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The Sahu people lives in Halmahera, an island in eastern Indonesia which is not commonly considered as important, in terms of culture, politics or economy. Accepting a request from the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NOW-WOTRO) to study Halmahera, Leontine Visser lived two years with the Sahu in the northwestern part of the island from 1979 to early 1981. After her retirement she was able to visit the same villages again several times since 2015. Such an opportunity has given her the rare chance to cover forty years of agricultural and cultural development, resulting in a very rich story about the culture of shifting cultivation – a topic little explored – that she observed and experienced in the everyday life of the Sahu during a period of modernisation in New Order Indonesia, and two decades after *Reformasi*. In more than 300 pages, she describes in detail the practices of Sahu farming along with its social organisation, land relations, rituals and myths.

Visser divides her story into seven chapters according to a logical sequence. For instance, the exposition of land ownership can only be understood after reading about social organisation in the preceding chapter.

The book begins with an introduction about the initial PhD research that represents the main part of the book. Visser evokes her experience as a foreign female researcher staying in a patrilineal society, where the word ‘researcher’ is unknown, and ‘woman’ means farming and taking care of children. In order to gain Sahu people’s trust, she chose to adapt herself to such notions: she got ‘married’ to Sahu people by means of a land relation and by taking care of someone else’s grandchild, who became her adopted son. The chapter describes the work of the ethnographer and shows how a thorough understanding can be gained by letting oneself merge into the everyday life of others. Visser’s empirical strategy demonstrates how knowledge comes from the ability to understand and speak the language, but also to understand the unsaid.

The following chapters describe Sahu settlement history, land use, food and eating as well as social system and land tenure. The third chapter, more than 100 pages or one-third of the book, comprises a fascinating story about dry land rice cultivation as an integral relation between material and spiritual life. It produces not only food but also a balance in the life of Sahu families. The Sahu believe that people do not own the land, but it is the land that owns the people. Humans and earth are bound by the mythology of King Baikole. The myth guides the organisation of relations between people and land, and among people through marriage and descent. Rice farming closely ties all

cultural aspects, from the distinct tasks of men and women and their mutual relation to communal land that specifies the relation between father, children and in-laws. The farming process, from planting preparation until harvest season, takes five phases and nine steps. Rice farming requires rituals based on a metaphor of care between humans as parents and rice as daughter. Every move in the lading rice farming process follows a certain direction, either toward the sea side or the landside, which symbolises wanted or unwanted materials that need to be thrown away or to be kept to cool down the earth and fertilise the soil.

A disconnection from the old past happened when copra economy started to dominate. As witnessed by Visser, 1983-1993 marked a pivotal decade for the lading rice culture. Coconut plantations, already introduced by the Dutch government and now added with cocoa and nutmeg trees, became the economically dominant forms of land use. These tree crops became a major source of income. They buy motorcycles and TVs, and ultimately pay for school fees. Land as bride-wealth has been replaced by money. Selling and leasing become a normal way to access a land, as well as to alienate someone from it. Consequently, from nine types of land-based social relations in 1980, Visser only found four remaining in 2017.

Change and continuity often go hand in hand, as clearly described in chapters about social organisation and land-based social relations. Sahu has a complex patrilineal kinship system. Patrilineal descent groups, called *rera*, consist of members of several descent lines (*fam*). Members of *rera*, who are connected by one ancestor, own a collective right to grow food and eat from the land they cultivate, but they do not own the land individually. Several *rera* create a socio-territorial unit called *garana*, where they share the same rituals and customary law and which is organised according to a genealogical hierarchy based on the myth of King Baikole.

At the time of Ternate's sovereignty, Sahu's *garana* comprised one territorial unit of tribute collection, called *co'ong*. For Sahu people, *co'ong* is seen as their father and mother, or their state of origin. And the materiality of *co'ong* as a social unit manifests itself in the Big Eating feast, which is a communal event to celebrate harvest and fertility. Since Indonesia's decentralisation, *co'ong* does not exist anymore, because the myth of King Baikole has lost its central place in Sahu's life. However, Visser witnessed that today the Big Eating adapts and survives. Indeed, a very long continuation from a pre-colonial time.

Chapter VI describes the Big Eating which takes place in the *sa'sadu*, the ceremonial house of each permanent village that still exists since the 1930s. It is designed to serve as a display and exposure of genealogical hierarchy of the *garana*. Senior and junior positions within genealogical hierarchy are displayed through sitting arrangement, as well as different tasks. Senior men

determine the place of their wives and children. Junior men and women are the ones who serve the seniors during the feasts. This is also a moment for a newly married woman to gain an official social position in her husband's family, along with access to use the land and eat from her husband's *rera*.

Visser often participated in these ceremonies between 1979 and 2017, and she observed that some elements of the ritual performance were unable to endure change. One of the important rituals is the *legu* dance or *ciawa*, a performance about the mythical figure of princess Moa ma Jum. *Ciawa* symbolises social fertility through the figure of Moa ma Jum, who becomes the bride of King Baikole, and thus represents the role of women to provide posterity. Unfortunately, after the social conflict that sat ablaze the Moluccas, including Halmahera, at the turn of this century, many people lost their ceremonial clothes. The dancers are ashamed to perform the *ciawa* ritual without the proper clothes, so it is not performed anymore. But, the Big Eating ceremony itself still exists, and its cultural meaning even increases as a representation of Sahu identity.

It is interesting to observe that, as it appears in many chapters, women and land within this patrilineal society are essential elements in connecting and preserving the system of patrilineal inheritance. Women (wife and daughters) are the key that connects bride-giver and bride-receiver descent groups and they move along the same lines as the land that is being transferred between affinals. Women connect land and inheritance across *rera* and *garana* through marriage and adoption. These two constitute a thread that knitted Sahu social system. Therefore, Visser suggests that Sahu kinship system is created by these two fundamental elements: land and blood. She indicates that many anthropologists often miss the fact that the transfer of land rights constructs kinship relations and vice versa.

Many fascinating observations about change and uniqueness are described in this book, which give rise to all sorts of questions. Why for instance Sahu people are still clinging to the Big Eating feast, while important elements are already missing today, and even the social organisation itself has changed? What makes the Big Eating so important? And why, among the nine types of land relations, four are still in practice today?

Overall, this book does an excellent work to describe in detail Sahu agriculture and culture over the past four decades. It provides the opportunity to dig and understand deeper about change. As the last chapter of the book mentions that Sahu people is now part of the indigenous people movement in Indonesia, it may also be important to understand how the Sahu can navigate the change rather than become "victims of modernity". Certainly, no one will be able to do so without the wealth of knowledge that Leontine Visser has brilliantly described and analyzed throughout this book.

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