic contour showed minimal variation. The melodies of these five hymns commonly utilize melodic movement by leaps of a 4th, 5th, or 6th, as well as by sequential leaps of a third, as visible in the following examples (Figure 28).
In the above example (example 2), melodic leaps of an ascending 6th are utilized in measures 1, 4, 6, and 9. In Figure 29 below (hymn example 3), the first, second and fourth staves show a pattern of descending thirds, while the third measure displays melodic movement of both ascending and descending thirds.
A similar pattern of descending thirds, leaps of a fifth, and alternating ascending / descending thirds can be seen in Figure 30, hymn example 5, below.

**Figure 30.** Melodic movement by ascending and descending thirds and fifths.

![Music notation](image)

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**Phrase Shape and Form in Hymns**

The form of melodic phrases shows significant regularity among the hymn examples. Figure 31 below shows hymn examples 1, 3, and 5 in which there appears a phrase pattern of: A A¹ B A¹, with each phrase extending for four measures.
Figure 31. Three examples of hymns with a shared phrase structure.

449. Logu No. 300: Sai solhot tu silangmi. F. H. No. 72.


2. Hahaanggi dohottondong, Na marholong roha i, / Aclele dohot dongan, / Tading do sudena i; / Nang pe dipataru hita sahat tu udean i, / Laho do muse nasida, / Ditadingkon bangke i.

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Examples 2 and 4 each consist of six phrases (in example 2 the phrases are 2
measures long and in example 4 they extend for four measures). The phrase pattern
for example 2 is: A B A' A' C C, and that of example 4 is: A A' B B' A C.
The examples are shown in Figure 32 below.

Figure 32. These two examples display six-phrase patterns.

335. Logu No. 50: Loas au, asa lao.

Pos ma ho, ro-hang-ku, Di De-ba-ta!

Bo-nom ma ar-sakmu Tu ro-hana, da! Unang lo-

mos, Ti-op ma go-mos Ha-por-se-a-on-mu,

Unang ho bo-bos! Pa-lu-a-on-na Ho ma an-
tong Si-an na-sa je-a Di ta-no on.

2. Pos ma ho, rohangku./ Di Debata!/ Bonom ma
arsakmu/ Tu rohana, da!/ Lao mago pe/ Na dison
sude,/ Sonang bahenonna/ Sogot ho muse./ Ale Ja-
howa,/ Haposanki,/ Sai togihon ahu/ Tu surgo i!

These phrase patterns differ significantly from the antecedent – consequent
phrases of laments described in Chapter Six, reflecting instead the contexts
(American gospel songs and German / Swiss revivalist hymns) of their mid 19th
century original sources (Eskew and McElrath 1980:34-43). The fact that the
melodic ambitus, melodic contouring, and phrase patterning of these representative
hymn examples differs significantly from those related features in Toba Batak
funerary laments suggests that these musicological features in Protestant hymns play
a minimal role in the processes connected to the replacement of funerary laments with
hymns—particularly in the determination of those features in hymns that favorably contribute to the “fragrance of lament.”

**Rhythmic Features in Hymns**

In the discussion in Chapter Six concerning rhythmic features present in Toba Batak laments, I suggest that the prevalent use of iambic rhythms in laments is a normative feature in lament creation and performance connected to the syllabic stress patterns of the words used in lament texts as well as to the sound of the lamenter’s cry breaks. These suggestions are based in part on my analysis of field recordings of Toba Batak laments, on conversations with Toba Batak musician Kalabius (Sampeltek) Simbolon, with whom I studied and played during my field research, as well as on discussions with Toba Batak research colleagues in Sumatra.

My examination of the five hymns examples from among those commonly used in pre-funeral wakes reveals that a similar rhythmic feature—an iambic rhythmic pattern, as well as its inversion: a trochaic pattern, that is a long – short (or stressed – unstressed) accent pattern, frequently appears in these hymns. Indeed, these two patterns of rhythmic meter, iambic and trochaic, are the most frequently represented patterns in the Protestant hymn tradition from which these five hymns originate (Eskew and McElrath 1980:16-17). Of the two hymns in 6/8 meter (Examples 1 and 5), Example 1 uses the trochaic structure throughout and example 5, beginning with the anacrusis beat 6, makes use of an iambic rhythmic structure in the

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first and second staves before shifting to a trochaic pattern from the second measure of the third staff. This is shown in Figure 33, below.

Figure 33. Hymn examples 1 and 5 showing the use of trochaic and iambic rhythmic patterns.

449. Logu No. 300 : Sai solbot tu silangmi. F. H. No. 72.

452. Logu No. 303 : Na ro pandaoni bolon. F. B. No. 89.

2) Lao ma sa tu silangmi, i haporusanku. Sai ari ma rohami,
unang tulak ahu. Silangmi. ...
In the other three hymn examples the use of iambic and trochaic rhythms are also present. In example 2 the trochaic rhythm is visible in the dotted-eighth note—sixteenth note pattern in all three staves as well as by the dotted-quarter note—eighth note pattern in the 3rd staff. In example 4 it appears as a dotted-quarter note followed by an eighth note in each of the 5 staves. This can be seen in Figure 34, below.

Figure 34. Further examples of the prevalent use of iambic and trochaic rhythms in funeral hymns.

335. Logu No. 50: Losi au, asa lao.

\(\text{Lo- as au, a- sa lao Tu Je- susku tu na dao; Ai ma- lungun do ro- hangku; Man- da- pothon Deba- tangku, A- sa di lambungna au.}\)

2. Jesuski, Sondang i; Sitorusi ombun i; O, an- digan ro tingkingku; Asa borhat ma tondingku;\(\ldots\) Lao marnida bohimi?

Hymn Example 2
It is significant that both Toba Batak funeral laments and the hymns commonly sung at pre-funeral wakes make frequent use of this iambic / trochaic rhythmic feature. Additionally, my field observations suggest that the preference for hymns that make use of iambic / trochaic rhythmic patterns is such that, on several occasions, where the music notation indicated evenly accented rhythms, the even rhythms were altered by the singers in performance so that the hymn’s rhythmic pattern included either iambic or trochaic patterns. This performative feature of altering the rhythm is evident in the excerpt of the hymn Adong Do Ama (Buku Ende # 383), recorded on January 22, 2003 at a pre-funeral wake in Tiga Balata.96 In the

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96 Despite an exhaustive archival search, the original source of this hymn is currently unknown to me. The Buku Ende indicates the source as “S. no. 216” which, according to the index in the Buku Ende,
Excerpt is verse 4 of the hymn. In the performance of this verse the straight eighth notes of measures 1, 3, 9, and 11 (beats three and four in each) have been altered to follow the dotted-eighth – sixteenth trochaic pattern presented in beat two of those measures. It is interesting to note from the performed excerpt that the penultimate measures of both the verse and the refrain (measures 7 and 13 respectively) do not appear to follow this pattern and, instead, maintain the rhythm as printed. The printed version of the hymn appears below in Figure 35 and the excerpt of its performance can be heard on the Example CD, track 7.

Figure 35. The printed version of the hymn “Adong do Ama.”

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corresponds to “Sankey Lieder no. 216.” Examination of the Sankey songbooks has, however, proven fruitless thus far.
Beyond the prevalent use of iambic / trochaic rhythmic patterns in traditional lament and in the hymns sung at pre-funeral wakes, these rhythms also appear frequently in that genre of Toba Batak popular lament known as *andung-andung* (a pre-composed, mass-mediated popular song genre which makes use of thematic, musical and textual features from traditional laments, mixing them with musical and technological aspects of western popular music). An example of the use of this rhythmic characteristic can be heard on the Example CD, track 8. The song represents a lament sung by a child for his deceased father and includes a number of meaningful sonic signifiers for death and bereavement in Toba Batak society, including the layered-in sounds of a running brook and chirping birds signifying the village setting—the son’s homeland (TB: *bona ni pinasa*), where his father lived and has died, the sound of the bamboo flute (TB: *suling*) playing in a “crying” style, and the voices of the singers who make use of a number of signifiers of crying / sobbing / lamenting as they sing (including the cadential pattern: “*hei, hei, hei*”—a refrain borrowed from traditional lamenting). All of these combined sounds conjure a nostalgic longing for the imagined past and for that which is lost (the dead), expressing that longing and loss in the most appropriate (nostalgic) manner—through a lament. While a detailed discussion of Toba Batak pop laments does not fall within the purview of this dissertation, pop laments are included in the present discussion with regard to the use of iambic / trochaic rhythms as both a compositional device

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97 The example is an excerpt from a pop lament by well-known folk and popular music composer and performer Nahum Situmorang (1906 – 1969) titled “*Boha ma Pangandunghu*” (“How shall I Lament You”). It is performed by Bunthora Situmorang and Jhonny S. Manurung on their album *Duet Si Raja Andung* (Duets by the Kings of Lament).
and performative choice intended to sonically and aesthetically forge and reinforce connections between Toba Batak pop laments, traditional laments for the dead, and the Protestant hymns that Toba Batak sing in pre-funeral wake contexts. These are connections which lend further support to the idea that this rhythmic feature is not only normative in laments but represents an important aesthetic connection, through a musicological and performative feature, between traditional laments and Protestant hymns in pre-funeral wakes.

Having examined aspects of the musicological and performative features present in Toba Batak laments for the dead as well as in the Protestant hymns commonly sung at pre-funeral wakes, the discussion, in Chapter Eight, shifts toward the socio-cultural dynamics of the replacement of laments with Protestant hymns in funerary contexts. Looking comparatively at the dialectic relationship between these two important ways of expressing grief and communicating hope as well as expectation in Toba Batak society, the chapter discusses musical, textual, and communal areas of conjunction and disjunction in the context of pre-funeral wake laments and hymns. The chapter also addresses the ongoing dialogue within the Batak Protestant Church as they ponder the possibilities embracing laments for the dead as a viable practice for the expression of grief by Toba Batak Christians, thereby moving from the replacement of laments toward the re-placement of laments.
Figure 24. Map of North Sumatra showing locations mentioned in Chapter Seven.
Part IV
Replacing Laments Becoming Hymns (Ganti Andung Gabe Ende)

Chapter 8
The Social and Cultural Dialectics of Grief – Hymns that have the Fragrance of Lament

In this chapter I discuss and comparatively examine aspects of Toba Batak funerary ritual that are particularly related to the performance of laments for the dead as well as the singing of Protestant hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts. In particular, I look at these two modes of mourning the dead as they variously reflect the ongoing and dialectical processes of socio-religious and cultural identity negotiation for Toba Batak Protestants as located in the expression ganti andung, gabe ende (replacing laments, becoming hymns).

Toba Batak pre-funeral wakes in the present day reflect a process of moving away from lamenting and toward hymn singing as the predominant musical mode of mourning the dead in the Toba Batak Protestant Christian community. In what follows, I examine this process by highlighting areas of conjunction as well as disjunction in present day practices of lamenting and hymn singing in pre-funeral wake contexts. I use the term conjunction in the general sense of being in a state of concurrence, of being joined together, of being in alignment, and focus on aspects of lament and hymn singing that share commonality, be they musical, performative, communal or otherwise. By disjunction I mean a state of being disconnected, separated, and out of alignment, and focus on aspects of lament and hymn singing
that appear separated and disconnected from one another either because of their particular structural characteristics (be they musical or linguistic, etc.,) or because of their particular function in the larger social context. Included in this discussion are conjunctions and disjunctions in the musicological and stylistic features of laments and hymns, in performative aspects of laments and hymns (including communicative gesturing, the giving and receiving of blessing, and the outward expression of grief through crying), in the formation and maintenance of communal solidarity though the acts of lamenting and hymn singing, and in the use of language and textual content in laments and hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts.

Beyond this discussion of conjunct and disjunct aspects of the use of laments and hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts, the chapter explores the position of the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP) with regard to the practice of lamenting in the Toba Batak Christian community today. Moving beyond earlier references to the Church’s historic doctrinal statements concerning the nature of the relationship between the living and the dead, this chapter includes recent statements by the Ephorus (Bishop) of the HKBP as well as descriptions of Church sanctioned activities that suggest the Church’s own ongoing internal dialogue regarding the value and necessity of maintaining the lament tradition (albeit in a re-contextualized and expanded form) as an important expression of Toba Batak cultural and religious identity. I frame this dialogue as reflecting a movement from replacing lament toward re-placing lament in the Toba Batak Christian community. What follows is a vignette illustrating aspects of the ongoing dialogic encounter between the need to
express grief through laments and the expression of grief through the singing of hymns.

**Vignette: Laments and Hymns in Dialogue**

One evening in April of 1993 I attended the pre-funeral wake for Bapak Sinambela, a man we had come to know through my wife’s friendship with his youngest daughter, Yudika. Bapak Sinambela had died the previous day after a slow and painful battle with cancer. That evening, as my wife and I sat with members of the Sinambela family and other friends, we participated in several brief rites of consolation (TB: *ulaon pangapulon*) led by various attendees of the wake. The room where we sat together on the floor was filled with extended family members and friends. Those who couldn’t find a space on the floor stood around the edge of the walls or peered in from outside through the door and windows. The evening was filled with communal hymn singing, scripture readings, words of consolation and comfort, and recitations of the Lord’s Prayer. Ibu Sinambela, the grieving widow, sat in a chair near her husband’s head. Her shoulders were wrapped in a woven ulos cloth, the design of which (called an *ulos tujung*) indicated that she was in mourning for her husband. Periodically, Ibu Sinambela would lift the ulos from her shoulders and cover her head with the cloth. Having done so, she would begin a lament for her husband, using the specialized language of lament known as *hata andung*. While she lamented, the others in the room would sit and listen quietly to the story she told through her lament. Some in the room wept openly as the lament progressed. It was not clear to me at the time whether they were weeping because of the content of the lament—
whether the story unfolding through it brought to mind their own experiences with suffering or pain at the death of a loved one—or perhaps whether their tears were triggered at the very sound of another’s lament. Occasionally, if the volume of her lamenting and the emotional weight of her crying reached a high intensity, others seated nearby would encourage her to stop her lament and would suggest the singing of a hymn as an alternative way to express grief. At these moments the dynamic would shift and Ibu Sinamela’s lamenting voice would be replaced by the communal voice of the gathered mourners singing a hymn. The expression of grief and loss would shift from that of a single voice to that of a multitude of voices singing and crying together. At one particularly memorable moment in the evening, the hymn “Ise do ale-alenta” (“What a Friend We have in Jesus”) was being sung.

“Ise do ale-alenta, na so olo muba i?
Ale-ale na sumurung, I ma Tuhan Jesus i.
Ai torop pe ale-ale na di hasiangan on.
Saluhutna i mansadi molo mate daging on.”

Translation:

“Who is our friend that does not change?
The truest friend, it is the Lord Jesus.
Though we have many friends in this life,
All of them will cease when we die.”

(Buku Ende #219; translation mine)

Our voices completely filled the small front room as we slowly made our way through the singing of the hymn. Each verse was lined-out by the woman who had suggested the hymn and begun the singing. I glanced around the room, taking in the scene. A group of women seated on the ground around Bapak Sinambela’s casket were moving their outstretched arms up and down over the body of Bapak Sinambela
in a steady, pulsing rhythmic accompaniment to the hymn singing. Several of the women were weeping as they sang and gestured. I had seen this type of arm movement (arms extended, palms downward) on similar occasions and understood it to represent the bestowing of blessing (TB: *mamasu-masu*)—in this case, the blessing of the words of the hymn on the spirit of the deceased. Its counter gesture, in which the palms are turned upward and the action is one of drawing-in toward oneself, is known as *mangalap sahala ni tondi ni na mate* (taking in / welcoming the spirit strength / charisma of the dead) and is often practiced at the funeral wakes of older, esteemed Toba Batak people as a way of symbolically drawing the spirit-strength of the deceased into the soul of the gesturing mourner. (These gestures and their connections to giving and receiving blessing in the context of pre-funeral wakes have been previously discussed in chapter 7.)

Glancing up from the women, I noticed the youngest son of the Sinambela’s eight children standing with some others against a wall and crying bitterly as the hymn continued. The sight of his grieving touched me deeply. Some time later I learned from another family member that, although of marrying age, he was not yet married and therefore had not yet fulfilled social customary (*adat*) obligations to extend the family line to the next generation, thereby increasing the prestige of his parents (in particular, his now-deceased father). In such situations feelings of disappointment at an unfulfilled obligations can be deeply painful, adding to the grief experienced from the loss of a parent.
As the last phrase of the hymn ended, my attention settled on Ibu Sinambela, her head covered with the *ulos tujung*, her arms outstretched over her husband’s body and moving slowly back and forth but in a rhythm altogether other than that of the hymn. As the sound of our voices quieted, I realized that she was performing a lament for her husband that she had begun while the hymn was being sung. Her voice and her gestures became the focus of the mourners’ attention once again, and we sat listening quietly until her lament reached its conclusion, she lowered her arms and uncovered her head.

My recollection of these events, i.e. the gathered mourners, the laments, the listening community, the weeping, the communal hymn singing as a replacement for lament, the gestures of blessing, the concurrence of hymn and lament, etc., at the pre-funeral wake for Bapak Sinambela serves to illustrate the array of elements commonly interacting in the larger context of mourning practices and expressions of grief for Toba Batak Protestants in the present day. My research suggests that, to varying degrees, both traditional laments and Protestant hymns play important and multivalent roles in the acts of expressing grief, honoring the dead, comforting the bereaved, and manifesting communal solidarity within the complexities of present day funerary ritual (particularly pre-funeral wakes) for Toba Batak Protestants. These two musical modes represent an ongoing dialogic relationship around questions about (and manifestations of) socio-cultural and socio-religious identity perception set against the backdrop of funerary ritual.
A Comparative Look at Laments and Hymns: Conjunctions and Disjunctions in Musical and Stylistic Features of Laments and Hymns

The analyses of musicological and stylistic features of laments for the dead and hymns commonly sung at pre-funeral wakes that appear in Chapters Six and Seven (respectively) reveal that these two musical modes of mourning the dead are primarily disjunct with respect to the musicological features examined (musical ambitus, melodic contour, melodic form, phrase shape, etc.). The most likely explanation for this disjunction lies primarily in the diverse traditions from which the sources originate—laments for the dead being indigenous to Toba Batak culture as a genre of vocal music, while the Protestant hymns originate from European and American sources, having been introduced to the Toba Batak through Protestant missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Those musicological and stylistic features indicating areas of conjunction between laments and hymns are seen in the analysis of rhythmic patterns that draw upon iambic and trochaic rhythmic accents. This pattern of rhythmic accenting is prevalent in the lament examples discussed in Chapter Six as well as in the hymn examples in Chapter Seven. The prominent use of this rhythmic feature in lamenting is, as stated earlier, likely related to the accent / stress structure of spoken Toba Batak, which, in linguistic terms, is categorized as a word stress language. In the particular case of the Toba Batak language, the stress / accent on the level of

98 The presence of this pattern of rhythmic accenting in Toba Batak pop laments (as discussed in Chapter Seven) not only forges a link between funerary laments and their reification as a pop music genre, but further strengthens the idea of a musicological conjunction between laments and hymns with regard to the prevalent use of these rhythmic patterns.
individual, multi-syllabic, words is characterized as largely penultimate and lexical.99

In her dissertation on the phonetic morphology of word and sentence prosody in Toba Batak and Betawi Malay languages, linguist Lilie Roosman states “in languages with word stress, one syllable is perceived as stronger than the other syllables in the same word. On higher levels, in phrases or sentences, accent is used to make particular words more prominent than other words. Accent is primarily marked by two prosodic features i.e., duration and pitch. When a word is prominent, it will have a perceptually prominent change in pitch and a longer duration than when it is non-prominent” (Roosman 2006:35). As suggested earlier, the morphology of the Toba Batak language, where accent is marked, as Roosman states, by changes in pitch and a lengthening of duration, serves convincingly as the reason for the prominent use of iambic / trochaic (short-long / long-short) rhythmic patterns in Toba Batak laments. Further, if the use of iambic / trochaic rhythms in lament is a normative feature (as I suggested in Chapter Six), it stands to reason that preferential weight would fall toward those hymns that also make use of this rhythmic patterning. Such hymns might well be said to bear the fragrance of lament, thus representing an area of conjunction between laments and hymns. It is also worth noting that although the prominent use of iambic / trochaic rhythms in Toba Batak laments is, in all likelihood, related to the linguistic morphology of Toba Batak, their use in the

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99 In her description concerning the linguistic properties of Toba Batak language as being word stressed, in which stress carries lexical weight, Roosman cites publications by of H. N. van der Tuuk (1971 [1864]) and Nababan (1981). Her Ph.D. dissertation in linguistics, *Phonetic Experiments on the Word and Sentence Prosody of Betawi Malay and Toba Batak*, was published in 2006 by the Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap (Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics), Utrecht, The Netherlands.
Protestant hymns commonly sung in pre-funeral wakes is not a matter of linguistic necessity but rather reflects the musicological/compositional practices of the European and American hymn tune composers who wrote them. That these hymns, i.e. the ones displaying the above-mentioned rhythmic patterns, are the ones most commonly sung in pre-funeral wakes as replacements for laments further supports the significance of this rhythmic feature in identifying those hymns that have the fragrance of lament.

A stylistic feature that represents an area of conjunction between laments and hymns (and figures into the manner whereby hymns take on the fragrance of lament) is that feature represented in the slow-paced tempo with which hymns are sung at pre-funeral wakes. In my observations of hymn singing at pre-funeral wakes, in statements by Toba Batak singers describing the ways in which hymns should be sung at wakes,\(^{100}\) and in performed demonstrations of “appropriate” hymn singing style, a common feature present in all of these contexts was the exaggeratedly slow pace of the hymn singing. This slow pace is clearly present on the recorded example of Pdt. Sihite singing “Na Ro Pandaoni Bolon i” (*Buku Ende* no. 452) with some of the church women at a recording session in Panombean (January 6, 2003). This example can be heard on the CD, track 9. The hymn (one of the five representative hymns discussed in Chapter Seven) makes use of an iambic rhythmic pattern

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\(^{100}\) In my conversation with Bapak Nababan in Medan (February 6, 2003), he stated that hymns which are sung as replacements for laments need to be sung at a pace slow enough so that the tears would be able to flow. When I asked for an example of such a hymn he asked his wife to sing “Pasahat ma Sudena” (*Buku Ende* no. 279) which is the first hymn in the Hymns of Comfort (*TB: Ende Pangapulon*) section. She started singing at a tempo of roughly 100 bpm. He immediately interrupted her to tell her to slow it down even more, eventually bringing the tempo down to around 70 bpm.
throughout, and his singing style demonstrates not only the slow pace of pre-funeral
wake hymns but is also an excellent example of the flowing of tears and weeping
while singing that the slow tempo is intended to elicit (despite the fact that Pdt.
Sihite’s tears, in this case, are strictly performed—evidenced through the background
giggling of the adults and children in the room, amused at his ‘crocodile tears’). The
stylistic feature of tempo / pace represents an area of conjunction between laments
and hymns in pre-funeral contexts in that, even though hymns make use of a metric
pattern and a regularly recurring pulse while laments do not—laments are, in fact,
metrically free, having no regularly recurring pulse, the singing of hymns and laments
requires a pace which is slow and unhurried, enabling reflection on the text
(particularly in the case of laments) and an emotional response aimed at the flowing
of tears, the outward expression of grief and the release of internalized sadness. Pdt.
Sihite, commenting on this idea stated, “In the present day many Christians use
hymns of the church as a means to cry—to release feelings of grief. If the church is
stepping in and saying ‘let’s replace these laments with hymns,’ then the people
would weep through the singing of hymns. These hymns, and the way in which
they’re sung, will encourage the shedding of tears” (p.c. January 6, 2003,
Panombean).

Conjunction and Disjunction in Performative Aspects of Laments and Hymns

Among Toba Batak Protestants the singing of laments and the singing hymns
in pre-funeral wake contexts include a number of performative features
(communicative gestures, gestures related to giving and receiving blessing,
expressions of grief, etc.). Some of these features are specific to the particular type of musical expression (either laments or hymns) and others appear to be common to both. The use of hand and arm movement is common to both lament singing and hymn singing for example, but the particular kinds of movements as well as the meanings intended by them may differ. In lamenting situations the hands and arms of the lamentor may be used to communicate specific information with those listening, as a way of affirming and reinforcing what is being expressed verbally through the lament. At the pre-funeral wake for Bapak Sinambela (recounted in the opening vignette) his wife, Ibu Sinambela, included hand and arm gesturing during her lament for her husband. As I listened and observed, I was cognizant of her gestures but did not know how they should be interpreted. Several months later, having returned to the United States, I was sitting in the living room of the eldest Sinambela daughter, Mardohar, who was living in a community east of Los Angeles at the time of her father’s death and was unable to attend her father’s funeral. My wife and I had been asked by Ibu Sinambela to deliver a videotape of the funeral proceedings to Mardohar when we returned to the United States in July of 1993. As we sat in Mardohar’s living room reviewing the videotape of the funeral (including portions of the several-days-long wake), she commented on her mother’s lamenting, pointing out that through her gesturing her mother was reinforcing information that was being communicated in the lament itself regarding the number of male and female children in their family, which of them were married, which of them had children of their own (Ibu Sinambela’s grandchildren) as well as the number of male and female
grandchildren. Several years later, while conducting dissertation field research back in Sumatra during 2002 – 2003, I took the opportunity to speak with lamenters about these uses of gesture as a way of sharing information during a lament. In particular, I addressed my questions to the women gathered at the recording done in Panombean in January of 2003. The women in the room confirmed that there are a number of ways that gestures that can be used by a lamenter to reinforce and highlight the content of the lament text during a lament. The gestures I had witnessed by Ibu Sinambela were among those the women in Panombean described. These gestures, however were specific to lamenting and were not found in connection to hymn singing—suggesting that this was an area of disjunction between laments and hymns with reference to communicative gestures. Other gestures, however, were present in both laments and hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts. These are discussed below.

**Gestures for Giving and Receiving Blessing**

Another performative gesture, one which I witnessed particularly with regard to hymn singing, is the use of the hands by hymn singers – especially the women seated most closely around the deceased – with the arms extended and the palms turned either upward or downward as a way of giving blessing (palms downward) or receiving blessing (palms upward) during the singing of hymns. Discussed earlier in chapter 7, the rhythmic pulsing of the arms with the palms facing downward is understood as a means of blessing the deceased with the words of the hymn being sung at the time. Singers will rhythmically pulse their arms and hands over the deceased’s body while they sing hymns. This pulsing movement mirrors the rhythmic pulse of the singing
and the downward facing palms reflects the “pushing in” of the blessing communicated through the text of the hymn into the body of the deceased. This is a gesture reflective of the giving of blessing by the wife-giving group (TB: hula-hula) to the wife-receiving group (TB: boru) during ceremonial dances at Toba Batak adat feasts. The contrasting gesture—the arms extended over the body of the deceased, with palms turned upward—represents the “gathering-in” or receiving of blessing and, in the context of pre-funeral wakes, is most often practiced when mourners are performing a circular dance around the body of the deceased (a form of tortor dance known as mangondasi) after the ritual known as mompo has taken place. This “gathering-in” gesture is most often (though not exclusively) associated with the mangondasi dance which takes place particularly when the decedent is an elderly person who has been accorded the exalted status of mate saur matua or mate saur matua na mauli bulung, meaning that all of their children are married and have children (or even grandchildren) of their own (Figure 37). Such a person is held in great esteem in Toba Batak society and the palms-upward gesture of gathering-in or receiving blessing is representative of the act of gathering the prestige, power, and honor of the deceased into the lives / souls of their living descendants. This gesture is referred to as mangalap sahala ni tondi ni na mate, meaning gathering-in the soul-power / prestige of the deceased. Through conversations about this gesturing with my colleague, Pdt. Simamora, I learned that, because of the possibility that such gestures

101 The mompo ritual commonly takes place the night prior to the burial ceremony. The mompo ritual happens inside the home and involves (among other things) moving the body of the deceased from the mat or bed where they have been lying in state and placing them inside the casket. Following the mompo ritual the gondang sabangunan is played and members of the family of the deceased will dance late into the night.
Figure 37. Following the mompo rite, the children and grandchildren perform the “gathering-in” gesture over the body of the deceased. Photo by the author. Pematang Siantar, January 20, 2003.
implied ongoing interaction between the living and the dead as well as the hope or expectation on the part of the living of receiving some blessing from the deceased, the church had taken a negative attitude regarding this gathering-in gesture by discouraging its practice by Christian Toba Batak and had instead given support to the palms-down gesturing as a way of re-contextualizing the gesture by suggesting that the living descendants could bestow a blessing on the deceased through the texts of funerary hymns.  

While the gestures of giving and receiving blessing are most often associated with hymn singing and / or the *mangondasi* dance, they are also (though to a lesser extent) used in the performance of laments. The women I spoke with in Panombean confirmed this for me but were quick to add that, in association with lament, such gestures were often understood as an attempt, on the part of the lamentor, to communicate with the deceased (or with other ancestral spirits) in order to make requests of them for blessings on their own or some other’s behalf. As such, they were frowned upon by the Church and were seldom practiced in the present day. With this in mind, it seems fair to say that the performative act of gesturing in association with lamenting and hymn singing in pre-funeral contexts represents an area of disjuncture as well as an area of conjuncture, depending on a number of considerations as discussed above.

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Conjunction and Disjunction: Expressions of Grief in Laments and Hymns

Beyond the performative features with connections to gesture and movement described above are the sonic features with connections to crying, sobbing, sniffling, and other “icons of crying” (Urban 1988:389) which Tolbert refers to as “performative elaborations and stylizations of natural crying” (Tolbert 1994:180). As discussed in Chapter Six in connection with the cadential patterns of Toba Batak laments, such icons of crying also play a significant role in the performance of hymns sung during pre-funeral wakes. As mentioned above in the discussion of tempo and the slow pace of hymns sung in pre-funeral wakes, Pdt. Sihite, the vicar at the Panombean church, commented that in the present day many Christians use hymns as a means to cry—to release feelings of pent-up emotion and grief. Further, he stated, “If the church is stepping in and saying ‘let’s replace these laments with hymns—this hymn is now our lament’ (‘beta marende hita...ende on ma andungta’), then the people would weep through the singing of these hymns. The hymns and the way in which they’re sung will encourage the shedding of tears. But this is crying, not lamenting” (p.c., January 6, 2003, Panombean). Pdt. Sihite then illustrated his comment by singing the hymn, Na Ro Pandaoni Bolon I (Buku Ende #452), as if during a pre-funeral wake. As he moved through the verse of the hymn his performance became increasingly marked by sobbing, quaking, voice breaks, and other stylizations of crying. After Pdt. Sihite’s performance of the hymn, our discussion concerning hymns and crying continued. The woman who had been

103 This can be heard on the CD, track 9
singing laments earlier in the evening, Boru Togatorop, mentioned that when she finished lamenting she often felt “puas” (an Indonesian language term meaning satisfied, relieved, content) in that she had outwardly expressed her inward sadness. She followed this by saying that when she sung hymns at pre-funeral wakes she felt the same way (puas). Crying through the singing of a hymn brought relief and release. Hymn singing for Ibu Boru Togatorop also meant the recollection of sad memories from the past that, when brought to mind through the singing of hymns, further enabled crying (p.c., January 6, 2003, Panombean). In this way, the expression of grief through tears represents an area of conjunction between laments and hymns. Both musical expressions incorporate tears as a way of releasing sadness thereby providing emotional relief to the singer.

This sentiment was echoed some weeks later in a conversation I had with Pdt. Simamora and a lamenter, Ompung Horas boru Butarbutar marga Siahaan, who lived in the village of Tiga Bolon, several miles southeast of Pematang Siantar (see Figure 36). We were discussing the use of hymns as replacements for laments and the ways in which hymns can serve to enable the expression of grief and sadness, especially when, in singing them, they bring to mind earlier sad experiences. At that point Pdt. Simamora interjected, saying that since the death of his eldest son and then of his wife some years later, whenever he hears the hymn Sai Solhot Tu Silangmi (Buku Ende #449) he begins to weep because of the strong association between that hymn and his experience of singing it at their wakes. He then began to sing it quietly and with a very slow tempo, much as it would be sung in a funerary context. At the end
of the first verse, he continued his comments, adding that no matter where he hears
the hymn—in church, on the radio, on a cassette, or at a pre-funeral wake—his tears
always flow because he associates the hymn with that painful loss. He concluded his
comments by saying, “Now, I don’t know how to lament…so, I have no other option
than to express / get out my sadness through this and other hymns” (p.c., February 27,
2003, Tiga Bolon). For Pdt. Simamora, the singing of particular hymns (as well as
the hearing of them) enabled the release of grief in a way that was not accessible to
him through laments. His comments suggest that the reason for this was related to the
strong associative meaning he assigned to specific hymns with connections to his own
experiences of grief and loss.

Tears, sobs, falsetto wails and other performative representations of crying all
play important roles in both Toba Batak laments and in the Protestant hymns which
occur during pre-funeral wakes. It appears, however, that the functions of crying
differ depending on the contexts in which they occur. As discussed in Chapter Six, in
traditional laments crying plays a role in the musical construction of the lament –
signaling moments of cadential rest, providing opportunities for the lamenter to
gather her thoughts and compose new material. Crying and weeping during a lament
also helps establish a measure of genuineness and authenticity for those listening in
and acts as a catalyst to better enable those listening to shed their own tears. Like the
crying which occurs with the singing of hymns, shedding tears in laments also brings
relief to the one weeping, enabling the release of stress from grief and sadness. As
Ibu boru Panjaitan expressed it during a conversation following her lamenting, “If we
cry and get out our grief it can help us feel relief – our hearts will be opened (udah longgar di hati kita). If we hold it in then we may become ill” (p.c., February 6, 2003, Medan). The shedding of tears in connection with laments for the dead appears to serve a number of functions, as discussed above. To the extent that crying in connection with laments serves to bring about relief from sadness and the release of grief, it represents an area of conjunction with the shedding of tears in connection with hymn singing in pre-funeral wakes. My research findings do not support the notion that crying in connection with the singing of hymns is intended in ways other than the release of grief and sadness, a finding that would suggest that there are meaningful areas of disjunction between laments and hymns in relation to expressions of sadness and grief through the shedding of tears.

**Conjunction and Disjunction in the Formation and Maintenance of Communal Solidarity in Laments and Hymns**

Pre-funeral wakes in Toba Batak society are, for the most part, communal settings. The numerous rites of consolation (TB: ulaon pangapulon) which occur through the night hours during the several days of the waking period are occasions when the community of family, friends, neighbors, and church gathers in the home of the deceased to be present, to sit with the family, to participate in the rites, speeches, meals, and discussions which, combined, form the Toba Batak funerary context. Each of these various acts represent facets of the manifestation of community in funerary contexts—some being more public and structured (such as rites of consolation, the various adat rites relating to death, shared meals, etc..) while others
may appear to be more private and individual (the preparation of and care for the body of the deceased, contacting distant relations and informing them of the death, sitting with the body in the mid-day hours, etc.,), even though they may occur in a communal context. Lamenting and hymn singing are integral aspects of the various manifestations of community in pre-funeral wakes. As such, they may function within, and in relation to, community in significantly different ways. Toba Batak lamenting in funerary contexts is essentially an individual expression. Often it is an expression of grief, sadness, and disappointment directed primarily at the deceased by the lamenter. Laments may also praise and honor the deceased, calling to mind the good deeds, honesty, or loving character of the deceased toward their family and neighbors. While essentially an individual expression, lamenting takes place in a communal setting where, as Greg Urban states in relation to Amerindian ritual wailing in Brazil, “it is intended not to be heard, in the ordinary linguistic sense, but rather to be overheard. Ritual wailing purports overtly not to engage an addressee, but to allow anyone within earshot access to something that would otherwise be private” (Urban 1988:392). In the Toba Batak context, traditional lamenting is understood not only as a way of expressing grief but may also be a vehicle through which the lamenter can communicate to those “overhearing” (i.e. the gathered community listening-in on the lament, including in particular, members of her immediate and extended family). In this way the lamenter can express her needs as well as hopes and expectations for her own, and her children’s, future well-being. These may be expressed in the form of a complaint directed (on the surface /
explicitly) at the deceased who has died before fulfilling promises to provide for a child’s future (as in the example discussed in Chapter Six of the widow’s lament – *andung mabalu* – sung by Ibu boru Panjaitan). Any family members (particularly those who represent the *hula-hula* of her husband) overhearing her seemingly private / individual lament expressed in the context of a public forum (among the gathered mourners) will understand that the hopes and expectations expressed in the lament and directed explicitly at her deceased husband are, in fact, also being implicitly directed toward themselves, with the understanding that they are obligated to assist the lamenter and her family in the future since her husband is no longer able to provide for them. In this way, the role of the community in lament contexts is, on one hand, a *passive* one of “overhearing” – the community listens-in while the lamenter expresses her grief, recounts the life events of the deceased, recounts her own sufferings, etc. On the other hand, the community’s role is also *active* in that as they become witnesses to what the lamenter expresses through her lament – particularly regarding to the implicit expectations for future assistance, they are expected to act on her words and provide future assistance for her family.

Another aspect of community connected to lamenting is that of the relationship between the lamenting tradition and the broader socio-cultural traditions and practices of the Toba Batak people as they are understood historically in relation to Toba Batak *adat*. The lamenting tradition is understood to be a part of that collection of beliefs, traditions, and customary practices which is subsumed under the umbrella of pre-Christian traditions and customs. As such, lamenting, with its use of
an old, venerated and specialized language (*hata andung*), maintains, through its practice, a connection with a community of ancestors who are remembered and honored through the act of lamenting and who join with the gathered community of mourners at the occurrence of a lament.

Hymn singing, in contrast, is an activity in which the gathered community plays a more overtly participatory and active role. Hymn singing in pre-funeral wakes is essentially a communal act. It is not done on an individual basis in such contexts. Either the entire mourning community sings together or a smaller portion of the community (such as a church choir group) sings. The communal singing of hymns is a fundamental aspect of communal expressions of solidarity and support for the bereaved family during pre-funeral wakes (Figure 38). Hymns are sung primarily in the context of the rites of consolation (TB: *ulaon pangapulon*) which occur throughout the wake period, but they are also sung outside of these rites, during times when the gathered mourners are simply sitting together passing the evening hours with the family of the deceased. Hymn singing also plays an important communal role if one of the bereaved is perceived to be overly distraught or if the emotional tenor in the room is felt to be increasing in sadness – often the result when, for example, mourners (especially family members) initially arrive at the home of the deceased and respond by loud, inconsolable sobbing (TB: *tumatangison*) or wailing (TB: *mangangguk*). Such outward expressions of grief are not uncommon and are, in fact, expected as an outward, explicitly public display of sadness and as a way of publicly honoring or paying respect to the deceased through an initial outpouring of
Figure 38. The community of mourners gathered around the deceased, singing hymns of consolation together. Their hand gestures represent the act of giving the blessing of the words they sing to the deceased. Photo by the author. Aek Hahombu, October 31, 1995.
emotion. My understanding of this was confirmed in a conversation with Bapak Nababan, a relative of the lamenter Ibu boru Panjaitan. When discussing crying and other expressions of grief during wakes, he stated that “for Batak people, if someone dies – if their body is laid out in the home – and no one is crying it is very bad (TB: *dang tabo*). If there isn’t someone crying at a wake, well…the feeling is that it is disrespectful” (p.c., February 6, 2003, Medan). If however, the one crying is felt to be in danger of becoming overwhelmed by their grief and sadness a hymn will be spontaneously introduced and sung communally in response, as a way of diffusing tension, regaining control, re-forming and maintaining a sense of communal solidarity as a way of protecting both the distraught mourner as well as the family of the deceased from any possibility of physical illness or spiritual malady which, it is believed, might occur as a result of being too long in an emotionally drained / weakened state.

Pre-funeral wakes for Protestant Toba Batak are essentially and fundamentally communal contexts. Lamenting and hymn singing serve variously in the formation and maintenance of communal solidarity, acting both in explicit and implicit ways to manifest community, protect and preserve community, and help facilitate the public and private processes of grieving and mourning the dead while at the same time providing the living the possibility of expressing future concerns, hopes and expectations. As such, laments and hymns represent areas of both conjunction and disjunction as they reflect multivalent and, at times, divergent concepts of community formation and maintenance in the context of pre-funeral wakes.
Conjunction and Disjunction in Texts and Language of Laments and Hymns

A comparative study of lament texts and hymn texts commonly used in pre-funeral wakes reveals important distinctions in the ideological orientation contained in the texts. My understanding of these distinctions was further confirmed through discussion with Toba Batak lamenters, mourners, and Protestant clergy during my field research. As stated earlier in Chapter Six, laments in Toba Batak society are (or have been) associated with a variety of social contexts including types of labor (andung paragat – palm wine tapper lament; andung parbabo – field laborer lament; andung parsoban – wood gatherer lament; andung martonun – ulos weaver lament, etc.), life events / rituals (andung ni na mate – lament for the dead; andung mangongkal holi – secondary burial lament), and social situations (andung salik – accusatory lament; andung ni natua na naeng mate – lament for an elder who will soon die) (Hutagalung 2001:29-38). In this dissertation my focus is particularly on laments for the dead. Within the genre of laments for the dead my research indicates a number of subgenre which differ from one another primarily based upon the subject of the lament itself, i.e. the one being addressed in the text of the lament (i.e. andung tu Inong Pangintubu—lament for mother; andung tu Among Parsumuan—lament for father; andung ni na mabalu—widow’s lament for her husband; andung ni anak siampudan—lament of the youngest child, etc.). As mentioned above, there is, musically and stylistically, little to distinguish one of these subject-oriented laments
from another—their primary distinguishing characteristic being the subject (addressee) of the lament itself.

Beyond this, the other significant distinction within this genre of lament for the dead has to do with the intention (purpose) of the lament as expressed through the lament text itself. Included here are laments referred to generally as andung riwayat in which the lamenter recollects in the text of the lament the life story (BI riwayat hidup) of the deceased, communicating both the admirable and less admirable qualities or behaviors of the deceased during their lifetime. Lament texts may also describe the difficulties encountered throughout the deceased’s life and the ways in which the deceased overcame those difficult situations. Life story lament texts describe ways in which the deceased has contributed to the strengthening of the clan community (TB: marga) through the birth of children or grandchildren, the accumulation of wealth, and the recognition or prestige they have earned during their life. These attributes are encapsulated in the expression of Toba Batak cultural values known as the 3-Hs: hagabeon (descendants), hamoraon (wealth), and hasangapon (honor / prestige), discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. Finally, life story lament texts express those hopes, plans and expectations of the bereaved that are now unfulfilled due to the death of the one lamented. Such unfulfilled expectations are often voiced in the form of a complaint and, as discussed above, while they may be addressed explicitly toward the deceased, there is also an implicit understanding that the listening community, in “overhearing” the complaint, will respond by providing assistance to the bereaved family. In these ways, life story laments can be seen to
function didactically— instructing the listening community on the benefits of morally positive (as well as the dangers of negative) behavior as exemplified in the life of the deceased.

An additional type of subject-oriented lament heard in pre-funeral wake contexts is one in which the lamenter herself is the subject of the lament. Through the text of the lament (known as andung parsorion—poor fate lament) she describes her own sufferings and the hardships of her life. These may include stories of family members who have died and the bitterness of that loss, failed business ventures and the resulting economic hardship, illnesses, and other tragic, fateful occurrences (TB: sori / sori ni ari). These laments occur in pre-funeral wake settings for a variety of reasons. The most common being that the lamenter may not be well-acquainted with the deceased and therefore may not know the details of their life story, making a life story lament (TB: andung riwayat) an impossibility. Another use of poor fate laments is in connection to the need for tears. As mentioned above, to have a wake where no one is crying is considered highly improper in Toba Batak society. The performance of poor fate laments will often elicit tears from the lamenter as she recollects, through the text of her lament, the story of her hard life and sufferings. This recounting of her past sufferings will likely result in the flow of tears from those listening-in as they relate their own hardships and those of the deceased to the lamenter’s text. Hardship, suffering, unfulfilled expectations and hopelessness characterize, in large measure, Toba Batak laments for the dead. As the lamenter Ibu boru Butarbutar expressed it during a conversation regarding lament texts and hymn

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texts with regard to expressions of hope or hopelessness, “When we lament [with an andung parsorion] there is not an element of hope—rather, it is hopelessness which drives the lament. But when we sing hymns there is hope in the words—the hope that we will meet again in heaven—this is the big difference between the two” (p.c., February 27, 2003, Tiga Bolon). This trope of hope and hopelessness was poignantly expressed during an interview in the village of Lumban Nabolon (see Figure 36) in March of 2003. Sitting in the home of Ibu boru Sitorus, a woman with an expansive knowledge of hata andung, I experienced an awkward instance of miscommunication. As I prepared to record her lamenting examples (having explained my research interest) she suddenly refused to do any lamenting, explaining that what she thought I was interested in was the collection of hata andung words and their meaning in common Toba Batak. She then made it very clear that because she was a Christian she had “living hope” (TB: panghirimon na mangolu) and therefore she had “no more use for those sad songs. I don’t want to put myself in that ‘place.’ I won’t go back there. There are too many tears that start flowing and I’m afraid I might fall sick” (p.c., March 13, 2003, Lumban Nabolon).104

104 After our conversation ended, I learned that Ibu boru Sitorus had recently become affiliated with one of the small Pentacostal churches that had moved into the mountain areas (such as Lumban na Bolon) in the past few years. It is the practice of these churches to eschew any cultural practices or traditions (including aspects of material culture such as woven ulos cloths) which they deemed to have some lingering connection to heathen animistic beliefs. As a result, many of those who have joined these churches have taken to publicly burning their heirloom ulos cloths, have refrained from participating in (or attending) any adat feast or rite (including funerary rites), have rejected traditional foods, etc., a situation that has resulted in deep relational rifts in families and in the larger communal network.
As stated above, hymn singing during pre-funeral wakes plays an important role in enabling the expression of sadness through crying and, additionally, serves to create and reinforce a communal solidarity. The texts of these hymns stand in marked contrast to the texts of the laments for the dead described earlier. Drawn from sections of the *Buku Ende* with headings such as: Praise for Your Sacrifice (TB: *Puji Sihophop Ho*), Songs in Remembrance of Man’s End (TB: *Ende Taringot tu Ajal ni Jolma*), Songs in Remembrance of Faith / Belief (TB: *Ende Taringot tu Haporseeaon*), and Songs of Comfort (TB: *Ende Pangapulon*), hymn texts convey messages of hope, comfort, looking ahead to the peace of heaven, assurance of salvation, and unending life in the presence of Jesus in heaven. These ideas are seen in the texts and translations of two of the five pre-funeral wake hymn examples that appear in Appendix C. The examples below are from *Buku Ende* hymn #335, “*Loas Au Asa Lao*,” a translation of the 19th century German hymn, “*Lasst mich gehn*” by Lutheran cleric Gustav Knack, and *Buku Ende* hymn #289 “*Pos Ma Ho, Rohangku*,” a translation of the mid 19th century German hymn “*Harre, meine Seele*” by choirmaster Friedrich Räder. The first two verses of the hymns, along with my translations, appear below.

**Hymn: Loas Au Asa Lao (B.E. # 335)**

**Toba Batak: verse 1**

*Loas au, asa lao /
Tu Jesusku tu na dao; /
Ai malungun do rohangku; /
Mandapothon Debatangku, /
Asa di lambungna au. /
Asa di lambungna au.*
**Translation: verse 1**
Give your permission, so that I may go / 
To my Jesus to that far off place. / 
O, my heart is heavy / 
To visit (be) in the presence of my God. / 
So that I may be at God’s side. / 
So that I may be at God’s side. / 

**Toba Batak: verse 2**
 Jesúski, Sondang i, / 
 Sitorusi ombun i, / 
 O, andigan ro tingkingku, / 
 Asa borhat ma tondingku, / 
 Lao marnida bohimi? / 
 Lao marnida bohimi? / 

**Translation: verse 2**
My Jesus, the Light, / 
The One who disperses the clouds. / 
Oh, when will my time arrive, / 
So that my spirit might leave / 
To go and behold your face? / 
To go and behold your face? / 

**Hymn: *Pos ma Ho, Rohangku* (B.E. #289)**

**Toba Batak: verse 1**
 Pos ma ho, rohangku, di Debata! / 
 Bonom ma arsak mu tu rohana da! / 
 Unang lomos, tiop ma gomos / 
 Haporaseanmu, unang ho bobos! / 
 Paluaonna ho ma antong / 
 Sian nasa jea di tano on. / 

**Translation: verse 1**
Believe firmly, O my heart, in God! / 
Immerse (drown) your sorrow in God’s heart! / 
Do not worry (fear), grasp tightly (to) / 
Your faith, do not [you] be perplexed (dull-witted)! / 
Freed (released), then you are / 
From every disaster (danger) on this earth. /
**Toba Batak: verse 2**

_pos ma ho,… /
...tu rohana da! /
(The first two lines are identical to the above)

_lao mago pe na dison sude, /
sonang bahenonna sogot ho muse. /
ale jahowa, haposanki, /
sai togihon ahu tu surgo i! /

**Translation: verse 2**

Believe firmly,… /
…in God’s heart! / (The first two lines are identical to the above)
All that is here will one day be gone (lost), /
Happiness (Joy) you will have (receive) in the future. /
O God (Jehova), my trustworthy (faithful) one, /
Forever lead (guide) me toward heaven! /

The first of these examples appears among the hymns collected under the heading “Songs in Remembrance of Man’s End” and, as the translation strongly suggests, the focus of the text is that of looking or moving forward from the end of one’s life and of dwelling in the presence of God in heaven. Both verses are in the first person. In verse one the first person, nearing the end of life, is addressing the second person (perhaps family members) and requesting permission to be released from life and move on to the next life with God. In the second verse the first person is again addressing the second person—in this case, Jesus, in order to know when they will be brought to heaven in order to see Jesus face to face. The second hymn example is found in that section titled “Songs in Remembrance of Faith / Belief.” Like the first hymn example, both verses of this hymn are also in the first person. In this case, however, the first person is addressing him/herself in an interior monologue.
through which they seek to strengthen their faith as they look forward expectantly to the time when they will be with God in heaven. These two hymn texts serve as representative examples of hymn texts commonly sung during pre-funeral wakes. As such, I suggest that they represent an area of disjunction between the texts of laments and the texts of hymns that is framed in terms of directionality as expressed in the texts. By directionality, I mean that aspect of the text as a whole which is either forward looking, positive, and communicating hopefulness, or that aspect of the text which is backward focused, full of despair and disappointment, and communicating hopelessness. As stated above, laments and hymns both serve as a means of expressing grief and getting tears to flow, and as such represent a conjunction.

However, within the forward – backward / hopeful – hopeless trope I am suggesting here, they represent very different, disjunctive perspectives. The texts of laments are, by and large, backward-focused and convey messages of hopelessness while the texts of hymns convey a hopeful message and are generally oriented in a more forward-focused direction.

One noteworthy exception to this formulation is found in laments addressed to the spirits of ancestors that, as such, represent a connection to former, pre-Christian Toba Batak beliefs. Known generally by the term hasipelebeguon (spirit worship / veneration), ancestor spirit cult practices formed the bedrock of the Toba Batak belief system for generations and, while the majority of present-day Toba Batak are affiliated with the Christian church, aspects of that earlier belief system remain present in Toba Batak social-cultural and religious ideologies. (Concepts related to
ancestor spirit veneration were discussed previously in Chapter Three.) In a conversation with the lamenter Ibu boru Butarbutar regarding the idea of hope and hopelessness as expressed through hymns and laments, she said, “the exception is when sipelebegu is a part of our lamenting—in this situation we believe there remains a connection between the living and the dead, and that through the lament we can ask our ancestors to bless us in some way or other. When we do this, we ask with a sense of hopefulness or expectation that our request will be granted” (p.c., February 27, 2003, Tiga Bolon).

Laments and hymns in pre-funeral wakes make use of language in ways particular to each form of expression, with ramifications that impact the processes of replacing laments with hymns in Toba Batak society. The language of lament, as discussed in Chapter Six, is an archaic, specialized, metaphoric register of language known as *hata andung*. This specialized language draws upon a lexicon of some 500 words that include kin terms, terms for parts of the body, as well as terms related to many other aspects of the Toba Batak material and cosmological worlds (Kozok 2002:47). *Hata andung* is one of several specialized registers of language used by Toba Batak in earlier times. Others include the language of trance speech (TB: *hata ni begu siar*), the language of magical incantations (TB: *hata tabas*), the language of spiritual invocation (TB: *hata pangaraksaon*), and the language of wisdom / instruction (TB: *hata poda*). According to philologist Ulrich Kozok, most of these specialized languages are in disuse or diminishing use (Kozok 1998:34).
Common, everyday Toba Batak is referred to as *hata somal* (ordinary language). It is accessible to any and all Toba Batak speakers, and is the language of daily communication and interaction, used in the home, in the workplace, on the street and in the fields. *Hata somal* is also the language used in Christian rites and in the hymns included in those rites. As such, the hymns sung in pre-funeral wakes provide far greater participatory access to the community of mourners. The possibility for each and every mourner gathered to gain access to, and engage with, the hymn text both actively (through singing) or passively (by listening) is further evidenced in that hymn singers (unlike lamenters) are not a specialized class of individual. Because the language of hymn singing is not a specialized register of language, it follows that, with regard to language / linguistic register, there is an area of disjunction between laments and hymns in pre-funeral wakes. While mourners, in the act of singing hymns together in *hata somal*, maintain their status as members of the mourning community, lamenters, through the act of lamenting and the use of *hata andung*, are transformed into a kind of specialized practitioner. They are respected, valued, and (to some extent) feared in the act of lamenting.105

This phenomenon of status transformation for lamenters is, to some extent, a more recent development which can be linked to steady decline of *hata andung*

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105 This transformation of status is similar, in some respects, to that which occurs among the musician who play in the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble, used primarily in Toba Batak adat-related ceremonies. The musicians, referred to by the collective term *pargonsi* (players of traditional music) are, as ethnomusicologist Mauly Purba states, “always called *raja na ualu* (the eight kings), [there are eight types of instruments in the *gondang* ensemble, thus the numerator ‘eight’] a status that is attributed to them only on the occasion of their performance. Although they are, of course, ordinary people, when performing the *gondang sabangunan* they become important people and must be respected and treated as experts” (Purba 1998:216).
familiarity and fluency over the past two or three generations. This idea follows Kozok’s suggestion that in earlier times *hata andung*, “although a special vocabulary, had (at least to a certain extent) to be acquired by everyone, especially women, who were expected to be able to sing a lament at the death of a close relative” (Kozok 2002:47). During recording sessions with lamenters I spoke with the women about the gradual and steady decline of lamenting as a practiced tradition in Toba Batak society. Reasons for this steady decline varied somewhat depending on the individual, but nearly all of them agreed that the tradition was disappearing and that an increasing loss of fluency with, and comprehension of, *hata andung* was an important indicator of its decline. Despite widespread perceptions regarding the decline in *hata andung* facility, some women remained optimistic. In a conversation with Ibu boru Butarbutar, she expressed that, “as long as there are people who know the language – and those who understand what is being expressed – the tradition will continue” (p.c., February 27, 2003, Tiga Bolon). Her strongest fear was that, because of the lingering perception that those who lament invite tragedy on themselves and on others, the tradition would fade completely (ibid). She also felt that the tradition of lamenting was slipping away because those who now understand and practice the tradition are not passing it along to the younger generation, as was done in the past (ibid). Pdt. Simamora concurred, adding that modernization, social change, and the abandonment of the village system also played a role in the fading of the tradition. “In earlier times the *huta* (village / hamlet) inhabitants were all from the same *marga* (clan). Now it is different. There are people from the Toba region married to people
from the Humbang region or the Samosir region or the East Sumatra region.106

Villages are made up of people from different ethnicities as well – Javanese, Melayu or Minang peoples as well as Toba – a situation which has tended to neutralize or Indonesianize village life, making traditional practices like lamenting less sustainable. It is for this reason that, if we want to find areas where lamenting is still practiced, we need to visit some of the more remote or less developed areas of the Batak lands” (ibid).

The ways in which language impacts the processes involved in replacing laments with hymns in pre-funeral wakes, as described above, can be understood as a transition in which the language which was formerly familiar and understood (albeit a specialized language) is now becoming a language which is less familiar, less practical, and less accessible. Conversely, that language which was formerly unfamiliar and foreign (particularly the Christian terminology and the related theological concepts expressed in the hymns) has now become more familiar and more accessible (particularly through the use of *hata somal*) – the once familiar is increasingly foreign and the once foreign is increasingly familiar. This process further affirms the earlier statement that, with regard to language, text, and linguistic register there are significant areas of disjunction between laments and hymns in pre-funeral wake contexts.

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106 References to various of the government Regions (BI: Kabupaten) in the Province of North Sumatra.
The Protestant Church and the Practice of Lament—Pondering an Embrace

As discussed above, the coming of Christianity and the subsequent growth of the Protestant Church have impacted people’s perceptions of, and acceptance of, lamenting as an acceptable practice for Christians. When discussing the Church’s attitude toward lamenting, responses from non-clergy Christians varied widely. Some were quite positive in feeling that the lamenting tradition could have a place in the life of Christians. Ompung Si Riana boru Sitorus stated clearly that hymns and laments were not enemies (“Ah, dang maralo!”), but that each had its place and purpose (p.c., March 27, 2003, Lumban Nabolon). In contrast some, such as Ibu boru Sitorus, felt that because of their Christian faith and belief in a “living hope,” they had no more need for laments or lamenting, believing that engaging in such activity might possibly result in illness (p.c., March 13, 2003, Lumban Nabolon). Others were more selective in their responses. The women I spoke with in Panombean felt that the Church’s negative attitude toward laments was particularly focused on laments which were used as a way to make requests of the ancestor spirits for blessings such as wealth, children, health, a good harvest, or protection from disaster. The women believed this practice was forbidden by the Church because Church teaching stated that Christians should place their hope and trust in God alone and not in the possibility of receiving blessings from the spirits of the dead. Similarly, they felt that when a lamenter attempted to communicate a message to the ancestor spirits through the deceased they were stepping outside of the Church’s teaching, i.e. when a
person dies there is no more possibility of contact with the deceased (p.c., January 6, 2003, Panombean).\textsuperscript{107}

When I had opportunities to speak with clergy from the Batak Protestant Church about the Church’s attitude toward lamenting, responses also indicated a wide variety of perceptions about lamenting and the Christian faith. Several pastors responded that lamenting was already lost as a Toba Batak tradition (\textit{ai nonga mago tradisi andung i}). Not surprisingly, these were pastors from urban settings and their responses echoed the sentiment of Pdt. Simamora’s comment concerning the impact of modernization and pluralization on the Toba Batak social structure that was formerly localized and based on a pattern of rural agrarian village life. Other pastors, particularly those serving in smaller rural parishes where lamenting still occurred, expressed a deep appreciation for opportunities they had to visit the homes of deceased parishioners where lamenting was taking place. They described ways in which listening to life story laments (\textit{andung riwayat}) provided them “access” into the life history of the deceased and the bereaved family. This access, they said, was a tremendous benefit to them in their work of pastoral counseling and grief support for the bereaved. For these pastors, the opportunity to sit and listen to a lament in which the life story of the deceased was recounted through the lament was aesthetically moving and vocationally beneficial. They also talked about feeling a deep sense of cultural pride and connectedness through their encounter with lament (p.c., January 11, 2003, Porsea).

\textsuperscript{107} See earlier references to Article 15 of the HKBP’s Confession of Faith (1996 revision).
Among non-clergy and clergy alike, the acceptance or rejection of lamenting as a valid practice for Christian Toba Batak seemed, in part, to depend upon the degree to which these individuals were regularly connected with, or participated in, *adat*-related ceremonies and other manifestations of traditional cultural. Rural or urban dwelling also factored into this attitudinal paradigm, as did regional background (those from areas with historic roots to early Christian missionary activity – the Silindung Valley region, for example – were less positively inclined toward lament). The gender of the individual did not appear to have much influence on a person’s opinion regarding lamenting. As stated earlier, laments for the dead are almost exclusively a part of women’s culture, although in their performance at pre-funeral wakes both men and women are, to some degree, participating in the performance as part of the community of mourners.

When I spoke with the Bishop of the HKBP Church, Pdt. Dr. J. R. Hutauruk, about the Church’s position regarding laments he stated that while the HKBP did not have a definitive stance on laments, he recognized the lament tradition as an important part of Toba Batak culture. For him, lamenting was a kind of expressive or performing art. Whether it was a positive or negative form of expression for Christians in general was, in his opinion, really up to the individual Christian and their intended use of the lament beyond its being an expression of artistic or cultural art (p.c., June 10, 2003, Tarutung / Pearaja).

Based upon my field research it is clear that many Toba Batak Christians hold the lamenting tradition in high regard, valuing laments as an aspect of their cultural
and religious identity as Toba Bataks. The regard for laments as culturally appropriate expressions of grief remains high even though (and perhaps, in part, because) lamenting appears to be a practice that is fading and being replaced with Protestant hymns. This sustained regard for laments as a valuable cultural expression and asset, even in the face of the replacement of laments with hymns (*ganti andung, gabe ende*) is elegantly contained in the earlier quoted statement by Bapak Nababan, in whose Medan home I interviewed and recorded the lamenter Ibu boru Panjaitan. During our conversation between her laments he stated that, when choosing hymns to sing during pre-funeral wakes, he endeavored to select those hymns “which have the fragrance of a lament in them” (“*ende yang berbau andung*”) (p.c., February 6, 2003, Medan).

The variation in responses by members of the clergy and by non-clergy regarding the appropriateness of laments for the dead as a viable means for expressing grief and mourning the dead by Toba Batak Christians suggests the possibility that the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP) is engaged in its own internal dialogue regarding laments (and similar cultural expressions) as important markers of socio-religious identity for Toba Batak Christians. Recent comments by the *Ephorus* (Bishop) of the HKBP\(^{108}\) concerning the position of the HKBP in regard to secondary burial ceremonies, the construction of burial monuments (BI: *tugu*) and the relationship between the living and the dead (particularly with regard to laments for the dead), indicate that such an internal dialogue is indeed underway. Further, and

\(^{108}\) At the time of my field research (2002 – 2003) the *Ephorus* of the HKBP was Pdt. Dr. J. R. Hutauruk.
specifically in relation to laments, the HKBP has begun experimenting with the incorporation of lament (albeit in a re-contextualized form) into the liturgical rites for worship in the HKBP. What follows is a vignette recounting one of these “experiments” and my particular role in it. The attitudes and actions reflected in the vignette as well as in the commentary by Ephorus Hutauruk indicate that the HKBP is pondering the possibility of embracing laments for the dead as an important marker of cultural and religious identity for Toba Batak Protestants. And, as such, enabling a re-wording of the axiom *ganti andung, gabe ende* (replacing laments, becoming hymns) such that replacing laments becomes instead re-placing laments.

**Vignette: Lamenting as Part of a Protestant Worship Liturgy**

One afternoon in March of 2003, I was approached by the Rector of the HKBP Theological College, Pdt. Dr. J. Sirait, with a request from the Bishop of the HKBP Pdt. Dr. J. R. Hutauruk. I knew the Bishop well as we had been neighbors during the years when I taught at the College. At present he was in the top leadership position of the Church and, as such, was well acquainted with my dissertation research on Toba Batak laments for the dead. The Rector informed me that the Theological College was in the final planning stages for an upcoming celebration of the College’s 25th anniversary. The events commemorating the anniversary would be spread over several days and would culminate in an extravagant outdoor worship service which would include an audience of several thousand guests made up of HKBP clergy, local lay people, government dignitaries, clergy from other churches as well as church leaders from other countries. The Rector then informed me that the
Bishop had made a special request of me, saying that “since Hodges is here doing his research on traditional lament, it would be good for us to include a Toba Batak lament in the liturgy for the worship service, as part of the Confession of Sin”. Further, the Bishop requested that I be the one to present the lament during the worship service.

The Bishop’s request intrigued me – using a lament in a worship rite had never occurred in the HKBP and I wondered whether this represented a new openness on the Church’s part toward Toba Batak cultural practices, some of which had been either forbidden or strongly discouraged by the Church in years past. The request also left me bewildered and confused about my identity as a fieldworker. My role, as far as I could tell, was that of a card-carrying, letter-bearing researcher, doing ethnographic interviews, sitting with families at burial wakes, recording women as they lamented the deaths of loved ones or sang hymns to guide them through their grief. This was a role I felt I had adopted and successfully negotiated with my Toba Batak associates. I thought it was very clear that I wasn’t trying to learn how to lament…after all this was predominantly a Toba Batak women’s tradition.

As a guest of the College community (and, to a large extent, the HKBP community) I felt a sense of obligation to accept the Bishop’s request. I also felt intrigued at the prospect of including a lament in a worship liturgy and wondered how it might be received. My preparations for the College’s worship rite involved a corroborative relationship with Pdt. W. F. Simamora, professor of church music at the Theological College. Pdt. Simamora was widely regarded for his extensive knowledge of Toba Batak cultural practices, the Toba Batak socio-customary law
(adat) and proverbial sayings and blessings (umpama and umpasa) that he often and skillfully wove into his sermons. We worked together on the selection of several texts from the Old Testament Book of Psalms as well as the writings of the Prophet Isaiah, eventually compiling a collection of scripture texts that would carry the intention of a Confession of Sin. Pdt. Simamora then extracted specific words and phrases from the texts in common Toba Batak language (hata somal) and replaced them with the complementary words and phrases in the specialized linguistic register used in Toba Batak laments (hata andung). By doing this, and by crafting a melody based on motivic and cadential material drawn from my field recordings, we endeavored to create a Confession of Sin which contained sufficient and appropriate “sign vehicles” (Goffman 1959:1) in both textual content and melodic shape to portray to the audience a context and its content suggestive of a Toba Batak lament.

Additionally, Simamora and another faculty member enlisted a group of students and choreographed processional and recessional dances based on Toba Batak tortor dancing to surround the Confession of Sin (Figure 39). Music and musicians from the gondang sabangunan tradition to accompany the dances were chosen and rehearsals got underway shortly thereafter.

While the musicians and dancers practiced their parts, over the next several days I spent time reviewing my field recordings, identifying melodic shapes, motivic patterns and cadential structures as well as sonic “sign vehicles” and vocal icons of lament—features utilized by Toba Batak lamenters—in order to develop the lament melody. This process of linking together the text and tune involved hours of isolated
practice on my part, working to develop some fluency with the rhythm and flow of the text and tune. I brought my attempts to Pdt. Simamora for demonstration, evaluation and correction. After several cycles of this pattern he indicated that I was ready to meet with the dancers and include the lament in our rehearsals together. At one point in our rehearsal process we received a rather stern caution from several College faculty who had been listening-in on rehearsals. Their concern had to do

Figure 39. **Processional tortor dance during the Theological College’s worship celebration.** Photo by STT-HKBP staff. Pematang Siantar, April 13, 2003.
with our use of the traditional title *Ompung Debata* as a way of addressing the biblical God in our text. Some felt that *Ompung Debata* (God, the Holy and Exalted) (Sinaga 1981:52; see also Tampubolon 1964:17) retained connections to pre-Christian beliefs and modes of addressing the Toba Batak High God, *Debata Ompu Mulajadi na Bolon*. Using this form of address might lead to confusion on the parts of some worshipers as to which God was being addressed. Among Christian Toba Batak, God was most often addressed as *Tuhan Jahowa Debata* (Lord Jehovah God), or *Debata Amanami na di banua ginjang* (God, our Father in heaven), or some other Judeo-Christian theonym. As a result of this concern over the title used to address God, we altered the textual references to God in the lament, using the Biblical – *Jahowa Debata*. Preparations and rehearsals continued over the next several days.

On the day of the event, as the worship rite got underway, I waited at the foot of the large quadrangle with the other dancers until the *gondang* music began as a signal to start our processional dance. We danced slowly and reverently forward toward the altar, with our *ulos* shawls shrouding our faces. Our dance movements were carefully coordinated with the *gondang* piece being played so that, by the time we reached the area in front of the altar we had shifted from two columns into two rows of dancers, facing the altar. The other dancers knelt and then bowed before the altar, while I made my way to the altar itself and knelt down at a microphone. I
covered my head with the *ulos* as a sign of mourning, and began the Confession of Sin lament (Figure 40).

Figure 40. The author presenting the Confession of Sin modeled on a Toba Batak lament for the dead during the Theological College’s Anniversary worship service. Photo by STT-HKBP staff. Pematang Siantar, April 13, 2003.
Over the several days following the worship service I received feedback from those who had witnessed the Confession of Sin lament. Much of it was positive. One Batak woman stopped me on a street corner near the post office in town and told me she had never experienced such a stirring liturgy – the use of the lament caused her to weep and spoke to her in ways that the standard, recited Confession of Sin had ceased to. Several clergy who attended asked whether we might come and do a similar Confession of Sin for their Sunday worship rite. Others, however, were less enthusiastic about the inclusion, in a Christian worship rite, of a cultural expression that, in its primary context, was associated with bereavement, hopelessness, as well as communication with the spirits of the deceased.

Several weeks following my experience of lamenting in the liturgy of worship at the Theological College I had the opportunity to sit with Ephorus (Bishop) Hutaruruk and ask him some questions about the HKBP’s position regarding to the relationship of the living and the dead, and the place of laments for the dead in the lives of Toba Batak Christians. We also discussed his motivation for including a lament in the liturgy for worship at the College celebration. Our conversation was in Indonesian and Toba Batak. Translated excerpts of our conversation follow.

Me: I’d like to ask you about the HKBP’s position relate to the relationship between the living and the dead—particularly from the perspective of the fifth commandment: “honor your parents…” So, what is the understanding of “parents,” because it seems that this is often understood in terms of “ancestors”—especially in the case of the construction of family
monuments (Bl: tugu) and secondary burial rituals, and the like. From my observations it appears that the interpretation of this commandment and the meaning of the term “parents” is often extended to include not only one’s parents but also one’s ancestors, along with the sense that, by honoring one’s ancestors there is the possibility of an ongoing relationship with them and the expectation of some benefit or blessing from them.

Ephorus Hutauruk: What I have seen in these most recent years is that the HKBP is no longer reluctant to support secondary burial feasts or the construction of family monuments. Rather, these things are embraced positively, and this is a development that is quite unusual when compared with the situation in the 1930s or 1940s. At that time these things were still strongly prohibited. Earlier, Christians were forbidden from participating in these activities but now it is permitted—as long as the intention is to honor one’s ancestors. The church is open to these things because we recognize that there is a spiritual connection between the living and the dead. But what also must be acknowledged is that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is still the Lord and to that nothing else may be added. The Lord of the living and the dead is the same Lord, and it is from this Lord only that we should expect any help or blessing. Not from the spirit of our ancestors—they are on the same level as the living when it comes to the power to bless. They cannot bless or increase health or wealth in any way.

Me: But it seems to me, from my observations and conversations, that the line separating “honor your ancestors” from “honor your ancestors so that you will receive a blessing from them” is quite fuzzy and unclear at times. How is the Church equipped to confront this confusing perception? Even though there have been several revisions to the Orders of Discipline over the
years, Christian Toba Batak still seem to wrestle with the expectations of the Church and the expectations of *adat* and *adat* customs / regulations.

Ephorus Hutauruk: Yes, I think that the Church needs to address this situation once again and very clearly spell out the criterion whereby Christians can show honor to their ancestors and what, as Christians, they can expect in return. This needs to be clarified. A thorough study of this situation should be undertaken so that the Church can provide the proper guidelines—and, if necessary, say clearly that this or that practice is wrong for Christians. We need to remember that we have come out of our traditional beliefs and practices and we should not return there. We should not practice two religions.

Me: I wonder whether some of this might be connected to a basic human longing for or need for “the spiritual” in our lives and whether that need might put us in a position to be accepting of beliefs and practices that might be in ideological or theological conflict. People’s perceptions and behaviors are guided by the particular contexts in which they find themselves at any one moment, permitting them to maintain beliefs and behaviors which may contradict one another.

Ephorus Hutauruk: Yes, I think this is right. I think that perhaps it is a universal phenomenon in these days. I feel that this only reflects a human condition that is thirsty for spiritual things. I see this reflected in your research project on lament: how to discern the positive aspects of lament as well as the negative. Perhaps your research will reveal something about lament and to what extent it is seen as a kind of art…someone will weep and then they will seek out things that will give them comfort. Also, your research might show to what extent there are beliefs within lament that are
not in keeping with the Christian faith. But, in any case, we still lament, don’t we. We lament, you lament…this is art—an art that was used to express and confess our sin—used in a Christian way. So, I think that even before your research is completed and written up you will see that the HKBP has made use of / benefited from your work here.

Me: Yes I wanted to ask you where the idea to include a lament in the worship liturgy came from?

Ephorus Hutauruk: Oh, we did something similar to that for the community Easter worship in 2002.

Me: Including the use of a lament?

Ephorus Hutauruk: No, only the tortor tudung dance with the gondang ensemble. Then in the planning for the service at the Theological College your research project came to mind and we said, “Let’s get Hodges involved—he may be in a position to put together a Confession of Sin with lament. And, I think this will develop further…next Christmas in the Gelora Senayan building in Jakarta we may try to include a lament in the worship service. There should be around 30,000 Batak people at that event.

Me: I think it would be very exciting to see Toba Batak lament introduced into the worship liturgy of the church occasionally. After the service at the Theological College I received a lot of positive feedback from people who were there, saying that they were really deeply moved by the inclusion of lament in the liturgy that day.
Ephorus Hutauruk: I know there were some people at that service who wept during the Confession of Sin. It was very meaningful.

Me: Some others, though, were less welcoming. A few people told me that the worship liturgy of the HKBP was grounded in the Old Testament and that it was not appropriate to introduce practices, like lament, from Batak traditions into the worship liturgy. I responded by suggesting that expressions such as lament are found throughout the Old Testament—the Book of Lamentations, for instance, and many of the Psalms of David are expressions of complaint to God.

There was also another perception/response that I became aware of…not coming from the clergy but from non-clergy church members. During my research, when I asked people why they thought the church might be interested in suppressing or forbidding lamenting by Christians, several of them responded that in lament there was an aspect of ‘hopelessness’ or ‘dejection,’ and their feeling was that the Church was saying, “hey, we’re supposed to be people who believe, people with faith…how can we sing these songs of hopelessness?” So as I thought about this, it seemed that, based on what I was observing and hearing from Toba Batak Christians, there were two kinds of attitudes/responses to death that were happening at the same time. The first, obviously, is sadness, grief, heartache, and the weight of mourning and loss. The other is one which says, “If I’m a Christian it is inappropriate for me to grieve, to be sorrowful, to experience doubt and confusion.” This particular outlook is rather confusing to me because there are times when I, as a Christian, experience doubt or a sense of being alone or without hope. I don’t feel that it is an indication of crisis or the loss of faith if Christians experience profound grief or sadness. What is the HKBP’s position relative to this issue? Is it acceptable for members to experience profound grief or hopelessness in certain situations?
Ephorus Hutauruk: I don’t believe this is so much a Church problem as it is a human problem—if someone is hurting, they can complain about it or express their frustration, either in private or collectively as a group. The question is: how is the Church going to respond? How is the Church going to give support and comfort? So, we can say: if you’re sad, you lament…bring it into the liturgy of worship and lament as a community (as we did at the College). But that is only part of it—then we must speak Jesus words of forgiveness that lead to joy, healing, restoration, and a return into the world. There is a balance and reciprocity. Sadness (however it is express, in tears, in lament, in confession) is appropriate, but there must also be forgiveness, healing and restoration. Your research on Toba Batak laments has helped the Church to experience this in a new way.

Me: This idea of balance and reciprocity reminds me of an experience I had years ago—more than ten years ago—when Pdt. Simamora’s son Estomihi died from cancer. It was a very difficult time for their family and for ours as we were quite close with Estom. The Simamora’s were really crushed by his death, understandably, and the response by some people at Pdt. Simamora’s grief really surprised me—and in a way raised questions that have informed my present research on lament and expression of grief. Some people seemed quite taken aback at the outward grief of Pdt. Simamora, saying, “Hey, you’re a pastor in the Church…why are you so upset? Why are you grieving so deeply? Where is your faith?” As though, because of his position as a pastor he was not permitted to show his deep pain and sadness publicly. It was not acceptable for him to struggle with his faith in that moment of crisis.
Ephorus Hutauruk: Yes, that’s it. But, if we look in the Bible at the stories of Jesus, surely we will see that it is not possible (or proper) to keep hidden our sadness because someone is in pain or has died. Now, in Simamora’s case, here was a father who was weeping over the death of his son—not a pastor, but a father. He needed to be given the time and space in order to grieve for his son. And this is a process, too. If he were to become totally lost in his grief, then he would no longer be able to serve as a pastor. So if a person needs to weep today…weep. Don’t be ashamed. Tomorrow they may not be able to weep any longer.

Me: As far as the disciplinary statements of the HKBP, is there a line, with reference to lamenting for the dead, which may not be crossed by Christian Toba Batak? For example, during my research on lament I have heard it said that through laments a lamentor is able to make requests of their ancestors, to pass on messages, to communicate with the dead. What is the Church’s position relative to the possibility of ongoing communication with the ancestor spirits through laments?

Ephorus Hutauruk: Well, my response is that, as a church, as a Christian community, we must hold fast to the Confession of Faith and to the witness of the church. Our baptism is a visible sign that we acknowledge the power of God at work in us, to help us, to send us into the world as His children. So, if lamenting does not interfere with that belief or, what’s more, works to strengthen my relationship with God, then that kind of lamenting is acceptable. But, if a lament causes my faith to be shaken somehow—if through a lament I come to believe that there is some other God in whom I should put my hopes and expectations (be it the spirit of my ancestor or what have you), then that lament should be avoided because it does not serve to strengthen my faith. It is as simple as that.
Despite the closing sentiment of Ephorus Hutauruk, my study of Toba Batak funerary laments and the hymns sung in pre-funeral wakes, the processes involved in the replacement of laments with hymns that carry their fragrance, the questions these processes raise for Christian Toba Batak, the women who lament, and the HKBP leadership as they each engage in their own dialogue and negotiation concerning socio-cultural and socio-religious representations of identity, the relationship of the living and the spirits of the dead, the acts of giving and receiving blessing, the rightness or wrongness of expressing (performing) grief, and the formation and maintenance of communal solidarity—all of these facets of my research project—are far from simple. Instead they are marked with areas of conjunction as well as disjunction, and conflicting and multiple perceptions concerning fealty to the Confession of Faith and fealty to adat custom and tradition.

I came away from my conversation with Ephorus Hutauruk with a strong sense that the HKBP was indeed engaging in a dialogue with itself and the practices of its people in a movement toward the possibility of re-placing lament instead of replacing lament as a viable expression of Toba Batak cultural and religious identity.
Figure 36. Map of North Sumatra showing locations mentioned in Chapter Eight.

Tiga Bolon, p. 351
Lumban Nabolon, p. 362
Chapter Nine

Conclusion

This study of the musical expressions of grief and loss in the context of the pre-funeral wakes of older Toba Batak Protestants (those accorded the status of sari matua, saur matua, and saur matua na mauli bulung) reveals an ongoing dynamic and dialogic encounter between the two primary means of musically voicing grief: Toba Batak laments for the dead (andung ni na mate) and the Protestant hymns (ende pangapulon) of predominantly European and American origin associated with the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP).

My study of these musical modes of expressing grief explores the ways that, explicitly, they variously represent the means for publicly voicing emotions connected to the pain of loss through death, honor the deceased through the recitation of their life story, and unify and strengthen the solidarity of the community of bereaved through shared communal song. Additionally, my study shows that, implicitly, these expressions of grief in pre-funeral wake contexts variously make possible the communication of what otherwise might be perceived as socially sensitive or restricted information (related to the life of the deceased or the expectations and hopes of the bereaved) to family and friends who are “listening-in,” serve to acknowledge and maintain continued connections to the world of ancestor spirits, as well as play a role in the contestation over the control of sonic space.
through musically symbolic representations of co-existing (and sometimes conflicting) beliefs in relation to concepts of religious and cultural identity.

In an effort to better understand the dynamic interaction and complex responses which mark the expressions of grief through lamenting and hymn singing in pre-funeral wakes, this study has explored the historic origins and development of both funerary laments and Protestant hymns in Toba Batak society using archival materials from the *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft* as well as folk legends, stories and more recent research from Toba Batak and other sources. This exploration has traced the development of Protestant hymnody in the Toba Batak Protestant Church and the role of hymns in the life of Toba Batak Protestants, including the ways in which Toba Batak Protestants use hymns as a means of associatively articulating their understanding of Protestant Christianity and their religious identity as Protestant Christians. Further, this exploration has focused on the development of the lexicon of Toba Batak lament—the specialized register of language particular to lamenting—and its important role in relation to Toba Batak concepts of lament as a representation of traditional art, as an aspect of Toba Batak culture that is highly valued, as a cultural expression which is rooted in Toba Batak socio-customary practice (*adat*) as an important and requisite marker of authenticity in lament.

With the coming of Protestant Christianity to the region in the mid-19th century, Toba Batak cultural and religious practices and their related ideological concepts experienced rapid and profound change. The practice of lamenting the dead served not only as a means of outwardly expressing grief in association with death but
also was connected to Toba Batak socio-customary (adat) practices of venerating the spirits of the deceased, making requests of them, and expecting blessing from them. These practices (and the beliefs associated with them) were viewed as contrary to the teachings of the Church with regard to the spirits of the dead and any possible ongoing interaction between the living and the dead. As such, the Church sought to impose restrictions on those practices believed to be connected to ancestor spirit veneration and in opposition to the teachings of the Church. These restrictions affected not only practices such as lamenting the dead but other musical representations of Toba Batak adat as well, in particular the playing of the gondang sabangunan in association with adat ritual. It is these musical representations of adat customary practices in their interaction with Protestant Christian practices that have continued to impact the formation and expression of Toba Batak identity, both cultural and religious, to the present day. As ethnomusicologist Yoshiko Okazaki asserts, “the relationship of adat and Christianity (in other words the interplay of Toba Batak ethnic values and what Christianity has tried to offer) has been the central issue among the Toba Batak people in the past one hundred and thirty years” (Okazaki 1994:54).

With reference to Toba Batak funerary practices and the performance of laments for the dead, the Toba Batak Protestant Church discouraged the singing of

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109 See, for example, Mauly Purba’s discussion of the Batak Protestant Church’s prohibitions against the playing of the gondang sabangunan in his article “From Conflict to Reconciliation: The Case of the Gondang Sabangunan in the Order of Discipline of the Toba Batak Protestant Church.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, (2005) 36:207-233.

110 Okazaki’s 1994 dissertation on this subject is *Music, Identity, and Religious Change among the Toba Batak People of North Sumatra*. University of California, Los Angeles.
laments because of perceived connections to spirit cult practices and beliefs. Instead, the Church encouraged the replacement of laments with the singing of Protestant hymns in the pre-funeral wake contexts where laments were commonly sung. As a result of this action on the part of the Church (as well as the result of socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural change in the region) the practice of singing laments has experienced a significant decline in recent years—a situation encapsulated in the often heard expression: *ganti andung, gabe ende* (replacing laments, becoming hymns). Toba Batak laments have not been entirely replaced by Protestant hymns in these contexts, however. They co-exist and, as such, represent ongoing, dynamic (and at times dialectic and tension-filled) processes of cultural and religious identity negotiation in Toba Batak society. In the present day these processes manifest in a number of ways, as evidenced through my fieldwork experiences attending pre-funeral wakes, recording lament singers, and through conversations with Toba Batak Protestant Christian lay people as well as members of the Protestant clergy. These include the movement of lament out of the context of pre-funeral wakes and into the arena of mass-mediated pop music as a genre of Toba Batak regional pop music (*andung-andung*) that borrows significantly from, and references repeatedly, aspects of the traditional funerary lament genre. Evidence

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111 In reference to similar processes regarding the use of gondang sabangunan by Christian Toba Batak, Okazaki states, “Gondang in a church context exhibits complex features revealing a dialectic relationship between Toba Batak cultural values and what the church offers. This tension between adherence to older traditions and attraction to the newly imported religion lied [sic] at the heart of Toba Batak identity” (Okazaki 1994: 262).

112 This popular music genre caters primarily to those Toba Batak who have migrated out of their homeland region, who have strong nostalgic longings for this (imagined) homeland, and who
of the processes of identity negotiation with regard to the replacement of laments with Protestant hymns is revealed as well through comments by Protestant Toba Batak who state that, when selecting hymns to sing in pre-funeral wake contexts, they are particularly drawn to those hymns which have the fragrance of lament in them. My study of Toba Batak laments for the dead and Protestant hymns sung in pre-funeral wakes includes an analysis of particular musicological as well as performative and stylistic features present in laments as well as in the Protestant hymns commonly sung at pre-funeral wakes. This analysis was done in order to discern areas of conjunction and areas of disjunction between laments for the dead and funerary hymns, and as a way to identify which of these features contribute to the “fragrance of lament” in Protestant hymns. The analysis reveals that areas of significant conjunction can be seen in the proclivity toward particular rhythmic patterns in both laments and hymns (in the case of laments these rhythms appear to be based largely on the linguistic morphology of the Toba Batak language), the use of slow tempos in performance, the shedding of tears (both in stylized performance and as an emotive response to grief), as well as in the incorporation of gestures that reflect both the giving and receiving blessing. Areas of significant disjunction between laments and the Protestant hymns sung in pre-funeral wake contexts are revealed through the analysis in musicological features such as melodic ambitus (where laments employ, in general, a much more narrow melodic range than do funerary hymns), melodic shape and structure, phrase shape (where hymns make use of a wider range of phrase

experience the emotions of grief and loss due to their separation from that place, their families, and their culture.
patterns—reflecting the varieties of phrasing typical of late 19th century European and American hymn tunes), and the use of specific cadential patterns. Additionally, disjunctions are present in aspects of the communicative nature of laments and hymns (where laments display a wider range of communicative possibility than do hymns, including communication between the world of the living and the world of the dead, communication which is explicit, public, and intended to recount the life story of the deceased, as well as communication which is implicit, and intended to express the needs and hopes of the bereaved to other who are “listening-in”). Another area of significant disjunction is lies in the language of laments and hymns. Laments make use of a specialized register of language (*hata andung*) with which many Toba Batak in the present day lack fluency or comprehension. While the ability to use *hata andung* places lamenters in a specialist category, the factors that have contributed to the general decline in *hata andung* fluency (Protestant Christianity, increased urbanization, ethnic pluralization, etc.,) threaten to push the practice of lamenting to the point of becoming incomprehensible and therefore communicatively impractical. The Protestant hymns commonly sung in pre-funeral wakes make use of common, everyday Toba Batak and, as such, are accessible to any speaker of the language, placing hymns in a position of communicative practicality as a means of expressing grief, giving comfort, affirming communal solidarity and identity.

The practices of lamenting the dead and singing Protestant hymns as ways of “getting out” one’s sadness, expressing grief and disappointment, giving comfort and communal support, reaffirming the bonds of familial and spiritual connection, giving
and receiving blessing, and representing one’s experiences with the heartaches of life and the hopes of the afterlife, all mingle and co-mingle in the pre-funeral wakes of Toba Batak Protestants. Mourners gather to mourn the dead, to celebrate a life well-lived, to comfort the bereaved and, in doing so, acknowledge together the transitory nature of life—with hopes and expectations fulfilled and unfulfilled, with the blessing of generations being added to generations. The pre-funeral wakes of Protestant Toba Batak are also a place where the various ways of expressing grief can be understood as a way of aligning oneself with a particular concept of identity. While often dichotomized between an identity rooted in adat custom (with its various concepts of adherence to traditional beliefs and practices) and an identity grounded in the teachings of the Protestant Church (with its rejection of practices perceived to be connected with ancestor spirit veneration), this study shows that the boundaries between these concepts of identity are porous and blurred and that for many Protestant Toba Batak concepts of identity, as voiced through the expressions of grief and sadness heard in funerary contexts, remain flexible and unfixed, changing as circumstance and context dictate.

This flexibility in the processes of identity negotiation and construction is reflected in the Batak Protestant Church, as well. Having historically taken a strong stance in opposition to practices such as lament singing, the playing of the gondang sabangunan, and other musical representations of Toba Batak adat (particularly those with perceived connections to spirit cult practices), the Church, in the present day, appears to be reconsidering its position relative to practices such as lamenting the
dead, recognizing their value as unique, artistic expressions of Toba Batak culture and allowing the possibility of incorporating such practices into the life and practice of the Protestant community. This is reflected, in part, through the HKBP’s decision to include a re-contextualized form of traditional lament in the liturgy of worship during the 25th anniversary celebration of the Theological College in Pematang Siantar, in 2003. While the HKBP does not appear to be embracing the use of laments for the dead in a wholesale manner—the earlier comments of Ephorus Hutauruk regarding the important place of the Confession of Faith as the guideline for Christian practice (which would preclude communication with, and the expectation of blessing from, ancestor spirits) makes this clear—their inclusion of a lament into the liturgy for Christian worship indicates clearly that the Church values the practice of lament as an important expression of cultural and religious identity for Toba Batak Christians and that it is pondering ways to both embrace and re-place lament as a viable and meaningful expression of grief in the life of the Toba Batak Christian community.

In working toward the conclusion of this narrative account of the voicing of grief by Toba Batak Protestants, I found myself searching for symmetries and patterns in the practices of Toba Batak mourners in hopes of being able to “wrap things up” neatly and in an orderly fashion. There is, however, no particular symmetry—no neat one-for-one exchange or simple, straightforward way of explaining what is transpiring in the complexities of the expressions of grief at pre-funeral wakes. It is, as I see it, as convoluted and clouded as the experience of death itself can be for those left behind. And, it is an apt representation of many of the
dialectic vagaries of Toba Batak society as it shifts in response to ongoing processes of cultural change and identity negotiation. One image that has meaningfully resurfaced at the close of this narrative is that of the young man Estomihi Simamora (Figure 41), whose death is recounted in the opening pages of the dissertation. He died far too young, a victim of cancer. It was my experience of his dying, of grieving with his family, and of observing the confusing response by some toward his father (a member of the clergy) swallowed up in his grief, that first led me to wonder about the socio-cultural and socio-religious dynamics of grief and death among Toba Batak Protestants. My recollection of Estomihi’s death and the deep grief of his family resurfaced and spoke to me more than 10 years later during my conversation with Ephorus Hutauruk as I continued to engage in the process of working out my wonderings. There is a satisfying (though incomplete) circularity in that image—an aspect, I suppose, of the reflexive process in ethnography—that enables me to end this narrative now knowing that it will never truly be finished.
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**Discography**


**Filmography**


