



# Textiles Asia

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JOURNAL



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11 Close up of the main motif *keware Hawu* (see also figure 7).



10 A man's blanket is known as *Hi'i worapi*. The main motif with curves is known as *keware Hawu* and is restricted to *wini Jèwu*.

Hägerdal (ed). *Tradition, Identity, and History-making in Eastern Indonesia*. Växjö: Linnaeus University Press: 26-67.

2009 "The genealogical model of Savu" in *Journal of Indonesian Social Science and Humanities*. <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl/index.php/jiss>

2004 "Woven Traditions, Collectors and Tourists: a Field Report from Savu" in Fiona Kerlogue (ed). *Performing Objects; Museums, Material Culture and Performance in Southeast Asia*. London: Horniman; 103-118.

2001 *Ikats of Savu; Women Weaving History in Eastern Indonesia*. Bangkok: White Lotus.

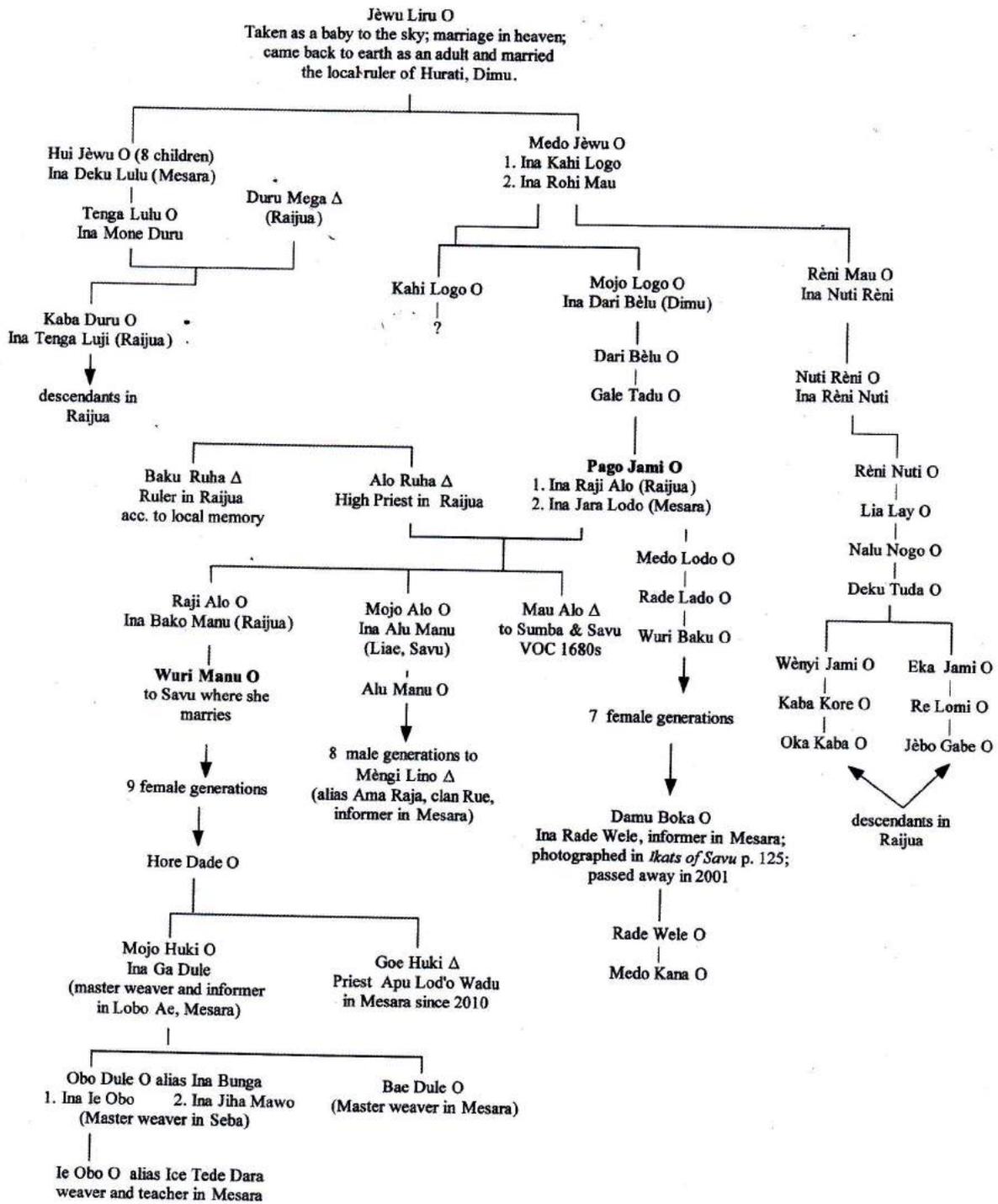
Geneviève Duggan

During her two and a half decades of contact with the islands of eastern Indonesia Dr. Duggan has researched textile traditions in social contexts and published her findings. She also studied the means of transmission of knowledge in an oral society for her PhD (Processes of Memory, NUS 2008). She spent three years as a visiting fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore working on a publication on the oral and written history of Savu (co-written with Dr. Hans Hägerdal; forthcoming). Duggan's publications focus on the conservation of textile traditions, anthropology and history. ([www.researchonsavu.com](http://www.researchonsavu.com))

Ice Tede Dara

Ms. Ice Tede Dara grew up in a family of skillful weavers and dyers. After graduating from school she enrolled as honour teacher in her home village and also became secretary of the village weavers' cooperative. In 2013 she participated in the exhibition *Woven Stories; Traditional Textiles from the Regency Savu Raijua* at the Textile Museum in Jakarta. In 2015 she was a co-presenter of the paper *Agency and Power in the Weaving Traditions of Savu, Eastern Indonesia* at the 5th ASEAN Traditional Textiles Symposium in Chiang Mai. [istededara@gmail.com](mailto:istededara@gmail.com)

Genealogy of *wini Jèwu, hubi iki* (Lesser Blossom group)  
 Δ = male; O = female



"modern" people neglect or even reject rituals and ceremonies which form the basis of their culture. A third factor is education. After attending school where norms and learning processes are disconnected from local knowledge and are foreign to indigenous socio-cultural practices, young people disregard the local ideas and values of their own culture. Young women who continue to weave cloths opt for chemical dyes and new patterns which they called "safari", a term that sounds exotic to them since the end products are purely commercial and meant for outsiders and foreigners. Educated people generally disregard manual work and prefer any boring office job. Weaving is associated with physical work and considered as backward or even primitive.

### Uncertain Future

The family depicted above is rather an exception. One is educated and yet continues to perform activities related to weaving. One reason might simply be that she cannot sustain herself with her teacher's salary. However a demand currently exists among wealthy people in western countries for hand-woven cloths with natural dyes which can provide a market for traditional weavers. An essential motivating factor for traditional weavers and artisans to continue their work is recogni-

tion. This does not necessarily mean financial reward (although certainly appreciated), but acknowledgement, appreciation and expression of respect for their labour-intensive and skilful work. Recognition can take many forms for weavers who are aware of the cultural value of their work. The conservation of certain techniques and practices transmitted over generations are essential and should not die out. These techniques and these cloths represent intangible aspects of a heritage that UNESCO is eager to preserve and for which guidelines have been defined. Local and national media, governments at local and national levels, have an important role to play in rehabilitating the skilful work of weavers. This goes beyond craft; it is about heritage, history and identity. Can the trend of a disdain for manual work be reversed?

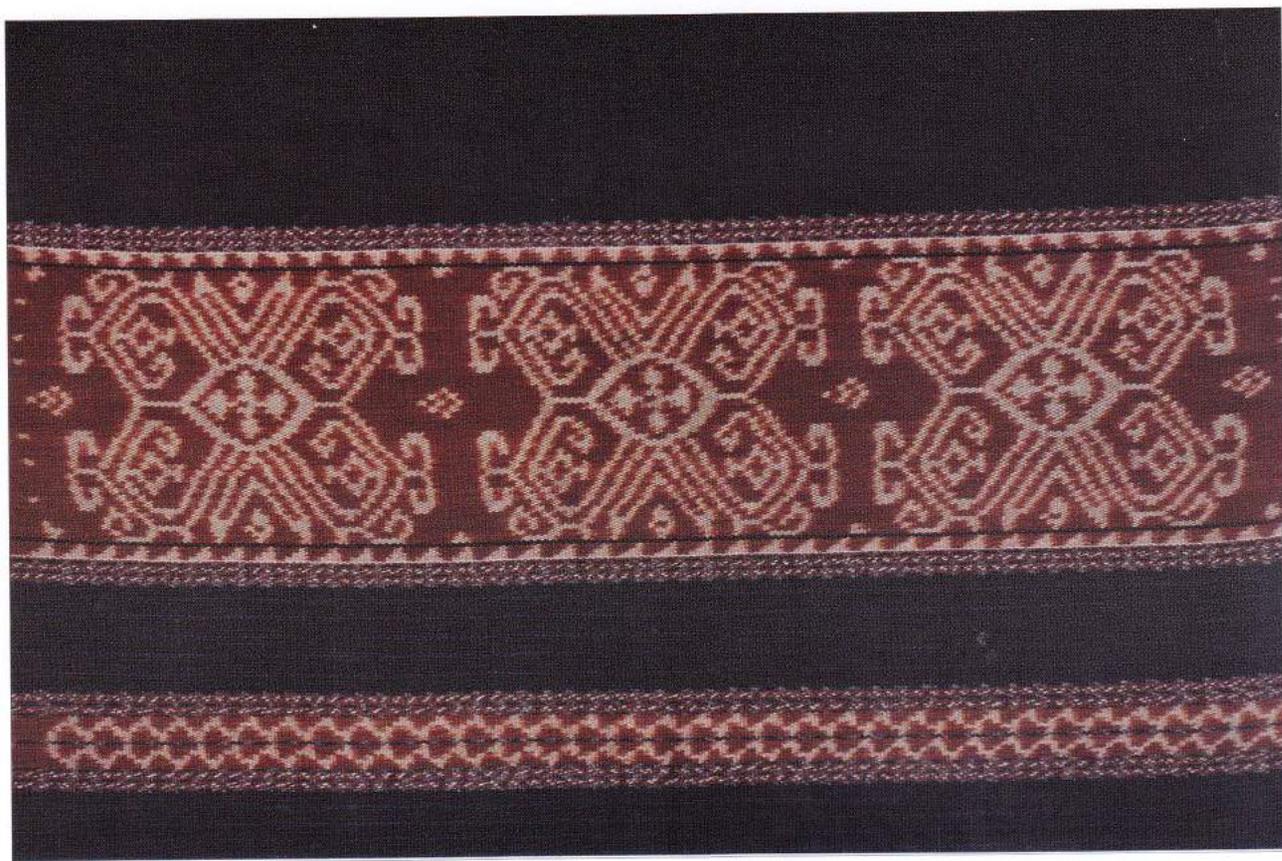
### Endnotes

Further readings on Savu, its history and weaving traditions by Geneviève Duggan ([www.researchonsavu.com](http://www.researchonsavu.com))

**2015** "Tracing Ancient Networks; Linguistics, Hand-woven Cloths and Looms in Eastern Indonesia" in Qin Dashu and Yuan Jian (eds) *Ancient Silk Trade Routes*. Singapore: World Scientific: 53-83.

**2013** *Woven Stories; Traditional Textiles from the Regency Savu Raijua*. Jakarta: Textile Museum.

**2011** "Modes of Remembering and Transmitting Knowledge; A VOC report of 1682 and Local Recollections, Island of Savu, NTT" in Hans



6 Motif *kebeba Raijua*, attributed to the ancestress Wuri Manu, granddaughter of Pago Jami. Late 17th century.

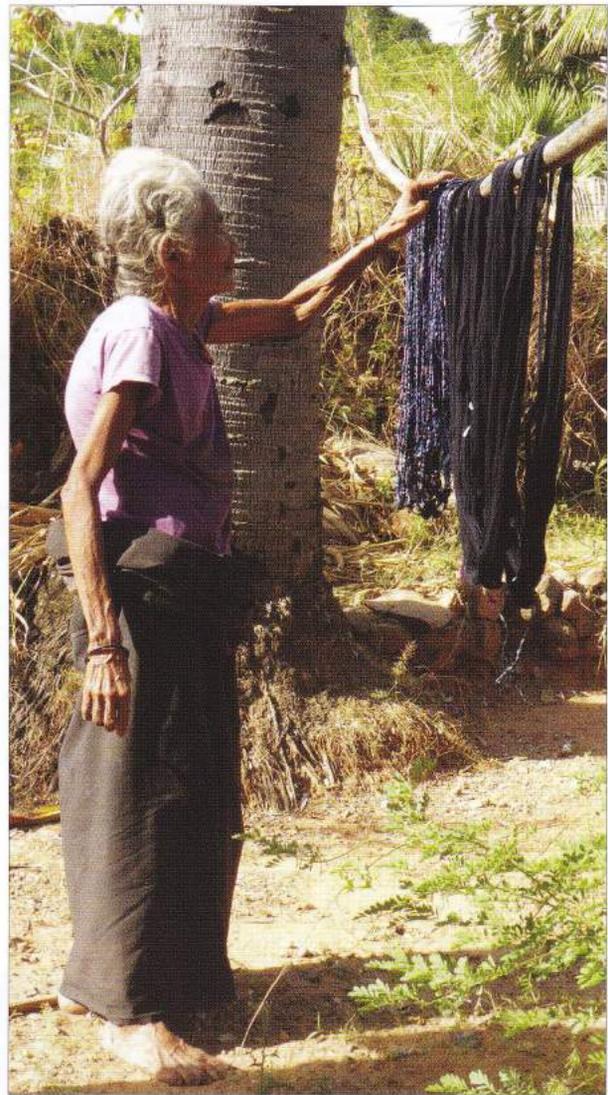
for making belts. At the age of 11 Ice started to weave larger pieces with three bands of motifs (shoulder cloth type) and learned the ikat process for small border patterns (*kelutu*). When she turned 15 she was able to ikat threads for men's hipcloths (*selimut*). She also helped her grandmother dig out roots of morinda and helped her to make the red dye. But as of today Ice has still not been allowed to perform the indigo dye process albeit she has been allowed to watch Ina Ga doing it.

In 2004 Ice moved to the house of her mother, Obo, who lives near the main town of the island in order to attend high school. During this time she continued to ikat patterns and to weave to help her mother pay for the school fees. This is how she was pictured in the tourism journal *Wisata* in 2006.

In 2007 Ice received a private sponsorship to study economics, accounting and finance at the University Nusa Cendana in Kupang, Timor, but she continued to tie threads in her free time for pocket money. After graduating as a teacher in 2012, Ice enrolled as honour teacher (for lack of position as a civil servant) at a secondary school near her grandmother Ina Ga's house and is again staying with her. She took up the task of secretary in the weavers' cooperative Tewuni Rai of her village, the main cooperative dedicated to the conservation of traditional textiles and natural dyes. In her free time Ice still continues to ikat threads after work but hardly has the time to weave since she has a two year old son.

These four biographies of weavers encompassing three generations seem almost too perfect to be real. Textile books sometimes mention biographies of weavers and dyers in a general manner; it is rare to have such a detailed report corroborating a general assumption regarding the impact of the outside world, of religion and education on weavers, their techniques and traditions. A few aspects are summarised here.

The grandmother, Ina Ga, did not attend school while her daughter Bae did, neither lived "abroad" or adopted a world religion. They know the patterns restricted to their maternal line and are the keepers of the ancestral heirloom basket. Obo, Ina Bunga, who experienced the "outside world" and converted to Christianity performed weaving for a number of years using chemical dyes, but after being told by outsiders of the value of natural dyes she reconnected with indigo and morinda. The decade she spent outside the island delayed her contacts and interest in the traditional dye techniques and heraldic patterns of her maternal line. Religion is a major factor for change of attitude toward traditions;



8 Ina Ga checking threads dyed in indigo. (May 2014).



9 Obo, Ina Ga and Bae during a ceremony for blessing the family heirloom basket containing textiles kept for a funeral. (April 2012).



7 Ina Ga and her children wearing hand-woven cloths of her heirloom basket: Bole wears a cloth with the pattern *kewore Hawu* as shoulder cloth (see 10 and 11). For the women tubular cloths of the Lesser Blossom group the main motif can be woven on three types of sarongs: *èi ledo*, *èi raja* and *èi worapi*. Bae (second from left) wears a *èi ledo* sarong with the motif *kétu pedi* (see 3 and 4). Ina Ga wears a *èi worapi* sarong with the motif *patola* while Obo wears a *èi raja* sarong with the motif *kebeba Rajiua* (see figure 6). (October 2010).

of a modern Christian dyer. Ina Bunga is the leader of the weaving cooperative, *Hawu Miha*, specialized in the conservation of traditional dyeing and weaving techniques in the district of Seba.

Obo's younger sister Bae, born in 1973, never left the island. She grew up in the household of her mother and followed a similar learning process in spinning, ikating and weaving as her sister and mother. At the age of four she became a shepherd. At seven Bae attended primary school and started to help her mother with the red dye process; she learned how to spin cotton at the age of ten, ikating and weaving at 11 and 12. She married in 1989 (age 16) and shortly thereafter, her mother introduced her to the secrecy of the "blue arts." This was 17 years before her elder sister, Obo, who had left the island and had converted to a world religion. It seems that the reason for passing on "the blue arts" to the younger daughter is that Bae, as her mother, is a follower of the ancestral religion, attends rituals at the

female ritual house (*tegida*) and performs all ceremonies that will ensure success for her dyes and weaving processes, prosperity and luck for her and her family according to her religion. Bae's husband is a farmer. The marriage produced six boys and two daughters; the daughters died in infancy so that Bae has no daughter to whom she will be able to transmit her knowledge.

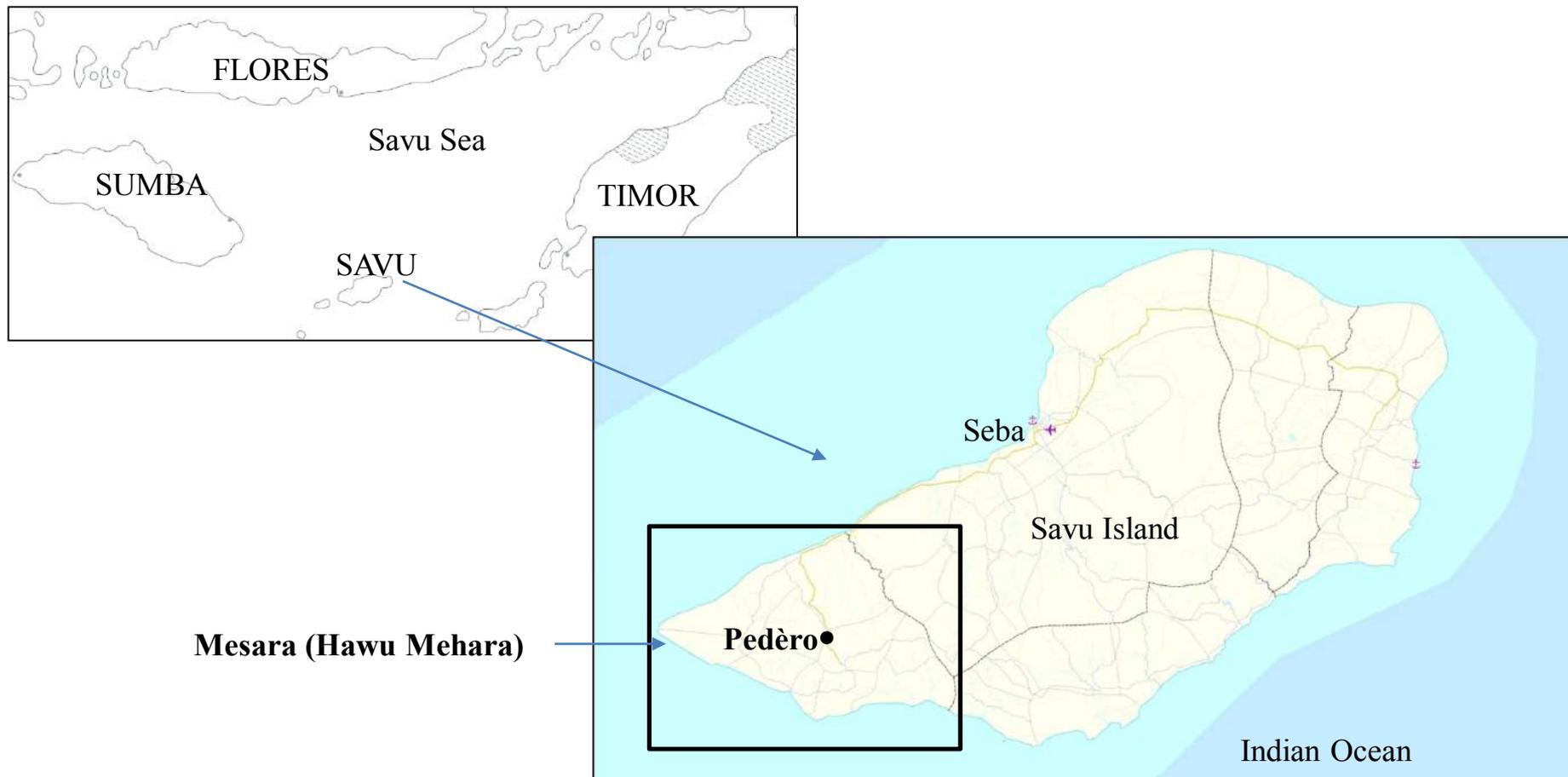
### Ice, the Third Generation

Ice was born in 1987 and spent her childhood in the house of her maternal grandmother, Ina Ga. As soon as she was able to do small jobs, she helped her grandmother fetch and carry water. At the age of six she wished to start weaving, but this was first forbidden by her grandmother. She secretly gathered small pieces of yarn, leftovers 20–30 cm long, tied them together making a long yarn and on a simple loom managed to weave a 3 cm wide belt. At the age of eight she attended primary school. In her free time she tied threads

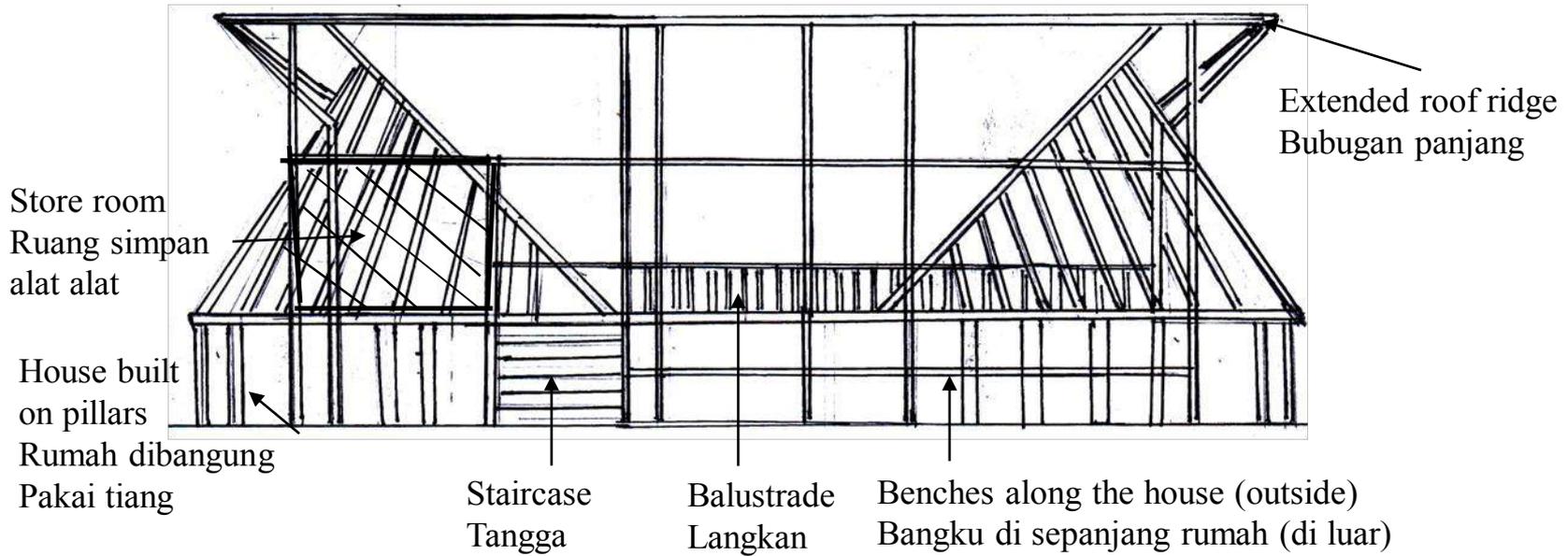
# Plan for a weavers' house

## village of Pedèro, District of Hawu Mehara, Regency Savu Raijua, NTT

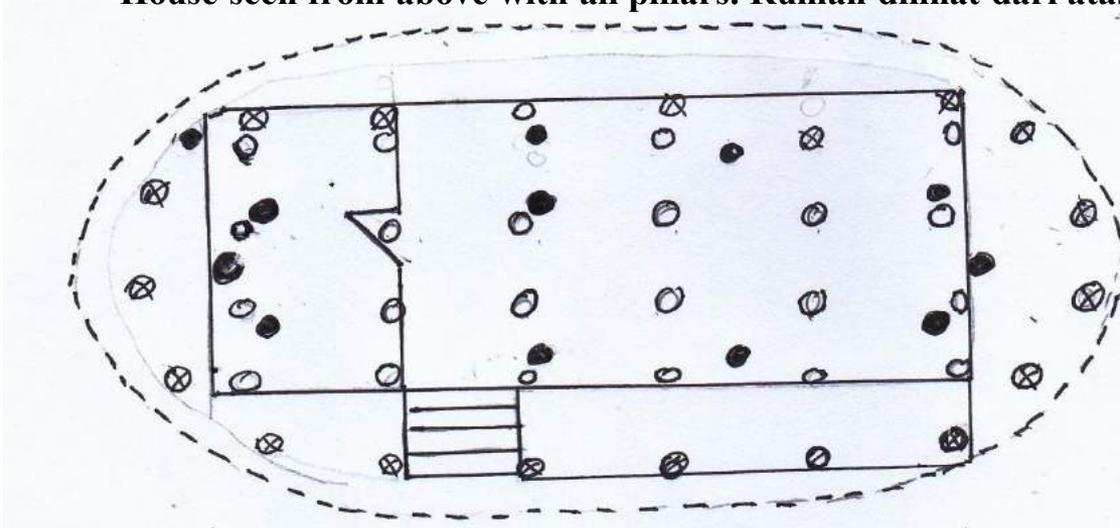
### Location



**Front view of the weavers' house. Tampak depan rumah tenun**



**House seen from above with all pillars. Rumah dilihat dari atas dengan semua tiang**





## Model for the weavers' house . Model untuk rumah penenun

Large community house in the main town of Seba.

It is an open building with balustrades and benches along all sides.

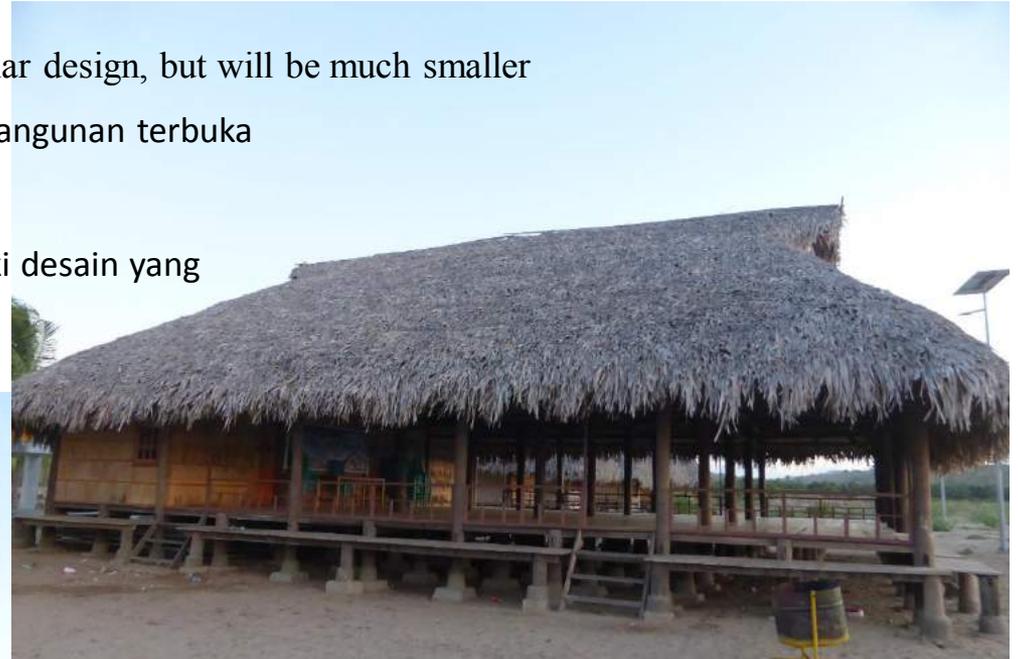
It has a room for storing material

The future weavers' house in Pedero will have a similar design, but will be much smaller

Rumah Kommunitas di kota utama Seba. Ini adalah bangunan terbuka dengan langkan dan bangku di sepanjang sisi.

Ini memiliki ruang untuk menyimpan materi.

Rumah penenun masa depan di Pedero akan memiliki desain yang serupa, tapi akan jauh lebih kecil.





Structure of a traditional house seen from inside  
Struktur rumah tradisional dilihat dari dalam



Structure of traditional Savunese house before and  
while roofing with lontar leaves.  
Struktur rumah tradisional sebelum dan selama  
ditutupi dengan daun daun lontar.



permission. Then her mother came to her house and held the necessary ceremony, blessing the vat, (*"kasih duduk priuk"*), preparing small offerings, praying and asking the ancestress who in ancient times brought the knowledge for indigo dyes to Savu to entrust Ina Bunga with the "blue arts". Since then Ina Bunga has been successful in making the indigo dyes and each time before starting the process she feels obliged to pronounce the name of her mother who is the first link in a long chain of the female ancestors to the one ancestress who introduced the indigo dyes. According to the locally recorded genealogies and the date of 1680 mentioned above, this took place a long time before European presence in the area; it is the last hint of the ancestral belief in the power of indigo dye in the hands



**3 and 4** The main motif of these tubular cloths is known as *kētu pedi* and is attributed to the ancestress Pago Jami who lived in Rajua in the mid 17th century. *Kētu pedi* means "buckle of the belt" and might have been derived from an ornament introduced through trade. In figure 4 where the entire piece is seen, the motif is depicted on a sarong of the *worapi* type. The term *worapi* refers to two different stages in the tie process allowing three different colours in the main pattern. Figure 3 displays the *kētu pedi* motif on a *êi raja* sarong; half of the piece is seen only; the term *raja* refers to small white bands of supplementary warp weaving which in the past were restricted to members of ruling families which is the case for ancestresses of Ina Ga. (May 2007).



5 Ice Tede Dara showing a sarong *êi ledo* with the motif *kebeba Raijua*. However the structure of the bottom part is derived from a *êi worapi* sarong. (May 2013)

and fluffing cotton buds, and started spinning. Then she learnt to tie-dye (ikat) cotton threads on a frame, starting with small pieces and easy patterns. At the age of 17 she learned to weave on a backstrap loom and by this time she practiced the first steps for making the red dyes, pounding the roots of the *morinda citrifolia* tree. She was not yet allowed to deal with the indigo process which is surrounded by secrecy in contrast to the red dyes. Traditionally a woman is ready for marriage when she is able to weave a cloth because weaving becomes her main source of income in its tangible and intangible aspects. Attendance at ceremonies and rituals at the female ritual house (*tegida*) is essential for building the intangible aspects of a cloth.

Only after marriage in 1964 and after having born

children was Muji Huki, then known as Ina Ga, entitled to do the indigo dye process. To be a full woman means to be a mother and this confers maturity. Ina Ga has two daughters, Obo and Bae, both weavers, and a boy, Bole. Ina Ga always has followed the local ancestral religion and did not follow the wave of conversions to Christianity of the 1970s. For decades she has been a respected master weaver and dyer. Although now Ina Ga is 72 and too weak to sit at the loom; she still performs the indigo dye processes and follows the ceremonies linked to dye and weaving processes and is always ready to guide her daughters and granddaughter in the various steps of cloth production.

### Obo and Bae, the Second Generation

Obo was born in 1964. She did not grow up in the house of her mother but with her maternal great aunt who did not have a granddaughter. As far as she remembers Obo can see her great-aunt spinning, ikating and weaving. Obo followed a similar learning process as her mother, ikating and reproducing simple patterns already ikated on a frame.

From 1972 til 1978 she attended primary school. At the age of 15 she started weaving small shoulder cloths. After finishing primary school in 1978 Obo wanted to see the Big World and for ten years she worked as a household helper in Kupang on the neighbouring island of Timor, coming back to Savu every year when all hands were needed for the harvest. Due to exposure to the "modern" world, Obo converted to Christianity in 1982. After ten years "abroad" Obo came back to Savu and resumed weaving activities as her main source of income. She has four children; Ice is her eldest daughter.

Except for the 10 years when she worked outside Savu, Obo has been ikating and weaving. She produced cloths with synthetic as well with natural dyes. She prepared the chemical dyes herself, but for natural dyes she brought the ikated threads to her mother who is renowned for the quality of her "blue arts," a deep blue almost black. For years Ina Ga did not entrust to Obo the indigo technique.

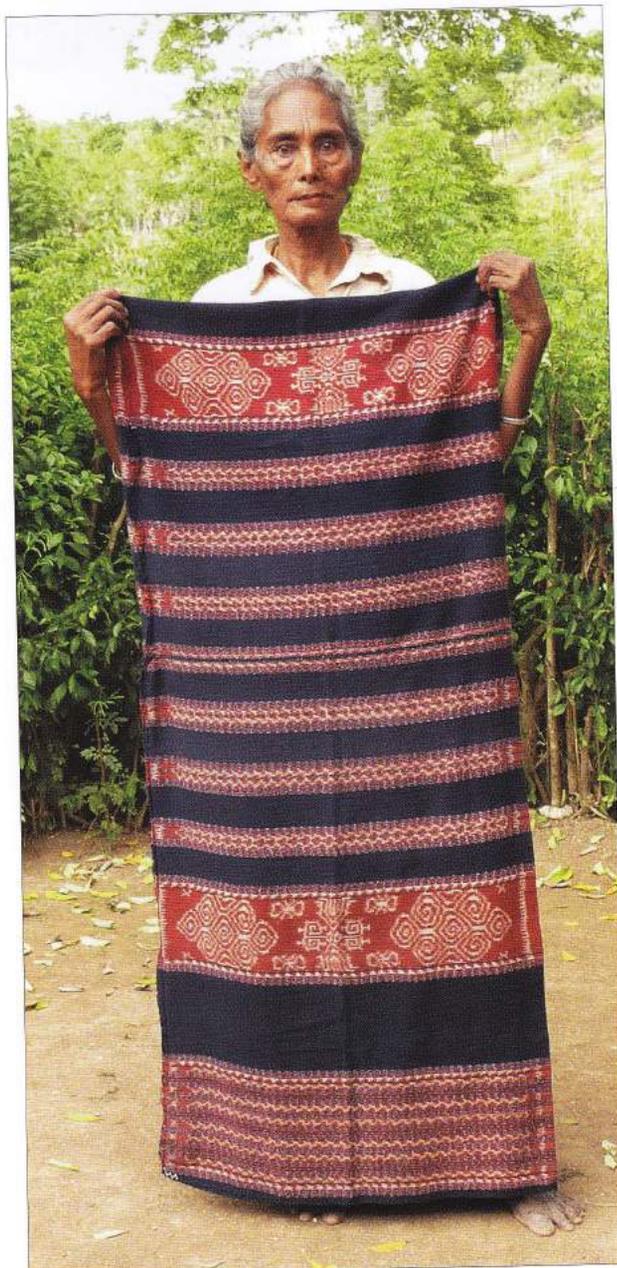
In 2006, Threads of Life, a non-profit organization specializing in the conservation of traditional techniques, visited the Savu weavers. The same year Obo was invited in Timor to a seminar held by this NGO. There she was taught the indigo dye technique although she already knew it from observing her mother, Ina Ga, without being expressly taught by her. After the seminar in Timor, Obo, then known as Ina Bunga, wanted to do the indigo dye at home and asked her mother for

is at the origin of the Greater Blossom group while her younger sister led the Lesser Blossom Group. Since that time, the people of Savu have specific composition and patterns for differentiating both groups (figure 1) and throughout time these two groups have formed subgroups, *wini* (or seeds).

For example Ice Tede Dara (who below recounts the lives of her family) is from the group or moiety Lesser Blossom (*hubi iki*), subgroup *wini* Jèwu, named after an ancestress, Jèwu Liru, who after being kidnapped lived for years in the sky (!) before coming back to Savu where she married the ruler of Dimu in the eastern part of the island. The long narrative (summarised in one sentence here) and the list of her female descendants have been passed on from generation to generation up to present-day. Along the line some of these ancestresses have created new patterns which distinguish them from other branches of the *wini* and whose descendants have the right to produce, wear and store these patterns in their heirloom baskets. For instance the ancestress Pago Jami married on the neighbouring island of Raijua. Her husband, Alo Rua, is remembered as the High Priest of the local traditional religion and her brother-in-law, Baku Ruha, as the political ruler of Raijua. Moreover Pago Jami's son, Mau Alo, is mentioned in a manuscript of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1680. Was it Pago Jami's high position in the society or the fact that she left her island to marry which created a new pattern (figure 3)? It is now impossible to say. Thanks to the VOC manuscript it is possible to estimate the pattern to mid 17th century

One of Pago Jami's granddaughters, Wuri Manu, escaped warfare on Raijua. She was injured but managed to flee to Savu with her maternal uncle Mau Alo and stayed on Dimu where she married. She too is at the origin of a new pattern her female descendants are entitled to wear and reproduce (figure 5). Using the same VOC source this pattern can be dated to the end of the 17th or the turn of the 18th century. A number of descendants married local rulers and thus were entitled to wear patterns restricted to the ruling families: for instance a motif derived from an Indian cloth and known as *patola* (figure 7) as well as a pattern called *lèba* which means "restricted" or "taboo", reminding one of two confronting nagas. These examples demonstrate how the women of Savu cared for their heritage and how they have transmitted orally and visually their history up to the present.

The following section deals with today's situation and summarises interviews conducted by Ice Tede Dara



2 Ina Ta Bire, a master weaver of Mesara, shows a tubular cloth with the composition *èi ledo* for the Lesser Blossom group; the main pattern combines elements of the basic motif compulsory for the Lesser Blossom Group (see figure 1). (May 2013).

in her own family. First is the biography of her grandmother (Muji Huki), then of her mother (Obo, alias Ina Bunga) and mother's sister (Bae), and finally of Ice Tede Dara.

### Tense Present: Muji Huki Alias Ina Ga

Muji Huki was born in 1943. Like every young girl of her generation she helped in the household of her parents while learning by observation and mimicking the tasks related to cotton and textile production. By the age of 13 Muji Huki knew all the steps for cleaning

# Heritage Weaving: Tense Present and Uncertain Future

Three Generations of Weavers of the Island of Savu, Eastern Indonesia

**Geneviève Duggan and Ice Tede Dara**

Like many societies confronted by external, mainly western influences, the island of Savu in eastern Indonesia has been shaken to its roots. The traditional culture and in particular the traditions of cloths woven on backstrap looms are in danger of vanishing since an antagonism clearly exists between the safeguarding of weaving traditions and their techniques and economical sustainability in a globalized world. "Heritage Weaving" in the title refers to the knowledge women have woven in their cloths over tens of generations. "Tense Present" traces the lives of four weavers in Ice Tede Dara's family

in the western part of Savu. "Uncertain Future" reflects the challenges weavers and dyers are facing in a competitive industrialised world.

## Heritage Weaving

The traditional textiles of Savu occupy a rather unique position among the textiles of Indonesia and possibly of Southeast Asia due to the peculiar structure of the society which has strong matrilineal aspects. In ancient times the society was divided into two groups (moieties) descended from two sisters: the elder sister



1 Detail of a tubular skirt for women of the Lesser Blossom Group: *èi ledo*. All elements of the *èi ledo* patterns are represented here.