

## Intangible Threads: Curating the Living Heritage of Dayak Ikat Weaving

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A few decades ago, the *ikat* weaving tradition of the Dayaks, the indigenous people of Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), was considered a disappearing art (Gittinger 1979; Heppell 1994), but through the work of the Dayak Ikat Weaving Project based in Sintang, West Kalimantan, the tradition has been revived.

This chapter considers the role the Weaving Project plays in the revitalisation and preservation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) associated with Dayak weaving. The Project is examined in the light of preservation strategies recommended under the 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* as well as Indonesian laws recently enacted or drafted to protect intellectual and cultural property. I suggest that efforts such as the Dayak Ikat Weaving Project offer more culturally appropriate, holistic and integrative heritage interventions than those proposed by the Convention and Indonesian laws. Special attention is given to indigenous curatorial practices embedded in Dayak *ikat* weaving traditions, and how these exist as both forms of intangible cultural heritage as well as strategies for their preservation. My goal is to show how the intangible cannot be detached from the tangible, or the whole fabric of life, and preservation strategies need to be informed by more 'ecological thinking', as Michael Brown recommends in his article 'Heritage Trouble: Recent Work on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Property' (2005). For Brown, ecological thinking is 'characterized by holism and awareness of interconnections. It recognizes that the management of complex systems demands attention not to one variable but to many, and that there will always be uncertainty about how changes in one variable will affect the whole' (ibid, 42).

### THE UNESCO CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was adopted by the United Nations General Conference in 2003 and entered into force in 2006. The Convention grew out of a concern within the international community over the rapid loss of the world's diversity of living cultural expressions. The Convention was also the culmination of years of debate over how to correct the imbalance in previous United Nations approaches that favoured the protection of tangible heritage in the form of monuments and sites over popular, folkloric and living traditions, especially those of historically marginalised communities such as indigenous people and ethnic minorities (Aikawa-Faure 2009, 14–15; Fairchild Ruggles and Silverman 2009; Kurin 2004a).

According to the Convention, intangible cultural heritage is:

The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and in some cases individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO 2003, Article 2.1, Definitions)

Intangible cultural heritage is manifested in oral traditions, including language; performing arts (traditional dance, music, and theatre); social practices, rituals, and festive events; knowledge and practices; and traditional craftsmanship. (UNESCO 2003, Article 2.2, Definitions)

One of the purposes of the Convention is to raise awareness and appreciation of ICH and maintain conditions under which it can be perpetuated, given the ‘social good’ it is purported to serve. Consequently, the aim is to sustain living cultural traditions, practices and processes in addition to collecting and preserving cultural products. The Convention also establishes a Fund for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage that can be drawn on to support safeguarding efforts. Furthermore, the Convention supports international cooperation and assistance, especially in the areas of research, documentation, education and training (Article 21). An important requirement of the Convention is that local communities and the ‘culture bearers’ themselves are involved in identifying their ICH and developing and implementing measures for its protection.

The articles of the Convention outline safeguarding measures in detail, as well as the role and responsibilities of state signatories to the Convention. The primary means for safeguarding ICH is the creation of national inventories, which, in turn, can be used to identify specific examples of ICH for nomination to the ‘Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding’. Listing and lists are intended to ensure greater visibility of ICH, increase awareness of its significance and encourage dialogue on the need to respect cultural diversity. Under the Convention, ‘safeguarding’ means: ‘measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission (particularly through formal and informal education) as well as revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage’ (UNESCO 2003, Article 2.3, Definitions).

#### THE DAYAK IKAT WEAVING PROJECT

The Dayak Ikat Weaving Project was initiated in 1999 by the People, Resources and Conservation Foundation (PRCF), a community development non-governmental organisation, in collaboration with the Kobus Centre (Center for Cultural Communication and Art) in Sintang.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> I first visited the Dayak Ikat Weaving Project in 2002 when I was sent to Sintang by the Ford Foundation in Jakarta to evaluate the Project’s progress. I returned in 2003 with two of my students participating in the University of Denver/Indonesia Exchange Program in Museum Training funded by the Ford Foundation. Novia Sagita also participated in this training program and spent nine months at the University of Denver studying museology and anthropology. I made a subsequent research trip to Sintang in 2008. I want to thank Philip Yampolsky, who was the Cultural Program Officer at the Ford Foundation in Jakarta at that time for initially sending me to Sintang and for supporting the Exchange

project's goals are to enhance the artistic and managerial skills of weavers; contribute to women's empowerment through greater financial security and independence; and foster appreciation of weaving through research and education (Huda 2002). The Project's overarching goal is to revive and strengthen the *ikat* weaving tradition, which has become a hallmark of Dayak cultural heritage.

The decline in textile production among the Dayaks, as in the case of most traditional arts, was a consequence of general forces of culture change, modernisation and development. Religious conversion to either Christianity or Islam undermined traditional animistic religious beliefs and rituals inextricably tied to weaving while the introduction of commercial cloth and other goods some 200 years ago decreased the need for hand-woven cloth (Heppell 1994).

*Ikat* is a term derived from the Malay verb *mengikat*, meaning to tie, bind or knot. It is used to refer to a style of weaving in which designs on cloth are produced by a resist dye process.<sup>2</sup> Dayaks, especially the Iban, are famous for their *ikats*, which have been highly prized by collectors for centuries and can now be found in museum and private collections around the world.

One of the Project's main activities has been the development of a cooperative known as *Jasa Menenun Mandiri* (JMM), which translates as 'weavers stand alone or go independent'. The cooperative has a gallery and atelier at the Kobus Centre that serves as a collection and distribution point for the weavers' products, including articles such as *ikat* textiles, bags, picture frames, place mats, wall hangings, jackets and scarves, as well as other local crafts like basketry. The Kobus Centre and cooperative are housed in the residence of Father Jacques Maessen, a Dutch Catholic priest who has been working in the region since 1969. He is also founder of, and senior adviser to, the Project (see Fig 15.1).

When the cooperative was established in 2000 it had fewer than 50 members. It now has more than 1200 from 32 different villages in the Sintang district (Sagita 2009, 120). The cooperative buys and sells the weavers' products and provides them with loans to purchase materials such as thread and chemical dyes or for other needs. Through their participation in the cooperative, weavers have the opportunity to earn much-needed cash and acquire skills in financial and business management. Thus, it exists to generate income for the weavers and their communities as well as to validate their art. The cooperative also sponsors training workshops on the use of natural dyeing techniques and traditional designs, motifs and colours.

According to Father Maessen, the cooperative has been concerned with promoting the use of traditional designs and natural dyes since this makes the *ikats* more 'authentic' and increases their market value. This policy also fosters the preservation of the traditional art form. Younger, less experienced and knowledgeable weavers are sometimes provided with photographs of old textiles with traditional designs to replicate (Kreps 2002). Although Father Maessen knows that traditional style textiles sell better, he also does not want to stifle creativity. To this end, he encourages

Program. I am also grateful to Father Maessen and Novia Sagita for giving me the opportunity to work with them, and to the weavers and their families who generously opened their homes to us. Many thanks to Helaine Silverman for her thoughtful comments on the chapter, and to Randy Brown for photographs from the 2008 fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> The *ikat* process entails tying off portions of warp or weft yarns so that they will resist dyes and then untying and retying other sections before immersing the yarns in successive dye baths. After dyeing, the knots are untied or cut away leaving patterned yarns ready for weaving. The Iban weave on back-strap looms (Gittinger 1979, 233).



FIG 15.1. FATHER JACQUES MAESSEN IN THE VILLAGE OF ENSAID PANJANG, WEST KALIMANTAN, INDONESIA, 2003.

weavers to be innovative, often buying non-traditional pieces, such as those that depict modern life and technologies such as mobile phones, aeroplanes and televisions, for his private collection.

Because *ikats* coloured with naturally-dyed threads fetch higher prices than those made from chemical, aniline dyes, the Project has been promoting the collection of plants used to produce dyes.<sup>3</sup> However, deforestation, a serious environmental problem in Kalimantan, has led to a scarcity of natural dye raw materials. To address this problem, the Project, in cooperation with regional government and conservation agencies, has initiated a forest rehabilitation programme by cultivating dye-producing plants. This conservation work complements one of the key objectives of the Project: to create sustainable livelihoods for the Dayaks (Huda 2008).

The cooperative also promotes Dayak *ikats* nationally and internationally through exhibitions, seminars, publications and via their website. Additionally, it sponsors an annual exhibition and competition in Sintang to inspire quality work. The competition is also meant to increase community awareness and appreciation of local cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation.

Father Maessen has been credited for being the principal force behind the revitalisation and promotion of West Kalimantan *ikat* weaving. In fact, he received an award from the Ministry of Culture for his cultural heritage preservation efforts. He began collecting textiles in the 1970s when he noticed how fewer women were weaving, and how older pieces were being sold or

<sup>3</sup> In 2006, the cooperative received a grant from the Ford Foundation to make an inventory of natural dye plants traditionally used by the weavers.

traded in response to demand from the international tribal arts market (Low 2009). Ironically, Father Maessen's initial attempts to rescue and preserve the textile tradition were met with resentment. He recounts how in 1974 a group of young women staged a protest in front of his house and burned heirloom *ikats* known as *pua kumbu*, a ceremonial cloth now highly valued. The women accused Father Maessen of trying to 'keep them primitive' and 'frozen in time' (Maessen as cited in Low 2009, 198–9).

This anecdote takes its significance from the historical context. At the time, the Indonesian state ideology mandated that citizens, especially those living in more remote regions, embrace modernisation and development. Not surprisingly, Dayaks began to reject traditional dress because they believed it marked them as 'backward' and 'primitive'. The use of *pua kumbu* was particularly shunned because it was historically associated with headhunting rituals and inter-tribal warfare and thus linked to a past identity Dayaks were trying to shed. Today, the situation is dramatically different. Young weavers have come to claim weaving and *ikats* as a symbol of their cultural heritage and identity. They also recognise that weaving is a significant economic resource and means of raising their standard of living. Weaving is also, for some, entry into a cosmopolitan world of international conferences, trade fairs, exhibitions and an elite national design and fashion industry. *Ikats*, as a result of these developments, have been transformed from being signifiers of 'primitiveness' to an internationally acclaimed traditional art form.

The Project is also illustrative of how globalisation intersects traditional art forms and the assertion of ethnic identities. While globalisation, on the one hand, tends to generate cultural homogenisation, on the other hand it also encourages the competitive marketing of difference. Through their participation in the Project, weavers receive international recognition and validation (via museums, collectors, publications, festivals, competitions, etc) not only of their art but also of their culture and identity as Dayaks, giving them added leverage when negotiating their identity and status on provincial and national levels.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly important in light of the Dayak peoples' continual struggles to secure land rights and access to other resources like jobs vis-à-vis other more economically and politically powerful ethnic groups. In the late 1990s, such struggles led to violent inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts (namely between Dayak Christians/Animists and Madurese Muslims) in Central and West Kalimantan, and the labelling of Dayaks as savage headhunters in the national press (see Schiller and Garang 2002, 250; Silver 2007).<sup>5</sup>

Commercial success is one way of validating and perpetuating Dayak *ikat* weaving. Conducting ethnographic research and producing knowledge about it is another. Hence, research is an essential component of the Project's work. It is considered 'urgent research' since knowledge of weaving techniques and associated customs is disappearing with the passing of older weavers. The information collected on oral traditions and *ikat* symbolism enriches younger weavers' understanding of the art and their own collection of symbols.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Helaine Silverman for this observation.

<sup>5</sup> In October 2008 a new museum opened in Sintang, the Museum Kapuas Raya. One of its main attractions is a collection and display of Dayak *ikat* weavings, donated by Father Maessen. The Museum is the product of a collaboration between the Kobus Centre, the district government and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. It is dedicated to educating the public on the rich history, art and culture of the Sintang district, and promoting peace and reconciliation among the various ethnic groups living in the region.

Research and documentation is also important for marketing purposes, as a cloth is considered more valuable to buyers if information on the meaning of specific motifs and the story behind them, as well as the weaver's name and village, is available. For this reason, the cooperative tags each piece with a label of 'authenticity' bearing the name of the weaver (artist) and her village (provenance), and whether chemical or natural dyes were used (materials). They also produce pamphlets that interpret the meaning of the cloth's motifs. Thus, the cooperative is savvy to the tastes and predilections of non-local consumers.

Novia Sagita, a Dayak woman from Pontianak, the capital of West Kalimantan, was a researcher for the Project and began field studies in the Sintang and the Upper Kapuas districts of West Kalimantan in 2002, focusing on Dayak Desa, Iban and Kantuk.<sup>6</sup> Sagita's research pertained primarily to documenting through photographs, notes and video the intangible aspects of Dayak *ikat* weaving, such as the symbols and motifs used in the textiles as well as their stories and meanings. She also recorded local customs, beliefs and rituals that accompany weaving along with oral histories of individual weavers. As such, her research was consistent with the safeguarding measures recommended in the Convention and by others involved in preservation efforts. Graham, for one, points out how 'ethnographic work is necessary to understand local ideologies of intangible culture in relation to safeguarding, documentation and representational practices. It is also essential to comprehending the precise nature of indigenous conceptions of and participation in such activities' (2009, 186).

In addition to the subjects above, Sagita was also interested in investigating indigenous curatorial practices associated with weaving, as this is part of the tradition that has been integral to its transmission and preservation, yet has been historically overlooked and undocumented. This is despite the fact that scholars have been studying and publishing on Iban textiles for decades.

#### INDIGENOUS CURATION OF DAYAK IKAT AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Previously, I have asserted that indigenous curation is both a form of intangible culture as well as a means of safeguarding it (Kreps 2009). Indigenous curation is a phrase that has entered museological discourse in recent years which I use to refer to a constellation of museological forms and behaviour, including structures and spaces (indigenous models of museums) for the collection, storage and display of objects as well as knowledge, methods and technologies related to their care, treatment, interpretation and conservation (curation). Indigenous curation also encompasses concepts of cultural heritage preservation or conceptual frameworks that support the transmission of culture through time.

Indigenous models of museums and curatorial methods may be found in vernacular architectural forms; religious beliefs and practices; systems of social organisation and structure (especially

<sup>6</sup> The name 'Dayak' is a generic term used to refer to the indigenous, culturally non-Malay and non-Chinese inhabitants of Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo). However, a number of different Dayak groups inhabit the island and possess their own names, languages and cultural traditions. The ethnic groups named live in the middle Kapuas River basin and have therefore been referred to as 'Kapuas Ibanic' ethnic groups in the ethnographic literature. These groups include the Kantu', Seberuang, Bugau, Mualang, and Desa (King 1993, 49). The 'Iban proper' are sometimes called the Sea Dayak (Drake 1988, 29) and have historically inhabited areas that now comprise the border of the Malaysian state of Sarawak and Indonesian province of West Kalimantan.

kinship systems and ancestor worship); artistic traditions; and aesthetic systems, in addition to knowledge connected to people's relationships and adaptations to their natural environment (Kreps 2003a; 2009).

Many of the customs, beliefs and ritual practices linked to Dayak textiles can be seen as curatorial traditions if curation is viewed in terms of how people use, give meaning to and interpret, classify, take care of and preserve things of value to them according to prescribed cultural protocol. The term curator is derived from the Latin word *curare*: to take care of. Returning to this original definition of curator as custodian, guardian or keeper, we can see how individuals or certain classes of people such as priests, shamans, ritual specialists – and in the Dayak case, weavers – are curators. As caretakers of a family, group or society's cultural knowledge, practices and creations they are responsible for transmitting culture from one generation to the next, or, in other words, for cultural heritage preservation (Kreps 2003b).

To be a curator one must possess specialised knowledge on the technical and formal properties of an art or craft, be educated in particular styles and traditions, and possess an understanding and appreciation of particular aesthetic systems. Dayak weavers certainly meet these criteria and can be seen not only as curators but also connoisseurs of *ikat* textiles, being able to judge the quality and efficacy of a piece (as a ritual object and spiritual medium) based on local aesthetic canons and cultural conventions.

#### IBAN IKAT

The Iban are famous for their *pua kumbu*, as seen in Fig 15.2. *Pua kumbu* (*pua*, for short) are large, blanket-size warp *ikat* textiles with intricate patterns. They are one of the most ritually and symbolically significant forms of Dayak art and have been used in a variety of ritual contexts, such as birth and naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, agricultural festivities, gift exchange and payment of fines, and, in former times, ceremonies involving headhunting. *Pua* are used to form a sacred enclosure around the space in which ceremonies are performed. They also have the power to protect wearers from malevolent spirits and facilitate their communication with the spirit world (Drake 1988; Freeman 1970; Gavin 2003; Haddon 1936; Heppell 1994; Mashman 1991). *Pua* are the embodiment of traditional Iban cosmological ideas, religious knowledge and beliefs. According to one author, '*Pua kumbu* ... represent the quintessence of Iban culture. It is, depending on the design, historical archive, a mythological or religious story or a personal tale. It is a statement about the soul of the weaver and her relationship to spirits' (Jabu 1991, 76).

Weaving *pua* traditionally has been a spiritually charged and sometimes a perilous venture. Iban traditional religious knowledge is attributed to communication with the spirits and acting in response to divine guidance. Weaving certain designs, for instance, can be dangerous because it brings weavers into communion with the spirit world or because certain designs hold mystical properties and possess special powers (*guna* or *bisa*) (Gavin 2003, 26). 'The more powerful the design, the closer it brings an Iban to the spirit world – and the greater the danger there is for the weaver as she seeks to capture the essence of the spirit and render it in cloth' (Heppell 1994, 129). To protect themselves during the various stages weaving women use charms, in the form of small stones or other objects, and make offerings to the spirits. The display of *pua* with well-executed and innovative designs pleases the deities and elicits their blessings during rituals.

Weaving is distinctively a women's art and symbolises women's creative essence associated with fertility, childbearing and well-being. Weaving is a means of gaining status and prestige, and 'a



FIG 15.2. WEAVING A PUA IKAT IN THE VILLAGE OF KUMIN, WEST KALIMANTAN, INDONESIA, 2008.

woman, depending on her use of dye, design, and skill, will fit into a certain rank within the community' (Jabu 1991, 80).

Nearly all the motifs on *pua* and other textiles are inspired by elements of the natural environment, religious beliefs and spirituality, or daily pursuits. Most Iban designs are so stylised that the only way to be certain of their exact meaning is to ask the woman who made the pattern (Gavin 2003, 235, after Haddon 1936). The weavers, when designing their cloth, traditionally relied solely on memory, so more intricate and complex designs are generally attributed to older weavers.

Many customs, taboos and restrictions surround designs, which are generally the property of a particular family or weaver. Design secrets are kept within a family and each woman has her own repertoire of designs. Among the Iban, the weaver owned the designs she wove and could pass them on to her daughter. She could also sell her designs, but if she did so, she forfeited her copyright to them (Mashman 1991, 245). New *pua* designs are first revealed to weavers through dreams. Designs that are copied are considered less potent because they do not come from dreams.

Dayak weavers have their own aesthetic canons and criteria by which the quality, value and potency of a piece may be judged. Iban value originality in design and expertise in executing difficult patterns. In dyeing, dark, rich, red colours are especially revered because they are the most difficult to achieve. They reflect a weaver's expertise in dyeing besides the degree to which

she is in touch with the spirit world. Because results can be unpredictable, weavers rely on divine intercession (Heppell 1994). Hence, there are a number of taboos and rituals attached to the multiple stages of dyeing. Each dyer has her own special recipes, which were often guarded secrets, and expert dyers can be well paid for their work (Jabu 1991).

Although various aspects of *ikat* weaving, such as ceremonial use, have changed considerably over time, Sagita found that many weavers, especially elderly women, still adhere to some of the traditional beliefs connected to weaving. For instance, she observed that older weavers continue to make offerings to the spirits or honour taboos throughout the weaving and dyeing process. In the following passage she describes her experience with an older weaver in a village.

I was extremely fortunate to have been visiting her when she was about to finish the last part of the dyeing and tying process of one piece and was starting to weave it. I was there when she unfolded the warp and put it on the loom. I could already see a beautiful motif in the warp. It took one week for her to finish the *bidang*, or a cloth for a skirt while continuing her work as a farmer. The day she finished the *bidang* she took it off the loom and folded it without finishing the fringes. She put a plate and a lamp next to the textile and filled the plate with rice, betel leaves and lime, a piece of cake made from sticky rice, and a cigarette. Two of her daughters who were learning to weave helped her gather these offerings. I followed her to a small river next to her house where she threw the offerings [*pagelak*] into the water. She then placed the lamp on the plate and let it float on the water. She explained that she was making this *pagelak* because her work was finished. She asked for blessings and health for herself and her whole family. After that, she started to do the fringes, while telling me the names of the motifs. She said it was *pamali* [taboo] to mention the name of any motif before the weaving is finished. This is because they believe the motif may harm her and then she may not be able to weave a beautiful *ikat* anymore.

The next day she asked me to come with her to visit her sister who was also a weaver. At her sister's house I was surprised when she pulled from her bag a piece of old *ikat bidang* (skirt also known as *kebat*) with a motif similar to her new textile. She gave the old textile back to her sister with a plate full of rice, a couple of betel leaves and cigarettes. She said it was to thank her sister since she had copied and borrowed her sister's old textile. They had inherited this textile from their parents. (Sagita 2009, 122–3)

Just as Ibu Rinai was required to 'pay' her sister for copying her *ikat*, Sagita was also required to pay the weavers for information about their motifs and in order to photograph them. She compensated them in cigarettes, rice, chickens or with money. These payments were not for the weavers themselves, but were used as offerings to the spirits.

Sagita suggests that the beliefs, customs and stories related to *ikat* weaving have worked to preserve the art form through the generations such as the 'indigenous copyright' system noted in the above narrative. She describes how she learned about the system in the course of her field research.

When I visited the weavers in different villages, I sometimes showed them my photo collection of *ikats*. This was one method I used for gathering information on motifs. The weavers were very intrigued by these photos and asked a lot of questions about which Dayaks made which *ikats*, and how the textile were [sic] collected. It was interesting to listen to their discussions

about the photographs and the comparisons they made between their motifs and those on the textiles in the photographs. A middle-aged weaver said that it was unusual for them to see photographs of *ikat*. She was also a little worried about how the photographs made it easy for other people to copy motifs. For them, when they want to copy someone else's designs (even those of relatives), they have to make payments in the traditional way. I believe this indicated how weavers are concerned about respecting and protecting traditional rights to cultural property. Traditional rules and customs regarding the use of motifs is a kind of indigenous copyright. (Sagita 2009, 125)

Sagita documented other examples of indigenous curatorial practices, such as how weavers fold cloths to protect their motifs as well as how they store them in baskets with sayang leaves that work as an insecticide. Some women also store heirloom textiles in ceramic jars to guard them from excessive humidity, light, dust and rodents (ibid, 124–5). In these customs we can see indigenous forms of pest management and preventive conservation.<sup>7</sup>

Sagita also recorded the practice of giving long names or titles to cloths, which is a practice that is well documented in the literature on Iban textiles (see Gavin 2003). According to Sagita, titles are based on the story of a particular cloth. In one case, an old *pua kumbu* she was shown had the title 'there is a big bad spirit that sits and stays still at a banyan tree near the waterfall by the river'. Weavers, in addition to naming cloths, may also classify textiles based on type of design and motif, use, an individual weaver or ethnic group's style, or a cloth's supernatural qualities.

The above examples of traditional knowledge, skills, social practices and rituals corresponding to Dayak *ikat* weaving well fit the Convention's definition of intangible cultural heritage. Some also constitute safeguarding measures in the sense that they have worked to transmit weaving traditions from generation to generation. Furthermore, the aims and strategies of the Dayak Ikat Weaving Project converge with the Convention's 'rescuing mission' and efforts to revive and promote a disappearing art form of a historically marginalised indigenous people. The weaving Project's research, documentation and education activities are also consistent with the Convention's safeguarding measures. Finally, the Project is a community-based initiative that requires the participation of the culture bearers – that is, the weavers and local community members – to protect valued local cultural traditions.

The UNESCO Convention could hypothetically be used to increase awareness and appreciation of Dayak *ikat* weaving traditions and aspects of its intangible cultural heritage, such as stories and oral histories that accompany weaving as well as indigenous curatorial practices. This is a realistic possibility since Indonesia is a signatory to the Convention, signing on in 2007, and has to date listed three examples of traditional arts: batik cloth production, the performance of *wayang* shadow puppetry, and the ceremonial use of and knowledge surrounding *keris* (a sacred dagger). However, the Convention's suitability for preserving *ikat* weaving traditions is problematic on a number of levels.

To begin with, numerous authors have criticised the way in which cultural traditions are conceptualised under the Convention, seeing them as bounded, stable and autonomous entities

<sup>7</sup> See Salomon and Peters (2009) for an example of indigenous approaches to conservation and heritage preservation in Peru.

originating in an identifiable past. Such views deny the fluid and performative nature of cultural traditions, and how they evolve over time within and outside communities through actual social practice (Brown 2005a; 2005b; Byrne 2009; Eriksen 2001; Handler 2002; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006; Kurin 2004a; 2004b; 2007). 'Change is intrinsic to culture, and measures intended to preserve, conserve, safeguard and sustain particular cultural practices are caught between freezing the practice and addressing the inherently processual nature of culture' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, 16). The conceptual isolation of cultural traditions into distinct, manageable units ignores the holistic nature of cultural expressions, or how they are inextricably tied to other aspects of life and culture. Such ways of thinking about cultural traditions, translated into policy and interventions, may inadvertently undermine the integrity of ICH by detaching knowledge and practices from their cultural whole. Byrne argues that heritage agencies and practitioners have a tendency to think of tangible and intangible heritage as two separate things, and heritage, in general, comes into being only via the discourse of heritage (Byrne 2009, 230).

But it is the safeguarding measures recommended – ie inventorying and listing – that many critics find the most inappropriate and ill-conceived. Many do not just question the logistics of creating inventories and lists but are also apprehensive about the unintended consequences of this documenting and archiving enterprise. Some fear it will lead to the objectification, reification and 'thingification' of intangible cultural expressions as they are translated into tangible forms such as inventories, lists, films, recordings, texts and so on. Brown sees inventorying and listing as nothing more than a 'vast exercise in information management' (2003).

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts that 'the process of safeguarding, which includes defining, identifying, documenting and presenting cultural traditions and their practitioners, produces something metacultural. What is produced includes not only an altered relationship of practitioners to their art but also distinctive artifacts such as the list ...' (2006, 171). To Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, conventions, lists and the heritage enterprise as a whole are 'metacultural artifacts' that ultimately create a paradoxical situation in which the intangible is made tangible and thus subject to the same management regimes as material culture.

The inventorying and listing of ICH for the good of all humanity is also questionable because it makes public and accessible that which is restricted or private. Public ownership and unrestricted access is unacceptable to many indigenous communities who believe that certain bodies of knowledge and cultural property should remain secret or belong only to those who have the right to possess them (Byrne 2009; Kreps 2009). As illustrated above, Dayak weavers follow their own rules and customs that dictate who can copy motifs and what kinds of payments need to be made for this privilege.

The Dayak Ikat Weaving Project, with its emphasis on community participation, ethnographic field research and preservation through practice, offers an alternative approach to not only the safeguarding measures promoted through the Convention but also those being promoted by the Indonesian national government.

#### THE PARADOX OF LEGAL PROTECTION AS PRESERVATION

Since the early 1990s, the Indonesian government has drafted and enacted numerous laws to protect and regulate the use of the nation's intellectual and cultural property. These actions signal Indonesia's participation in international debates on how to protect national cultural 'assets' from external exploitation and privatisation. They also reflect adoption of a discourse on culture

promulgated by such bodies as UNESCO and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) which deploys particular ways of conceptualising culture and managing it, as discussed previously. Of special concern here are Indonesia's 2002 Copyright Law and the 2006 draft law known as the *Law on Intellectual Property Protection and Use of Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions*. The laws overlap with the Convention and WIPO's discourse on culture and what they purport to protect.

Indonesia's 2002 Copyright Law was enacted to protect national cultural and intellectual property against foreign appropriation and commercial use. Following standard Euro-American copyright protection, the law grants Indonesian artists who practice 'Western style individualistic arts', such as painters, authors, choreographers and music composers, protection of their work for a period of 50 years after the work is produced or 50 years after the death of the creator, depending on the type of the work created (Aragon and Leach 2008, 613). However, the Copyright Law not only pertains to individual creators and rights to the ownership of their cultural property but also claims state ownership of the copyright of all communal 'folklore' and 'works whose creators are not known' (ibid, 608). Articles 10, 11, and 31 of the Law awards the state in perpetuity copyright jurisdiction for 'folklore and people's cultural products' as well as copyright in anonymous 'works whose creators are not known'. This protection is held by the state 'on behalf of the interests of the creator' for 50 years after the work is made known to the public (ibid, 613). According to Aragon and Leach, this section of the law is based on the concept that Indonesian 'common people's cultural products' [*hasil kebudayaan rakyat*] are 'valuable national goods' that are vulnerable to 'erosion and distortion', especially by foreigners, and thus need state protection (ibid, 613).

The *Law on Intellectual Property Protection and Use of Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions* was introduced in 2006 and is still in draft form. It is designed to regulate any 'expression of traditional culture' that is preserved or practised by a 'community or traditional society' (ibid, 613). The Law employs the term 'Traditional Cultural Expression' (TCE), borrowed from UNESCO and WIPO, which refers to both tangible and intangible cultural property. If passed, it would regulate reproduction or adaptations of Indonesian regional material arts, music, theatre and dance, as well as stories and ritual ceremonies, regardless of their date of origin (ibid, 613).

While the copyright law and TCE law are purported to preserve and protect the rights of individual artists and 'traditional cultural communities', they are primarily motivated by economic development interests. In the words of Aragon and Leach, who carried out an ethnographic study of Indonesian intellectual property law from 2005 to 2007:

Indonesia's 2002 Copyright Law and the draft law propose to regulate TCEs as if they were all tangible objects, like natural resources, from which the state should profit. TCEs are viewed as commodifiable 'cultural products' and national patrimony. Their use is properly supervised by the state and also, by moral right, subject to contracts with designated subsidiary 'owners and/or customary custodians' from 'traditional societies' (whose members or boundaries are unspecified). (2008, 614)

For Aragon and Leach these conceptualisations of culture as bounded entities subject to exclusive ownership runs counter to local understandings of regional/local arts as knowledge and practices, and a means of cultural reproduction that binds generations, as well as humans, spirits and ances-

tors, together. They also discovered that traditional Indonesian artists are not proprietary about their ideas and creative works, and nor do they see themselves as sole creators. In fact, many attribute the origin of their genius or creativity to an ancestral, communal tradition of which they are merely conduits. 'Much local rhetoric maintains that it is the ancestors who really "own" the land and knowledge traditions and who provide all descendants rights of access, subject to permission from elder custodians, ritual fulfillment, or oral contractual precedents' (ibid, 613). This holds true for Iban weavers, at least historically, who received their inspiration and ideas for new designs and motifs from deities and spirits through dreams. The supernatural realm, rather than individual weavers, was the source of creativity and innovation.

The Indonesian laws also make claims to ownership and impose protection where it is not needed. Aragon and Leach learned that many artists consider it their moral responsibility to share and promote the replication of their work and actively seek to spread it, seeing no need to restrict or have exclusive rights to ownership (ibid, 623). On the contrary, some feel honoured and proud when their art is duplicated. For many, the value of their art rests in acts of circulation, the exchange of ideas and ongoing social processes of production and reproduction within a universe of human and supernatural relationships.

Some Indonesian artists also fear that the new national laws will block customary access to their groups' heritage, and do not see a need for these laws because local customs already dictate codes of stylistic sharing, limitation, acknowledgement and reciprocity (Aragon and Leach 2008, 608). As Aragon and Leach report, 'most resisted the idea of their local social activities being managed by the government as a form of commercial property' (ibid, 624).

The new laws, furthermore, run counter to processes of democratisation and decentralisation that have been taking hold in Indonesia since the collapse of the Suharto government in 1998. These movements have 'transformed the role of local government from that of implementing national development objectives defined largely through the central government agencies in Jakarta to one of serving local community needs as identified by local stakeholders' (Silver 2007, 88). Silver contends that a powerful 'new localism' has emerged in Indonesia that has the potential to generate a heritage movement that is more respectful of local traditions than those of the past (ibid, 89). But the new laws, bearing the stamps of nationalism and globalism, may end up trumping localism.

Legal protection does not equal preservation (Aragon and Leach 2008, 611) and in fact may have the opposite effect. Placing the management, control and ownership of traditional arts in the hands of the state is dispossession rather than either protection or preservation. Legal protection also shifts the regimes of value in which artistic traditions have historically circulated. Traditional arts move from being valued for how they construct and maintain relationships and identities and what they do for people, for example in ritual contexts, to deriving value from their status as property, assets and national wealth.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how the Dayak Ikat Weaving Project provides a more culturally appropriate, holistic and integrated approach to heritage preservation than those set forth by the 2003 UNESCO Convention, Indonesian 2002 Copyright Law and the *Law on Intellectual Property Protection and Use of Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions*.



FIG 15.3. VIEW OF THE LONGHOUSE IN ENSAID, PANJANG, WEST KALIMANTAN, INDONESIA, 2008.



FIG 15.4. PREPARING AN IKAT WARP ON THE VERANDA OF THE LONGHOUSE. IBU LIMAH WITH HER DAUGHTER RITA AND GRANDSON FEBRI, 2008.

This is because it integrates Project activities into the daily lives, needs and interests of the weavers and their village communities.

Sagita contends that the Project has been successful because its organisers involved the weavers (culture bearers) in all phases of planning and developing the project. Organisers also respected local, indigenous knowledge as well as social organisation related to gender and work roles. Thus, while the Project was largely initiated by 'outsiders', community participation has been its cornerstone. The cooperative has also been very active in building the capacity of weavers to share their knowledge, skills and experiences with one another and with weavers from other areas of Indonesia (2009, 126–7).<sup>8</sup>

While many aspects of weaving have undergone change it is an activity that still carries much social significance. It continues to be integrated into the daily course of life, something women do in their spare time when they are not tending the rice fields, collecting firewood, preparing meals and looking after children and livestock. Weaving brings women together and gives them an opportunity to share the events of the day, tell stories and relax. It is in the comfort of home, or longhouse<sup>9</sup> (see Fig 15.3), where most young weavers still learn how to weave from their grandmothers and mothers or from other weavers (see Fig 15.4). And although most women now weave to earn an income, and textiles have become commodities, weavers control the means of production through their participation in the cooperative.

Father Maessen does not want the Project to evolve into a large-scale commercial enterprise in which women are engaged in factory-like production. He fears that this may not only lead to a decline in the quality and uniqueness of the weavings but also distract women from their other work. Even though he encourages competition as a means of inspiring the weavers to produce high-quality pieces, through, for example, annual competitions, he is also aware of how competition can engender jealousies and strife. In short, Father Maessen is mindful of the ways the Project can disrupt the integrity of village life and adversely influence the social dimensions of weaving (Kreps 2002, 5).<sup>10</sup>

The Dayak Ikat Weaving Project has been successful as both an economic development project for women and a cultural heritage preservation strategy because it is tailored to fit into the lives of weavers and the local sociocultural context or 'ecology', meeting specific needs and interests. It has not just been devoted to marketing and preserving a traditional art form. It has also been dedicated to preserving a way of life. Respectively, the Project is largely about curating

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the Project has also been successful owing to its organisers' ability to gain support from international foundations and non-governmental organisations like the Ford Foundation, provincial and district level government departments, and private donors.

<sup>9</sup> A longhouse is a multi-family dwelling comprised of attached apartments forming a long rectangle. Each apartment is inhabited by an individual family. A veranda, running the length of the longhouse, is a public, communal area. Longhouses have been described as a 'village under one roof'. Winzeler states that, for those who live in them, the longhouse is the core of traditional culture and way of life, and 'longhouse people are regarded as the keepers of tradition and *adat* (customary law and ceremonies)' (2004, 50).

<sup>10</sup> When I visited one village in August 2008, I was shown a building that had been built by a government agency as a place for women to weave. However, the building had never been used because the women preferred to weave in the longhouse where they could be with their family members and friends and watch over children.

(safeguarding) living culture – culture as process and culture as performed – and showing how it is the intangible threads of the *ikat* tradition that give it life and a future.

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