

THE ART OF KAIN TENUN TAIS: A GENDER DIFFERENTIATION AND SOCIAL STATUS SYMBOL OF BUNAQ ETHNIC GROUP IN WEST TIMOR INDONESIA

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Abstract: *This study examines the socio-cultural importance of the Kain Tenun Tais in the Bunaq ethnic group of West Timor Indonesia. It assesses the role that the Kain Tenun Tais has played in the past, and continues to play in the Bunaquesse society at present. The study analyzes how the colors, motifs and patterns of the Kain Tenun Tais reflect gender and status differentiation in the Bunaquesse society. The study contends that the Kain Tenun Tais serves not only as marker of Bunaquesse ethnic identity, but also plays an active role and influences the perpetuation of the traditional weaving process that generates this identity. The weaving process connotes complementarity of tasks between men and women. The traditional weaving of Kain Tenun Tais is founded on the stories narrated by women/weavers in the poems of “Tei Gugul Hiliq”. This study uses qualitative approach to generate information on the role of Kain Tenun Tais as signifier of social status and gender stratification in the Bunaq society. It is supplemented by descriptive statistics derived from representative survey of 40 randomly selected respondents who are familiar with weaving. The wearing of the Tais signifies social stratification. The patterns, motifs, and colors of the Kain Tenun Tais communicate the social status of the Bunaqs based on land ownership. The pattern of the thread weft signifies the distinction of the social statuses. The Kain Tenun Tais symbolizes the connection of the present Bunaq people with their ancestors. It also represents the power relations between the Bunaq men and women. Asia. The patterns, motifs, and colours of the Kain Tenun Tais mark specific life events that stratify the Bunaquesse people based on status and gender. It is a crucial material expression of the Bunaquesse identity as a people.*

Keywords: *Cloth, Identity, Weaving, Colors, Motifs, Patterns, Gender, Social Status.*

Background of the Study

Textile is one of the most powerful and exciting art forms throughout Asia. It reflects the mystery and the splendor of one's tradition, culture, religion, ethnicity, and identity. In the Southeast Asian region, cloth making communicates the social identity of an ethnic group, both in terms of gender and social status. This paper draws upon Weiner and Schneider (1989:1) remark in their book entitled *Cloth and Human Experience* that:

“Cloth in the form of clothing, adornment and clothing has become a symbolic expression of the social economic, and political life of the people.... Cloth also lends itself to an

extraordinary range of decorative variation, whether through the patterned weaving of color wraps and wefts or through the embroidery, staining, painting, or dyeing of the whole. These broad possibilities of construction, color, and patterning give cloth an almost limitless potential for communication. Worn or displayed in an emblematic way, cloth can denote variations in age, sex, rank, status, and group affiliation”.¹

This study examines the socio-cultural importance of the Kain Tenun Tais in the Bunaq ethnic group of West Timor Indonesia. It analyzes the role that the Kain Tenun Tais has played in the past, and continue to play in the Bunaquesse society at present. The study analyzes how the colors, motifs, and patterns of the Kain Tenun Tais reflect gender and status differentiation in the Bunaquesse society. It also examines how the Kain Tenun Tais as a material culture plays a central role in the maintenance and perpetuation of the Bunaquesse ethnic identity, especially when worn during rituals and public celebrations. The study contends that the Kain Tenun Tais serves not only as marker of Bunaquesse ethnic identity, but also plays an active role and influence the perpetuation of the traditional weaving process that generates this identity.

The preservation of the traditional weaving process of the Kain Tenun Tais is an indicator of the unique identity of the Bunaqs because they are the only ethnic group in West Timor that still practice the traditional weaving process at present. However, the kain Tenun Tais textile does not exist in isolation and its significance as a material culture can only be understood in the context of Bunaquesse cultural, political, social life.

In his article entitled, *“The Clothes We Wear: A Sociological View”*, Abad (2006:1), contended that the clothes people wear are influenced by their immersion in society, in groups, in relations, in interactions and the context of the particular time and place. In other words, the way people choose their clothes or the kind of textile they use is a way of expressing who they are, how they feel, and what they do in the context of their social worlds and social experiences. Even their choice of cloth or textile is a product of historical forces and social experiences.

In the context of the Bunaquesse society, the wearing of Kain Tenun Tais represents the distinct identity of the Bunaq people. Throughout their history, the motifs, colours, and patterns of the Kain Tenun Tais communicate the material culture that they inherited from their

¹ Weiner, Amette B., and Jane Schneider (eds.), (1989). *“Cloth and Human Experience”*., Anthropological Research of United State of America, p.1

ancestors Bein Mone (Male ancestors) and Bein Pana (Female Ancestors) in their Deu Hoto (the main house clan). The Kain Tenun Tais legitimates their identity through the process by which the cloth is made, and the functions and representations it serves in their everyday lives and in the special occasions they celebrate. For the Bunaqs therefore the Tais is more than just a cloth. It is a visual representation of their history, ethics, oral literature, religious belief, social values, economic, and political thoughts. Patterns, motifs, and colors are associated with the social status of the wearer. The cloth itself expresses one's position in the Bunaquesse society in terms of walth, prestige, and power.

Likewise, all society distinguishes male and female, constructs similarities and differences between them, and assign them different roles and responsibilities (West and Zimmerman, 1987:146). Among the Bunaqs of West Timor, the roles of men and women are dependent on their domestic tasks. Farming is mainly a male activity while child rearing and household chores are female activities. In addition, however, weaving is traditionally assigned as a main task of the woman. It is the duty of a Bunaquesse woman to weave two pieces of Kain Tenun Tais in a year for the family. Gender differences are also distinguished through the way that clothes are worn (Abad, 2006). As gender norms prescribe the way men and women proclaim their different positions in society, in the Bunaquesse society, how the Tais is worn also can signify constructed statuses. Specific designs and colors of the Tais express these differences.

This study focuses on the role of the traditional cloth, namely the Tais, in communicating the ethnic identity of the Bunaqs of West Timor in Indonesia. It examines how the process of making the Tais defines the social relationships of the Bunaquesse men and women, and determines how its colors, motifs, and patterns convey the gender and social status differentiation among them.

Review of Literature

Culture Interpretation of Symbols.

Clifford Geertz defined culture as a "System of inherited conception expressed in symbolic forms by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (1973:89). Cloth as symbolic culture relates to the identity of an individual belonging to particular ethnic groups and sub-groups. For personal and group identity, the cloth may serve as a symbol for expressing oneself and one's relationships with

others in his/her community. As such, the cultural and environmental backgrounds of a person can influence the patterns, designs, and color of his/her cloth.

Cloth as part of a sub-culture system also binds a community as it helps the individuals identity with it (Gordon, 2011:124-5). How the cloth is worn is a stepping – stone for determining issues of deeper portent, involving the articulation of questions of production in the definition of the roles of both women and men in society.

Although aesthetic details such as colors, patterns and motifs need to be established, the ramifications of the exchange of cloths for establishing and codifying power and social organization, and the use of textiles and ancillary materials signify the meaning of transitions (Leedom: 1992, Vol. 23, No.1). The rituals performed in the various steps of appropriate motifs for the wearers are very significant texts for description.

Throughout this process, the cultural meanings and interpretations of a piece of cloth as material culture remains. Following Geertz, the Kain Tenun Tais is a symbolic culture implies an interpretive approach from the "native's point of view". It provides good interpretation that takes us into the heart of that which is being interpreted (Geertz, 1973).

In her book entitled *Natural Symbol: Exploration in Cosmology*, Douglas (1996:74-75) shows how certain forms of social life., i.e., bring forth regularly the same varieties of symbolic expressions. The scope of the body as a medium of expression is limited by controls exerted from the social system. The human body is always treated as an image of society and that there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension. Control of the body is an expression of social control – an abandonment of bodily control in rituals responds to the requirements of a social experience that is being expressed. Furthermore, there is little prospect of successfully imposing bodily control without the corresponding social forms. The same drive that seeks harmoniously to relate the experience of physical and social, must affect ideology. For example, dressing up in a uniform in school, or at work is a clear instance of outside forces managing the body. The fact that most people accept this convention shows how successful authorities have been in inducing others to follow a dress code. People are not only brainwashed with a purity of heart. And so, uniforms prevail and dress codes remain intact: we have homogenized the society and create a world of sameness. It is what Giddens (1997:7) calls "The double involvement of individuals and institutions", or the creation of society at the same time that we are created by it (cfr. Abad, 2006:4).

This perspective of bodily control as a manifestation of social control and/or social hierarchy is seen in the Southeast Asian textile. Some colors, motifs, and pattern reflect a specific social status and gender. Lefferts (1992), for example, remarked that among the Tai',

“Textiles embody social meanings.... Beyond clothing people, they define the fundamental division of labor, signal changes in status and liminal periods in rites of passage, and commemorate important occasions”.²

Howard (1998:37) said that a particular type of skirt cloth traditionally woven by Phuan communities is associated with a particular region and when used in contemporary fashion, is also intended to convey Thai-ness. As such, it is also associated with national identity.

In some Asian countries (Maxwell, 2003., Terwiel, 1983., Hitchcock, 1985., Fox, 1980, etc), women and men are not allowed to wear whatever color of clothes they like. The color, fabric, and material of their clothes are dictated by their rank, gender, status or position. This is enforced through the socialization process. This normative structure of the society is part of their cultural inheritance from their ancestors.

An awareness of the development by which a society's worldview is encapsulated in the patterns and construction of its textiles is thus very important. However, a particular culture is only meaningful to the public who share it. The colors, patterns, and motifs of cloth or textile assume different meanings depending on the people who create them. Moreover, it is used and created in public and in social exchanges. For example, the Kain Tenun Tais distinguishes the Bunaq people from other ethnic groups and from each other through its colors, patterns and motifs. In the Bunaq myth, the tokoq (gecko), mape (eagle), and una (butterfly) are animal patterns that represent man's bravery, loyalty, and unity. According to Barfield (1997), the identification of cultural life requires isolating symbols, identifying meanings, and showing how they resonate within a specific dynamic cultural context. Culture is public because its meaning is public. For the Bunaqs, these motifs are thus significant as marks of social status. Only the adat leaders, tribal chiefs, warriors, priests, shamans and elders can wear these motifs during in public occasions.

² Leedom, Lefferts, (1992), “Review Article: Southeast Asian Textiles: New Research and Writing”, in Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol.23, No, 1 September.

Cloth as Representation of What Society Holds Sacred and Important

The textile arts of Southeast Asia reflect diverse influences: the ancestor figures of earliest legend, the sacred mandala of the Hindu, Buddhist world, the zodiac menagerie of Chinese Iconography, the flowing calligraphy of Islam and the lace of the West (Maxwell, 2003). The belief in ancestors and spirits, shamanism, omens and magic, extended burial rites, head hunting and tattooing, the domestication of certain animals, early forms of agriculture and boatbuilding are considered as original cultural traits of Southeast Asia. These are still reflected in the motifs and the ways by which textiles are used in the Southeast Asian region.

Ritual experience and wisdom, to a large part, are a function of age. These are sometimes indicated by distinctive textile decoration. The color, the structure of the patterns, and the use of ritually important motifs are often related to a strict hierarchy that governs the making of clothes (Maxwell, 2003). In the Sikka region of East Nusa Tenggara-Indonesia, only women of social and ritual maturity may create certain motifs, perform certain types of weaving, or process particularly dyestuffs (Hamilton, 1994).

Gittinger (1990) also indicated that in the Southeast Asian art, perceptions of cosmic dualism include the division of the universe into Lower and Upper Worlds. Females are associated with the lower world, the profane, the night, the moon, and the color blue-black. Conversely, the males are associated with the upper world, the sacred, day, the sun, and the color red. Animals representing the upper world such as birds and flying creatures are put side by side with animals to represent the lower world like fish, lizards, crocodiles, etc. woven in ceremonial clothes, these can symbolize the important identities of these animals in their spirit world. The Sumbanese of eastern Indonesia, for example, believe that a person wearing textiles displaying such motifs, acquire the special powers and qualities of certain creatures (Maxwell, 2003)

In some societies, certain textiles are specifically patterned, presumably to allow communication with the spirits. A shaman or seer may prescribe the weaving of a special cloth to protect the owner or to dispel evil especially when physical danger such as unexplained illness is perceived (Gordon, 2011). In Batak, Indonesia, the priests suggest the weaving of an *ulos ragidu* as cure for personal difficulties. In Sarawak, Indonesia, the shamans hang decorated cloth known as *pua* at the entrance of the house to dispel the incubus, which is believed to cause disaster or death in the family. The *pua* is believed to transform into objects of supernatural power during the rites of driving away evil. This notion is implicit in an

alternative iban term in Bali for these textiles, which means ‘to exchange in form’ (Graham, 1987)

The Southeast Asian conception of the universe is also depicted in the colours of the textiles. In her study of Southeast Asian textiles, Maxwell (2003) noted that the colour black is often associated with the left and with femaleness, while red is associated with the right and maleness. Hence, the warrior’s outfit is often red in colour. In the Thai court of the late Ayutthaya period for example, the right hand guards wore red while the left hand contingent wore black (Terwiel, 1983). At the court of Bima in Sumbawa, the Sultan’s troops wear red as a sign of bravery while his civil retainers wear blue black (Hitchcock, 1985). It is common to find red as the favoured colour for ceremonial costume while black is generally used for everyday wear in Southeast Asia (Fox, 1980).

The symbol of unity of the cosmos and the divergent or conflicting forces it encompasses are intertwined in red, black, and white thread yarns. The Bataks of North Sumatra and the Balinese use bundles of these threads as magical talismans. Furthermore, the Karo Bataks believe that the tri-colour threads represent the three elements that form the foundations of their social structure. Since no ceremony can be properly and effectively performed without the presence of these three essential elements of the Karo kinship system, the intertwining of the three colour threads (*benang tiga rupa*) symbolizes the ideal unity and cooperation which should exist between a family, its bride-givers and bride-takers (Kipp, 1979). In northern Thailand, on the other hand, a red jacket adorned with a black and white cross is believed to make the wearer live longer (Campbell et.al, 1987).

Textiles are also often included in the offering rites to the spirits and deities. In Southeast Asia, clothes are used in many sacred activities that are intended to ensure the safety of the individuals, the prosperity of the group and the equilibrium of the universe. In Bali, textiles are chosen for their sacred qualities and colour; and set out as offerings for the gods (*rantasan*). On the other hand, tie dyed *kain Kembangan*³ are offered to the gods as ritual gifts in Java. This shows that the textile is an expression of their closer relationship or affinity with nature and deities. The spirits that are responsible for securing fertility and safety of the village and fields in Toraja are offered with the sacred *ma’a* while Iban offerings are covered with the finest *pua*

³ The Kain-Kembangan cloths of Central Java have tritik-patterned borders. The examples of these are the red silk Pelangi cloths of Palembang (South Sumatera) which are probably the most outstanding of those produced in Indonesia. The compositional layout of these cloths is very similar to that of the so-called patola double-ikat cloths of Gujarat (Hann and Thomson, 1993, p.16)

kumbu textiles (Crystal, 1979). In the region of Flores, it is customary to cover a portion of a successful harvest with clothes during the celebration.

Supernatural beings have an important place in textile colours, patterns and motifs. The centrality of beliefs in the ancestors and spirits is apparent in the people's depiction of such in the antiquity and prehistoric arts (Hamilton, 1994). For example, the Sumbanesse of eastern Indonesia believe that a person is able to acquire special powers and qualities when textiles displaying animal motifs are worn. Particular animal patterns are equated with the characteristics of royalty and are depicted on Sumba textiles and jewellery used by the marimba (Adams, 1969). The identifiable creatures that appear on royal Sumba textiles include chicken or cocks (animals or ritual sacrifices), the deer with large spreading antlers (a symbol of royalty who also wear an upright, branching golden head-dress), and the shrimps that shed their shells in a process of renewal (Maxwell, 2003).

Cloth as the Role of Signifiers in Social Stratification

Max Weber (trans. & ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 1958: 180-94) developed the three-component theory of stratification and the concept of life chances. He emphasized the difference between class, status, and authority, and treated these as separate but related sources of power, each of which having different effects on social action. Weber introduced three independent factors that form his theory of stratification hierarchy namely class, status, and power. Class refers to a person's economic position in a society. Status, on the other hand, refers to a person's prestige, popularity and social honor. Weber also contended that political power was not rooted in capital value solely, but in one's individual status. Lastly, power refers to the person's ability to get their way despite the resistance of others based on their party class or their affiliations in the political domain.

Weber further argues that status denotes "a quality of honor or a lack of it" (trans. & ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 1958: 405), which is differentially attributed, constituting a system of social stratification based on custom and communal values. Members of similar status groups enjoy the same level of honor and are characterized by a common consumption pattern and lifestyle. These groups strive to enhance the position of their members by claiming rights and privileges, while resisting status loss. In Weber's view, status groups differ from classes. It differentiates people on the basis of non-economical qualities like honor, prestige, and religion.

The difference affects the person's access to life chances. Persons belonging to high status groups have more access to wealth and power due to prestige, popularity and social honor. However, economic classes who have wealth can acquire status. In the end, status and class become “knitted” and interlinked. A highly valued status group acquires wealth and power, while a wealthy class acquires high status (Weber, 1974: 180–94). Consequently, the lower status groups have less chances of acquiring such due to lack of prestige, popularity, and social honor. Thus, they also have less chances of gaining higher status. For example, clothes and other emblems denote the social standing of the raja and nobleman, distinguishing them from the common people (Maxwell, 2003). In the late dynastic period in China, on the other hand, only the emperor or the members of his family can wear robes adorned with a dragon. The dragon represents the ideal leader, a kind of primordial force that unites cosmic energies and embodies strength, wisdom and benevolence (Gordon, 2011). Thus, only a particular group in special circumstances such as the emperor and his family can wear robes adorned with a dragon. By wearing robes adorned with a dragon, the emperor and his family publicly display their superior lifestyle and high standing in the society. The people recognize their authority and the privileges attached to such. The wealth and privileges accorded to their social status are signified by the dragon motif.

A cloth with a certain motif becomes a status symbol and prerogative of particular families and clans. Hence, possession of ‘precious cloths’ by some people like the antique collectors in Ngada region of East Nusa Tenggara-Indonesia provide them with status accorded only to families who own such (Hamilton, 1994). At times, people who get to own certain cloth with colours, patterns, and motifs exclusive for those with authority and power are bestowed high esteem and prestige even though they do not belong to that same class. Consequently, the level of skill in the traditional weaving and dyeing techniques distinguish one family from the other. Women who possess more artistic talent and skill in weaving are respected and valued in the family or clan. She has better chance of marrying a wealthy man than a woman who has less skills and talent in weaving. Because of this, she is valued not just for her contribution in the community but also for her contribution to the income of the family.

In the island of Flores, Indonesia, for example, a community of aristocracy is free to organize their own economic activities and enjoy the fruits of their labour. They have slaves that work for them. As such, their women are in the best position to develop the time consuming skill needed to produce the finest textiles in the community (Hamilton, 1994).

Cloth as Signifier of Prestige and Social Status

The structure and patterns of cloth can reflect basic social differentiation in terms of sex, age, marital status and family affiliation. Certain motifs and colours are deemed appropriate for different ages and depict the social and ritual maturity of the wearers. For example, in the Sikka region of Flores, the elderly women continue to wear traditional styles of cloth while the young women experiment with motifs and patterns. All women's skirts used to be very long and composed of four panels. However, only the elderly women from remote villages wear skirts of this style nowadays. Throughout the Sikka province however, the women still wear two panel skirts from the waist to the ankles. The long multi-panel skirts remain widely valued as an important bride-wealth in this province, as well as in the neighbouring Lembata province.

Some types of textile with more complicated patterns and larger sizes have higher values in ceremonial gift exchanges. Gittinger (1975) noted that among the Toba Batak of Indonesia, the choice of cloth to be presented in weddings is determined by the potential wearer's age and status in the wider family group, the seniority of the giver, and the closeness of family ties between the giver and receiver. The parents of the bride wrap the seated couple in highly valued cloth such as the ulos ragidup while the distant uncles and aunts of the bride cover them with textiles of lesser ceremonial value (Niessen, 2009).

In eastern Indonesia, gifts are expressions of powerful connections between the extended family and the prestige and wealth of the deceased. Textiles, in such cases, are usually presented by one set of relatives while the other relatives give different types of male grave goods – livestock. To honour prominent relations, fine textiles are given as shrouds during funerals.

For alliances forged through marriage, a protocol involving cloth giving is strictly followed. The cloth serves as a form of compensation for marriage. The groom and his family give gold, silver, and other material gifts as dowry to the bride's family, depending on their social status. The bride and her family, on the other hand, give cloth or textile as compensation for the dowry. The Indonesian tradition is similar with other Southeast Asian countries in the sense that the giving of cloth in exchange for dowry in marriage represents kinship attachment of the bride's clan to the groom's clan. The cloth symbolizes the new family affiliation through marriage.

According to the strict hierarchy of the court circles in Central Java Indonesia, certain batik patterns such as the diamond lozenge with triangular zigzag edge are traditionally reserved for the rulers. On the other hand, the Javanese wax-resist batik is worn both by the

nobles and the peasants during rituals intended for the appeasement of the spirits, the fertility of the kingdom and the individual, exorcism of evil, and at times, death. The simple stitch-resist *kembangan* or woven *lurik* cloth is required even when these ceremonies are performed within the court. The central Javanese wax-resist batik when used in such rituals does not display divisions of rank and prestige (Heringa, 1985).

In Ende, in the region of Flores, only the male aristocrat wears the *patola*-inspired animal patterns such as the elephant while senior female of high status can only use horse motifs (Maxwell, 2003). A popular mythical creature usually found in Southeast Asian textiles is the *doglion* or *qilin*, also known as *kilin* in Java. Winstedt (1925) noted that in the early 15th century, a suit of clothes with the *qilin* motif is among the gifts from the emperor of China to the king of Malacca.

King (1985) stated that among the Toraja in Indonesia, families or groups are distinguished by patterns or structure of the patterns of textiles. Certain schematic design such as the “*sekong*” rhomb is viewed as genealogical figures.⁴ In their culture, these decorative designs represent the revered and deified ancestors and clan founders believed to have played an active part in the everyday affairs of their descendants. Disregarding of these restrictions imply threats of dire consequences. In the Lamaholot areas of East Flores and the islands of Solor, Lembata and Adonara, the family affiliations of the weavers or wearers of cloth are identified through certain motifs of the *ikat* worn as the widest band or central panel of a wrap (Maxwell, 1980).

A range of highly specific and subtle signals of rank is adopted, as textiles became a sign of class differences within hierarchical societies. Rulers are distinguished from the ruled through the origins of the cloth they wear (i.e., foreign or local), the textures, the designs and the manner in which they wear the cloth. Certain motifs and colors serve as both men and women could wear symbols of noble birth while many cloths. An example of this is the yellow cloth associated with the Malay aristocratic costume and reserved exclusively for royalty. In the Malay tradition, a ceremony is not complete without a parasol of silk or velvet, plain colored or embossed with gold, embroidery and sequins worn by the Aristocrat family.

⁴ *Sekom rhomb* refers to the genealogical design of a cloth with equilateral or geometric patters having four equal sides. The lozenge or rhomb is a common pattern used as a separate isolated motif, as part of a continuously repeated design, or intermeshed and embellished with other decorative devices as seen in the blouses of the Karen women of the northern Thailand, the belts of the Toba Batak of Sumatera and the coverings of the Kalinga of Luzon. (Maxwell, 2003:82)

Cloth as Signifier of Gender Stratification

Textile is a tangible representation of the female element of the Universe because it is a product of women. This male-female complementarity is encapsulated in the notion of the Highest Beings as the Father Sun, the Creator of Human Life and Mother Moon, the Weaver of Human Life (Adams, 1969). Textiles are viewed collectively as a female component along with the Lower World, darkness, internal, left, moon, and death. The male characteristics of the Upper world, light, external, right, sun, and life are opposing yet complementary with the female aspects of the cosmos. In ritual exchanges, textiles are prominent parts of the reciprocal gifts for objects received from the men such as metal, ivory, and buffalo. The man's family give these to the woman's family. Among the Sumbanese of Eastern Indonesia the burden of giving gifts is heavier because of the men's inferior status as wife takers (Maxwell, 2003).

Throughout Southeast Asia, the complementation of weaving and warfare symbolically corresponds to the pairing of the spear and the cloth. Though regarded as a male activity, warfare is still linked with the women's task of weaving. Textile making among women has parallel meanings in the rituals performed by men. The visual symbols women provide in matting and textiles are linked to the male oratory as weaving of legends, genealogies, and history in the Ancient Austronesia cultures.

Southeast Asia's great oral and written chronicles exalt the achievements of gods, ancestors and great leaders. These also include the details of their fine apparel and rich regalia. In certain cultures, men are identified by their names while women are known by the pua patterns they invented. Among the Ibans of Dayak ethnic group in Kalimantan-Indonesia, weaving is referred to as "women's war". If a young woman has not yet made a complex patterned pua, she is criticized and not allowed to receive a captured head. Moreover, the farther the pua travels, the more prestigious is the woman who wove it (Maxwell, 2003).

In the small islands of Palau in Flores island of Indonesia, textiles are hanged as symbolic sails at the launching of traditional fishing boats (Maxwell, 2003). In the island of Roti in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, the combination of structures built by men and the covering textiles created by women are recognized as essential parts of the establishment and maintenance of harmony and order.

In Southeast Asia, the best religious practitioners for the restoration of the cosmic order are the ones who can incorporate both male and female qualities. A shaman can be either male or female. In certain societies, bisexuality is displayed in transvestite apparel when a male

shaman, after initiation, wear women's clothing and perform women's tasks, including weaving (Hamonic, 1977). These complementary yet opposing symbolism containing male, female or even bisexual elements are depicted in some Southeast Asian textiles. There are numbers of important ceremonial textiles among the various Batak peoples of north Sumatra that have male and female ends where each set of gender related elements are concentrated. These include the Simalungun Batak head cloth, the Toba Batak clothes (such as the ulos ragidup and the ulos pinunsaan), and some nineteenth century Mandailing and Angkola Batak textiles.

The arrangement of different patterns and the structures of the pattern at each end of the shoulder cloth suggest interesting comparison with the overt and intentional sexual imagery of Batak textiles among the people of the south Bengkulu and Pasemah region of Sumatra (Maxwell, 2003). Among the Palu'e people of central Flores, cloth motifs depict gender differentiation. Women decorate their textiles exclusively with geometrically stylized representations of objects from their own daily lives in accordance with mythical narratives. They depict cultigens such as tubers or maize, as well as things related to animal husbandry like pig sty or the chicken's feet and objects associated with body care such as fine toothed comb used for removing nits.

According to Palu'e myths, when the men saw the motifs of the cloth woven by the women, they pleaded for the inclusion of a motif associated with one of their own realms namely, hunting. The inclusion of a conceptually male element in a predominantly female field illustrates a general features of Palu'e dual classification, wherein everything is believed to also to contain a little bit of its opposite (Vischer, 1979).

Throughout Southeast Asia however, the world of textile is predominantly a female sphere. In certain cultures, participation of men in textile making is usually limited to making the weaving equipment. In Islamic cultures, men carved the patterns for backcloth painting or beading. The Sultan of Terengganu supplied drawings of his cloth patterns into shed patterns for songket brocade and silk weaving (Sheppard, 1978). The rulers of central Java inspired certain batik patterns made by their concubines.

Textiles are engaged in the social and ritual practices of Lamaholot communities. The ceremonial attire of men consists of two panel tubular textiles with a pattern format akin to the women's keriot (De Jong, 1986). In the Lio Village of Ngada, Indonesia, on the other hand, the textiles serve not only as prestigious items in several socio-political and ritual contexts, but

also as gender signifier. The women wear striped non-ikat sarongs (luka) while the men wear ikat sarongs (lawo). Ikat patterns are interpreted as male markers while the stripes are considered as female markers.

Decorative techniques in some places are also quite specific. Among the Toraja, shell and patchwork appliqué are used only on women's tunic while supplementary weft weaving and tapestry weave appear only on men's loincloths. No matter how simple the structure of the textile or its decoration is, they usually depict a clear distinction between men and women. These distinctions are indicated by the shape, size and structure of the textile that are gender-specific. In many societies, gender identification is made through the manner of wearing traditional cloth, the choice of textile, the pattern and colours. The structure of patterns and colours of cloth are related to a strict social and gender stratification. In the case of ritually significant textiles, such restrictions are especially important.

Given the literature about cloth and textile discussed above, and taking into consideration the context of Southeast Asia, the author assumes that it is possible to study the Kain Tenun Tais of the Bunaq ethnic group of West Timor by exploring its patterns and colours and how these depict the way by which this ethnic group stratify their society.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study uses qualitative approach to generate information on the role of Kain Tenun Tais as signifier of social status and gender stratification in the Bunaq society. It is supplemented by descriptive statistics derived from representative survey of Bunaqs who are familiar with weaving.

Study Objectives

This paper situates the woven cloth, the Kain Tenun Tais, within the Bunaquesse ethnic culture. It shows that significant relationship exists between the traditional cloth of Kain Tenun Tais and the Bunaquesse identity. It examines the Kain Tenun Tais as a symbolic representation of social status and a gender signifier among the Bunaqs. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the different colours, motifs and patterns of the Kain Tenun Tais? How do these explain the Bunaquesse worldview, religious belief, and relationship with the

environment?

2. What cloth colours, motifs and patterns signify the gender of the wearers? What are the symbolic meanings of these, which mark the specific life events of the Bunaquesse men and women?
3. How do the Tais determine the social stratification of the members of the Bunaq ethnic group? How does it reflect the wealth, status and prestige accorded to its wearer?

Significance of the Research

At present, there is very little information written about the Bunaq ethnic group. This underscores the gap between oral history and written representation of the Bunaqs as a people.

From the perspective of the Bunaqs, existing historical accounts and cultural writings do not adequately represent the importance of their traditional clothes. Although there are many studies about the textiles and clothes of the different ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, there are very few studies written about the Bunaq traditional cloth, the Kain Tenun Tais, more so, its functions in the creation of the Bunaquesse identity.

The researcher hopes that through this study, it can make the Bunaq from the village of Makir in West Timor, Indonesia more conscious of the importance of the Kain Tenun Tais on their cultural heritage. In particular, the study will provide better understanding of how the cloth actually defines the status and gender stratification systems of the Bunaq ethnic group.

Scope and Limitations

Although other studies of textiles detail the geographic and ethnic divisions, as well as the importance of decorative techniques, this study focuses only on the traditional cloth, the Kain Tenun Tais, and how the use of such enable the Bunaqs to distinguish and/or affirm their social status and gender identity in the Bunaquesse society.

The validation of the oral history of the Tais' tradition passed on to the present generation is possible through the existence of the antique cloth. However, the decay of the cotton cloth unfortunately led to information loss that could explain the significance of clothing in the Bunaq culture throughout the years. Because of this, the historical changes in the functional significance of the Kain Tenun Tais in the Bunaquesse society, while alluded to, have not been thoroughly examined. This undermined the cultural significance of the Kain Tenun Tais in the Bunaq society.

Although there might be similarities in terms of the cultural meanings of the textiles and clothes among many societies in Southeast Asia, there are nuances in the Bunaq's internal social dynamics and external socio-political conditions that might not be present in other ethnic groups. As such, some of the findings of this study might be unique only to the Bunaquesse society and inapplicable to the other ethnic groups in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Findings

Site Selection

Several Bunaq ethnic groups occupy the central part of West Timor Indonesia. These are Makir, Gewal, Lakmaras, Henes, Nualain, Hulul, Leowalu, Duarato, Ekin, Loonuna, Abis, Sasaq, Mahui, Dirun, and Leosogo. This study, however, focuses on the village of Makir where the traditional community of weavers live. Geographically, Makir is at the center of Timor Island. It is located at the border of East Timor (Timor Leste) and West Timor of Indonesia. Presently, Makir village is the only remaining village of the Bunaq ethnic groups that continues the practice of the rituals and traditional weaving process of the Kain Tenun Tais. Other Bunaq ethnic groups now use imported materials from China to weave the Tais. Hence, the rituals involved in the planting of cotton up to the weaving of the Tais are no longer practiced by these groups. It is for this reason that the village of Makir has been chosen as study site. The researcher deemed that it is important to preserve the Bunaq weaving tradition and culture in this village before these are lost.

To date, the weavers of Makir village continue to practice the Bunaq weaving tradition, especially the “Bei Gua”, which involves the singing of the “Tei Gugul Hili”, a genealogical account of the Bunaq group, during the thread preparation.

Data Collection

Data for the study are obtained from secondary data sources, key informant interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation. The key informants for the study comprise of: (1) the women members of a family of weavers in a Bunaq community, (2) the tribal leaders of the Bunaq ethnic group, and (4) clan members in the village of Makir, especially those who are categorized as clans of aristocrats, elite families, and commoners.

To obtain the general profile of the Kain Tenun Tais weavers and users in the village of Makir, questionnaires were fielded to 40 randomly selected respondents, 5 of whom are men and 35 are women. The 5 men include a tribal leader, a ritual leader, an elementary school

teacher, and 2 students. The 39 women include 31 weavers, 2 students, a tribal leader, and an elementary school teacher. Twenty of the women respondents are married while fifteen are still single. Among the male respondents, two are married and three are still single. Most of the respondents belong to the age group, 28 to 38 years old (45%), and 17 to 27 years old (32.5%). The rest are of the age groups 39 to 48 years old (15%), and 49 year old above (7.5%). All the women respondents are familiar with the tradition of weaving the Kain Tenun Tais. In fact, only one respondent has less than 5 years experience in weaving the Tais. Most (57%) had been weaving the Kain Tenun Tais for 5 to 10 years. Others (15%) had been weaving for 11 to 20 years while another 15% of respondents had been weaving for 20 to 30 years. Ten percent of the respondents did not specify the time period that they are weaving the Tais. This is because weaving is a family and community tradition that these women had been exposed to since their childhood years. It is part of their everyday life.

To supplement the information generated from the survey the researcher interviewed six (6) elderly women. These six are not included in the 40 respondents who filled-in the questionnaires.

The researcher also participated in the weaving activities and the rituals involved in it while observing the process. This enabled the researcher to gain more insights on the importance of the Kain Tenun Tais and to understand the process of weaving and cloth production.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

To highlight the experiences of the Bunaq weavers, the researcher transcribed and coded and the data collected from the interviews and observations of the rituals involved in making and using the Kain Tenun Tais. These were categorized and analysed according to the themes of gender and social status stratification. Visual models such as tables and cognitive maps were used to represent the coded data. Participant observations, feed backing and triangulation of information were also used to validate the data.

Results

Gender Division of Labor in the Weaving Process

Tais making also involves complementary tasks between men and women. Weaving is the primary task of women while the men assist in preparing the tools needed for Tais-making. The men provide the woods and ingredients needed for making a Tais such as the esaq (palm

leaf rib), nenuq (thread coloring), and ma' (bamboo) while the women provide the goq (cotton), kira (small stick), and bián (small plate) for the preparation of the thread for weaving. The men also prepare the Pil Bekaq (traditional carpet) and the Bian Gol for spinning the thread while the women prepare the goq and rene gol - a traditional basket that contains the cotton.

The women pick the cotton and spin these into threads until they produce a piece of Tais. The women hold the Tais when someone is born or dies in the family. It is also the task of women to bring the Tais in a Rene or Uhus. Hence, the tradition of the Tais starts and ends in the woman's hands.

The traditional weaving of Kain Tenun Tais is founded on the stories narrated in the poems of "Tei Gugul Hiliq". As the weavers spin cotton to produce thread for Tais using Kira and Bian (a traditional tools used by weavers for spinning a thread), they sing the "Tei Gugul Hiliq".

The "Tei Gugul Hiliq" rite is held near the Mot Mone and Mot Pana at night or daytime depending on the announcement of the Deu Gomo (tribal leader) or the Ama Desa (Barangay Captain) in the village. The weavers follow certain rules related to rites such as wearing a Tais, bringing their own cotton, and a local carpet that identifies their clan status. Both men and women participate in arranging the tools needed during the rite.

Tei Gugul Hiliq is a doctrine that is in the form of poems intended to keep the Bunaqs aware of the lives of their ancestors. The poems emphasize that weaving is the tradition of the Bunaq ancestors that they should keep it their hearts ("Kes li'as Bei gie rele zol – I ege zen roe rimil no" or As Kes Li'as Weaving is our ancestor's tradition - Keep it always in our heart). This indicates the importance of Tais weaving as a cultural heritage from the Bunaquesse ancestors and the centrality of weaving in the lives of the Bunaqs. For the Bunaqs, to weave is to give respect to the ancestors. In making the Tais, therefore, the Bunaquesse women have the role of perpetuating their cultural heritage.

During the rite, men and women wear different colors of Tais according to their gender, with the combination of a blouse (for women) and a shirt (for men). The women wear the Tais with combination of black color; while the men wear Tais of brown color with various combinations of black. The two colors of the Tais symbolize the respective roles of Bein Mone and Bein Pana of the clan as male and female lord authorities in the family and the continuation of the Tais tradition of spinning the thread. The most significant point in the ritual of spinning the thread is the consistency of pulling the cotton up and down to produce the thread as they

sing the Tei Gugul Hiliq or the poems narrating the genealogical life stories of their ancestors from one generation to the next. The participants to this ritual promise to perpetuate the legacy of their ancestors by continuing their weaving practice to ensure long life and the continuity of their clans. Since the tradition of weaving a Kain Tenun Tais is considered a task of women, the rite of “Tei Gugul Hiliq” also conveys the importance of the women in the Bunaq society.

Tais making is considered to be essentially women’s work. The Bunaquesse men merely assist the women in producing the thread by Gugul Hiliq (spinning the thread). The right hand symbolizes masculinity known as Heten (right), which depicts the tasks of men to ensure his family’s survival. The left hand refers to femininity known as Suel (left). Suel portrays the responsibilities of women to do the household chores.

Kain Tenun Tais as Signifier of Feminity and Masculinity

As an expression of material culture, the Tais is customarily used by the Bunaqs to cover their bodies. However, the design, color and motifs used also serve as distinguishing marks of gender for the Bunaqs. The Tais used by the men is called Tais Mone, (Mone means Men), and the Tais used by the women is called Tais Pana (Pana means Women). Regardless of the motif, the Tais mone is traditionally twisted-worn along the loin by a man with the design of long dress and the combination color of red and black.

A Bunaquesse man may choose a desired motif of Tais depending on his social status in the Bunaquesse society. The Tais belt called doq tiq (a traditional belt made of a piece of cloth) tied up in a man’s loin complements the Tais. The Bunaquesse man also wears a small piece of cloth called lesu (a colorful traditional hat) to cover his head. He also wears a selendang (a small piece of Tais) on his shoulder down along his loin. In the past, the Bunaquesse men only wear the Tais. Nowadays however, they combine the Tais with modern clothes.

Moreover, the Tais Mone is worn following the pattern of Tais Mone Es. The word Es refers to the pattern of Tais Mone that conveys the function of Nolaq (wide) and Legul (long). In Bunaquesse culture, the phrase Nolaq o Legul symbolizes gentleness and accountability for one’s actions, which are expected from the man. Hence, a Bunaquesse man is always required to be Mone Ganal o Jelo (a responsible man) to his family. This also extends to his involvement outside his family such as in politics and business. The words Nolaq o Legul indicates the expectations from the Bunaquesse man to take care of his family members and clan, to participate in politics (as barangay captain, district government official, etc.), and to engage in livelihood activities or trade.

The Bunaquesse women, on the other hand, wear the Tais Pana. Tais Pana is a sarong with an average length of around one to two meters. As a sarong, it is a long dress without any peculiarity in it (as compared with the Tais Mone). It covers the body from the breasts down to the feet. The size of the Tais Pana mostly depends on the woman's body. Its colors are a combination of black, yellow, and brown.

As part of the Bunaquesse tradition, the woman is required to wear a selendang (a small size of Tais) to cover her head or to put on her right and left shoulder covering the breasts. The woman's selendang has various colors and motifs designed similar to the Tais Mone, with a range of one meter. In addition, the Bunaquesse woman also brings a colorful *rene gol* (a traditional basket made of palm tree), which contains *Molo o Pu* (betel vine and areca nut). The *rene gol* is designed with some motifs of Tais such as flowers, eagle, or butterfly, which indicates her clan of origin or *Deu Hoto*.

The Bunaquesse woman's dress is called Tais Pana Na'ut, which means to cover the body tightly. Unlike the symbol of Tais Mone as *Nolaq o Legul*, the word Na'ut refers to *Til o Baraq* (*Til* means narrow; *Baraq* means short). For the Bunaqs, the phrase *Til o Baraq* symbolizes fertility and respect. The Bunaqs call them *Pana Maktaran o Loi Bul*, which symbolizes skills and knowledge in supervising the households. *Til* is an indication of the role of the Bunaquesse women to be always "close" to their family members, doing household tasks. *Baraq* emphasizes the limit on the Bunaquesse women's involvement in politics. Women in the Bunaq society cannot be a leader except as *Bein Pana* in the *Deu Hoto*.

Kain Tenun Tais as A Basis for Social Stratification

Because cotton trees grow everywhere, the Bunaqs from different social status groups have access to such. Because of this, the cotton tree and the weaving of the Tais serve as equalizers of social positions for the Bunaqs and as a symbol of the identity of the Bunaq people as a whole. Nonetheless, the patterns, motifs, and colors of the woven Tais serve as means to distinguish the *Nai*, the *En Soi*, and the *Renu* from each other. The colors black and brown are soil colors in the lowlands where the *Nai* and the *En Soi* grow rice. The color red, on the other hand, is associated with the chivalry of their ancestors.

The motifs of butterfly, eagle, and gecko, on the other hand, are representations of superiority because these animals are considered belonging to the upper world in the Bunaq myth. Hence, they become the signifiers of ownership of lowland rice fields, superiority, authority, prestige, and wealth of both the *Nai* and the *En Soi*.

On the other hand, the Renu depend on the nature's produce for survival. Hence, the colors blue and green that symbolize cotton trees and natural products of nature freely given to all people, and the flower, which is a natural product of nature, came to symbolize the lower status of the Renu. The comb is a representation of the rake, a tool use to cultivate the soil. The survival of the Renu depends on what the soil (nature), which they cultivate, will produce. Hence, comb like the flower becomes the motif for the Renu as these symbols depict their dependency to nature.

The complexity of the dyeing or coloring process serves as a determinant of the worth of Kain Tenun Tais. The color and its brightness become the basis for determining the value of the Tais. Black thread is produced by soaking the cotton thread in the boiling leaves of the Tau' tree. Brown and red threads are produced by soaking the threads in the boiling roots of the Nenuq tree. The Tau' and Nenuq trees only grow in the fertile soil of the lowlands owned by the Nai and En Soi and are not readily available. As such, only the Nai and the En Soi can afford to use these in making the Tais.

Green and blue threads are produced by soaking the cotton threads in the boiling bark of Gewang tree and the leaves of the Lontar tree, respectively. These trees do not require fertile soil and are found everywhere; hence, the Renu cloth is cheaper and always available.

The motifs used in designing the Tais also depict status differentiation. The zoomorphic motifs are mostly found in the Kain Tenun Tais used by the Nai and En Soi family. Based on the Bunaq's myth, the toko'h (gecko), mape (eagle) and una (butterfly) are animal motifs that represent man's bravery, loyalty and unity. These animals belonged to the Upper World of the Bunaq legend. It is a Bunaquesse belief that animals that can fly or live in high places are superior than animals that live on land. The superiority of these animals is linked with the authority and privileges of the Nai. The En Soi have similar motif with the Nai because of their inherited social status, they have the privilege to become the assistant of the Nai in administering the community. This does not imply that because Nai and En Soi have similar zoomorphic design, they are of equal footing in the society. In public events or clan celebrations where the Bunaquesse are expected to wear the Tais in accordance to their social status, the Bunaqs can distinguish the Nai from the Soi. This can be explained through the proposition of Geertz that culture has to be appreciated from the "native's point of view".

The motif of gecko, eagle and butterfly implies no distinction on the social status of the Nai and the En Soi from an outsider point of view. However, for the Bunaquesse they can

differentiate the social status of the wearer because they know each other. They are aware of the family background or clan history of the wearer of the Tais as this is part of the story, in the Tel Gugul Hiliq. Hence, these are reflected in the motif of their Tais. On the other hand, the geometric motifs that depict nature such as Hotel Gubuk (Flower) and Sawe (Comb) are seen in the Kain Tenun Tais of the Renu family. These motifs are considered part of nature, tools for agriculture, and commonly found in the Bunaq's environment.

The pattern of the thread weft of the Kain Tenun Tais can also mark social status distinctions. The weaver has no authority to cut the thread weft because this privilege is given only to the male Nai and En Soi. Three kinds of thread weft are associated with specific status groups. These are the Tais Saren, Tais Goroq, and Tais Gulo.

Conclusion

In the context of Southeast Asian culture, cloth and textile plays an important function in preserving and promoting values and traditions of the society. Aside from its use for clothing or body protection, textile differentiates people in the society. The cloth depicts the way by which ethnic groups construct realities through its colors, motifs, and patterns.

Throughout the history, the social life of the Bunaquesse ethnic group is distinct from the other ethnic groups in the Belu district of West Timor because of its preservation of the weaving tradition of Kain Tenun Tais. The traditional weaving process by which the Kain Tenun Tais is crafted, the symbols and the socio-cultural importance it serves in the daily lives of the Bunaquesse people and the special occasions they celebrate not only affirm the Bunaquesse identity, but also signifies the group's gender and status stratification system.

Gender division of labor is evident in the process of weaving the Tais. The actual weaving of the Kain Tenun Tais is the chief task of women while the men assist in preparing the tools. During the Tais preparation, gender stratification is affirmed by the Bunaquesse men and women wearing the Tais that represent the role of Bein Mone (Male Lord Authority) and Bein Pana (Female Lord Authority) in the family.

Likewise, this study confirms the proposition of Douglas (1996) that the human body becomes an expression of social control. The colors and patterns of the Kain Tenun Tais become a signifier of gender differentiation among the Bunaqs. They are expected to wear different colors of Tais based on their gender especially during the performance of the rituals.

The manner of wearing the Tais follows the patterns of Tais Mone, Es (for men) and Tais Pana, Na'ut (for women).

Moreover, the division between men and women are evident in the structures and decorations of the Tais, no matter how simple these are. The shape, size and structure of the textiles are designed in accordance with the wearer's gender. Among the Bunaquesse, the woven Kain Tenun Tais in the dominant colors of red and brown with uncut thread weft serve as gender signifiers of the male Nai and En Soi. On the other hand, the woven Kain Tenun Tais, which have the dominant color of black without thread weft, serve as gender signifiers of the female Nai and En Soi. The woven blue Kain Tenun Tais with cut thread weft marks the male Renu while the woven green Kain Tenun Tais without thread weft marks the female Renu. This attests to the claim of Abad (2006) that the way people wear their clothes or chooses kind of textile is an expression of their belongingness to specific social words and their social experiences.

Because of the importance of the Tais in depicting the identity and preserving the continuity of the traditions of the Bunaqs, the Bunaquesse society upholds the position of the women who possess more artistic talent and skills in weaving. This also indicates that the skill and knowledge of weaving leads to the stratification of women group based on their ability to weave the Tais.

The patterns, motifs, and colors of the Kain Tenun Tais communicate the social status of the Bunaqs based on land ownership. Black and brown colors stand for the ownership of the lowland fields for rice farming between the Nai and the En Soi. Blue and green symbolize the connection with nature; especially with the cotton trees are assigned to the Renu. As a material culture, the Tais economic value is based on the complexity of the dyeing or coloring process. The color and its brightness helped determine the dye's value and the price of the cloth. The trees that produced the dyes for brown, black and red are rare that caused the thread to become expensive and more valuable.

In terms of motif, the butterfly, eagle, and gecko designs, which are representations of superiority, are used to symbolize the power, prestige, and wealth for both the Nai and En Soi. The Renu, who are dependent on the nature's produce for survival are assigned the flower and comb motifs.

The Tais narrates the Bunaq's ancestral story and bring this history into their present social, economic, and political relationships. The hereditary privilege of the higher status

groups (Nai and En Soi) which are affirmed through the use of the Tais as signifiers both in the everyday life and in rituals perpetuate the process of social closure or the continuation of stratification and inequality in the Bunaq society. It affirms what Parkin (1979:44) described as social closure, a process by which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligible”.

From the above, it can be seen that the Kain Tenun Tais of the Bunaq ethnic group of West Timor is a distinctive textile that distinguishes the Bunaquesse from the other ethnic groups in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia. The patterns, motifs, and colours of the Kain Tenun Tais mark specific life events that stratify the Bunaquesse people based on status and gender. It is a crucial material expression of the Bunaquesse identity as a people. For such reason, it is crucial that the symbolisms of the Tais are understood and the practice of weaving such among the Bunaquesse be preserved.

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