Sita T. van Bemmelen, *Christianity, Colonization, and Gender Relations in North Sumatra: A Patrilineal Society in Flux*. Leiden/Boston: Brill [Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 39], 2018, xv + 574 pp. ISBN: 9789004345744, price: EUR 125.00 (hardcover).

Sita van Bemmelen's careful analysis of Toba Batak colonial history, as seen through the lens of marriage arrangements, will be long recognized as a boon to Indonesianists, Batak scholars, gender specialists, and historians of *adat*, evangelism and colonialism. This accessibly written account examines the impact of the Christian Mission and the Dutch colonial power on a North Sumatran ethnic group. Van Bemmelen's review is admirably and minutely detailed, at once summarizing and blazing a trail through the voluminous and complex wealth of publications on Batak history and culture, and the archives of the United Evangelian Mission and the Dutch Ministry of Colonies. It is complemented by the findings from interviews that the author was able to conduct with 33 Toba Batak women born between 1905 and 1933. Van Bemmelen's skill in Dutch, German, Indonesian, and English facilitated the scholarly breadth of this volume. She was also able to consult published Batak texts on social customs and some Batak stories in translation. In addition, she made insightful use of archival photographs as a primary research source, not just to depict historical personages key to her narrative, but to document allegiances, identity, and ideological divergence through apparel dynamics.

In the first part of her volume, the author constructs a kind of baseline of Batak social organization before the society was plunged into the rapid change induced by external religious and political forces. The attention Van Bemmelen pays to the construction of gender and marriage customs is consistent with her recognition that the rules surrounding marriage were to become a primary site of contestation. How spectacularly central the role of marriage has played out in the historical dynamics of Batak society becomes increasingly clear as Van Bemmelen's history unfolds in part two of her volume.

If part one is the explanatory foundation and starting point of the history, the eight succeeding chapters in this weighty tome devoted to the "Negotiations on Marriage Customs (1830–1942)" are both a chronological and thematic play-by-play in the three-way tugs-of-war motivated by faith, identity, administrative ease, politics, and/or control. The research changes, in the latter chapters, from a focus on archival and published material to a focus on fieldwork results. Strongly interwoven throughout the latter is the theme of women's education and the latitude that women have to control their destiny. The study, as indicated by its title, examines gender relations but Van Bemmelen is empathetic

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to the position and circumstances of women in particular, their empowerment and agency, and how shifting rules influenced their position, within the patrilineal (Batak) and patriarchal (colonial and church) systems. Where indigenous *adat* leaders and colonial officials such as J.C. Vergouwen safeguarded the position of men in their seemingly neutral applications of *adat* law, Van Bemmelen's work provides a counterbalance. Moving more deeply into the historical period, by which time the indigenous laws had been codified, she was able to consult legal cases, the statistics and results of which bring into relief women's latitude, agency, and difficulties within the marriage system.

The concluding chapter points out fertile and necessary directions for follow-up research but does not quite bring the reader up to the present day. The author covers the colonial era amply, from before it began to after it ended, and she makes the claim that the Batak have adhered to their kinship system and retained their identity. Given the recent invasion of charismatic Christianity into the Batak area, the erosion of *adat*, and the indomitable advance of agri and other business, the reader longs for an explanatory bridge, and senses, perhaps, that the system of indigenous exchange, being a tool to define and bind social units in constant flux, needs to be brought into sharper relief against the money economy that has now all but supplanted it.

Given the complexity and ambitiousness of Van Bemmelen's study, the reader will be pleased with the excellence of the introductions and conclusions to the volume as a whole and each of its component parts, which deepen insights and offer broader contextualization.

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