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The Historical Paths of Sahu Ceremonial Textiles

Le cheminement historique des textiles cérémoniels de Sahu

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Association Archipel

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The Historical Paths of Sahu Ceremonial Textiles

Introduction

Most studies on Indonesian textiles concern handwoven or batik cloths that are produced in the society that is the subject of research of the author. Yet, undoubtedly “weaving communities must have supplied non-weaving communities throughout eastern Indonesia with much-wanted textiles for a very long time” (Barnes 2015: 315). However, little is known about inter-island textile trade and motif borrowing in the North Moluccas. Sahu, on the North Moluccan island of Halmahera, is an interesting case in point that has not been described earlier because, like other societies on the island of Halmahera (Map 1), Sahu does not have a history of weaving.² Nor are the Sahu known for mat plaiting, unlike the Tobaru, Galela, and Tobelo people of northeast Halmahera (Bastian 1884; Kükenthal 1896; Fortgens 1930). The collection of the Netherlands Museum of World Cultures stores beautiful examples of the richly ornamented barkcloth from northeast Halmahera (Campen 1884, Pl. III; Chijs 1885: 175; Loebér 1921-22: 264, 266; Kooiman 1963)³. Barkcloth in

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2. Ternate Resident De Clercq noted that on the North Moluccan island of Makian, he saw women weaving with European threads on a Javanese style loom. These simple cloths were mostly in demand with the Alfurs of Galela on the island of Halmahera (Clercq 1890: 90-91).

3. It may have been the case that the Sahu did not produce such richly ornamented

Map 1 – Indonesia. (@ Visser 1989b)

Map 2 – Halmahera. (@ Visser 1989b)

Sahu appears to have been replaced by cotton textiles already in the late 19th century (Campen 1884: 173; Clercq 1890: 108). The Sahu are the only people on Halmahera island who have a long, but little known history of selecting and importing foreign textiles for ceremonial use.⁴

A first, mostly technical, description of two handwoven ikat textiles, an embroidered scarf, and a batik shouldercloth was published 30 years ago (Visser 1989a). This article presents new data that provide more historical depth to the possible origin of the imported textiles from various parts of Sulawesi that paid tribute to the Sultans of Ternate. I provide new evidence to support my hypothesis about the meaning of the word Kulincucu or Kolincucu and the spread of weaving techniques in East Indonesia. The present article finally provides examples of the way local values are attached to imported textiles in the context of the annual harvest ceremony or the Great Eating, including the *legu* ritual (see below).

Numbering about 12,000 in 1979-80, today the Sahu-speaking population living in the sub-districts of Sahu, Sahu-Timur, and Jailolo⁵ number about 25,000. While the number of villages hardly changed, existing villages have expanded. For example, the population of the research village of Awer has grown from 252 to 763 over the last four decades. The Sahu speak a non-Austronesian language (Visser and Voorhoeve 1987) and inhabit the fertile river basin of the Akelamo river where they grow rice as a staple crop by means of swidden cultivation. Since the 1930s, household incomes have been based on the production and sale of copra (Visser 1989b). Recently, many younger people have been opting out of agriculture as they are no longer willing to carry out heavy work on the upland rice fields. They often find employment in the rapidly expanding provincial and district bureaus, schools, and medical services. Their regular income allows them to buy rice rather than producing it themselves. The increased demand for a more regular flow of money as demanded by school fees and higher education stimulates the shift from food production to cash cropping (Visser 2019).

loincloth. But in fact the interior of northwest Halmahera was hardly ever visited during the 19th century. Northeast Halmahera was better accessible, even from Ternate. Dutch protestant missionaries first settled there in the late 19th century in Galela, and government officers and natural scientists travelled through Galela, Tobelo, and Tobaru, collecting material objects and describing what they saw.

4. Most data for this article was collected during a 20 months' stay in Sahu to carry out my PhD research on swidden agriculture and social-territorial organisation (Visser 1989b). Additional data was obtained during several recent visits since 2015. I am thankful to Geneviève Duggan, Willemijn de Jong, Sandra Niessen, and anonymous reviewers for useful comments on earlier versions of this article.

5. Administrative reorganisation of the province of the North Moluccas in 1999 and 2004 resulted in the formation of the new district of West Halmahera, including the three sub-districts of Sahu, East Sahu, and Jailolo.

The northern part of the island of Halmahera paid tribute to the Sultans of Ternate until the middle of the 19th century. However, paying tribute does not imply that the social groups on Halmahera converted to Islam. Protestant missionaries of the Utrecht Missionary Society (UZV) brought Christianity to the northeast of Halmahera (Galela, Tobelo) during the last decades of the 19th century. The north-western part of the island, including Sahu, gradually converted to Christianity only after the 1930-50s. Although some indigenous beliefs and practices were disapproved of and forbidden, conversion did not affect the performance of the annual ceremony of the Great Eating (see below).

Halmahera is the largest island east of Sulawesi. The articles published in the special volume of this journal on “East Indonesia” (Rappoport and Guillaud, 2015) focus on the row of islands stretching eastward from Java as far as the Southeast Moluccas. Surprisingly little attention was paid to the Northern Moluccas, particularly the islands of Ternate, Tidore, and Halmahera. This is all the more remarkable since the vast sphere of control of the Sultans of Ternate stretched as far west as the islands of Timor, Buton, Selayar, and Banggai, and to the dependencies of Bungku and Gorontalo on the east coast of Sulawesi (Map 2; Clercq 1890). According to Barnes (1987: 219) “The Sultan of Ternate also claimed Solor as a dependency during at least part of the sixteenth century and later, and the various *sengaji* of Solor and Adonara repeatedly acknowledged this tie throughout the first century or more of European contact.” In addition to political-economic domination, also cultural interactions and linguistic relationships were established between these islands, coastal Sulawesi, and Ternate (Schapper 2015; Yampolsky 2015).

Of all the dependencies of Ternate, Sahu was the most heavily populated. Sahu village clusters (*co'ong*) became “the granary of the sultanate” supplying a considerable amount of rice to the Sultan’s family. In addition, Sahu was also required to supply the Sultan each year with six gate-keepers and two guards for the court, and also one hundred manservants, according to the Dutch Resident of Ternate in 1859 (Bosscher [1859] 1980: 179-184). The representative of the Sultan in the Sahu district also had rights to several servants every few months (Olivier 1834: 268). On the island of Ternate, Sahu men and women seem to have been in great demand as domestic servants, reputed as hard-working and capable of performing heavy tasks. However, when they finished their term of service, they immediately wanted to return home on Halmahera island, even when offered higher wages to remain in service, according to the Dutch Governor on Ternate, F.S.A. de Clercq (Clercq 1890: 108).

Tribute and trade brought all kinds of goods to Ternate. On returning home after their term of service on Ternate, the Sahu often brought back foreign handwoven textiles, and Portuguese or Dutch uniforms bought from Arab

traders in Ternate (Fortgens 1913: 518). Together with imported, foreign objects like ornaments, bracelets, birds of paradise,⁶ and chinaware, these textiles became highly valued as Sahu family heirlooms. During the last two centuries, and until today these valuables were inherited through patrilineal family clusters (*rera*). During the year, the textiles were carefully stored in chests (*kabila*) in their garden houses and surrounding forest land. They were, and still are, exhibited mainly during the annual adat ceremonies.

The only historical account about a Great Eating ceremony is a publication with photographs by the Dutch Protestant missionary Fortgens (Fortgens 1913: 508-520 + 12 pictures). A century later, one can still witness these annual ceremonies in the Sahu villages of the sub-districts of Sahu, East Sahu, and Jailolo (Jouwera et al. 1985; Visser 1984, 1989b, 2019). The following paragraphs will elaborate on the different Sahu ceremonial cloths, especially the two ikat sarongs, but also other handwoven sarongs, embroidery, and batiks. I will substantiate my hypothesis that Sahu ceremonial cloths are a conscious blending of a variety of Sulawesi textiles traded to (and through) the sultanate of Ternate, together with Indian textiles and Javanese batiks. They were purposely selected to fit Sahu social values.

Foreign Origin of Sahu ceremonial textiles

From the narratives of Dutch governors and military commanders who travelled through the hinterland of west Halmahera in the 19th century, and from the Dutch Protestant missionary who resided in the Jailolo village of Sidangoli during the early 1900s we know that foreign textiles were bought or bartered, and brought home from Ternate by the Sahu themselves. The foreign textiles appear to have been selected primarily for their colours and motifs, in order to fit the values expressed through the various ritual parts of the annual ceremonies of the Great Eating (see below). In this section I describe the different types of ceremonial textiles and discuss their potential origin. I differentiate between handwoven sarongs (ikat, songket, and monochromatic indigo), embroidered scarfs, and batik shoulder- and headcloths.

Handwoven ikat sarongs

One highly interesting indigo-and-red warp ikat sarong with supplementary weft white lines in the head is the dark '*ba'a boba*' (figs. 1 and 2). Worn by women and belonging to patrilineal family heirlooms, this indigo-and-red

6. Olivier (1837: 316) reports that "one finds birds of paradise on Halmahera, Ternate, Ambon, and Buru, but especially on the Aru islands and New-Guinea. On Ternate they are called *maneko-diawata* (bird of the gods)."

7. '*Ba'a*' means cloth. Sahu language is of non-Austronesian origin. It has several implosives written as 'b', 'd', and 'g', and a glottal stop, written as 'a', 'e', 'i', and 'u' (Visser and Voorhoeve 1987).

woven cloth plays a major role in Sahu adat ceremonies. Together with the red-and-yellow *'ba'a suje* (figs. 3 and 4) these textiles are known as "Kulincucu cloths" in Ternate and Sahu. Related to the Sahu name *boba* is the word *bomba*, a word still used by the last generation of Kulincucu weavers I visited in Ternate in 1985, meaning "to bind with yarn" (Personal communication, Mrs. Bonso, Ternate, 16.08.1985). The word *bomba* appears to be used not only by the Kulincucu women originating from the island of Buton, but also elsewhere in Sulawesi, for example, in Donggala where ikat textiles are called *buya bomba* (Kartiwa 1983). Apparently, this has been transmitted to Ternate and into Sahu where the indigo-and-red warp ikat cloth is still called *'ba'a boba*. Recently, P. ten Hoopen published an example of the *'ba'a boba* (Hoopen 2018: 528-29).⁸

Kulincucu is the name of a domain to the north of the Wolio (or Bolio) realm of Buton island southeast of Sulawesi (Map 1), which became tributary to the Ternate Sultan in 1580 (Valentijn 1724: 207). Bolio was the place where Ternate soldiers would replenish their stocks on their raids to islands further to the southwest. The island was their "market" or *butu* in Ternate language. Thus the island became known as Buton (Valentijn 1724: 207). Butonese princesses already married Ternate kings in 1465 and 1652 (*ibid.*: 82-83). As the personal domain of the crown prince of Wolio, Kulincucu had considerable status in local politics and trade. By custom every crown prince spent his childhood and adolescence in Kulincucu before being crowned ruler, and it was said that the queen of Wolio should give birth to the prince in Kulincucu (Abdurachman 1983: 24).

Around 1820 a small population from Kulincucu was presented by the ruler of Wolio/Buton and moved to Ternate as a tribute or a "gift" to the sultan. The Dutch Governor at Ternate, J.H. Tobias, noted that in 1857 some 1,000 people from the "region of Kalentjoetjoe" were still living on the island. In 1855 they were allowed to return to Buton or to remain on Ternate and settle on a piece of land in the periphery of the palace grounds (Tobias 1857: 18-21). The women were allowed to weave only for those connected to the Sultan and the district chiefs as far as the interior of Halmahera. Colour, pattern, and motif were prescribed by the court (Abdurahman 1983: 26). In 1985 I visited a few families that were still living in what is known as Kampung Makassar, near the Ternate Sultan's palace. The women of the Bonso family were then still weaving monochromatic red and green textiles called *rapi dino*

8. The pictured sarong is one of a pair, collected by J.B. Lüth in 1987. The collection of the National Museum of World Cultures, Leiden, from the early 20th century includes a sarong from Central Sulawesi, possibly Banggai or Bungku (*lipa sabe*; RV-1008-14) and one from Selayar (RV-2429-14) with characteristics comparable to *'ba'a boba*.

9. Tobias writes the name of the Wolio domain as "de landstreek Kalentjoesa" (1857:18) or "het landschap Kalentjoetjoe" (1857: 23). In the 1980s I heard the name Kulincucu in Ternate and Sahu. Van den Berg, in his Grammar of the Muna language (1989, Map 2) shows the name Kulinsusu for the realm in the northeast of Buton.

Fig. 1 – ‘Ba’a boba mara. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

Fig. 2 – ‘Ba’a boba. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1982)

or “woven cloth” in Ternate language. The oldest of the two remembered that she had seen the indigo ikat textiles, but she had not woven them herself.

The ‘*ba’a boba* is a two-panelled indigo-and-red ikat sarong with white warp ikat figures. The ikat motifs alternate with supplementary white lines. The cloth is made of coarse handspun cotton in warp-faced plain weave. In the blue body, white warp ikat is executed in diamond-shaped figures (fig. 1) or stripes (fig. 2). The head consists of a blue warp and a red weft, and shows the same ikat pattern as the body. The head is symmetrically divided into two groups of ten supplementary weft white lines of alternately different width (Visser 1989a: 84).

The other textile which is glossed as “Kulincucu” in Sahu is a red-and-yellow handwoven cloth with continuous complementary weft patterns, called ‘*ba’a suje*. The red-and-yellow ‘*ba’a suje* (figs. 3, 4, 14) is a handwoven two-panelled sarong with continuous yellow supplementary wefts creating six-pointed stars, crosses or stripes, lending the cloth its yellow image. The textile is made of commercial cotton yarns. As in ‘*ba’a boba*, the head is divided into two groups of ten supplementary weft white lines that are alternatively smaller and broader. Both the indigo-and-red and the yellow-and-red sarongs are worn in pairs, and only by senior women.

The Kulincucu women I visited in 1985 in Ternate still applied the supplementary weft technique using the word *suje* to refer to the technique “by which your hand takes the yarn up and down.” The older woman could

Fig. 3 – ‘Ba’a suje. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980) **Fig. 4** – ‘Ba’a suje (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1982)

still recall orders made from Sahu for *suje* textiles. Also, the adat head I asked in Sahu in 1982 remembered to have seen a woman weave the red-and-yellow ‘ba’a suje in Susupu, Sahu in the 1930s, but no ‘ba’a boba. The dark indigo-and-red ikat thus maybe older than the red-and-yellow ‘ba’a suje.

From what is shown by the textile literature on the islands of the Central and South-eastern Moluccas and the Lesser Sundas (Barnes and Hunt-Kahlenberg 2010; Maxwell 2003; Völger and van Welck 1991), the patterns and colours of the Sahu ikats are different. I therefore started looking for comparison with historical descriptions and museum collections of Sulawesi textiles to deepen my understanding of the origin of the Kulincucu-Ternate textiles described in this article, that became so highly valued by the Sahu as ceremonial cloths since late the 19th century. In his book on the Ternate residency governor De Clercq shows a very detailed drawing of two cloths strikingly similar to the red-and-yellow ‘ba’a suje with complementary weft white diamonds. He writes, “Two *sarongs* originating from Soelabési and weft with European yarns.” (Clercq 1890: ix; Plate III Photo 2). Two decades later, Jasper & Pirngadie state that in northern Sulawesi only in Gorontalo, Limbotto, and the Minahasa ikat textiles are produced (Jasper & Pirngadie 1912: 180; 270). Nevertheless, the examples shown in their volume do not resemble the Kulincucu-Ternate textiles brought home by the Sahu around that same period.

We are likewise faced with a problem comparing the Kulincucu weaving technique and tools used in Ternate with the names for the Butonese textiles and parts of the loom documented in the literature. According to Jasper and Pirngadie (1912: 160) the Butonese loom has no reed. The Ternate Kulincucu loom I saw in 1985, on the other hand, does have a reed. Its warp, although actually discontinuous, appears to be circular and continuous. Rita Bolland has recognised the Kulincucu loom to be of the heddle and stick type (Visser 1989a: 90, note 4). Other characteristics (Visser 1989a: 84) make this loom resemble the Type C loom described by Bolland in Gittinger (1979: 230-231). This type of loom occurs in a relatively limited area – West Flores, parts of Celebes, Sangir, and the southern Philippines. It should be noted that many of

these regions were within the political and economic sphere of influence of the Ternate sultanate.

Further comparison between the Kulincucu-Ternate terms and those from Buton underscores the heterogeneous origin of names for the techniques and weaving tools used by the Kulincucu women in Ternate. Several Butonese words (Jasper & Pirngadie 1912: 160) for example, like warp beam (*tetera*, a Ternate word meaning “to regularly put down”) and sword (*balida*) are indeed cognates of the Ternate-Kulincucu words *tetera* and *walida*, respectively. Other words they use better resemble terms from Toraja in Central and South Sulawesi.¹⁰ This brief discussion may show a heterogeneity of words for weaving tools and techniques ended up being used on Ternate, but originate from different parts of Sulawesi that were dependencies of the Sultans of Ternate for centuries.

The catalogue descriptions and objects I found in the collection of the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) in Leiden show several Sulawesi textiles that resemble the Sahu textiles.¹¹ Although none of the individual textiles are identical to any of the Sahu textiles, together they support my hypothesis that Sahu ceremonial textiles originate from an amalgamation of influences from southern and eastern Sulawesi weaving cultures. Until recently, none of the handwoven cloths from Sahu, Halmahera were known in the literature or stored in Dutch museums, with the exception of one single red-and-yellow sarong at the Rotterdam World Museum (WM-2211) collected in Ternate in 1884 that clearly resembles the Sahu red-and-yellow ‘*ba’a suje*, including the supplementary weft pattern in the head of the cloth. Achjadi (2015: 252) pictures a cloth she found in the collection of the Museum Siwa Lima in Ambon “decorated through use of continuous supplementary weft technique, *suje*.” However, there are marked differences between this modern sarong, possibly woven in Ternate with industrial yarns¹² and the *ba’a suje* woven with coarse handspun cotton yarns that the Sahu

10. For example, the Kulincucu words for reed (*yangka*), clothbeam (*fakanga*), backstrap (*bubungkua*), and warp (*sawu*) show closer resemblance to the Bare’e-Toraja words *jangga*, *wakanga*, and *boko-boko*, and the Tae-Toraja word *sa’u*, respectively (Kruijt 1922: 403-425). See also Visser 1989a: 84.

11. Several photos of sarongs can be found in the online open access NMVW collection, like one from South Sulawesi (RV-2429-10) and several from Selayar (RV-2429-14; RV-3600-5521; WM-2164) all show supplementary warp and/or weft patterns. However, none of these textiles are similar to the ‘*ba’a suje*, and none were made of the kind of coarse cotton used to weave this kind of sarongs I found in Sahu. Also, a Bugis sarong (TM-1772-1206) and one from South Sulawesi (RV-3600-5527) bear resemblance to the ‘*ba’a grem*.

12. In 1985 I interviewed and photographed a Kulincucu-Ternate woman weaving a green cloth (NMVW collection RV-6234-1107; RV-6234-1111) similar to the red-and-yellow sarong in Achjadi (2015: 253). Nevertheless, I have never encountered this kind of modern textile in Sahu. Possibly only the wives of Ternate government officials could afford to buy these sarongs, not the Sahu farmers of Halmahera.

bought in Ternate around the turn of the 20th century. I described these “foreign cloths” in a contribution to M. Gittinger’s book, *Speaking with Cloth* (Visser 1989a).¹³ In 2015, the National Museum of World Cultures acquired my small collection of Sahu ceremonial textiles and ornaments, including the ‘ba’a boba and ‘ba’a suje here described.¹⁴

Another conundrum is the name “Kulincucu” and its geographical spread. Wellfelt (2014) writes about the use of fibres from the milkweed shrub (*Calotropis gigantea*) due to a shortage of cotton on the island of Alor. Locally called *kolon susu* (Wellfelt 2014: 3-4), its seeds produce a silky fluff from which weaving thread is (see also Heyne [1927] 1950: 1293-4). Alorese women also give the name *kolon susu* to a particular cloth for pregnant women (ibid.: 4). Interestingly, this custom is not unique to Alor. Following Butonese custom, the Queen of Wolio/Buton should give birth in the domain of Kalensusu or Kulincucu. Also, the weavers from the Kulincucu domain were given the exclusive right to produce a sarong for women giving birth (Abdurahman 1983: 24). Buton was a hub in the inter-island trade controlled from the sultanate of Ternate in the Moluccas, possibly including the northwest coast of Alor. The introduction of weaving on Alor is associated with the introduction of Islam during the 16th century reign of Sultan Babullah of the North Moluccan island of Ternate (Wellfelt 2014: 7).¹⁵ The eastern Indonesian islands Buton, Selayar, Solor, and Alor all belonged to the vast sphere of influence of the Sultans of Ternate. It is not unlikely nor uncommon that words travel, become attached to a different object or practice, and are given new local meaning. We may therefore hypothesize that the name “kolon susu” originally travelled from the domain of Kulincucu on Buton to Alor, where the technique of weaving a particular ikat cloth related to pregnancy and child birth, has also become associated with the word for milkweed.

Monochromatic handwoven cloths

Sahu ceremonial textiles include several monochromatic handwoven cloths, with bright pink or rose hues, or dark indigo. Like the two previously

13. Achjadi misinterprets my article (Visser 1989a) when she states that “textiles were still being made in the subdistrict of Sahu... in the first half of the 20th century” (Achjadi 2015: 252-253). Sahu never had a weaving culture.

14. This collection was obtained by the Museum in April 2015 and registered as RV-7038-1/26. I acquired these objects, several of which are shown in this article, in 1980 when several families with whom I had established close relationships during my stay (1979-1981) presented me with one of their heirloom textiles or ornaments in exchange for my bicycle or transistor radio. In one case, in another village, in exchange for money to buy medicines. In all cases it was their own initiative to present me with a cloth of which they owned several.

15. Sultan Babulah reigned from 1570 to 1583. In 1580 he conquered “Banggai, Tobungku and Buton,” and obtained Selayar (Clercq 1890: 153-154). See Map 1.

described cloths, these cloths belong to the male family heirloom. The *songket* like sarong is called '*ba'a grem*' (fig. 5). Likewise, any cloth that has a silk-like hue, may be called '*ba'a grem*' (see also centre of fig. 14).

The monochromatic indigo handwoven textiles include a two-panelled indigo sarong in a plain weave of commercial cotton, called '*ba'a ute*' (figs. 6 and 14). This kind of indigo textiles has been traded from South Sulawesi through Ternate and into Halmahera possibly from the late 19th century to the early 1920s, but without the embroidery (see below) (Personal communication, K. Tjiawa, Awer, 2017). While I have not seen any historical pictures of this textile from Sahu, Kükenthal (1896: Photos 34 and 35) shows monochromatic indigo sarongs worn by Galelarese women of northeast Halmahera. Also, De Clercq (1890: 90-91) notes that cheap monochromatic cloths woven on the North Moluccan island of Makian were in great demand by the Alfurs of Galela on Halmahera, but it is unclear if these were indigo dyed. Less common is an indigo two-panelled, coarser homespun cotton sarong, called '*ba'a tobuku*' (fig. 7 and 14). Like the name suggests, this cloth may originate from the To Bungku in Central Sulawesi.¹⁶

Interestingly, while both kinds of indigo cloths have been imported the Sahu women have subsequently given local value to them by attaching embroidery and/or geometrically positioned mica dots.¹⁷ Although it was not practised anymore in the 1980s, several women in Sahu recalled that embroidery was added using the stitches they learned at school in Ternate with the Catholic nuns during the first half of the 20th century. The motifs are similar to those on the locally made scarf discussed in the following section.

Embroidered scarfs

In his study on textile ornamentation, Loebér states that embroidery was first applied on barkcloth, then on mat plaiting. However, only when using woven textiles could embroidery fully develop (Loebér 1914: 10). In his view, the eastern Indonesian islands did not offer remarkable examples of this technique (ibid.: 11). Possibly, barkcloths and plaited mats from Halmahera, including embellished Sahu female jackets and sarongs were not known to him.

The most conspicuous piece of local Sahu embroidery is a triangular red cotton scarf, paired with a yellow triangle, and diagonally sewn together. It is worn as a loincloth by *legu*-dancers (fig. 9), as a headcloth by genealogically

16. For a contract between the Sultan of Ternate and the rulers of "Bangaaij and Tomboekoe" see Bosscher [1859] 1980: 128-141. "The *kain Tobungku* woven of local threads is very rough, but it is in demand with the Alfurus because of its durability. The price is f 4,- per piece, and the colours are blue and black." (Clercq 1890: 138 note 1; Taylor and Richards 1999, 95 note 5).

17. On the Banggai Islands "at a place named Mambulusan, which belongs to Liang on Peleng, antimony or mica is dug up from a depth of four-five fathoms" (Clercq 1890: 134; Taylor and Richards 1999: 93).

Fig. 5 – *Ba'a grem*. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1982)

Fig. 6 – Embroidered '*ba'a ute*'. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1982)

Fig. 7 – '*Ba'a tobuku* with mica (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1982)

younger men (fig. 10), and as a shoulder cloth by genealogically older women (fig. 11). The scarf is about 55 to 66 cm square. It is called *tuala dale* if both triangles are plain, and *tuala suje* if the red part is embellished by embroidery. It is used with the red part on top, showing just a little yellow rim. The only historical reference I have come across is by Campen, who writes about Sahu daily costume of a white loincloth and “a half red half yellow cloth around their heads” (Campen 1884: 174).¹⁸

Either commercial cotton or silk yarn are used in the embroidery on industrial cotton textile. The symbols embroidered with black, white, and yellow yarns often resemble the circles, arabesques, and the floral, celestial and maritime motifs painted on barkcloth female jackets, male loincloths, and mats¹⁹ from northeast Halmahera (Tobaru and Tobelo). See figs. 10 and 11. While these figures are often associated with headhunting in the northeast (Campen 1884; Kooiman 1963), this was never the case in Sahu. Unfortunately, by the 1980s, some 50-80 years after they were made, the meaning of these figures was lost.

Batik

In this article I wish to discuss two kinds of batik cloths. The first is a one-sided hand block-printed indigo batik with a geometric pattern (figs. 12 and 18). Although it looks a Javanese batik, its geometric pattern suggests production on demand from Sahu. It measures 210 by 50 cm which is actually a batik *kain panjang* cut in two lengthwise after the dyeing process.²⁰ The cloth is folded lengthwise to form a kind of shouldercloth about 25 cm wide, and it is worn by genealogically junior men diagonally from the right shoulder to the left hip, where it is loosely fastened. The genealogically “younger” women wear it in an opposite way from the young men, with the open ends hanging loosely from her right shoulder (fig. 18).

Unlike the woven patterns and embroidery that vary considerably, the pattern of this batik shouldercloth is similar for all male and female users. According to the villagers, this batik used to be commanded through Javanese

¹⁸. The military officer Campen may have passed through west Halmahera at the time when the Sahu people gathered for the annual Great Eating ceremony, but he does not mention any embroidery on the headcloth. The scarfs are not for daily use, nor is the plain red-and-yellow scarf *tuala dale*, wrapped around the head.

¹⁹. Bastian (1884: Photo2) shows the geometric pattern on “a sleeping mat from Sahu,” which is possibly Tobaru. Fortgens (1930) and Kooiman (1963) show mats, jackets, and loincloths from Tobaru and Galela. Comparison is particularly interesting with barkcloth from Sulawesi and Halmahera in the collection of the National Museum of World Cultures in Leiden (online collection, numbers RV-37-695; RV-370-2131; RV-370-2135; RV-621-9; RV-2784-1 (Clerq 1980: Pl. II); RV-2784-2 (Clerq 1980: Pl. II); TM-15-222; WM-5074). To my knowledge, there is no barkcloth collected from West Halmahera/Sahu.

²⁰. This is evident from the stitching of the long side of the textile which is not dyed, and therefore of a more recent date than the coloured stitching of the shorter sides.

Fig. 8 – Embroidered *tuaia suje*. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

Fig. 9 – *Tuaia suje* as loincloth (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

Fig. 10 – NMVW collection TM-A-3015.

Fig. 11 – NMVW collection RV-278402

Fig. 12 – Batik shouldercloth. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

Fig. 13 – Batik headdress. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

traders around the turn of the 20th century, with an explicit Sahu demand for the pattern shown here. Together with the imported ikat textiles the batik shouldercloth belongs to the male heirlooms of Sahu family groups (*rera*), until today.

The second type of batik was imported during the late 19th and early 20th century, and is well-known from Java and, for example, Toraja in Sulawesi (Kooiman 1963). It is about 155 cm square, and has non-geometric motifs or a combination of floral and geometric motifs. Often, there is a square or *modang* (Loebér 1914: 30) in its centre.²¹ The colours of this headcloth may be red, blue, or brown, monochromatic or multicolour. Unlike the shouldercloth, the patterns and colours of this batik kerchief appear not to have been selected by the Sahu. But the headdress is imbued with local value by the way the cloth is starched and folded, with an upright tip to the right (fig. 13). It is worn as a headdress by the genealogically “older” men. The Sahu call it *tuala jawa*, because of its batik motifs, or *lipa* after the way it is folded. Interestingly, a similar plain headdress can be seen on a photograph taken in 1913 (fig. 16).

²¹. See NMVW online collection numbers RV-6234-794; RV-6234-796; RV-6234-798; RV-6234-815; RV-6234-817.

Fig. 14 – ‘Ba’a tobuku, - ‘ute, - grem, - suje, - suje (fltr) (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

Sahu textiles as indicators of social position during the Great Eating

Originating from a communal commemoration of the dead (Fortgens 1913) today’s annual ceremony is still called the Great Eating (*ngorom lamo’o*) or the Great Cooking (*sa’ai lamo’o*). It is held each year in the ceremonial house or *sasa’du* in the centre of each Sahu village around September, after all the swidden rice fields have been harvested (Visser 1989b; 2019). The ceremonial house is called a boat, but a boat at rest (*kagunga tego-tego*) with its bow turned toward the land, and its stern turned toward the sea. The women are located in the front or junior half, separated from the rear or senior half where the men are located by four large drums.

Adat and Christian faith go hand in hand in a “thanksgiving” to the ancestors and God who provided the village community with a good harvest and prosperity. During the 20th century, the focus of the Great Eating has gradually shifted from a death ritual (Fortgens 1913) to a harvest festival (Jouwiersma et al. 1985). While the meaning of certain oral texts and actions has largely been lost among today’s participants, as ritual knowledge has been shared unevenly, the Great Eating including the *legu* ritual (see below) still clearly include representations of both marriage and mortuary rituals of a landholding community, involving the inhabitants of several Sahu villages at each occasion.

Sahu social organisation revolves around clusters of patrilineal inheritance groups (*rera*) who exchange land, women and adoptive children within a particular village cluster (*co’ong*). Affines from inheritance groups within the

Fig. 15 – Ciawa costumes and headdresses, 1913. (Photo @ J. Fortgens 1913: Photo 4)

village cluster participate at each other's Great Eating ceremonies. Precedency plays a very important role in the spatial organisation of the ceremonial house or *sasa'du*, indicating the relative positions of genealogically "older" and "younger" men and women within the village cluster (Visser 1989b; 2019). The distribution of land rights is legitimised by the Raja Baikole mythology. Raja Baikole, the mythical ruler of Sahu, is said to have seven children, four sons and three daughters. The four sons are the founding fathers of the Sahu domain of Pa'disua²² which presently more or less coincides with the sub-district of East Sahu. His three daughters were married uxorilocally to foreigners, hence their sons became the founders of the Tala'i domain which presently constitute the sub-district of Sahu.

Although ceremonial dresses vary per individual and per village, one can still observe some interesting differences between the two Sahu domains of Tala'i and Pa'disua. For example, although Christian, the Tala'i villages closer to the coast exhibit Islamic influences from the sultanate of Ternate that were not adopted by the Pa'disua villages in the interior. For example, in Sahu-Tala'i the ceremonial turban or *sadtari* is worn (see the man on the left in fig. 9), a turban which is similar to the black turban worn by the *bobato*

22. In 1980, the elders of the two Pa'disua landholding groups could recite the names of their ancestors going back 15 to 22 generations to their founding fathers. Unfortunately, this knowledge has not always been passed down and in many cases it now has been lost.

dunia or worldly advisors to the Sultan of Ternate (Fraassen 1987).²³ Also, the *ciawa* dancers in the Sahu-Tala'i village of Idamdehe wear a crown that has a vertical, folded cloth to its left side (fig. 16; Fortgens 1913). I have regularly observed such attire with *ciawa* dancers from Sahu-Tala'i in the 1980s (fig. 9), in contradistinction to Sahu-Pa'disua dancers who wear a metal crown with birds of paradise, but no such cloth (fig. 17). There are no historical documents about Sahu-Pa'disua ceremonial cloths and headdresses. The only written document showing Sahu-Tala'i attire is provided by the Dutch Protestant missionary Fortgens who attended a ceremony in the Sahu village of Idamdehe in the Jailolo district in 1912 or 1913. Close scrutiny of Fortgens' work (Fortgens 1913: 515-517; Photos 2-5) shows the folded headdress (fig. 16) that today is still part of the ceremonial costume of senior Sahu men.

Apart from these differences, the ceremonial dresses worn during the Great Eating ceremonies in all Sahu villages share a common set of values and acknowledge the rules of precedence laid down in the Raja Baikole mythology. The textiles differentiate the positions of male and female participants, and genealogically "older" and "younger" men and women. The genealogically

Fig. 16 – *Ciawa* dancers' headdress and crown. (Photo @ J. Fortgens 1913: Photo 5)

23. On 19 September 1980 the Gamalama volcano of Ternate erupted. Sultan Mudaffar Syah carried out the *kololi kie* ritual, encircling the volcano in *kora-kora* boats. The same white headdress and white and black turbans were worn by the Sultan and his half-brother, and his officials, respectively (Leontine Visser, NMVW online collection numbers RV-6234-329/339).

“older” men (*bibiri’i*) represent the assembled patrilineal family clusters; they take a seat on the high benches at the two men’s tables at the rear or seaward end of the ceremonial house, wearing a folded batik scarf (*tuala jawa*) or an Indonesian cap (figs. 13 and 18). This generic name means “scarf from Java” and scarfs are not differentiated by motif or colour.²⁴ The men also wear a short, locally made shirt with an open neck made of a variety of industrial cottons with non-geometric patterns; the *takóa* (fig. 18).

The position of the genealogically “older” women follows the ranking of seats of their husbands. During the two or three nights of the ceremony they take place at the high benches along the two tables in the front or landward half of the ceremonial house, wearing the indigo-and-red warp ikat (*‘ba’a boba*) or the embellished monochromatic indigo cloths (*‘ba’a ‘ute*; - *tobuko*). During the afternoon of the second day they wear the indigo-and-red ikat or the red-and-yellow supplementary weft *‘ba’a suje* or songket (*‘ba’a grem*). These cloths should be used in pairs, one as a sarong and the other, folded diagonally, as a shoulder cloth loosely hanging over the left shoulder. During the second night of the Great Eating, in addition to the handwoven indigo textiles, the “older” women have two red-and-yellow embroidered scarfs (*tuala suje*) knotted together in one corner over their breasts, with one scarf over each shoulder. Wearing the scarfs in this manner is called *kalaotala*,

Fig. 17 – *Ciawa* or *legu* dancers from Sahu-Pa’disua. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

24. Several examples of these scarfs from Sahu are shown in the Sahu collection of photographs and slides (RV-6234-1/1345) available through the online public collection site of the National Museum of World Cultures in Leiden, Netherlands. The collection depicts and describes Great Eating ceremonies, agricultural practices, marriages and funerals, infrastructure, etc..

Fig. 18. – Older and younger men at the table. (Photo@L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

meaning drawn down together, as shown by the two women in fig. 14. They also have two red woollen tassels at each side of the comb at the back of her head. Genealogically “younger” men sit or stand at the lower sides of the two tables, opposite their fathers and uncles. They are distinguished by the red embroidered scarf as a headdress and the batik shouldercloth (figs. 12 and 18). The embroidered red-and-yellow scarf plays an important role in male as well as female ceremonial attire. Worn in three different ways, depending on how and where it is worn, the scarf differentiates gender and genealogical seniority (figs. 9, 12, 13, 18).

The highlight of the annual ceremony is the *ciawa* or circular dance, also called *sepa* in Sahu after the upward movement of their right leg. The *ciawa* dance is performed by an uneven number of men, not by women. It takes place during the afternoon of the second day. The names *lêgo* or *legu* occur in late 19th century sources about Ternate, Makian, and Halmahera and invariably refer to a row of several men who walk in circles, singing (Campen 1884: 513; Clercq 1890: 90). According to the De Clercq, on the island of Makian *lêgo* is also named *cawa*, which is similar to the name *ciawa* used in Sahu for the elegant circle dance of the men; a dance that can still be witnessed a century after Fortgens’ observations (Fortgens 1913: 515-517; Visser 1989b: 145-168; Jouwersma et al. 1985). The name *lego* or *legu* also spread to other islands and regions that were subordinate to the Sultanate of Ternate.

The dancers wear splendid silk-like coloured or black velvet kaftans (*juba*) over a short felt jacket (*sandaria*) with a *tumpal* motif (fig. 9). The red

embroidered scarf – or any red folded cloth – serves as a loincloth worn on top of a pair of plain trousers. On their heads, the dancers wear a metal crown (*paluala*) adorned with a bird of paradise at each side, their feathers projected towards the back (figs. 9 and 17).

The Sahu *legu* dancers dance around the Moa ma Jum figure. They are acting out the intended marriage of a young woman representing the “princess” Moa ma Jum to the mythical ruler of Sahu, Raja Baikole. A myth tells how a small frog was found in the forest on top of a *moa* shrub (*Donax canniformis*), hence her name, and taken home by Raja Baikole. He keeps her in his tobacco pouch, but within one night she has grown out of it. He then puts her in his clothes chest, and when she has grown out of that too, he keeps her under a mosquito net. The next day, Raja Baikole finds the little frog has turned into a beautiful young woman.

While the men dance around her, the young women representing Moa ma Jum do not laugh or sing, and either sit still or walk around in the opposite direction to that of the dancers (Visser 1989b: 161-168). They wear a silver-coloured metal crown (*léri*) on top of the comb at the back of their heads, in the shape of a “tree” of three layers of tendrils, ornamented with metal flowers, strings of small diamonds, and birds or fish (figs. 19 and 20). The tendril motif is rather common in eastern Indonesia. One finds it on plaited marriage mats and barkcloth female jackets from northeast Halmahera (Snelleman 1907, Kooiman 1963) and on ancestor statues, altars, and boats from Tanimbar (Geurtjens 1941). The Moa ma Jum figure wears three layers of folded sarongs on top of each other, in shades of red, yellow, or green (fig. 19). In each hand she holds a red embroidered *tuala suje* (or any other red cotton scarf).

During the *legu* or *ciawa* ritual, senior representatives of the family clusters from the host village and their guests take place at two tables under a temporary roof at the land side of the ceremonial house. Some men wear half-long open coats (*kín*) made of red-and-yellow handwoven cotton with continuous supplementary warps²⁵ (fig. 21). Interestingly, the supplementary warp patterning is at both sides of the cloth, creating identical positive and negative images. The female participants, at their own table under the temporary roof, mostly wear the indigo ‘*ba’a boba*’ or other indigo handwoven cloths, but mainly because their families do not own the yellow- and-red ‘*ba’a suje*’ anymore.

In 1982 we filmed the Great Eating.²⁶ Discussions with the adat leader and

25. Achjadi (2015: 251) pictures a beautiful “Sultan’s coat” from Ternate in the Siwa Lima Museum in Ambon, probably from the early 20th century. Exactly the same ceremonial cloth is still in use in Sahu today (fig. 21).

26. This 16 mm colour film was made in 1982 by anthropologist Saskia Jouwersma (Jouwersma et al. 1985), assisted by myself and two Indonesian counterparts, during a four month’s stay in Sahu. It was edited and published by the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of Leiden University, Netherlands. In 2017 the National Museum of World Cultures funded its DVD transmission. Thematic shorter films will become available on social media in 2020.

Fig. 19 – Moa Ma Jum's crown. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1982)

the representatives of inheritance groups in preparation for the film revealed that they were keen to have the ceremony performed “properly.” It meant that only Sahu language should be used, and that the cap or *kopiah* (fig. 18) should be replaced by the “original” batik headdress (*tuala jawa*; fig. 13). At that time, only a few men still knew how to fold the cloth, but the cloths themselves appeared to be still in the possession of most families. For the purpose of properly showing Sahu adat on film, the adat leader invited a man from a village further inland to fold the kerchiefs, and for the first time in half a century these headdresses were worn again (Jouwiersma et al. 1985). The pictures made by Fortgens (1913) together with my own data attest to the historical presence of this batik folded headdress in both Sahu-Tala'i and Sahu-Pa'disua domains (fig. 16). Today, partly also encouraged by the local government, this adat headdress has almost fully replaced the Indonesian cap during Great Eating ceremonies in Sahu.

Cultural continuity and material change

The Sahu acknowledge the assignment by the Sultan of Ternate of three particular areas in West Halmahera (*tana'a gala* or *golago*) together with the right to wear ceremonial cloths as “Sultan's gifts” (*cucatu re ma 'olana*) (Visser 1989b). The Sultan also bestowed the Sahu with the unique right to perform the *ciawa* or *legu* dance beyond his court (Fortgens 1913: 515).²⁷ The

27. Dutch Governor F.S.A. de Clercq of Ternate observed that “... like on Ternate... légo, or *tjawa* in the Makian language... consists of... a melodious recitation of...

detailed drawing and description of naval officer C.W.M. van de Velde, who was invited to the sultan's court in 1839 (Velde 1979: Plate 35) show what the Ternate court dances were like, although he does not mention the name *legu*.²⁸ In 1839 Van de Velde noted,

"We better liked a kind of ballet of twelve male dancers, jumping around... with a three-cornered hat, at the back of which two birds of paradise were attached, an old-Spanish skirt with wide-cuffed sleeves, big buttons and bells at the elbows, and a wooden dagger..."²⁹ He also observed, "Twelve female dancers, beautifully dressed in red cloths which showed a faint resemblance to old-Spanish costume, and with gilded crowns, heavy earrings, necklaces, a large silver breast plate and richly adorned waistband, ... started to dance while they alternatingly sang a rather ill-sounding indigenous song" (Velde 1979: 46).

There appears to be only a single historical description of the *legu* or *ciawa* circle dance performance in Sahu. Fortgens describes the dance he witnessed in the village of Idamdehe (Fortgens 1913: 508-520). He notes how during the *ciawa* ritual "the princesses" walk around solemnly. His sixth photograph shows a young woman in a dark skirt and a single sarong, with some kind of cloth on her head. However, that image does not bear much resemblance to either the richly adorned Ternate "princesses" or today's Moa ma Jum figure. About the *ciawa* or *legu* dance itself, Fortgens continues, "Some five men, dressed in multi-coloured long shirt-like dresses with a stick in their hands, around the knob of which a white or coloured cloth is held... proceed to... the flagpole..." (Fortgens 1913: 515). On one of the pictures attached to his article, included here as fig. 16, one can observe a man wearing a crown, but it is difficult to see if there are birds of paradise attached to it, and the author does not mention them. The other men wear the kind of headdress which closely resembles the *tuala jawa* nowadays only worn by the genealogically "older" men sitting at the tables during the Great Eating.

Today, the *ciawa* or *legu* ritual continues to be performed during the annual Great Eating or *ngorom lamo'o* in the villages of Sahu and East Sahu districts (Visser 1989b: 145-168; Visser 2019: 235-281; Jouwersma et al. 1985). The young women representing the mythical princess Moa ma Jum wear layers of red and yellow sarongs (fig. 19). Nobody could tell me the origin of this

love stories."... "The sultan of Ternate has appointed certain people who perform the *légo* during visits of foreigners." (Clercq 1890: 90; note 1). English translation Taylor and Richards 1999: 60.

28. In recent years, the Ternate sultanate together with the department of tourism and private entrepreneurs has begun to organise the annual "*Legu Gam*" festival (www.legugamternate.com).

29. Facsimile edition of a series of drawings and descriptions made by C.W.M. van de Velde during his voyage with the "Triton" through the Indonesian Archipelago (1838-1840). Ternate was visited in 1839. The Spanish were present on Ternate from 1606 to 1663. The citation are my translations from Dutch.

Fig. 20 – Moa ma Jum figures. (Photo @ L. Visser, Awer, 1980)

Fig. 21 – Coat (kin). (Photo @ F. Decius, Awer, 2018)

particular way of layering 2-3 sarongs on top of each other, but it seems to make sense that Moa ma Jum's dress finds its historical origin in what reminded Van de Velde of an Iberian costume. However, the links between Ternate court dances and Sahu ritual performances, like the birds of paradise, the layered women's skirts, and the *tuala* scarf are rather reminiscent of Iberian influences. Together with the many handwoven cloths Sahu servants brought back home, these valuables continue to refer to Sahu's past subordination to the Ternate Sultans.

The Sahu borrowing of foreign elements is not remarkable in itself. What is amazing is their purposeful selection and composition of weaving techniques, motifs, and colours from Buton, Selayar, and mainland Sulawesi. While form or outward appearance may have been borrowed, the social value of the textiles worn during the Great Eating and the *legu* ritual tell a local, autonomous story strongly rooted in Sahu social organisation based on genealogical precedence and land ownership, as testified by the Raja Baikole mythology and the *legu* performance of his mythological marriage with Moa ma Jum.

Yet, there is a possibly more striking evidence of historical continuity between Sahu and other Halmahera societies, on the one hand, and to

Sulawesi and Buton, on the other hand. Sahu ceremonial textiles blend the non-geometric motifs from northeast Halmahera and the geometric patterns and techniques from Sulawesi. For example, the embroidery on the imported indigo sarongs from Sulawesi are reminiscent of the non-geometric figures painted on the plaited mats and barkcloths from Tobaru, Galela, and Tobelo (North Halmahera), see figs. 10 and 11. Also, festive female barkcloth jackets from Galela “embellished with mica, embroidery, and coloured arabesks” (Campen 1884: 173), are remarkably similar to the embroidery and mica on the handwoven sarongs of the Sahu women (fig. 6, 7, 14). Similar motifs appear in the locally embroidered motifs on the *tuala suje* scarf (figs. 8, 9, 12), and in the metal tendrils of the crown of Moa ma Jum (fig. 20). In other words, we need to acknowledge that motifs and colours rather than techniques and textile materials are key to our understanding of the uses and values of Sahu ceremonial cloths.

Another example is the very juxtaposition and complementarity of the geometric motifs and the circles, diamonds, and floral motifs found on barkcloth and plaited mats from northeast Halmahera (Galela, Tobelo, Tobaru)³⁰ (figs. 10 and 11), on the one hand, and the similar complementary juxtaposition of motifs and patterns in Sahu in the north-western part of the island. As is visible from the photos, the circles, diamonds, and floral motifs on the metal crowns of the *legu* dancers and Moa ma Jum, the cotton red-and-yellow scarfs, and the monochromatic indigo sarongs are as much part of Sahu ceremonial textiles as the *tumpal* and *modang* motifs found on them. This implies that pan-Halmahera cultural continuity of motif and pattern gain priority over the uses of particular materials and techniques, in the sense that among the cultures of the northern part of Halmahera island we find similar motifs and patterns on barkcloth, handwoven sarongs and embroidered cotton scarfs, whether of local or foreign making. The present article demonstrates that Sahu men and women actively selected and converted foreign shapes and objects to fit their cultural values and social organisation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and continue doing so until today.

While this analysis and regional comparison may testify to tributary relationships of parts of both Sulawesi and Halmahera to the Sultanate of Ternate, Sahu people themselves are not aware of these wider political-historical connections. They stress local change, especially since the 1980s. Our film project in 1982 made them aware for the first time of their own Sahu identity vis à vis an outside world and another time, hence the demand of the adat leader to show a ‘pure’ image of the Great Eating to future generations. During the preparations and the filming of the ceremony itself, Indonesian words were replaced by Sahu words, and the Indonesian cap was replaced by the folded headdress.

30. See also the online NMVW collection numbers RV-621-9; RV-2784-1; RV-2442-355; RV-793-4.

More drastic changes to the use of ceremonial textiles are considered to result from a rapidly developing cash economy and improved mobility since 1985 of the people of Sahu, Halmahera. The younger generation started to opt out of food production and into cash crop cultivation. The need for a regular income to pay for the education of their children affected their valuation of family heirloom, particularly chinaware and ceremonial cloths. Families started selling these valuable objects to outsiders. Selling handwoven textiles to national or foreign traders and tourists is common in many Indonesian societies. In most cases, the local women have their own weaving culture so that, although over time techniques and colours may change, the weaving culture itself does not necessarily dwindle. In the case of Sahu who have no weaving culture, there is no way to reproduce these unique products of history.

Between 1999 and 2002 religious clashes in eastern Indonesia (Duncan 2013) severely disrupted everyday social and economic life, also in Halmahera. In the Sahu villages no ceremonies were held for several years, and ceremonial textiles withered away or were lost. Interestingly, after peace returned, Sahu self-identification with “the seven village clusters” revived the annual ceremonies of the Great Eating since 2005. Those who do not own heirloom cloths any more can now borrow a yellow-and-red cotton skirt and velvet jacket, produced and commanded in Java by the village head. In 2017 I also witnessed that all kinds of indigo and industrial blue sarongs were being worn during the ceremony, and new metal crowns had been made for a new generation of *legu* dancers. The headcloths of the older men were now being starched and folded around a mould, to be permanently stored until next year’s performance.

Conclusion

Halmahera societies are known for mat plaiting and barkcloth decoration, but not for weaving. Sahu is the only place where foreign textiles, colours, and motifs have been consciously selected as ceremonial dress to fit the values of the receiving culture. This is an ongoing historical process of cultural change and continuity. Imported from or through Ternate, Sahu ceremonial textiles and ornaments belong to the heirlooms owned by male inheritance groups (*rera*). But their mothers and wives are the women who show the more interesting indigo-and-red ikat (*‘ba’a boba*) and the yellow-and-red *‘ba’a suje* with its white supplementary weft pattern. Although a good historical description of these two interesting cloths from Sahu is absent, data I gathered in 1985 with Kulincucu women in Ternate support the fact that both could be woven in Ternate until the early 20th century. Comparison of the embroidered monochromatic indigo cloths from Sahu with handwoven indigo cloths stored in Dutch museums suggests that Sahu ceremonial textiles were woven in Sulawesi and were traded to Ternate, where the Sahu acquired them to take home and embellish them by embroidery.

The textiles, colours and motifs described in this article depict an eastern Indonesian society on Halmahera with a social organisation that differentiates not between classes but between genealogically “older” and “younger” male and female participants at the annual Great Eating ceremony. Birds of paradise, kaftans, and Moa ma Jum’s “Spanish” dress are historical evidence of Sahu’s tributary status to the Sultan of Ternate. But, at the same time they represent a pan-Halmahera cultural inheritance through the close resemblance of the motifs embroidered on the red-and-yellow scarfs and indigo cloths worn by the senior representatives of male inheritance groups during the Great Eating ceremony, and similar painted motifs on the male loincloths and barkcloth female jackets from northeast Halmahera (Galela, Tobelu, Tobaru). 19th century Ternate court dances and headhunting images from northeast Halmahera have been reshaped to fit local representations of Sahu social organisation and claims to forested land. Claims that are legitimised by the annual acting out of the Raja Baikole mythology during the annual ceremonies of the Great Eating.

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