ENGLISH SUMMARY

Good customs, bad customs in North Sumatra: Toba Batak, Missionaries and Colonial Officials Negotiate the Patrilineal Order (1861-1942)

The Toba Batak are an ethnic group originating from the mountainous interior of North Sumatra. The organization of their society is based on exogamous patrilineal clans. This thesis has as its main theme the changes in that social organization due to the influence of mission and colonial rule in the period 1861–1942. These changes were the result of negotiations between the Toba Batak, missionaries, and colonial officials about which customs and customary laws should be maintained—the good customs—or revised or abolished—the bad customs. The growing number of Toba Batak who converted to Christianity, their increasing appreciation of Western formal education, and outmigration since the turn of the century also stimulated change. Focusing on the agency of the parties concerned makes it possible to map the manner in which change took place and why. Changed customs and customary law affected groups of men and women differently.

This case study contributes to our knowledge about the following subjects.

World history
For colonized peoples, relations—especially marital alliances—were often of crucial political, economic and social importance, far more so than for peoples in Western societies. Colonizing agents—colonial governments, missionary societies, and private companies—influenced these relations, a matter largely ignored in the grand narrative of the history of the modern world. Because these agents came predominantly from bilateral societies, their policies may have accommodated some kinship systems more easily than others. Patrilineal and matrilineal societies in particular, being most different from their own, probably became the target of outspoken civilizing missions intended to make them more congenial. This thesis makes clear that the customs and customary law related to the patrilineal organization of Toba Batak society induced the mission and, to a lesser extent, the colonial government to launch an outspoken civilizing mission.

Modernities
The view that modernization of colonized societies has always been driven by colonizing agents who envisaged development according to a Western model has been abandoned. It has been replaced by the insight that the groups involved had different ideas about a desirable development of the indigenous society. Ideas about modernity on the part of the Toba Batak, missionaries, and colonial officials—and even segments within each of these groups—indeed differed and also changed in the course of the period covered in this research. It is therefore appropriate to speak of evolving multiple modernities. Modernity is understood as a set of ideas that were new at the time they were expressed or acted upon.
The relationship between the colonized and the colonizing state

The Toba Batak long remained outside the orbit of the colonial state. Their first encounter with an outside agent came from the Muslim region of Minangkabau: between 1825 and 1830 bands of the Padri, a Wahhabist movement, invaded the region. This was followed by a period of isolation and internal conflict. In 1852 a small number of rajas felt the need for an impartial outsider—a stranger king. They approached colonial officials stationed outside the borders of their homeland. Colonial rule was not established, because the Dutch Indies government was not in favor of territorial expansion. Only when a crisis presented itself in 1876, in the form of attacks on missionary stations by forces of the Batak priest-king Singamangaraja XII, did the man on the spot—the governor of West Sumatra—decide to intervene. The annexation of the region took place gradually over the next thirty years, during which part of the Toba Batak rajas were incorporated into the colonial administrative system. A similar course of events took place in several other regions in Indonesia in the second half of the nineteenth century. The developments outlined above are discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.

The Toba Batak region became an independent Residency (residentie) in 1906. Intensification of colonial rule followed in the fields of infrastructure, administration, the legal system, and education, in conformity with the Ethical Policy launched in 1901. Besides the administrative territorial division and reorganization of the administrative system, the administration of justice was a hot potato, because the Toba Batak were prone to litigation. This remained so during the entire colonial period and therefore marked the relationship between the population and the administration. Twice—in 1914 and 1926—a colonial official was appointed to conduct research, assignments which were embedded in discussions about a set of laws for Indonesian Christians and the introduction of a universal system of law for the entire Indonesian population, a debate which endured for over forty years. The results were a conservative revision of Toba Batak customary law, which had developed under the influence of the Batak Mission (see below) in 1915, and the preservation of the indigenous system of law in 1930. This thesis posits that the second outcome was the consequence of pressure by administrative heads of several regions in the first half of the 1920s and only later due to the influence of the Leiden school for adat law, founded by C. van Vollenhoven. The course of the discussions and the results of the aforementioned research projects in North Tapanuli are discussed in Chapters Nine to Twelve.

Secular modernity in the field of law may have been heralded by the application of justice and fairness through the legal system, but in practice the colonial state usually prioritized legal security. North Tapanuli was no exception. Legal security had to be achieved through cooperation with the Toba Batak rajas. They made good use of this government policy to preserve traditional adat law and hold on to their own role as judges, which had been an important source of their status and income. The government introduced new case law only in the last two decades of the colonial period, to meet certain needs of women: Christian wives who wanted to divorce their husband because he had taken a second wife were granted that right, and men were denied the right to repudiate an older wife because there was no son. The Toba Batak judges grudgingly accepted these revisions, sealing their loss of independence in the administration of justice.

The economic development of the region never really took off. On the instigation of Hezekiel Manullang, an activist in a Toba Batak version of emerging nationalism, the Toba Batak
population resisted the transfer of land to planters intended by the government around 1920. Their acts of resistance, their addiction to litigation, and the perseverance of the rajas in holding on to their traditional roles in the new colonial setting indicate that the Toba Batak used the new constellation to their own advantage on the one hand and frustrated undesirable intervention of the colonial state on the other.

The relationship between the colonized and mission
Missionary zeal was a global phenomenon in the nineteenth century, and it emanated from the Islamic world—with which the Toba Batak came into contact through the Padri—as well as from Christian Europe and America. In 1861, fifteen years after the establishment of colonial rule, missionaries of a German missionary society, die Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft, settled among the Toba Batak. The Batak Mission wanted to convert them to Christianity and create a Christian society by introducing new routines that were generally introduced by Protestant and Catholic missions elsewhere: baptism, the Sunday service, Sunday school and primary schools for children, Confirmation, a Christian wedding, and so forth. Converts had to distance themselves from ‘heathen’ customs and were subjected to disciplinary sanctions if they did not do so.

As in other societies where the population adhered to a single faith, the first conversions led to ostracism and expulsion from their communities. Civil death expressed itself also in a typical Toba Batak way: families from clans other than those to whom the Christians belonged, broke off the affinal relations with them. How that happened is described in Chapter Six. The Batak Mission identified the payment of brideprice as the cause of these conflicts, which were endemic, and proposed in 1884 to abolish the brideprice. The Christian rajas turned this proposal down, because they could not imagine an orderly society without marriage based on the exchange of marriage gifts. Conversion to a new faith fitted their vision of the future, but the destruction of the Toba Batak social order did not. The discussion on abolition of the brideprice is the subject of Chapter Seven.

The Batak Mission subsequently employed another strategy to create a Christian society: partial revision of customary law based on Western Christian values and practices. These included the consent to marriage, virginity preserved until marriage, monogamy, divorce only in the case of adultery, care for widows and orphans, and inheritance rights for sons and daughters. None of these converged with Toba Batak norms and practices. Consent to marriage by a daughter was not considered necessary; pregnancy before marriage proved the highly valued fertility of a woman; reasons for divorce other than adultery were more common; polygamy was allowed; and a widow was taken care of by marriage with close patrikin of her deceased husband (levirate marriage). The right to inherit was reserved for sons only.

Nonetheless, the Christian rajas cooperated with the partial revision of customary law, the result of give and take: the missionaries did not have the power to force their wishes on the rajas. The concept of Christian modernity explains why the Batak Mission went out of its way to change customary marriage law. Mass conversion through the chiefs of clans and the central role of marital alliances implied that the individual convert could prove his or her sincerity of faith only by compliance with the new Christian By-laws and the Church Ordinance. The emergence of the Christian By-laws is probably exceptional, because, in contrast to legal provisions for
Indonesian Christians elsewhere, the colonial government was not involved. Only in 1892 did the colonial government approve the Christian By-laws as the guideline for disputes in which Christians were involved.

Implementation, however, proved impossible because the majority of the rajahs who were not Christian withheld their cooperation. In 1914 the colonial government asserted its authority to determine customary law. This forced the Batak Mission to give up its vision of a Christian society based on the separation of church and state, because the rajahs did not fulfill their role as Christian bearers of secular authority, and the government withheld its support for the implementation of the Christian By-laws. Subsequently, the Batak Mission focused on the internal strengthening of the Christian community by way of a new Church Ordinance, and grew to depend on the Toba Batak Christian elite formed at its seminary, which by 1900 consisted of a small number of pastors (pandita) and hundreds of teacher/preachers (guru). To strengthen Christian family life, it also started community work among women and special schools for girls. These developments are described in Chapter Nine.

Around 1920 the Toba Batak Christian elite started impinging on the power of Batak Mission, which was worn down by the financial consequences of the First World War and the ensuing economic crisis in Germany. This led to the establishment of the independent Batak Church in 1930, the first of its kind in the Netherlands Indies. The Christian elite had a second demand too: Dutch education, or at least more advanced education, for girls. This demand was fuelled by the fear that well-educated young Batak men might marry girls from other ethnic groups who were better educated than Batak girls. The Batak Mission yielded to the demand, because it wanted to regain its hold on the Toba Batak elite. Community work among women bore fruit in the 1930s: under the guidance of a German missionary sister, there emerged a religious awakening amongst village women, known as ‘Bible women’. This was the Toba Batak variant of the rising women’s movement asserting itself at the national level around the same time. As a result of the religious movement, Batak women gained a position of leadership in the community for the first time.

The Toba Batak region was the most successful Christian mission field in Southeast Asia in terms of numbers; and by the end of the colonial period the Toba Batak population counted more Christians than any other ethnic group in Indonesia. For that reason this thesis is important, and also because it offers material for research into the relationship between the mission and population of other patrilinear societies.

Hardening ethnic identities of Batak groups
At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Toba Batak region was part of a larger territorial and cultural entity in the interior of North Sumatra known as the Batak world. Other Batak groups were also part of this world: the Mandailing, Angkola, Pakpak, Dairi, Karo and Simalungan Batak. The Batak groups had in common the Batak language and script, a social organization based on patrilinear clans, and a faith worshipping ancestors which was influenced by Hinduism. Contact between these groups and with Acehnese, Minangkabau, and Malay in coastal areas was maintained by trade routes. There were probably no sharp divisions between the various Batak groups at the time.

This changed due to the Padri invasions during the years 1825–1830. In the following
decades the Mandailing and Angkola Batak converted to Islam. The Toba Batak rajas did not follow suit, choosing Christianity instead as their preferred path towards a new future. The divide between the Muslim southern part and Christian northern part of the Batak world became fixed. The administrative division between North and South Tapanuli as separate administrative units (residenties) in 1906, which remained after Indonesian independence, reflects this breach.

This thesis sheds light on a second division, which is now largely forgotten: that between the southern part of the Toba Batak region where the population converted first, and the northern part where a large part of the population remained faithful to the Batak faith until the end of colonial rule. This division was still strongly felt around the turn of the nineteenth century, and it explains why the Christian By-laws initiated by the Batak Mission could not take root, as recounted in Chapter Nine.

**Historical ethnography**

Change can be established only by determining a point of departure and arrival in time. In the first part of this thesis a historical ethnography of kinship and marriage in traditional Toba Batak society is presented based on comparison of nineteenth-century sources. The twentieth-century anthropological literature on the Toba Batak was useful for the analysis of these sources.

The most prominent and problematic gender relationship which comes to the fore in the Toba Batak myth of origin—analyzed in Chapter Two—is not that between man and wife, but between father and daughter. This mirrors the importance for fathers of forging marital relationships through an arranged marriage for a daughter, who may not be willing to comply. In practice, marriages were concluded not only by way of arrangement, but also after a girl or boy had taken the initiative, which then forced their fathers to start the negotiations on the marriage gifts. In the literature on patrilinear societies practicing marriage with the exchange of marriage payments, the influence of the daughter on the conclusion of marriage is considered negligible. In Chapter Three, I contend that in Toba Batak society the agency of the daughter was crucial for the outcome of the negotiations on the brideprice and the willingness of her father to provide her and her husband with gifts at the time of and during their marriage.

The main purpose of marriage was the production of offspring: sons and daughters to forge marital alliances, and sons to perpetuate the patrilineal descent line. But, as is demonstrated in Chapter Four, parents particularly hoped for a son, because only male offspring could guarantee them a place with the ancestors of the lineage in the hereafter. Infertility and lack of male issue were problems solved by divorce with mutual consent or a second marriage of the husband, which could be arranged in cooperation with his first wife and her family.

Women were legal minors according to customary law. Before marriage they were under the authority of their father or oldest brother, after marriage under that of their husband, and after he had died under that of their eldest son. The construction of women as legally incompetent and the lack of a woman's rights, except the right to be maintained and usufruct of land and house, were in accordance with the patrilineal system and clan exogamy. Despite this, women did not always comply with their fate, which could lead to nasty situations, as narrated in Chapter Five.

**Changes in gender relations in patrilinear societies**
Despite all the changes in customs and customary law through the intervention of the Batak Mission and colonial government, no fundamental changes in gender relations took place. Exogamy and marriage with exchange of marriage payments remained the norm; the father and his clan continued to have the exclusive claim on children; and males retained the exclusive right to inherit. The Batak Mission’s effort to abolish the brideprice had failed; and although in favour of inheritance rights for daughters, the Mission did not try to lobby for it. The colonial government did not even consider changing any of the above. The Toba Batak therefore did not encounter significant threats to the preservation of the main tenets of their social organization.

The partial changes which took place influenced the lives of men and women in various ways. Fathers saw their power over the partner choice of their children diminished by the increasing number of marriages by elopement, condoned by the Batak Mission, and by outmigration of young men for schooling or work. At the same time, fathers had less need to control partner choice, because they became less dependent on marriage with marriage payments to meet their political, economic, and social interests. The avant garde of the modern elite and their well-educated daughters also found common ground more easily, because fathers’ and daughters’ perceptions of a good prospective husband came to converge: a young man with a good education, preferably employed in the service of the colonial government. Only if he was of slave descent was he not eligible. These developments are discussed in Chapter Thirteen. Forced marriages and related cases of suicide by girls, however, continued to occur sporadically. Modern and traditional patterns thus continued to exist side by side for a long time.

Marriage became a matter of increasing anxiety, in particular for couples who were childless or had no son. The traditional solutions for these situations—divorce by mutual consent and bigamy—became problematic. The Batak Mission forbade divorce on the grounds of barrenness and lack of male issue, a policy the Batak Church continued after 1930. Thus many Christian men were excommunicated because they had taken a second wife with or without the consent of their first wife. Men also experienced more difficulty in repudiating an older wife if they had no son. Young women without children who had been abandoned by their husband faced a dreadful dilemma: either staying with her husband’s family and not being able to conceive, or starting an extramarital relationship in the hope of having a child. Those who took the second step were severely punished, with their new partner; and if they had a child, it was allocated to the women’s lawful husband. Christian first wives, on the other hand, benefited: they were given the right to divorce if their husband took a second wife. In general, however, women remained averse to divorce, because they did not want to part with their children.

Many widows must have experienced a harder time than before missionization. The Batak Mission’s crusade against polygamy made it impossible for married Christian men to marry the widowed wife of a kinsman, as was the traditional custom. The consequence of this was a high percentage of widows compared to other regions, as is evident from the data of the 1930 census. If they had a son, they might be able to cope, because they had the usufruct of their husband’s inheritance. But widows without a son were sometimes left barely enough to live on with their daughters by the heir of her husband’s estate. Young widows who started a relationship with a man without being separated formally from their husband’s kin group were subjected by the judges to harsh treatment similar to abandoned wives who did the same.

A remarkable change was that women were no longer considered legal minors, although
the colonial administration still upheld that principle in theory. Analysis of over two hundred lawsuits in which women figured, dating from the late colonial period, demonstrates that women filed lawsuits and were also sued and punished for a crime or misdemeanour. These lawsuits, discussed in Chapter Twelve, bring to the fore for the first time that women's economic role in family and society was significant. The most prominent cases—which I have termed 'dynamite disputes'—sparked not only new case law, but also an organized protest of educated Toba Batak women in the early 1930s, followed by a request addressed to the government to outlaw bigamy. By doing so they showed that their perception of a just society differed from that of the traditional rajas.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from these findings. First, changes brought about by colonizing agents in a patrilinear society do not necessarily lead to a shift towards a bilateral one. Second, these changes, even though meant to ‘improve the status of women,’ may not always have benefited them. Several issues that emerged during the colonial period resurfaced in modern Indonesia and are mentioned in the Conclusion. These issues indicate that people belonging to a society based on patrilineal descent can perpetuate the order of things only by continued gender differentiation of roles, rights, and entitlements.

Sources
For this thesis I have made use of the relevant literature on the Toba Batak, archival sources from the archives of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft in Barmen, the Department of Colonial Affairs in The Hague, the Royal Institute of the Tropics (KIT) in Amsterdam, the collection of manuscripts of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), as well as the newspaper collection of the National Library (Perpustakaan Nasional) in Jakarta and interviews with Toba Batak women above the age of sixty in 1985 in Jakarta, Medan, and North Tapanuli.