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Association Archipel

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Palu'e Ikat: Nomenclature and Iconography

Introduction

This paper presents extensive documentation of the traditional hand-woven tie-dyed textiles (Ind. *tenun ikat*) of the Palu'e, an Austronesian cultural-linguistic group in eastern Indonesia, and investigates the extent to which the nomenclature and local interpretations constitute an iconography of the designs.³ Researchers' assumptions amidst the forgotten meaning and symbolism of traditional textile patterns locally and their connection to mythology became a pressing issue in the course of writing. As noted by Mattiebelle Gittinger (1990:42-43) in her seminal work (1979), textiles have been "part of larger ordering structures that are no longer recognized," and "[t]he message of design is often extremely complex even though local people cannot explain it today." Roy W. Hamilton (1994) includes similar observations in a survey of Flores and Solor textiles, for example from Edward D. Lewis (1994:160): "Both the origins and the meanings of the motifs of Sikkinese cloths were once encoded in a complex oral and mythic tradition which has now, for the most part, been lost." Hamilton (1994:119) reports from Mbai, Flores, that

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3. This research grew out of a language documentation project (2014-2016) conducted under the auspices of the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (RISTEKDIKTI), with the Oral Traditions Association (Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan, Jakarta) acting as an Indonesian partner organization. We thank all our Palu'e interlocutors, and especially weavers Longge (whose work is shown in fig. 8 and 15), Meti, and Sugo.

“[t]oday’s weavers do not have names for the individual motifs or any explanation of their history.” Prior to Hamilton, Warming and Gaworski (1981:85) reported that weavers in eastern Indonesian villages were “not accustomed to talking about the motifs they create and found it odd that we should be interested in what the motifs ‘mean’.” On Borneo, Michael Heppell (2014:91-94) cites Derek Freeman’s observation (1949-1951 field notes) that Iban weavers were ‘quite unable’ to match names of patterns to design elements, though Heppell is convinced that Iban patterns constitute a “language of symbols,” forming part of a now largely forgotten “secret domain.” Vernon Kedit (2009), a descendant of an Iban master weaver, affirms the esoteric symbolism of Iban *pua kumbu* textiles and opines that the meaning of the patterns rests primarily with the maker, to whom Haddon and Start (1936:xiii) had already pointed for ultimate clarification. “Only the weaver herself would know what each motif represents [...]” (Kedit in Hoopen 2018:93).⁴

Indeed, the earliest inquiries that we know of provide no evidence that ikat patterns are understood as symbolical messages in the cultures concerned. Jasper and Pirngadie (1912:280) were informed by Sumbanese weavers (women) that they only design motifs that they consider to be beautiful. Some forty years later, a Sumbanese Marapu priest assured Alfred Bühler that their patterns, which are often figurative, all have meaning, although neither he nor his associates (men) could provide any details (in Adams 1969:151). Were the motifs meaningful (i.e. “full of meaning”) to the priest at another level or a different way to Bühler’s line of inquiry? In an extensive debate, Heppell and Kedit challenged the conclusions of Traude Gavin (2003) on Iban ritual textiles in a study examining naming and scrutinizing the common underlying assumptions of “reading textiles.” The latter is the linguistic model used by anthropologists to analyse non-verbal modes of communication, resulting in art forms being “perceived as containing a ‘visual grammar’ which may be ‘read’,” as Kathy M’Closkey (2004:97) emphasizes in writing about Navajo textiles. Gavin (2003:273) refutes the idea of “a readable code of symbols” in the Iban cloths and concludes that names of design motifs are often based on formal resemblance and serve as a mnemonic device, as “labels” denoting rather than indicating meaning.

Gavin and Victor King (2017) ascribe the desire to read textile designs to the influence of Western written cultures and institutional education, which explains why educated persons from ikat cultures show the same “preoccupation to reveal the symbolic meanings assumed to be embodied and conveyed in artistic productions” of previous “oral cultures” (King 2017:85).

Our search for the “real meaning” of Palu’e textile designs was further distracted by long-established methodologies and interpretations, which

4. We infer that the motifs are likely to represent and mean something different to weavers from another longhouse or village, and that their interpretations would be less authentic according to Kedit.

proliferate through assumptions of “cultural continuums” and circular referencing without field evidence. These universalizing frameworks represent an epistemological problem for traditional textile studies, which depend on input from anthropologists. In addition, collectors, traders, enthusiasts, and local politicians, all of whom are keen to know the meaning of textile patterns, encompass textile studies. Our discussion therefore engages with a central problem in anthropology, namely the meaning and interpretation of artefacts. Susceptible to, but aware of, the problems with the comparative method and the “Malay Archipelago” as a “field of anthropological study,”⁵ we adopt a multivalent and grounded approach to the issue of meaning in ikat patterns.

This first iconography of Palu'e ikat contributes to the growing body of documented naming systems, such as the Iban, Batak, and Savu, which all have specific and shared traits, for future comparison purposes.⁶ Our inquiry begins with the following questions: Are motifs representational or symbolic? What objects are depicted? Are motif names descriptive of the motifs or do they refer to the named objects? Are the patterns repositories of mythology with a code of symbols that can be decoded and interpreted? What is the function of the nomenclature?

Previous Research

Michael Vischer (1994) did the first study of Palu'e textiles, providing an anthropological account of the relationship between Palu'e ideas connected with textiles, including non-Palu'e heirlooms, and the system of Palu'e socio-cosmic thought. The most common women's tubular skirt (*sarong*) is elucidated with the help of local male interlocutors from the “ceremonial domain” (*tana*, meaning customary land with borders) of Ko'a,⁷ revealing a coherent relationship between design, social structure, and cosmology. According to their narratives (Vischer 1994:265), “women first decorated their textiles with exclusively geometrically stylized representations of objects from their daily lives.” They “depicted” tubers, maize, the pigsty, chicken's feet, and the fine-toothed comb. Later, the weavers added motifs from the male realm, such as a “trace of the civet cat,” which “consists of groupings of dots portraying the footprints a civet cat leaves on a humid surface” (Vischer 1994:266).

5. Josselin de Jong outlined a comparative research programme for the future anthropological study of Indonesian societies (1935).

6. For terminology, see *Oxford English Dictionary* (2019). See Sandra Niessen (2009) and Geneviève Duggan (2001) on Batak and Savu ikat, respectively. Drawing on colonial archives, Duggan and Hägerdal (2018) confirm the link between the Savunese matrilineal patterns and oral history.

7. Hereafter, Palu'e place names will be used to refer to the traditional domains, also described as “domains,” which are defined territories with a ceremonial centre. Each domain consists of several hamlets or villages.

Fig. 1 – Eastern Indonesia, Nusa Tenggara Timur Province.

Fig. 2 – Map of Palu'e. The names of ceremonial domains are in bold and placed by their main settlements. Cawalo and Ko'a stretch from the northwest coast to the south coast. Images are the authors' own, unless indicated otherwise.

Palu'e

Palu'e (*Lu'a*) is a small (49 km²) volcanic island near the coast of north-central Flores. The term Palu'e also refers to the cultural-linguistic group *ata Lu'a* that inhabits the island and the common language of *Sara Lu'a*.

The <10000 inhabitants are traditionally horticulturalists, growing tubers, beans, and maize. Palu'e men fish and engage in seasonal work outside the island or migrate to Malaysia for work. The women work more on the plantations than the men, look after the children, cook, and weave cloths. Because of the frequent eruptions of the island's active volcano, a few thousand Palu'e people now live in settlements along the Flores north coast. Palu'e Island is relatively poor and isolated, not visited by tourists.

Adha (Ind. *adat*), Palu'e ancestral custom, prevailed beyond the first decades of the twentieth century when the Dutch pacified the island and brought it under administrative control and a Catholic mission was established by Societas Verbi Divini (SVD).⁸ With the gradual conversion to Catholicism and the transition to modernity, ceremonies devoted to the ancestors and the Supreme Being, *Hera Wula Watu Tana*, or "Sun Moon Stone Soil," lost its prestige and sacredness.⁹ The traditional Palu'e worldview emphasizes fertility, ancestors and descendants, and is characterised by an asymmetric dualism, particularly between male and female forces, as illustrated by the common, shifting categories of heat (male) and cool (female).¹⁰ The Supreme Being is the realm of the *lakimosa*, the spiritual leaders of a ceremonial domain, and is rarely invoked. The *lakimosa* generally maintain a close connection with *Hera Wula* (short, the first word pair invokes the second), representing heavenly and earthly powers that give rise to life. The name with two binary word pairs exemplifies asymmetric dualism. *Hera Wula* denotes up/above and is masculine, while *Watu Tana* is feminine and denotes down/below. Sun is hot (masculine) and Moon is cool (feminine), while Stone is masculine and Soil feminine. *Hera Wula*, the animated universe, may appear in dreams or visions in different animal forms, such as a water buffalo or a pig.

Hina hama pu mori, the ancestors, are revered and close to people's hearts, and their sanctions are feared. Custom is still practised alongside Catholicism, particularly the water buffalo ceremonies and the dowry system that ties houses, families and alliances together in reciprocal exchanges of masculine and feminine goods, in which *dhama lambu* ("sarongs and clothes," cloths of mostly Flores designs and other clothing) are the main symbolic good given by wife-givers to wife-takers.¹¹ Cloths are integrated into the sacred realm

8. A note on spelling: *bh* and *dh* stand for the implosives /b and d/. *W* is read [v].

9. "Supreme being" is the term used by Vischer.

10. See James Fox (1989:44-48) for comparisons with other eastern Indonesian peoples.

11. Susan McKinnon (1989) analyses the significance of this engendered exchange

(see Vischer 1994). Heirloom textiles, primarily *patola*, are sacred and serve important ceremonial functions. Palu'e cloths, conceptually female and cool, are thought to enhance healing, particularly the treatment of rashes, and the deceased are traditionally given a cloth as a mortuary gift of exchange to be worn in the realm of the ancestors.

Of Palu'e's fourteen traditional domains, seven larger and more interior domains, the "domains of buffalo blood," defined from the largest sacrificial animal, adhere to an agricultural cycle beginning with the ritual of *Pua karapau*, when young water buffaloes are brought to the island. After the ritual begins a five-year period allowing for building, clearing of land, bartering and trade. The cycle ends with *Pati karapau*, when the full-grown buffalo(es) is (are) sacrificed as atonement and for fertility at the ceremonial centre. Once the ceremonies are over, a period of five years of restrictions ensues. During the buffalo ceremonies, there must be several nights of *togo*, dance-chanting with rhymed riddles, to which other domains are invited. The buffalo rituals require the wearing of Palu'e cloths, which are primarily made in the domains of buffalo blood. "Domains of pig blood" participate in the rituals of allied buffalo domains, in particular Awa and Téó.¹² Overall, there is less weaving in these domains, with either little or no requirement to wear Palu'e cloths ceremonially.

Methodology

Theoretical considerations

The language documentation preceding this research covered several genres of oral traditions, using the ethnographic method (participatory observation, interviewing, elicitation) and recording interlocutors based on the methods of field linguistics.¹³ More tailored data related to weaving with interlocutors from the different weaving domains were collected in a similar way on subsequent short visits. The analysis consists of two parts: (1) The meaning of the nomenclature, whether lexical or metaphorical, is determined based on a semantic analysis of linguistic field data, the spoken vernacular, and translated-interpreted into written English glosses. It is examined, in close analysis of name and form, to what extent the cloth nomenclature conveys the meaning of designs (whole) and motifs (singular parts), and whether the nomenclature is embedded in mythology and the motifs are symbolical. (2) Mikhail Bakhtin's (1990) thoughts on meaning in folk art match our multivalent

among the Tanimbar. She took this direction of research after finding that the textiles did not have any inherently meaningful patterns.

12. Téó has a history of carrying out buffalo ceremonies but has renounced its ceremonial ability (Vischer 2006:186).

13. The work is described in SD1-000, Danerek (2017), and in the introduction to Danerek (2019).

approach, and we propose to put his main idea to the test: artefacts and their imagery retain and accumulate new meaning over the course of history, and each interpretation has validity and may even return at some point to an original meaning. We inquired of Palu'e weavers, who are all women, and male interlocutors about how they understand Palu'e cloth designs, motifs, and nomenclature, including ritual usages, while considering both original and subsequent meanings assigned by the creators and their descendants.

The nomenclature was created in an oral culture. Except for the oldest among them, weavers today are generally literate, with around six years of elementary education, but Palu'e culture is still clearly more oral than written or media-visual (electronic). Bearing this divide in mind, we find Gavin's terminology to be useful, except that, as Walter J. Ong (2002:32, 73-75) explains, the term "label" is not a suitable description for the vernacular. In written cultures, words are primarily imagined as visible signs and "tend rather to be assimilated to things" ("motif name"-object), whereas oral cultures equate the word with a "necessarily powered" speech event (Ong 2002:32). To illustrate the problems with naming and appearance, we begin by examining a few motifs on the same and most common women's *sarong* from two major weaving domains with different nomenclatures and motifs. The motif names are drawn from interlocutors in the Ko'a and Kéli domains respectively and then crosschecked. We first show that matching a motif with its name is almost impossible, for both ikat experts and the average Palu'e person, including many weavers.

Fig. 3 – Motifs on *Wua wela*, Ko'a (*sarong* Fig. 11). Left to right: *keke*, or "comb" (traditional nit comb), *wé'u sangane/ri'ine*, or "vine tuber with branches/twigs," *manu wa'ine*, or "chicken feet."

Fig. 4 – Motifs on *Wua wela*, Kéli. Left to right: *laku la'ene*, or "traces of civet cat," *mata bo'one*, or "short eyes," *mata ké'o*, or "maize eyes." See the *Wua wela* worn in Fig. 18.

Ikat motifs are, more often than not, symmetrically composed and identical left/right and up/down. The chicken feet motif bears a minimal formal resemblance to chicken feet, which have three forward pointing toes. Of the above motifs, only the 'comb' is figurative; locals perceive a comb, although the real object usually has fewer teeth on one side only. The tuber

motif is more complex. It is not a stylized geometrical representation, even if the species have branches/twigs, assuming resemblance is a requirement for the definition. Making a trailing plant recognizable in warp ikat is almost impossible, and it would be naive to assume that Western style mimesis was a primary guideline for Palu'e creators. Moreover, as Soetsu Yanagi (1989:118) reminds us, apart from being an artistic creation that does not reproduce nature: "Real pattern is the consequence of a series of technical processes." If it is impossible to determine what is represented from the formal properties, does the naming then determine what is represented?

The three motifs in fig. 4, "traces of civet cat," "short eyes" and "maize eyes," and "chicken feet" in Fig. 3, are all made up of rhombuses. A rhombus in a rhombus bears a formal resemblance to an eye with the iris, and such motifs are named "eye" in textile traditions around the world. When rhombuses stand as singular motifs, they are called *koja walane*, or "kenari nut," in Cawalo, Ko'a, and further northwest, and *kobho*, or "(pig)sty," in and near Kéli and Ndéo.

Gavin (2003:206) and Ong (2002:50) explain how oral cultures tend to assign names to geometric figures based on resemblance with objects from everyday life, whereas scientific cultures have specific categorical names.¹⁴ The singular rhombus, a basic form, bears a formal resemblance to the oval *kenari* nut, which is more difficult to argue in the case of the pigsty. "Traces of civet cat" is certainly more a stylized representation than a realistic depiction since it consists only of rhombuses.¹⁵ "Maize eyes," a diamond grid, has seven eyes and is flanked by three triangles on each side, which contributes neither to the name nor to the impression of maize.¹⁶

Apart from having eyes, "maize eyes" has a formal resemblance to maize; the rhombuses have no space between them, like the kernels of corn on a cob. Doubled motifs are more problematic since it can be difficult to discern the basic unit after which it is named. "Short eyes" is in fact two "short eye" motifs, a rhomb-in-rhomb pattern with lines protruding from each of the four diagonal lines. The shared axes form two additional rhombuses, making "short eyes" formally similar to "maize eyes." Below are images of the ornamental band *dubhi napene*, which is tied to ceremonial necklaces (*dubhi*), and the motif *dubhi napene*. The motif is clearly figurative, pointing to the object with the same name, a reversal of Ernst Gombrich's (1984:93) description of artistic creation, according to which 'making comes before matching'.

14. Modern Indonesian has retained a descriptive name for the rhombus, *belah ketupat*, the name for the small lozenge-shaped rice container of plaited bamboo leaves.

15. The Nitung versions of "traces of civet cat" consist of fewer rhombuses, flanked above and below by several triangles, which makes the motif less figurative. The number of triangles is part of the motif name.

16. Another motif with four rhombuses in a row is flanked in the same way but only named after the triangles (fig. 15).

Fig. 5-6 – *Dubhi napene* and the motif on *sarong Cabu tedhéne*. Kéli.

The above exercise provides four working categories for motifs and names (names by themselves are not referential): 1. figurative: simplified realistic representation, referential (i.e. referring to an object) 2. figurative: stylized representation, referential; 3. formal resemblance, non-referential (sharing formal properties with an object with the same name); 4. no formal resemblance, non-referential (others). These categories are unstable and cannot be clearly demarcated, but the object of a stylized representation should be recognizable since, following Yanagi (1989:113), “[a] pattern is both true to nature and artificial.” To the second category belongs what Yanagi (1989:114) described as “a picture of the essence of an object,” as exemplified by the bamboo grass pattern.

Fig. 7 – Bamboo-grass pattern (Yanagi 1989:114).

We begin with the assumption that the most common categories are (2) and (3). For example, “traces of civet cat” is the only motif depicting animal footprints (based on name alone). Symmetrical and stripped of non-essentials, the association with footprints, among other things, is certainly possible, although there is nothing in the image that points to any particular animal. However, because the civet cat is the only hunted mammal on Palu’e, it makes sense to assume that the “animal footprints” refer to that animal. Apart from that, “civet cat,” like “maize,” can be substituted by another species or thing. Most motifs

are not representational to the same degree as these two, which, together with the specific style and technique, suggests that “making comes before matching” (i.e. not depicting) more often than the reverse (i.e. depicting).

Fieldwork

In the language documentation, Stefan and his local assistant and partner Ratu (b. 1984, BA computers) collected lexemes from the semantic domain of weaving and came across names of designs that neither they nor most weavers had ever heard of. They talked to more weavers and focused on interviewing senior weavers aged above 65 years (referred to hereafter as “grandmothers”). This prompted a search for old cloths resulting in the discovery of one *Bhejo* and one *Loka*, both over a century old, and no longer made or worn in Kéli and Ndéo, where the search was carried out. We have not come across any other Palu’e cloths as old as these. Stefan and Ratu had the cloths remade, and both thought that pursuing this work would be more rewarding than language documentation, while also offering immediate benefits to the community. The following year (late 2016), during Magnus’ first visit to Flores and Palu’e, the three of us decided to collaborate on Palu’e ikat. Sadly, Ratu, who was often in poor health at the time, passed away not long after. Nevertheless, we continued the work the following year, assisted by local friends and weavers, including from Ratu’s family, using the same collaborative method of inquiring into collective memory. Stefan was based in Kéli during his research. Ratu, who also lived in Maumere, was from the neighbouring Ndéo. We had easier access to interlocutors there, particularly the *lakimosa*, although this was more important for other subjects, and Stefan already knew skilled weavers and interlocutors in the other domains of buffalo blood.

Importance was placed on tangible work, including the traditional natural dye methods, which had been extinct for decades. A couple of other lost designs were discovered and remade from memory with the help of a few grandmothers and our weaver and main interlocutor, Longge (60), who also carried out inquiries and crosschecking. The inventory of customary textile types, according to present memory, has now been identified, with samples made in Palu’e natural dye methods. However, we cannot rule out that other *adat* designs existed before the 1900s.¹⁷

Documenting motifs and their names can be difficult and tedious work, requiring patience, time, and good interlocutors. Today’s Palu’e weavers make more Flores cloths than they do Palu’e cloths. We estimate that most cannot tie

17. Peter ten Hoopen (2018:259) shows a late 1800s cloth, provisionally identified as originating from Palu’e. Though unknown on Palu’e, the ikat technique and motif shapes suggest Palu’e makers. Hoopen’s work is also available online (Pusaka Collection), where numbered images can be accessed, including of the mentioned cloth (PC 209).

Palu'e patterns and that the majority of those who can are unable to identify most of the motifs on their cloths by name. The more curvilinear and figurative motifs on Flores cloths are simply *bunga* (Ind.) "flowers." Motif names are only mentioned when mother and daughter, or kin and neighbours, work together, or if a senior weaver tells them how and which motifs should be included.

Using *Sara Lu'a*, we consulted individuals who are considered to be knowledgeable in their own communities, among them weavers who remember the motif repertoire and nomenclature of their respective domains. Typically, if someone was unsure, they would refer us to another, more knowledgeable interlocutor, although, more often than not, we, or a Palu'e friend or assistant, already knew who to talk to. Occasional errors were corrected by crosschecking with more confident interlocutors, who were, without exception, senior members of the community (>55 years). At times, the interviewing process became irritating, not least to the weaver who was being questioned again about the same matter. Meti, our most senior (>75) weaving interlocutor, from Kéli, emphasized both the weaver's and the oral culture's separation of motif name and object, which were still too closely assimilated in our minds.

Stefan: What is *mbési*? -*Mbési* is its name!! Iiii [...] It's originally like that. Original!'¹⁸ Later, having presumably grown wiser, we went straight to the point: 'Are the motifs, like chicken feet, what the names say they are?' This elicited a similar, almost typical response from grandmother Huke: "It's just the name. My mother taught me like that, from generation to generation. Nobody knows." Stefan: "Is the 'goat eyes' motif goat eyes?" Huke: "Hahaha..."¹⁹

Over time, it became possible to predict some names, or parts of them, based on a logic of resemblance and the descriptive words in use for composite motifs, and also to discern the basic motif that names a double or another version, or even to suggest a more "correct" name than the one provided. Naming is not arbitrary, although some weavers mix names up because some motifs, especially doubles, are very similar to others. What the names of *sarong* types and motifs mean as lexemes, including combined words, in *Sara Lu'a* is almost always clear, despite the many homonyms. However, it took us three years to understand *kela(ne)*, the name of the common triangle motif. The name of the most common *sarong*, *Wua wela*, also had us puzzled for a long time, until Malu, a knowledgeable grandfather from Cawalo and our most senior male interlocutor (75), revealed a linguistically sensible explanation, which met with immediate agreement from weavers. Interpretations of textile designs are typically obtained from male interlocutors, although no men, to

18. "Asli" (Ind.). Weaving, videoclip, SD1-301. All quotes from *Sara Lu'a*, Indonesian and Dutch are the authors' translations.

19. Nangahure, Flores, 13 Oct 2018. Laughter is, of course, inherently ambivalent. We interpret it as a repeat of the previous answer.

our knowledge, can identify the repertoire of motifs from their own domain. The menfolk, including the few *lakimosa* we spoke to, can at best name the three most common *sarong* types and cite some motif names, although they are only able to identify a small number of these, or even none. This is consistent with Vischer's (1994) interlocutors, who mentioned a few names of plants and animals in literal terms. Interpretations vary but invariably fall within the traditional worldview, and none are as coherent as Vischer's, which, we infer, were provided by a limited number of local male experts in close proximity to the Ko'a ritual centre. Ratu struggled to interpret *Wua wela*, including its elusive name, but did not get much further than seeing footprints of a civet cat while "cleaving a hill" (*kela wolo* ascending straight upwards).

Researchers contribute to the production of the meanings associated with artefacts together with the local communities and, possibly, other actors. Being able to name a domain's cloths and motifs or participating in an informed discussion about them with senior weavers always met with approval. We also provided them with information, with the results of the documentation being fed back to members of the community in further inquiries. We have no reason to believe that we were misled in our inquiries, as "naive foreign anthropologists," by interlocutors who were having fun while concealing the deeper layer of secret meanings.²⁰ Results were also shared with weavers who had a more immediate need for them, particularly a Palu'e refugee weaving collective on Flores, west of Maumere, who had relocated there after the volcanic eruptions on Palu'e in 2012-2013. They lack arable land and the women therefore work primarily with weaving, which is not something most women on the island tend to do. The members are inspired by the established weaving collectives in Sikka regency and are in the process of reclaiming their heritage. We shared with them several *adat* designs of which they were unaware, including the motif names.

The collective provided ethnographic data, which they themselves have reason to gather. Sugo (41) and her friends revealed how they had struggled with the meaning of their patterns from the first time a potential buyer had inquired about it. Sugo, amid much smiling and laughter, told us how she had spontaneously improvised an answer to increase her chances of selling her cloth, although the potential customer was not won over by her premature explanation.²¹ A year or two later, the weavers began a more serious effort to explain the patterns, discussing them collectively and asking their seniors for their views, just as we were doing. They came up with a few ideas but admitted that they could not make up any sensible story from the designs, even after learning the motif names.

20. According to her critics, Gavin was deceived by her Iban interlocutors. See Hoopen (2018:93) for a summary of this ethnographic issue, or the Iban experts mentioned in the introduction.

21. Personal communication during several field visits (2017-2019).

We identify four “design clusters,” represented by four major weaving domains each with their own motif inventories for the same types of cloths: Ko’a, Cawalo, Nitung, and Kéli. The Ndéo style is shared with Kéli. The two domains are close allies and support each other’s buffalo ceremonies. Awa and Cu’a tend to follow the style of their larger neighbour, Nitung. Nitung and Cu’a support or participate in each other’s buffalo ceremonies, while Awa, which also supports Ko’a, only participates. The people of Woja, an area that is not a single ceremonial domain, mostly descend from Kéli, support the Kéli buffalo ceremonies, and make cloths that are very similar to the Kéli. The people of the fishing hamlet Hona in the same area speak like the Cawalo, and their cloths are similar to the Cawalo. Tomu, though ceremonially allied with Cawalo and Ko’a, tend to follow the style of Kéli and Ndéo. Tomu people often borrow cloths for ceremonial use, and they need help from other domains to perform their ceremonies. Téó, like Awa, are only participants in the buffalo ceremonies, and tend to follow the style of the neighbouring allies Kéli and Ndéo.

Regaining ‘lost’ meaning and heritage

New meanings and interpretations of traditional designs and motifs can be created, and this is obviously going on today. Maxwell (2003:127), writing about anthropomorphic forms in Southeast Asia, notes that, in some cases, the style of motifs “is so schematic that their real meaning is not immediately apparent and may not even be understood by present day weavers.” But if the “real” meaning is the meaning that the anonymous creators assigned to their patterns hundreds of years ago, there seems little prospect of accessing that meaning. Colours are a case in point. All Palu’e cloths use the same basic, archaic colour trinity common throughout insular Southeast Asia: a black (or dark blue indigo) background,²² with red bands and white (undyed cotton) motifs, which may be swapped for yellow. The black is associated with fertile soil and the red with blood, bravery, and the setting sun. Today, the red together with the white, associated with purity, can be associated with a religious God-fearing society, highlighting a process of reinterpretation and acculturation since the Palu’e were converted to Catholicism during the 1900s: “The red bands symbolize the character of the Palu’e who are courageous and defend the truth as a people who are faithful to the almighty God.”²³

Vischer’s Ko’a interlocutors (1994:263-264) associate the black with the deep black sea and ancestral voyages and the red with the setting sun, from where the ancestors voyaged, and, on another level, with the blood of Ko’a’s two main origin groups. This makes equal sense, although Ratu expressed

22. Black is traditionally achieved by over dyeing the dark indigo blue yarn with bark and leaves from two tannin-rich plants.

23. Sugo with father, a ritual officiate in Woja, 26 Sept. and 21 Dec. 2018.

scepticism, not least about the association of the fine yellow threads on *Wua wela* with placenta and, in particular, the white with semen, which together are said to relate to conception.

Descendants ascribe new meaning to designs in a long process of forgetting, remembering and reinterpretation, because that is the nature of oral traditions, which contrasts with the tendency of the reference work to arrest this evolving process. “While motifs such as reptiles, birds, buffaloes, ships [...] depicted in spiral, hooked and rhomb configurations, have been identified among the earliest [...] Southeast Asian art, new meanings have been added to these ancient forms, and objects and designs have been transformed and reinterpreted to suit local conceptions [...]” (Maxwell 2003:407). Like a “floating signifier” (Lévi-Strauss 1987:62-64) ikat patterns leave unlimited scope for the imagination, but the laws of local interpreters’ symbolic thinking distribute the vast surplus of signification along predictable routes, which anthropologists tend to follow. Thinking along Bakhtinian lines (1990), the interpretations mentioned are all valid, and become increasingly so as more sincerity and effort is invested.

Nomenclatures and iconographies

Terminology and technique

Palu’e ikat textiles are *sarongs* (*dhama*) and shoulder cloths (*sépa*). Since the latter follow the style of the main *sarongs*, the discussion focuses on the latter. *Dhama Lu’a* refers to all Palu’e *sarongs*, whereas *nae* is specific to Palu’e men’s *sarongs*. Different from the Sikka and Ende-Lio traditions, the designs (*ringgi*) and patterns are all egalitarian, providing no indication of the wearer’s status or descent (other than their domain). Neither is there any hierarchy between the different cloths, although there are reasons why the *Wua wela* design is the most popular and why *Dhama hura*, which is only decorated with a pattern of linear dots, has disappeared. Cloths are ranked primarily by execution, reflecting the ‘technology of enchantment’ (Gell 1992). All can be worn both during major ceremonies and in everyday life. Only minor variations are allowed in the making of Palu’e cloths, and there are small differences between domains, which can serve to identify the wearer. The cloths are often made after a model, if not directly from memory. Each design became accepted and copied in the community longer ago than any living person can remember. Being impossible, weavers do not create new patterns for *adat sarongs*, but even the smallest variations can lead to incremental change.

After the motifs (*léko*) have been tied (*nuju*) to bundles of cotton yarn with the characteristic stipple technique, dyed (*langi*), and reassembled on the loom, the cloths are woven (*noru*) with the continuous, circular warp technique, using the ancient back-strap loom common to eastern Indonesia. The ready woven circular warp is cut from the weft side into two pieces,

which are sewn together in both warp and weft directions to form a tubular cloth and are identical up/down and inside/out. Because two or more motifs are tie-dyed together, the motif bands are identical and symmetrical on the *sarong*, whether as mirror images or not. Asymmetry requires more ikat work and is extremely rare these days.

Because the tying of threads in warp ikat is mainly done rectilinearly and diagonally, ikat patterns tend to be geometric. "Ikat weavers assemble complex geometric motifs by repeating simple shapes ("primitives") and applying transformations to them [...]," notes Christopher Buckley (2012, appendix Classification [...]) in a phylogenetic study that points to a shared origin of the Southeast Asian warp ikat traditions, a "proto-Austronesian warp ikat." In tying $\times$ $\diamond$ are equivalent; two chevrons made from the same primitive, a diagonal line. Working from "basic building blocks," as Alfred Gell (1998:164) noted, is "not only ancient, but also practical," and often how visual artists actually do approach their tasks. Palu'e is unique in the categorical application of ikat dots (*weja* "piece") over a large part of the cloth surface (stippling) and exclusively geometric patterns. A design has thousands of dots with many different motifs, which must be correctly aligned prior to dyeing and before the weft is inserted. For this reason, Palu'e cloths are considered more difficult than the Flores cloths that Palu'e weavers often make. Haddon and Start (1936:xiii), with contemporaries (see Gavin 2003:1-3), thought that motifs could begin as realistic depictions and change or degenerate through time, which would explain the discrepancy between Iban motif names and appearances. The consistent Palu'e technique, a sign of involution, rules out that possibility.

Widths of bands and motifs are measured in *lati*, the unit for ikat dots counted diagonally. The motifs of a band can be mentioned with *lati*, such as *léko lati limane* ("five unit motifs"). As a rule, the number is uneven. Bands are called *hopa*, *enda* or *dui*. The largest ikat bands are called *hina*, or "mother," sometimes referred to as *nua*, or "houses." Palu'e women's cloths have one or two "mother bands" along the warp. Cloths from the Ko'a domain (fig. 11) have a *hina ca*, or "large mother," which is wider than *hina lo'o*, or "small mother." The different designs are largely decorated with the same motifs, drawn from the inventory of a domain. The smaller bands, down to "three *lati*," are called *hanane*, or "children." The motifs on the child bands tend to follow the motifs of the larger bands, as halves or thirds, which obscures the source, while retaining their names. Vischer's (1994:264) interlocutors associate the three types of bands on their *Wua wela* with the stem family (*hina ca* interpreted as conceptually male) and marriage alliances between houses, and the mother bands with the domain's two ritual centres. Similar terminology and associations to the stem family are common among the Sikka.

Our findings differ little from Vischer (1994), who observed that Ko'a strictly followed older models.²⁴ There are no strict rules for the sequence of motifs, or even which motifs to include or repeat, although the rule is to begin with a singular version of "chicken feet" (see figs. 13, 15). It is unusual that the whole inventory of motifs is included. We have examples of cloths with fewer, larger motifs on a wider mother band, up to double the size and about half the number of motifs, six instead of 10-12. This is a matter of personal preference and is accepted practice in several domains.

All traditional Palu'e *sarong* designs have names that function as proper names, like the names of bird species. The cloths are decorated with roughly 50 different motifs, up to 15 per domain, including variants, many of which are domain-specific. The names of the Palu'e ikat *sarongs* are, in order of observed prevalence: *Nae romo*, or "Joined warp"/"Wide carving," or, simply, "Sarong ikat";²⁵ *Wua wela*, or "Dehiscing areca" (stage in the flowering of the palm); *Widhi mata*, or "Goat eye"; *Bhejo* "(to) Tie"; *Loka*, or "Family, Cluster"/"(to) Carve"; *Sa loi*, or "One tuber";²⁶ *Cabu songgo*, or "lively and exalted"; *Cabu tedhéne*, or "chant-dancing next to one another"; *Sika dobho*, or "Sikka machete";²⁷ *Dhama hura*, or "Rain *sarong*."

The glosses for *cabu*, "to dance and sing in trance," and "to compete, to fight (as cocks)," both have ceremonial relevance (*togo*), and *tedhéne*, meaning "next to, in row," describes how participants are positioned during dancing. *Songgo*, or "to praise or give offerings," can, with *cabu*, be interpreted as "lively and exalted," which fits the ceremonial context. *Dhama hura* was extinct and specific to Ndéo and Kéli. *Cabu songgo* is identified with Nitung but is also made in the neighbouring Cu'a and Awa.

Sara Lu'a has many homophones. Concerning the name *Wua wela*, or "Dehiscing areca," the other glosses for *wela* are the nouns "lower part of the belly" and "smoked pig fat," which does not fit at all. Vischer (1994:259) glosses *Wua wela* as "the candlenut [cloth]" and *wua wela* as "candlenut." *Wua* is the name for the areca tree and its ceremonially important fruits,²⁸ while the name for the candlenut tree, and its fruits, is *welu*.

24. Longge (SD1-130) thought that weavers were more creative in the past, "using their brains" and not just copying.

25. The men have only one ikat *sarong*, which explains its prevalence.

26. *Sa* is used in counting; *ha* is the amount "one." *Loi* is a tuber whose inedible roots are used in the dye process to protect the thread. The Kéli/Ndéo *Sa loi* is extinct and significantly different from the Ko'a and Cawalo *Sa loi*, which are still made.

27. *Cabu tedhéne* and *Sika dobho* are similar to *Widhi mata*. Meti, who knows the two designs by heart and also tied them for us, confirmed their status as *pusaka* (Ind., "heritage").

28. *Wua* is a generic term for fruits in the form *x wuane* "fruits of x."

The men's sarong

Nae romo has a wider warp and shorter weft than the women's *sarongs* and is sewn together directly along the weft without first cutting the warp into two identical pieces, as is the case with the women's cloths. Two identical warps or *sarongs* are often sewn together to form one large *Nae romo*.

Fig. 8 – *Nae romo*, Kéli. Short *sarong* (one piece).

The *Nae romo* design is almost the same in every domain. *Nae romo* has only two style clusters, one represented by Kéli and Ndéo, the other represented by the domains of the north (Cawalo, Ko'a, Nitung, Cu'a). The domains that are not mentioned follow one or the other of the two clusters. We discuss the cloths and the motifs from Kéli and Ko'a interlocutors for that reason. Both the naming systems and the design formats are the same. This cloth only has small basic shapes as motifs. Simple shapes are more open to signification, although there are institutionalized interpretations, which we question. The *Nae romo* design is made up of two alternating rows of motifs against a black background. The main motifs, i.e. crosses and rhombuses, consist of diagonal lines of three or five ikat dots.

29. The time glass marker was referred to as *keke*, or “comb,” on the *Nae romo*, although on Ko'a women's *sarongs* (Figs. 3, 11), *keke* has the same classic shape of a comb, as in the other domains.

Fig. 9 – *Nae romo* motifs. Ko’a. Motifs: (right to left until the “time glass,”²⁹ the vernacular is not repeated hereafter): 1. *koja walane*, or “kenari nut”; 2. *laku la’ene*, or “trace of civet cat”; 3. “kenari nut”; 4. *mata dhiti*, or “flat eyes”; 5. *manu wa’ine*, or “chicken feet”; 6. “trace of civet cat”; 7. “chicken feet”; 8. “kenari nuts”; 9. “flat eyes.”

The five different motifs on each of the two alternating rows, one split by the red line, are almost identical and have the same names. Similar motifs with the same names are found on women’s *sarongs*. Like the motifs on child bands, they can be seen as smaller versions of the mother band motifs. “Flat eyes,” which has no eyes, is neither a name for anything other than the motif nor does it resemble any known object, including the version on the mother bands of women’s *sarongs*. The only link we can point to between the form and its name is the horizontal lines (eyes shut). “Kenari nuts” appears in the same shape on women’s cloths, where the singular *kenari* nut is more simplified. “Chicken feet” is just a cross of dots. “Trace of civet cat” appears here in two similar forms, one as a minimal single lozenge (seven dots) and the other with three vertical lines of dots. The naming was crosschecked with two senior Ko’a weavers,³⁰ after a weaver in her 30s, who did not want to be quoted, mentioned the same names, except “traces of civet cat” for what should be “kenari nuts,” and “chicken feet with combs” instead of “flat eyes.” The latter makes particular sense since the motif actually consists of those two shapes as a conjoined motif. The same interlocutor also renamed a large motif on the women’s *sarong* based on its formal characteristics, showing that she was both unaware of its real name and evidently happy with the new name – a good example of inconsistencies, creativity, or errors on the part of interlocutors.

Fig. 10 – *Nae romo* motifs. Kéli (*sarong* fig. 8). Motifs (unordered): *kekene*, or “combs” (far left, small row), *kobhone*, or “(pig)sty” $\diamond$, “chicken feet” $\times$, *mata lawane*, or “long eye” $>\diamond<$, *widhi matane*, or “goat eyes” $\diamond\circ\circ\circ$.³¹

Like the Ko’a version, the two rows of motifs are almost identical, and the motifs with the same names also appear on Kéli women’s cloths but more elaborate on the mother bands. “Long eye,” formed by allowing two crosses

30. Pali and Toji, Ko’a, 30 April 2019.

("chicken feet") to align, is, like the "comb," not obligatory on Kéli *Nae romo*. "Goat eyes" is formed by two adjoined rhombuses ("pigsty"), just like "kenari nuts" on the Ko'a version, and the Kéli *Nae romo*, or "combs," motif and the "flat eye" of Ko'a on the smaller row are identical (both 12 dots). Some of the shared motifs have different names in the different domains or style clusters.³¹

The rhombus is the most common shape in Palu'e warp ikat because of the geometric stippling technique, in which the rhombus is also used to assemble more complex motifs. Rhombuses and triangles, including *tumpal*, are often understood in the literature as signs of abundance and fertility.³² Maxwell (2003:139) mentions "ancient rhomb and triangular shapes" in certain Batak textiles as examples of how "male and female elements [...] are sometimes reduced to phallic and vulval symbols," and the simple cross as a way of representing the human form. Applying this interpretation to *Nae romo*, the *kenari* nut or (pig)sty rhombuses, and the technically identical 'chicken feet' crosses with which they are paired, could both represent human forms. Are the rhombuses symbolic of vulvas and the crosses of phalluses?

Hoopen (2018:67, 277), with reference to Willemijn de Jong (in Hamilton 1994:217. Fig. 10-8), views the Lio diamond pattern *mata bili* as a symbol, "which probably represents the vulva, a fertility symbol," and relates it to a similar *mata kari*, or "buffalo eye" from Sumba. Jong (1994:217. figs. 10-8) cites Ndate ("pers. comm."), a local Catholic priest, who "interprets it as the female vulva, symbolizing fertility," and adds that "Nggela weavers do not know its symbolic meaning." Following this, male line of thought, which Boudot and Buckley (2015:7) identify as "psychoanalytical approaches to the art of 'primitive cultures'," the Palu'e "maize eyes" motif, even the majority of motifs, may be assumed to represent vulvas, although local weavers are unaware of it. This is how lozenge and triangular shapes in Palaeolithic cave engravings have for long and predominantly been categorized by scholars as vulva, without considering how this sexual interpretation first appeared and gained such universal appeal.³³

Another widespread idea is that the rhombus is protective. In a study of Flores ikat, P. Sareng Orinbao (1992:47), a Catholic priest from Flores, refers to the "expert opinion" of Alkema and Bezemer (1927:507) that "the rhombus

31. The three white vertical lines are signs for measuring, called *loki netine* (*loki*, or "make hole," *neti*, or "bring"). The single line *mbolane*, meaning "the good one" (or *dheké mbolane*, meaning "good staff"), is a sign for measuring and bordering between motifs.

32. See Gavin (2010:227-233) for an analysis of this pattern of elongated triangles, which is often found near the edges of cloths. The pattern consists of elongated lozenges on *sarong batik tumpal*.

33. Genevieve von Petzinger (2017:220-224) discusses methodological problems in Paleolithic research. Henri Breuil (an abbé) first identified cave engravings as vulva in the early 1900s. In the 1960s, Leroi-Gourhan made the interpretation standard through his structuralist classification system, which categorizes based on resemblance.

has the power to protect the wearer from disease.” Similarly, Jong (1994:221) says this about Lio cloths: “Of the geometric motifs, the rhombus (symbolizing combat against calamity and providing healing power) is the most important.”³⁴

Alkema and Bezemer refer, without citing page numbers, to a short anecdote in Jasper and Pirngadie (1912:8) about a diamond-patterned *pamintan sarong* on Borneo, which “has the power to heal the ill when worn.” Jasper and Pirngadie provide no reference, nor do they speak specifically about the pattern or the rhombus.³⁵

Members of the mentioned weaving collective came up with the interpretation that “chicken feet,” which exist on all Palu’e cloths in different forms, may be symbolic of *ata manu wa’ine*, the person in a family or clan who must ritually plant beans before the others.³⁶ The idea is tempting since “chicken feet” is first in the sequence of motifs on women’s cloths, but the weavers were not convinced themselves. The following day, we asked Mumbu, a senior man who performs the ritual, about this, but he knew nothing of any such link. In due time, we were provided with an interpretation of *Nae romo* expressing the traditional worldview: The two bands of rhombic figures and crosses symbolize a harmonious community living in mutual assistance (Ind. *gotong royong*), unity and oneness.³⁷ This is consistent with Orinbao’s (1992) description of the fundamental principle of Flores ikat art: the harmonic and inseparable dualism between sexes/partners and fertility, infused with sacrality and purity.³⁸ The same interlocutor also associated the chevrons (*ngengane*, meaning “something wide open”), which the crosses and rhombuses consist of, with the fertile earth (the black background) that gives life to farmers, though without assigning any sex to them. No interlocutor has described the rhombuses and crosses in sexual terms or as human forms.

Women’s sarongs

In this section, after describing the two most common women’s *sarongs*, we compare and analyse one of the types, but from the two major weaving domains of Cawalo and Kéli, each of which has different motif inventories and nomenclatures. Because both the naming systems and the design formats are the same, using another design type from other domains would yield

34. Jong refers to Orinbao and Ndate in the preceding paragraphs. Ndate was a student of Orinbao.

35. We searched in works referred to in the preceding and following pages and found nothing. *Pamintan* batik cloths with different patterns for different types of healing do exist.

36. Lali (41), Nangahure, 24 April 2019.

37. Mama Sugo with father (26 Sep and 21 Dec 2018).

38. Orinbao acknowledges the influence of the pioneering work by Jeanne Adams (1969).

different meanings, but the same conclusions. We discuss all the motifs on the mother bands for the reasons mentioned above. This is not the entire inventory of each domain, although a significant majority of them are covered. The other women's *sarongs* are largely decorated with the same motifs. We must also briefly address an enigma among the Palu'e *adat* cloths, *Loka*, which is seldom worn but found all around the island. Oral history, and the curvy-linear patterns without names, is evidence that *Loka* is not originally from Palu'e but was instead copied from Sikka peoples (Hewokloang) before the 1900s and appropriated locally. *Loka* is therefore not included in the discussion.

Fig. 11 – *Wua wela*. Ko'a.

Fig. 12 – *Widhi mata*. Cawalo.

Figs. 11-12 show the (lower) halves of the *sarongs* and, therefore, the entire front since the other (upper) half is identical. Figs. 13-14 show the mother bands of the *sarong* in fig. 12 (front and back). The *Wua wela* of Ko'a has one *hina ca*, one *hina lo'o*, and twelve *hanane* along the warp.³⁹ The Cawalo *Widhi mata* has two identical *hina* and six identical *hanane*, and features rows of small motifs inside the large black bands. The largest black band furthest from the centre on both types must be empty. The iconic rows of triangles on the child bands surrounding the mother bands on both *sarongs* are called *kelane*, meaning “something cleaved/'clefts'.” Glosses for *kela* are “thunder,” “(to) cleave,” “spicy,” and “hot.” We concluded that “cleft” is correct after learning that some Flores groups refer to rhombuses in ikat as “areca fruit” and to triangles as “cleft areca fruit” (Orinbao 1992). We have never come across *nua* “house” (Vischer 1994:264), except as an interpretation of what the motif

39. The Kéli version has only one mother band, while the Cawalo has two of the same size.

represents. As a rule, the cloths feature between eight and ten motifs on the mother band, with one or two motifs repeated. This Ko'a *Wua wela* features 18 motifs, including seven “combs” and the variants among the other eleven. According to interlocutors from the same village, the band would be complete with a twelfth motif. The Cawalo cloths feature, as a rule, eight large motifs. In fig. 12, each motif is located between two comb motifs, which function here as borders and are not counted. *Wua wela* has five large black bands with the linear pattern of dots *hua wuane* “vine tuber (species) fruits,” named after the tiny white-yellowish fruits characteristic of the species.⁴⁰ The same pattern is contained within the thin red lines on *Widhi mata*, which are usually in rows of four, in all domains.

Figs. 13-14 – Motifs *Widhi mata*. Cawalo.

Motifs, right to left, excluding the comb borders: 1. “chicken feet”; 2. *Mbési*, or “(species of) squash”⁴¹; 3. *mbusa (lape rua)*, or “arrow (two layers)”; 4. *séra dhaba dhubune*, or “*séra* head like ritual centre,” (*Séra* “Ceram,” “male personal name”); 5. “squash”; 6. “chicken feet (two layers)”; 7. “*séra* head like ritual centre”; 8. arrow (two layers).⁴²

Fig. 15 – *Widhi mata*. Kéli.
Unsewn warp. Indigo.

40. Vischer (1994:266) interprets *hua wuane* as a generic term for allergenic seeds and emphasises the fact that *Wua wela* is used to cover the patient after treatment for skin problems. The tuber *hua* can also cause rashes.

41. Sikka: *bési*. The “squash” motif can be more elaborate, like the Kéli (next), also in Cawalo.

42. Another Cawalo *Widhi mata* that we examined with the help of Eli, a senior (>50) Cawalo weaver (7 May 2018), has two other motifs, *lenge wuane*, or “fruits of *lenge*” (or *lenga*), and *kéza*, or “turtle” (similar to *séra dhaba dhubune*), and the comb motif is not used as a border.

Motifs right to left: 1. “chicken feet”; 2. “squash”; 3. *widhi matane*, or “goat eyes”; 4. *mata bo'o*, or “short eye” (also *lambo*, “a Bugis boat with several sails”); 5. *séra ladhône*, or “red *séra*”; 6. *kela deta dhelune*, or “three triangles (‘clefts’)”; 7. *manu wa'i sangane*, or “chicken feet branches”⁴³; 8. “long eye” (or “long *lambo*”).

More curious than the obvious lesser differences is the fact that the Kéli “Goat eye” cloth must include the motif “goat eyes,” which we have never seen on any Cawalo “Goat eye.” As regards the more complicated nomenclature, the Cawalo senior weaver explained that “*séra* head like ritual centre” is a pun on a Bugis (*Pugi*) hat, and everyone present laughed.⁴⁴ The hat shares a minimal formal resemblance with the ritual centre, a large “Family, Cluster”/“(to) Carve” oval structure formed from a pile of overgrown rocks. The word *séra* is also associated with an unidentified red type of headwear, although no interlocutor has associated it with the motif. The squash motifs (*mbési*) resemble each other, but not squash. The same “squash” appears on Kéli, Ndéo and Woja cloths, and it is similar on the Nitung, Ko'a, and Cawalo cloths. Is it “an angular version of *jilamprang* drawn in stippled lines,” as suggested by Hoopen (PC 209, PC 305)?⁴⁵

Fig. 16 – *mbési* “squash”

Fig. 17 – *Patolu jilamprang* (PC 061).

43. Different from other “chicken feet,” but actually an inversion, $\diamond$ instead of $\times$, which shows that these shapes are identical for the persons who tie them.

44. 28 April 2019.

45. *Jilamprang* motifs derive from the eight-petal lotus flower motifs on *patola*, called ‘basket pattern’ in India (Hoopen 2018:73). Barnes (1989:352) shows images of similar transformations of *patola* motifs on Lamalera and Atadéi cloths. The motif *séra ladhône* (fig. 15) may also be derived from *jilamprang*.

Transformed by technique, rectilinear and geometric with stippled rhombuses, elongated to fit within the mother band, with arrowheads added on each side of the centre.

Fig. 18 – *Pati karapau*, Ndéo, 5 Feb. 2014. Kéli women wearing *Wua wela*. *Singgi-singgi*, sacred heirloom batik or *patola* cloths, surround the ceremonial centre.

Closing discussion and conclusions

The names of the Palu'e cloths are either metaphoric and high ("Dehiscing areca") or simple and pure ("Rain *sarong*"), without any connection to status or purpose, with the more marginal *Cabu songgo* and *Cabu tedhéne*, whose names relate to ceremonial chant-dancing, being possible exceptions. Neither do the designs reveal status or purpose, and there are also no intrinsic links between design and name. It makes sense to interpret the "vine tuber fruits" pattern as raindrops on the "Rain *sarong*," but we have almost no information about this (until recently) extinct cloth. In some domains, the "Goat eye" *sarong* features the motif "goat eyes," although it is only one of the motifs, with no hierarchy between them, and is not exclusive to "Goat eye." Motifs are always separated from each other, never obscured, and subordinate to the whole.

There is no clear-cut answer to the question of the depiction, symbolism, and meaning of Palu'e motifs. Naming is not arbitrary, but consistent within each domain, although many weavers only know half of the names. With few exceptions, the motif names constitute an inventory of things that are

traditionally important or seen in everyday life; maize is a traditional crop, while the goat is a domesticated animal with ritual significance. The most ritually significant animal, the water buffalo, is absent in both name and form. The ritual centre appears in naming, but the cited name invokes a Bugis (*séra*) hat, which is oval like the ceremonial structure and the motif.

Concerning what motifs really are, Palu'e weavers refer upstream the genealogy to their mothers and further, just like the Lio (Jong 1994:220): "When asked about the symbolical meaning of the motifs, weavers generally answer that they originate from the ancestors." The persons who tie and weave these patterns understand that most motifs do not depict according to naming, and by all accounts, weavers do not appear to have been puzzled by these matters until outsiders started asking about them.

Our most senior interlocutor made clear that *mbési* "squash" is the given transmitted name of the motif and that there is no point in asking why or whether it depicts anything. The discussions with weavers, the close observation of motifs, and the technique of geometrical stippling lead us to infer that the majority of motif names are primarily and exactly just that, i.e. names, rather than indicating meaning by pointing to objects. Weavers can do without motif names because the transmission of motifs from generation to generation is primarily handed down through the use of existing cloths. They can also invent names should the need arise, as the cited inconsistencies or errors suggest.

Senior men, who are at a greater remove from the making process and are only able to identify a small number of motifs, take a literal approach and mention how things from everyday life have inspired the motifs. For weavers, motif names, like the names of the cloths, are like given names, separate from the objects to which they refer, whereas they assimilate in the minds of their husbands, who are prone to see names and motifs as signs referring to other signs. The interlocutor for the iconic Palu'e cloths even mentioned *mbési*, or "squash," as a sign (Ind. *melambangkan*) for a species of squash, but the motif is a stippled version of *jilamprang*. It was mostly men who provided the few examples of symbolism: the cross-and-rhombus design of *Nae romo* and the linear dot pattern (a harmonious and mutually helpful society); the triangle(s) (island-mountain or houses), whose name is an ethno-geometric term for the half rhombus (a cleaved *kenari* nut).

The word *séra* (Ceram) appears in several motif names and is associated with Bugis ancestral descent because the Palu'e have a long history of interaction with seafaring peoples who are often lumped together as *ata Pugi* (Bugis) or *ata Séra*. We infer that the symbolism of *hua wuane*, the linear dot pattern, derives from how all the different parts of the vine tuber with its fruits are linked together like the dots of the pattern, which serves as an analogy for the bonds formed between the individual members of the *adat* community. It makes no sense to say that this widespread and ancient pattern is a stylized representation of the plant.

A minority of the motifs do indicate meaning on a name basis, in line with how “figurative” and other categories were defined in the introduction. We have shown the ornamental band, which is realistic and simplified; the arrowhead; the (knit) comb; and “traces of civet cat.” These motifs capture the essence of the objects. If generics are included, “goat eyes” is also figurative, whereas the diamond pattern “maize eyes” remains in the category of formal resemblance. The “eye motifs” animate the cloths because the naming influences perception, so that motifs are assimilated to objects. Therefore, while acknowledging the reservations noted above, we accept the men’s literal approach to motifs and meaning as a descriptive, though incomplete, iconography.

Several motif names are taken from edible plants, although there are few formal resemblances. “Maize eyes” does not depict maize; it is an ancient lozenge pattern consisting of rhombus-eyes adjoined like corn grains on a cob. However, we cannot rule out that the more composite motifs especially build on visualized abstract elements of objects. Judging from form, “squash” is a stippled geometrical version of *jilamprang*, which is a good reason to be sceptical of literal interpretations. Whether the creator(s) of “vine tuber with twigs” was inspired by the species is impossible to say; patterns are not self-explanatory, and it is near impossible to produce a recognizable stylized representation of a trailing plant in stippled warp ikat.

Palu’e cloths do not feature any anthropomorphic motifs, unless rhombuses and crosses operate as male/female symbols, a fact that remains unconfirmed. The only zoomorphic-like motifs are “goat eyes” (generic) and “traces of civet cat” as an indirect sign of the animal. “Chicken feet,” which are mostly M-shapes with a central rhombus, are not figurative.

Fieldwork shows that the same basic motifs of combined diagonal lines, like rhombuses, are interpreted differently among different ikat-producing groups, even within Palu’e. These motifs are found in warp ikat all over insular Southeast Asia, whether because of the shared technique or because of a common origin of proto-Austronesian warp ikat. Here, matching comes after making. The fact that (mostly male) interlocutors, sometimes even from the same domain or village, give different interpretations to patterns reflects Bakhtin’s idea that meaning in folk artefacts is transformative and cumulative. Our field experiences on Palu’e largely replicate those of previous investigators in other places, but on the issue of forgetting design meanings and underlying mythologies, we suggest the possibility that the patterns were not intended to confer meaning according to their assumptions, or perhaps not at all.

“Until recently, the motifs of the cloths themselves bore names that recalled the major events, characters, and creatures of Sikkaneese myths. The names are retained, but the myths are now almost completely lost, and it has proven impossible to reconstruct the meanings of the textile motifs in relation to Sikkaneese mythology.” (Lewis 1994:168)

“Until recently” implies that if the researcher had arrived a generation earlier, the researcher’s reconstruction of meaning would be possible, granted that the naming was taken from myths and with other intentions than giving the motifs familiar or powerful names. We doubt that, and indeed have witnessed Sikka experts differing on the interpretation of the most basic design elements.⁴⁶ The Palu’e, along with many other groups, have not forgotten the meaning and symbolism of their patterns. Instead, the patterns derive their meaning from the very act of being handed down from generation to generation as an integral part of the culture. Meaning and symbolism may perhaps have been assigned to them in the course of their history, but perhaps never more so than in the current era of heritage discourse, with interlocutors being prompted to assign meaning. Now, educated persons from ikat-producing cultures believe that ceremonies should benefit from protection and that the weavers have forgotten the meaning of patterns, which have become bothersome floating signifiers.⁴⁷ Or, as Hoopen (2018:66, 93) puts it: “The universal yearning for meaning is irrepressible and can be so fervent that it becomes self-defeating.”

The Palu’e folk tales and myths were recorded for the Palu’e audio collection. The depositor has not found any link between the nomenclature and the recorded narratives, which includes a myth about the origin of weaving – curiously, a tale of loss and recovery of know-how (Lengu, SD1-037). Neither has any local interlocutor stated any such connection. No motif names record an important person or event. Lengu (1916-2017), the most important contributor, did not draw on any cloth designs for her storytelling. Ikat patterns function as markers of group or clan identity, but we conclude that they are inherently ineffective as repositories of longer narratives or as a cultural mnemonic device beyond the essentials, such as clan origin in Savu ikat (Duggan and Hägerdal 2018).

Researchers in the interpretive sciences carry with them interpretations of symbolism that “attempt to coordinate or even identify symbols with myths” (Ladner 1979:233). The approaches of the (Western) written scientific traditions are problematic, and especially French anthropological structuralism and the psychoanalytic tradition (Jungian: rhombus-vulva), whose perspectives are fundamentally different from the oral cultures to which they are applied.⁴⁸ We have quoted several examples of how the rhombus (including triangles and

46. Discussion IG for Sikka *tenun ikat*. Maumere 25 April 2019.

47. In the course of our work, we came across two university students, a Palu’e man and a Sikka man, working with issues related to Palu’e weaving and weavers’ groups for their MA theses. They expressed the same types of assumptions highlighted in this article, namely that the weavers “have forgotten the meaning of their patterns,” and so on. The latter encouraged the weaving group mentioned to create a new “story cloth,” which incorporated figurative, non-stippled motifs.

48. See Gavin’s (2003: 276-277) discussion entitled “Problems of approach.”

crosses), the most prevalent shape in (Palu'e) ikat, is often interpreted as a symbol of protection or fertility, from being a symbol of the vulva (rhombus-in-rhombus) to, ultimately, the divine mother. This is not impossible, but there is a lack of fieldwork evidence. Specifically, we demonstrated a case of circular referencing: Dutch and Dutch East Indies researchers in the early 1900s influenced local Flores researchers/authors who in turn, as local intellectual authorities, misled subsequent (Dutch) researchers/authors.

Textual archaeology enhances our understanding of the concepts used to describe material culture, and we draw a parallel with the standardized male-centric vulva interpretations in Palaeolithic cave art research, which continue to govern knowledge-production. We conclude that the rhombus-in-rhombus, when named "eye of x," is best understood literally because it is an iconic form of an eye. Were the rhombuses placed vertically instead of horizontally, they would also be iconic forms of the female vulva, but they are neither positioned nor named so. The making is more important to consider than the matching because the universally applied technique of tying diagonal lines as patterning explains the prevalence of rhombus motifs in warp ikat. Alongside acknowledging that ikat-cultures show great variety, we see other ways of reconciling the differing opinions on the meaning and symbolism of patterns. The symbolism that Palu'e interlocutors, including Vischer's, speak of is consistent with the fundamental principles of Flores ikat set out by Orinbao (1992). It links the design with cosmology through the traditional worldview, which holders of traditional offices especially must reproduce, resulting in unsurprising philosophical iconographies.

We consider the nomenclature to be important and indeed crucial for documentation purposes. More than enabling reference among weavers, it serves as a mnemonic device that conjures up images of designs and motifs. However, we conclude that it is the very transmission of patterns from generation to generation that assigns them sufficient and lasting meaning, whereas signification and exegesis are inherently transient, although stabilized by a traditional worldview. Ikat cloths, including the ancient technology and the ceremonial context, both signify and constitute a form of cyclical transmissibility. Of importance here is the link between ancestors and the new generations, as shown by the Palu'e word *pu*, which signifies both grandparent and grandchild, with the grandchild being given the name of his/her grandparent. Cloths do not need encoded messages to be meaningful and sacred, as illustrated by the *patola* displayed in the buffalo ceremonies, from which the "basket pattern," or *jilamprang*, evolved to become *mbési*, or "squash," simultaneously fulfilling both decorative and sacral purposes.

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