The Indian *Patola*: import and consumerism in early-modern Indonesia

Soniya Billore  
*Department of Marketing, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden, and*

Hans Hägerdal  
*Department of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden*

Abstract

**Purpose** – The present paper aims to focus on the Indian influence in the transfer of, the business of and consumer markets for Indian products, specifically, textiles from producers in the South Asian subcontinent to the lands to the east of Bali. This aspect of the influence of Indian products has received some attention in a general but not been sufficiently elucidated with regard to eastern Indonesia.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper is based on archival research, as well as secondary data, derived from the published sources on early trade in South Asia and the Indian Ocean world. The study includes data about the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, a Dutch-owned company, and its textile trade history with India and the Indonesian islands with a special focus on *Patola* textiles. Narratives and accounts provide an understanding of the *Patola*, including business development and related elite and non-elite consumption.

**Findings** – The paper shows how imported Indian textiles became indigenised in important respects, as shown in legends and myths. A search in the colonial sources demonstrates the role of cloth in gift exchange, alliance brokering and economic network-building in eastern Indonesia, often with important political implications.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study combines previous research on material culture and textile traditions with archival data from the early colonial period, thus pointing at new ways to understand the socio-economic agency of local societies.

**Originality/value** – Only mapping the purchase and ownership of trading goods to understand consumption is not enough. One must also regard consumption, both as an expression of taste and desire and as a way to reify a community of people.

**Keywords** India, Consumer culture, Textiles, Consumption, Indonesia, *Patola*

**Paper type** Research paper

**Introduction**

The importance of Indian culture in the vast region known to early-modern Europeans as the East Indies has been repeatedly demonstrated. In this article, we define early-modern as the period between the rise of the age of commerce in the fifteenth century until the establishment of colonial spheres of interest in the early nineteenth century. The concept of East Indies has European roots, but it is partly applicable in an indigenous context. From Arakan to Champa to Bali, Indian belief systems, methods of governance and artistic ideals were adapted to local conditions, many centuries before Muslim or European influences were even introduced. This impact or “Indianisation” is most conspicuously seen in the remaining religious architecture from the early centuries AD and onwards (*Schulte Nordholt*, 2016). In Indonesia, the pre-1500 period is conventionally labelled as the “Hindu-Buddhist Era”, indicating the strength of the cultural contacts. This should not be taken too
far, however, as it is also observed that although Hindu remains have been found as far east as Maluku, there are relatively few traces of Indianisation east of Bali, and none whatsoever on Flores, Sumba and Timor. The eastern regions of what is today Indonesia were not suited for large-scale production of crops which enabled the cultivation of Indic cultural elements on Sumatra, Java and Bali. The Austronesian- or Papuan-speaking societies in the East were organised in other ways, in minor polities or tribal groups, which were later on overlaid by Malay-Islamic or Christian cultural features.

The present article will focus on another aspect of Indian influence which has received some attention in a general Indian Ocean or Indonesian context but not been sufficiently elucidated with regard to eastern Indonesia. This is the transfer of, business of and consumer markets for Indian products, specifically textiles, from producers in the South Asian subcontinent to the lands to the east of Bali. While less durable than stone temples, such textiles had prime importance as markers of power and prestige at least as far east as Maluku, the Spice Islands. To acquire unusual objects from faraway places was a strategy in aspiring for social status – in a way, a timeless aspect of consumer culture (Miksic and Goh, 2017). This leads us to some important theoretical considerations. Only mapping the purchase and ownership of trading goods to understand consumption is not enough. One must also regard consumption, both as an expression of taste and desire and as a way to reify a community of people. Thus, consumption is conceptualised from cultural, social and psychological dynamics in various cultures, and symbolic and material tools are used to create a relationship between the self, one’s identity and the society (Elliott, 1997). Different theories of consumption have described the consumer either as relatively passive, and subjected to one-sided pressure from larger economic or power structures, or someone actively shaping the practices of consumption (Glennie and Thrift, 1996; De Vries, 2013; Karababa and Ger, 2010). Either way, consumption is often assumed to be a way to communicate identity, lifestyle or social status. Various social categories become visible through consumption processes and get constantly reinterpreted over time (Husz and Lagerkvist, 2001). Consumers of Indian goods in the small-scale or even stateless societies may have been routinely seen as passive recipients in the historical literature on the region. This is however gainsaid by the way local consumer cultures evolved, taking up foreign elements to create ever new cultural forms. Thus, while the high-status textiles were initially meant for a small elite, the aesthetic ideals permeated the local societies of eastern Indonesia and, as we shall see, underpinned the self-understanding of these societies in various ways. Here, one may also refer to the syndrome found in many parts of the world, for example, China in the same era, that elements of an elite culture are by and by appropriated by the larger strata of the population, including customs, values and material commodities (Hansen, 2000).

From an economic–historical perspective, the import of the famed double-woven Patola and other textile types was part of the upsurge of trading activity known as Southeast Asia’s age of commerce (c. 1400-1680) (Reid, 1988/1993). This was initially driven by the stabilisation of the Chinese Ming Dynasty and the role of Malacca as an entrepôt, but the significance of the trading routes was immediately understood by the European powers which established bases in South and Southeast Asia in the early-modern period. The Portuguese, and after them the Dutch East India Company or Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), tried to regulate the flow of trade in maritime Southeast Asia, which from a European perspective was made into a peripheralised component of an increasingly interconnected world trade system (Wallerstein, 1980). In that way, the precious textiles were involved, on one hand, with the interlocking networks evolving in maritime Asia, and
on the other hand, with European attempts of commercial and political control (Bühler and Fischer, 1979).

Indian textiles in eastern Indonesia have interested a number of scholars over the years. There is much more work to be done, however, in tracing the circulation of Indian textiles via contemporary sources of the pre-1800 period. The voluminous European material, especially the reports of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), provides us with an opportunity to study the trade in cloths on a micro level, with the important reservation that the European trade was only part of the larger picture. On an Indonesia-wide level, this has been discussed in the unpublished PhD thesis of Ruurdje Laarhoven (1994). The present study develops this by tracing the demand and uses of the textiles in the early centuries of European influence, c. 1500-1800, in other words, the patterns of consumption. It studies how the symbolic value of Indian textiles led to an indigenisation of cloth culture, further leading to production in its own right and development of related yet varied consumption patterns. Indian textiles, namely, have been adapted to cultural, geographical and demographical characteristics wherever they travelled. In spite of this, Kahlenberg (2006) notes an interesting aspect about the business around the Indian textiles and states that “Two thousand years after India first began exporting textiles, the marketing strategy has not changed-adapted to the taste of the client” (p. 125). While acknowledging the rather fragmentary evidence, it seems clear that there were cultural processes in 1500-1800, where outward appearances and consumption were influenced by external input, and woven textiles with and without indigenous alterations, gained an increasingly important role in social identity formation.

Against this background, this article will address four interconnected themes. First, it will discuss the emergence of a textile market and the consumption culture in eastern Indonesia. Second, it will focus on the cultural ramifications of a specifically valued textile type called *Patola* (sing. *Patolu*), which was predominantly produced in western India and exported to Indonesia by Portuguese and Dutch textile businesses. Third, we investigate how Indian textiles in general underpinned economic–political systems in the region, as found in archival sources. And fourth, we ask how the Indian input changed local modes of textile consumption. Textiles in general play a big role in the Indonesian social milieu (Laarhoven, 1994). The great and ritually laden value of the *Patola* has been studied by researchers such as Roy Hamilton and Barrkman (2006, 2009, 2015), Barnes (1989, 2006), Duggan (2014) and. An issue that has engendered discussion is the extent to which the *Patola* motifs have influenced indigenous weaving traditions. The migration of the *Patola* has also generated, over the years, a unique position in the consumer markets of Indonesia and greatly influenced the meanings and relevance of the local businesses around textiles.

The research gap that this article seeks to contribute is the scant amount of research related to historical studies regarding an understanding of consumer’s consumption of textiles in the eastern region of maritime Southeast Asia, even as there is much evidence of booming trade, with textiles being imported from the Indian subcontinent. Methodologically, the article is based on archival research and secondary data derived from the published sources on early trade in South Asia and the Indian Ocean world. VOC records in particular provide minute details on sold and bought items in the various trading ports operated by the Dutch, which is unfortunately not matched by indigenous Asian materials. In the context of this article, these records are used to highlight in which economic, cultural and social contexts the Indian cloths occurred. The study was conducted in various layers of analysis, starting from available commercial data by the Dutch-owned company, the VOC. This is followed by a study of published sources regarding textile trade history with India and the Indonesian islands, and finally the examination of published sources with a specific
focus on Patola textiles. Narratives and accounts relating to the consumption of textiles, and particularly around the Patola textile type, are studied to gain an understanding of the way different clusters and societies related to the Patola, how business developed due to demand, how the elite and non-elite consumption occurred and how changes happened with the product, resulting in either inspired variants or mere imitations which gave rise to new usages of an exclusive product.

Consumption of textiles – a historical perspective

The consumption of textiles has been a way of showing one’s wealth by making it part of one’s identity formation and personality since time immemorial. In some places it is representative of rank and status, while in others, it is a tool to show affinity to a group or show membership to a clan. Textiles have been a major article of possession as recorded in research focusing on the Roman, Greek and Mesopotamian empires, and even to the far eastern Japanese civilisation. Minowa and Witkowski (2009) explore the consumerism of textiles among royalty in Iran and how state-directed consumerism and related economies influenced the society. As Karababa (2015), writing about Turkey, states:

The availability and accessibility of goods increased through a proliferation of alternative marketing channels, such as fairs, peddlers and department stores. Interest in the acquisition of consumer goods increased. Fashion, luxury and leisure items were commercialised, spread among the lower ranks and aestheticised the everyday lives of the ordinary people. Consumers wanted to satisfy the desires of their imaginations through consumption rather than adopting what was prescribed to them (p. 281).

Karababa further highlights that the consumption of goods and services including luxury items spread to the lower ranks of the society, making way for alternative consumption wherein the commodity of interest could be altered and made affordable by making changes in raw material, technique and presentation. De Vries (2008) highlights that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the market experienced an abundance of commodities like fabrics, household goods and luxury items. Owing to an upsurge in consumer demand for textiles, there was increased dependence on buying these from a variety of wholesalers and retailers such as shopkeepers, hawkers, travelling salesmen for cloth, etc. (Mitchell, 2010). Faroqhi (2006) mentions that trade routes all over the world encouraged cultural interactions and resulted in hybrid forms of products and services, further causing changes in the socio-cultural dynamics and ways of living. From an anthropological perspective, it is seen that textile played an important role in the manifestation of traditions, as they were considered central to social and evolutionary theory. Cloth is therefore described as “an economic commodity, a critical object in social exchange, an object of ritual intent, a vehicle of symbolic meaning and an instrument of political power” (Schneider and Weiner, 1986, p. 178).

Over time, a significant amount of textile trade was directed towards elite consumption as well as mass consumption (Prakash, 2005). This also draws attention to the discourse on conspicuous consumption, wherein a link is formed between the consumers’ purchase decisions and the need to exhibit a higher social status (Corneo and Jeanne, 1997), the resultant commercial and economic activities (Mason, 1984) and related psychological antecedents that lead to a particular kind of extravagance in consumption (Braun and Wicklund, 1989).

Forshee (2001) connects cloth to the tendency for conspicuous consumption, especially in a system dominated by the caste system, where the number of folds of cloth on a person
indicated the wearer’s richness and exclusivity, thereby placing the wearer in a clan, way ahead of the common man and the underprivileged. Interestingly, textiles are usually positioned uniquely on a middle ground between excessiveness or indulgence and necessity or obligation, where if the commodity is rather expensive, it has the power to alter the pattern of its consumption among the non-elite, actually even enrich it to some extent (Weiner and Schneider, 2013). In relation to clothes and textiles, one can see, in subsequent sections of this paper, how non-elite consumers created unique ways of consuming the Patola given that it was not possible for them to afford this exclusive product imported from the Indian shores.

Trade connections with eastern Indonesia
While eastern Indonesia did not develop the advanced state systems of the western and central parts of the island world, it had an important role in the early globalisation of commerce. The prime reason for this is the availability of spices, and second, precious forest products such as sandalwood and massoy. Sandalwood grows mainly in Timor and is coveted for its fragrant smell, while massoy is the bark of a tree which grows in New Guinea, from which a fragrant oil is extracted, and used for medical purposes (VOC-Glossarium, 2000, p. 65). The Chinese factor has often been pointed out as decisive in the evolving “age of commerce” in the fifteenth century. The Zheng He expeditions (1405-1433) opened up new possibilities for interaction between China and Southeast Asia, in spite of the reservations of the Ming regime about overseas trade. On the Malay Peninsula, Malacca was founded as an entrepôt in c. 1400 with diplomatic recognition from the Ming court, and it rapidly became a major hub in the sea-roads (Reid, 1988/1993). There was also a vital Indian factor in the process, and it is likely that Muslim traders from the Indian west coast were helpful in spreading their religion to maritime Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, there are very few textual sources about the vast regions to the east of Bali before the coming of the Europeans (see Figure 1 and 2 for an idea of the geographical trade routes being discussed here). That Chinese and Indian products reached the eastern waters of the Indonesian Archipelago is, however, clearly seen from the earliest preserved accounts. The Portuguese Duarte Barbosa, who wrote in c. 1516, before European influence in the area had taken hold, pointed out that the goods imported to Timor were partly of Indian origins: iron, axes, knives, swords, cloth from Pulicat in India and copper, mercury, vermilion, tin, lead and coral from Cambay, also in India (Le Roux, 1929, p. 42). Cloth from Cambay was stored in the Banda Islands in Maluku where it could be used to trade against nutmeg and mace. These Cambay textiles actually seem to be the same thing as Patola (Laarhoven, 1994). A Portuguese account of Maluku from c. 1544 states that Chinese traders were probably the first to arrive via the Borneo route, and their influence was seen in the local Malukan architecture as well as the import of various items. But the authors also mention that the houses of the rulers were “decorated with carpets and with multi-colored cloths of cotton and silk, which are called Patola” (Jacobs, 1971, p. 79). The 1544 text is one of the earlier explicit references to the famous double-woven cloth from Gujarat in this part of the world. The imports soared over time: in the early seventeenth century, more than 400,000 Indian pieces of textile were imported to Maluku in a single year. In fact, a triangular trade evolved in the early-modern era: Chinese and Japanese precious metals were used by European traders to buy textiles in India which were brought to the Spice Islands and bartered for cloves, nutmeg and mace, which in turn was shipped to Europe (Barrkman, 2006).

In spite of its relatively unfavourable climate and dangerous coastline, Timor was attractive to seafarers because of the immensely valuable sandalwood, just as the nutmeg,
mace and cloves of Maluku gave the Spice Islands an attraction of global dimensions. Exactly therein lies an important key to the understanding of the import of Indian textiles to these remote quarters. Sandalwood was used for medicine and fragrant pieces of handicraft, but in particular for incense. The burning of incense in religious buildings is an important act of veneration in large parts of Asia, as seen from the finely crafted incense burners that have been preserved. The faraway connectivity involved in the sandalwood trade made for high-status goods which travelled long distances from producers in India, China and ultimately Europe (Roever, 2002). To these goods belonged the valuable textiles which would become an inevitable part of eastern Indonesian elite culture. Some dates are actually provided by recent carbon-14 tests of Indian textiles found in the home of a local prince in Lospalos in easternmost Timor; the cloths dated from sometime between 1410 and 1635, partly before the onset of European influence (Barrkman, 2009).

**Figure 1.**
Map of the East Indies (*Indiae Orientalis*) region as was perceived by a European map-maker of the seventeenth century

**Source:** Public domain
Figure 2. Historical map of the Timor region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

Consumption culture connected with Indian textiles

The pioneer of Indonesian socio-economic history, Leur (1955), influenced by the thinking of Max Weber, argued that trade in traditional societies was a function of the ruling elite, in particular in places lying in the coastal areas. The old elites of maritime Southeast Asia were the ones who possessed the capital, goods and ships, and let peddlers bring the goods to

Plate 1. *Patola*-style Indian trade cloth used for covering offerings in the traditional Savunese domain Mesara, Thanksgiving ceremony (Kowa hole), 2011

Source: Photo: Geneviève Duggan

Plate 2. *Patola*-style Indian trade cloth, made from cotton, photographed on Savu in 2013

Source: Photo: Geneviève Duggan
consumers in the realm against a percentage of the profits (Leirissa, 1994). Thus, the aristocracies of the small eastern Indonesian domains, with populations often amounting to no more than a few thousand people, were deeply involved in the exchange of goods and products, detailed records of which are found in the VOC.

Gift-giving and gift-receiving have been explored vividly by researchers of culture and consumption, and this activity is considered as an important component of the consumption phenomenon (Sherry, 1983; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In the early days of Dutch contacts with local societies, the Europeans had to present the rajas with gifts known as sirih pinang (literally betel and areca), toll fees and anchorage fee, before the raja allowed the precious wood to be delivered. The wood itself was sold for a modest price; the important matter was the gifts and fees to the ruler (Tiele and Heeres, 1886/95). Apart from China, much of the sandalwood went to the Coromandel Coast in India (eastern shores of India along the Bay of Bengal) on Portuguese and later Dutch keels. The other way around, merchandise of Coromandel origin was popular in the Timor area. As archaeological research bears witness, Coromandel was the home of textile industries since early historical times (Tiele and Heeres, 1886/95; Rajan, 2011).

But was there a production of textiles in the Timor area before imported Indian cloths became common? For certain, loom weaving has been known in the Austronesian world for a very long time, maybe 5,000 years (Barnes 2015b, p. 311). When serious ethnographers began to investigate these islands in the nineteenth century, they found an accomplished weaving tradition that has persisted until the present times in some cases. These textiles were used for not only covering the body but also marking local identities; for example, a kain (sarong) with a peculiar pattern marked the inclusion of the owner in a dynastic domain. The oldest accounts, by contrast, emphasise the lack of covering. Pigafetta of the Magellan expedition wrote in 1522 that Timorese men as well as women went around naked, and that the situation was similar on the other islands around there (Le Roux, 1929). Nakedness is also claimed for some peoples of Maluku and the Papuan Islands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: only some well-to-do would wear clothes (Souza and Turley, 2016). A Catholic missionary account from Timor from 1670 says that:

The dress of the women is limited to just tattooing the body – like the African Moors – from the ankles to the legs like borzeguins [a kind of boots], from the fingers to the elbows, and on the whole shoulder (Teixeira, 1957, p. 452).

Whether the early Timorese were actually stark naked is up to debate. It is quite possible that they wore cawat, a loincloth made of bark that is known from some other societies of eastern Indonesia up to the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the quoted missionary asserts that only the elite women wore two robes similar to Costal, a term that means merchandise acquired from a coast, and may allude to cloths from the Coromandel Coast (east coast of India):

Of these [robes], one falls from the waist downwards, and the other is put on the top of the shoulders, falling over one or both arms, which leaves the breasts appropriately covered. They also use bangles around both arms, which are usually of ivory. That concludes their gala dress (Teixeira, 1957, p. 452).

Dutch illustrations from the seventeenth century show the men wearing a loincloth made of straps which had obviously disappeared by the nineteenth century, to be replaced by kain. The earliest detailed illustrations of Timorese dressing, from the French scientific expedition of 1801-1803, show women, including slaves, wearing the two robes and covering the bosom, while the men are dressed in a short-woven loincloth or a larger piece of cloth which can be worn in a style similar to a toga (Hägerdal, 2012, p. 18; Lesueur and Petit, 2015,
plates 39, 31-3). VOC sources are usually reticent about indigenous weaving, but there is in fact a note about the nearby island of Sumba which reveals an interesting trading network beyond the eyes of the VOC, which generated textile production. The inhabitants of Ende on the south coast of Flores were a mixture of Makassarese and locals and were skilled seafarers in contrast with most peoples in the region (Kartodirdjo, 1973). The Endenese sailed over the north coast of Sumba on an annual basis, selling cotton yarn. This in turn was used by Sumbanese female weavers who produced sarungs and other clothes (VOC 1335, Dagregister, sub 14 June 1678, Nationaal Archief [hereafter NA], The Hague). Where the cotton came from is not mentioned; it was grown in places like Java, Sulawesi and Sumbawa, but also on Timor. In a lengthy report from 1702, the first Portuguese governor in Lilau assures that “there is much cotton with which the Timorese produce very fine textiles and clothes” (Matos, 1974, p. 263). We can therefore conclude that the art of weaving spread in the course of the early-modern era, to wider circles among the populations in the islands. Further it is possible that this migration had close ties with the need of the local people and markets to create identity clusters for which they used textile as an instrument of expression.

**Indian cloth trade and the Patola in Indonesia**

*Patola* is a traditional cloth from the state of Gujrat in western India and has been recognised as one of the finest silk cloths produced since the pre-industrial times. It is made of patterns created by the resist techniques, which is a method of using partial coverings on the fabric where the designs or motifs are left blank before it is dyed. Apart from signifying exclusivity and social identity, various material forms have been used as important tools in creating religious identities with the formation of ritualistic activities around the material and thereby expressing commitment to a set of religious beliefs and conformity (Cosgel and Minkler, 2004). In case of the *Patola*, it is seen that the double Ikat cloth made of pure silk historically occupies the status of a cloth type of traditional, religious and luxurious significance. Bühler and Fischer (1979) elaborate on the *Patola* style describing that the cloth is usually worn uncut and is also used for traditional purposes other than wearing such as during rituals. The authors also refer to numerous publications from 1850s and onwards that describes the *Patola* as a must-have traditional cloth of choice in Indian weddings for the bride’s trousseau and as a garment for the bridegroom as a sash or Pitamber (Bühler and Fischer, 1979), also often becoming an heirloom commodity (Golden De Bone, 1976). Apart from exclusivity, this also finds connection to the scarcity effects on value in the marketing theory of products and services, where limited availability affects the consumers relationship with the commodity in terms of its possession, use and symbolic function (Lynn, 1991).

Owing to the exclusivity of the *Patola*, people from the medium socio-economic segment could not afford to buy long lengths of it in which case it was used in small lengths or sizes. For example, women used a small piece of the *Patola* to cover their heads in rituals or it was used to cover baskets carrying items used in rituals. The elitism associated with the *Patola* was so high that even the producers of the cloth could not afford to wear it (van der Veen, 1972). As production and business around the *Patola* textile grew, there were clear strategies to identify the market for domestic use as compared to export use among the *Patola* producers and traders. Bühler and Fischer (1979) refer to Martha Gogel (1954) who describes two specific patterns for the *Patola* – the Chabadi design of the *Patola*, recorded as MT 11, was used for export purposes, while the Vohra Gaji pattern, recorded as MT 23, was used for domestic consumption.
While Bühler and Fischer (1979) recognise the Patola as being “rightly considered to be the most beautiful of all pre-industrial creations” (p. 1), Barnes (2005) states that Indian textiles were also a major article for export for nearly 2,000 years. Cloth from the Indian archipelago was used to trade for spices from Indonesia in the early colonial period. These pieces of woven textile played an important role not only in the Indian society but also gained importance in the Indonesian context when the textile moved to Southeast Asia aboard the Dutch and Portuguese ships. Barnes (1994) quotes a weaver from the island of Lembata, “without cloth we cannot marry [...] nor die or be buried in a respectful manner” (p. 102), further describing that in many Indonesian households, textiles are used to cover the sacred place of rituals to not only envelope the place but also represent family lineage and prestige. The Indian textiles had a big role and contribution here, as apart from their lightness, durability and functional contribution, they also became a vehicle to convey social meaning and cross-cultural influences, thereby leading to their widespread consumption and generating business opportunities. The above context can be propounded as an example of how societies and agents within a given culture interpret the social meaning of objects and convert materialism into expressions of wealth, hierarchy, status and locations (Weatherill, 2002), using them to signify aesthetic and spiritual significance, symbolic meanings, authenticity and uniqueness (Throsby, 2003).

**Patola and influences on consumption**

*Patola in myth and reality*

It is interesting to note that the famed Patola became indigenised to the extent that they entered the world of myths and became ritualised objects. A few examples recorded in modern times may convey the deep impression made by the artful cloth from the west. On Savu Island, situated in between Timor, Sumba and Flores, local mythohistory tells of the first ancestor Kika Ga who came from a land far to the west. After a sojourn to heaven, he was sent back to earth by the deity Liru Bela with a spear and a spindle and began to create Savu. Together with Liru Bela's son, he stole soil from underneath the houses of two other beings. The soil was brought in a sacred Patola, Patola lai rede, and eventually an island was formed in the middle of the sea (This is drawn from ongoing fieldwork on Savu carried out by Hans Hägerdal and Geneviève Duggan, Singapore). The myth is instructive; the Savunese have quite distinct ideas about their own past, with a pronounced sense of genealogy. That the first foreign settler uses Patola to physically establish the island speaks for the strong ritual role of this imported item. The same theme of Patola and earth comes back several generations after Kika Ga, alluding to the wife of a Savunese ancestor who divorced her husband and has since been holding the earth in a Patolu cloth. There are few good descriptions of clothing practices or other uses among peoples of the region before 1800, but myths and legends provide some clues about the use of Patola. A story from the village Atengafeng on Alor, like our Savunese case, combines it with the very origins of the human condition. In this account, a mythical Figure called Alomai is slighted by his kin and proclaims:

Humans will die and be buried in the ground. Wrapped in cloths or sarongs, in fatola (patola)!
They will have death feasts with buffaloes. Buffalo will be cooked for the dead and served as food at the death feast! Sarongs and blankets will be used to wrap the body; they will be shrouds for the dead! (Wellfelt, 2016, p. 189).

Here, Patola is thought of as being associated with death rituals from the beginning of mortal human history. All this provides an interesting perspective on the development and indigenisation of a consumer culture; what began as luxury goods from another part of Asia became important tropes in the local understandings of society and origins.
Patola and the gift economy

The Indian cloth exported to many parts of the Indian Ocean was not only used for apparels and furnishings but also got integrated into the political and social structures. For this it had mainly three uses: one, as items of dowry in elite and political marriages; second, for presentations and gifts on political missions; and third, as an indispensable commodity for the traditions and rituals of everyday life, even similar to the earlier mentioned Indian context, taking on the status of highly regarded religious and heirloom items (Barnes, 1989). Christie (1993, p. 199) refers to the Indian cloth identified then as the Buat kling putih or “white cloth made in Kalinga (India)” which was referred to as gifts in the Javanese tax edicts. Andaya (2016) also refers to the cloth as a prestigious commodity that represented friendship and interdependence. Hence the cloth was often used as a gift item between the rulers of various regions to confirm the ruler’s legitimacy, confirm alliances and so on. From Dutch reports, we know that the petty rulers allied to the VOC eagerly awaited the corresponding gifts sent to them from Batavia, and there is no reason to think that the enthusiasm was less in Portuguese Timor. The rather frugal conditions of local societies made the imported cloths an instrument to reinforce hierarchical relations.

Localisation of the Patola

Although there were many indigenous textile varieties in the Southeast Asian region, the demand for Indian textiles was always large, leading to local industry taking them as inspiration and regional adaptation. Gittinger (1982) refers to the Patola as a highly valued and revered silk cloth from Gujrat that arrived in Indonesia as early as the fourteenth century. Barnes (1989) highlights that Indonesia in particular had a high demand for the double ikat silk and cotton fabrics which were designed and produced in western India. The interesting aspect of the movement of textiles is that “as they move between cultures, they take on new meanings” (Barnes, 2005, p.9). There is increased embeddedness for objects in the local culture and prominent consumer affinity, thereby also increasing the level of inter-relationships between local actors and factors (Boddewyn and Hansen, 1977). This is exemplified in Barnes (1989) in an extensive study of the Patola that highlights how the cloth which was considered as a luxurious and exclusive prestige item as early as the sixteenth century in Indonesia was eventually modified over time with local symbolic adaptations that became infused in the cloth. Localization happened in the form of motifs, patterns and designs that had local relevance and cultural associations. Adaptation of the textile worked towards creating new contexts while still connecting with the traditional and more rooted expressions of the Patola cloth. For example, a floral border representing a floral bush found in the original Patola textiles from Gujrat in west India was translated and modified into local Lamalera interpretations in the form of human figures identified as ata dika (Barnes, 2005) and used to represent ancestors and village chieftains.

Then, to what extent did Indian cloths, and in particular the Patola, influence weaving patterns in eastern Indonesia? There is some disagreement on the point in the existing literature. Yeager and Jacobson (2002) have traversed West Timor and documented regional variations in woven cloths in considerable detail. They found that, although Patola patterns had a significant impact on weaving in East Flores, Sumba and Rote, this was not the case in Timor. They did not detect much Patola influence on the patterns used, and little was heard about its ritual uses. This is notable, as Timor is otherwise known to produce high-quality woven cloth. However, more recent investigations by
Barrkman (2006) have given a partly different picture. She has analysed various collections of textiles and concluded that Patola was traded in West and East Timor around the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Patola imitations and motifs inspired by Patola are found, although they were not widespread but reserved for ritual functions within clan groups. Barrkman found that royal motifs used by elites within the petty kingdoms could be Patola-derived, and that these were essential for ceremonies assuring the well-being of the realm. In the rather hierarchical society of Timor, the highest aristocracy brokered the textile patterns, and the wives of the princes or chiefs had a great role in the process. At the same time, the Timorese were “extremely judicious” in their ways of incorporating such motifs and did so according to local technical constraints and preferences – quite differently from Sumba, Flores and so on (Barrkman, 2006). It might be remarked that the kingdom where Barrkman made a detailed study, Biboki, was heavily influenced by the Topasses (an ethnically mixed group of people with a Portuguese identity, also known as Black Portuguese) in the old days and is likely to have received foreign cloths from the coastal Eurasian lords, which could have served as models for subsequent patterns. Another former realm studied by Barrkman, Suai-Camenaça in south-western Timor-Leste, similarly betrays influence from trade clothes. Star and floral motifs in the area are inspired by similar motifs which are found both on Patola and block-printed trade cloth (Barrkman, 2015). Finally, it is striking that the textiles of Rote, off the western tip of Timor, were replicas of silk Patola, and that the Indian Jilamprang motif was specifically used by ruling families acknowledged by the VOC in the early-modern era (Barrkman, 2006). As will be seen below, the VOC gifts to their allies made their marks in the local culture, which is epitomised by the use of Patola as a personal name among the aristocracy (VOC 1311, Enumeration of Rotenese regents, 1675, NA).

Symbols of affluence
As noted above, Patola cloths were exported from Gujrat to Indonesia and made a big influence on the elite society in eastern Indonesia (Barnes, 1989). Records from as early as 1914 by Rockwell show the movement of Patola to the Sulu archipelago, Langkawi and beyond in the mid-fifteenth century. The strongest influence is seen in the Kain limar kind of clothing found in Jambi and a close comparison is seen between Kain limar and the Patola (Bühler, 1959). The author further emphasises that both the Gujarati Patola and the more local Kain limar (weft Ikat designs) held a very prestigious place in society and were symbols of affluence and luxury. Records also indicate that the Patola influenced the Ikat designs of eastern Sumatra, while the technique of Patola weaving was introduced by weavers from India to the people of Jambi. Both the imported Patola from India as well as the local adaptations were used as personal belongings by the wealthy people of power and affluence, as family heirlooms, in religious events, ceremonies, used as dowry and also for funerals (Barnes, 2005). This again underlines that the Patolu was not just a symbol of personal affluence and power, it also played an important social, cross cultural and inter-regional role in maintaining people’s alliances with each other and functioned as a widely accepted symbol of interdependence and integration.

In the world of Solor, a group of islands in Indonesia, Patola symbolised wealth and authority like in many other places in the region. In modern times, this has been extensively studied by Ruth Barnes who has shown that Patola motifs were used in indigenous bride-wealth textiles on Lembata, one of the Solor Islands. In the clan-based communities of the Timor area, an intricate system determined what clan was the bride-giver and bride-
receiver. The family providing the bride had a precedent position and would demand substantial bride-wealth when a marriage was planned. What little there is of early written accounts on the subject reinforces the all-importance of high-quality Indian cloth for the consumption culture of local aristocracy. In 1653 the anti-Dutch inhabitants of Lamahala on Adonara made a pact with the Portuguese Topasses, who were also enemies of the VOC. They sent two slaves and 19 Patola to the Topasses, who promised to deliver elephant’s tusks, another imported and ritually laden status object, in return (Coolhaas, 1964, pp. 683-5). Such pacts were serious business, and the gifts and counter-gifts were doubtlessly carefully arranged. In 1680, a Timorese envoy from the inland visited the Dutch port Kupang and asked to see the adolescent “empress” of Sonbai’i who stayed under VOC protection:

When [the envoy] Ama Naki asked to see the empress (being a girl of 14 years with her two under-age sisters), I asked her to come to the great hall […] They came accompanied by the baptised daughters of the field commander [veltoverste] Ama Tomananu, Anna Maria and Susanna, all adorned in their best attire according to their fashion, with silk Patola around the waist and with golden crescents on their head, and discs. They were politely received by all of us and seated at the ordained place. Then Ama Naki came, half creeping, towards the girls. With great humility, he kissed the feet and hands of them, which was imitated by his entourage of seven or eight men. (VOC 1367, Dagregister, sub 26 October 1680, NA.)

Here, cloths and adornments are underpinning the solemn and tense situation when the envoy meets the little empress, scion of the highest-ranking dynasty of West Timor. Imported cloths are matched by golden crescents which were indigenously made adornments applied on the forehead, often mentioned in older sources as prestige goods at ritual exchanges. The same goes for the gold discs made on Timor which were hung around the neck of prominent persons (Lombard-Jourdan, 2000; Teixeira, 1957).

Varying ways of usage
As stated earlier, the Patola was used as long uncut rectangular pieces of cloth in India, but this was changed as particular consumer cultures evolved in the export zones. Compared to India where the Patola is used to drape oneself as in a saree or stole, it was used differently in Indonesia. Here the cloth was cut into pieces to make trousers, skirts and shirts (Bühler and Fischer, 1979). Records from Elmberg (1968) speak of the imitations of the Patola cloth that was exported to Indonesia, although there is no claim about it on a time line. Even so, the imitations seem to be highly valued commodities and had a “ceremonial significance” Elmberg (1968). Bühler and Fischer (1979) refer to the works of Larsen (1974) on how the Patola print and weave were used to create women’s kerchiefs and other items for use as court apparel, while the influence of Patola motifs and patterns are seen to be done for warp Ikat cloths and on its borders and end panels. In Winstead (1909) mention is made of the Patola’s use for charm cloths and magical purposes and used for the protection of the owner and his house. Elmberg (1968) mentions about the use of Patola rectangles for being used as nappies and swaddling cloths for babies, usually from royal and the elite, while in other cases imitation pieces of the Patola were used as curtains and even table cloths in the homes of the rich.

Bartering and business of the Patola
The attractiveness of the Patola for business and bartering is first illustrated in the account describing the first contact between the VOC and the Savunese in 1648. The Dutch wished to make a contract with the islanders and promote “trade” – in fact the delivery of slaves,
reminiscent of European agreements with African coastal polities. When befriending the local rajas on Savu, they brought Carmosine red cloth and some Patola. There followed a long and difficult bargaining about the length of cloth to be traded against a young slave – at last, the flesh and blood of a human being was taxed at 2½ cubit, which the Dutch commander considered overly expensive (Tiele and Heeres, 1886/95, p. 425). While we only have the European account of this exchange, it reveals something about the Savunese notions of foreign goods and reciprocity: the Patola and Carmosine cloths had such consumer value that modest lengths could be bartered for one of their compatriots.

As the Dutch established a permanent residence on Solor in 1646 and Timor in 1653, a system of labour division evolved between the VOC and the areas tied to it – in the first place, westernmost Timor, Rote, Savu and parts of the Solor Islands, occasionally also Ende on Flores and the Alor Islands. The Dutch acted as “stranger kings” in the area, in the sense that they were seen as a useful, mediating force which was potentially able to offer protection against enemies and solve internal conflicts in the small principalities and tribal areas. The locals, on the other hand, delivered products of their land for established prices. Sandalwood turned out to be scarce in the VOC sphere, and was mostly found in the parts dominated by the Portuguese rivals. However, the frequency of bees made for deliveries of beeswax, coupled with a few other commodities including slaves. The partly Muslim island Solor, to the north of Timor, delivered whale oil to the VOC and served as fishers in Kupang, providing the townspeople with seafood (Hägerdal, 2012).

The central role of Patola is seen from numerous examples. The detailed Dutch dagregister (daily records) from Kupang records the arrival of the sengaji (ruling prince) Dasi of Lamakera at the western end of Solor, in June 1680. Dasi brought three vessels loaded with coconuts which were sold to the locals of Kupang, but also two slaves which were handed over the VOC authorities as a gift (VOC 1358, Dagregister, sub 27-28 June 1680, NA). The gesture was not for free, but in fact understood as included in a system of reciprocity. Dasi gave a letter (probably in Malay and written in Arabic-derived Jawi script) to the VOC representative where he thanked the Dutch for previous gifts: a drum, a VOC flag, and two yellow Armosijntjes, which were fine silk or satin textiles from Ormuz in Persia (VOC-Glossarium, 2000, p. 24). Now he wanted one package of bleached guinea cloth and 20 silk Patola (VOC 1358, Dagregister, sub 1 July 1680, NA). Given the laborious process of weaving a Patolu – some six months of skilful handling of the loom – this would indeed have been a princely counter-gift. It should be noted, however, that not all the so-called Patola that were traded in Southeast Asia were genuine, but included imitations (Barrkman, 2006). Nevertheless, by obtaining Patola from distant lands, the enterprising prince increased his authority in the competitive political landscape of the Solor Islands. A few examples may illustrate the goods involved in the reciprocity of gifts. In a letter to the VOC authorities in 1795 (Leiden UB, LOr 2238, Letters from three Timorese allies, 1795), the Timorese ruler of Ambeno, who vacillated between Dutch and Portuguese colonialisms, demanded the following goods in order to secure his friendship:

- one piece of refined black-earth Chintz;
- three red-flowered Chintz;
- one piece refined black kain with gold inlay;
- two pieces of refined Lensu kosta;
- two pieces of refined Hamam kain;
- four Patola intra; and
- three dozens of pisu (knife) of ebony.
The rather specific list also testifies to the well-developed tastes that were part of the consumer culture. The local aristocrats were well aware of the available types and sub-types of foreign goods.

Not all the goods mentioned above are immediately identified, but the ruler demanded different kinds of Chintz (Sits), colourful pieces of cloth made of cotton or silk. This is an Indian word, though Chintz was also fabricated in the various VOC posts (VOC-Glossarium, 2000, p. 106). Hamam should refer to Hamman, a thick cloth, while Lensu may be Lenso, an East Indonesian term for handkerchief (Echols and Shadily, 1989, p. 339). The only requested item in the list that is clearly of South Asian origin is the Patola which is further specified as intra. This is presumably Indra or Indera, a term referring to the gods or heavenly abode. With the VOC being in its death-throes and severely threatened by British rivals, luxury goods transported from India to eastern Indonesia must have been increasingly exclusive. But trade involving Patola was not only an affair for the rajas. The Muslim village Leraaing on the south coast of Alor had steady intercommunication with Portuguese Timor on the opposite shore. Local tradition mentions villagers going to Timor with maize, beeswax and edible bird’s nests – the last-mentioned being a much-sought delicacy among Chinese buyers. They bartered this for cutlasses, plates, bells, bracelets, and Kain Vatola, i.e. Patola (Welfelt, 2016).

If these reminiscences are correct, which there seems little reason to doubt, the luxury consumption pattern reached down to grassroots level over time. This can be connected to the significance of the ascribed criteria of status in consumption and culture discourse where possession of heirlooms and antiquities result in an elevated state of being in a social domain (Nelsen, 1970). Consumption behaviour with the Patola was now reinforced as they were considered heirloom objects among the lineages of the Lamaholot (Sloorese) world, Timor and so on (Barnes, 1996) and maintenance of the Patola was likely by kinship groups rather than individuals. The Portuguese trader and politician Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo deliberated with a number of Timorese rulers in 1664 to attract them from the Dutch rivals. As he relates in a letter:

I ordered that the house of reception would be covered with painted cloth. After I had given them great gifts, I ordered that these cloths were to be taken by their retainers. There was a great feast, and there was a struggle for the cloths, of which almost all secured pieces, and they were very content. (Boxer, 1967, pp. 88-9)

Further to the east, the relatively non-hierarchical and stateless societies of southern Maluku likewise developed tastes which were satisfied by foreign traders who were well aware of what their customers demanded. For example, a Dutch burgher went to Tio’or, Kei and Aru in 1688 bringing Guinees (simple cotton cloth, often from Gujrat), Bastas (usually cotton textiles from north-western India), Bolangs (cotton pieces used as headcloths, etc.) and Chintz, apart from an assortment of hatchets, cutlasses, knives, water containers, etc. (VOC 8051, Dagregister Banda [1687-1688], sub 3 February 1688). The large scale of VOC import ensured a steady flow of Indian products to even small and faraway islands. As a Dutch front Figure expressed it, “without the textiles of Coromandel, commerce is dead in Maluku” (Laarhoven, 1994, p. 147).

Other Indian cloths and the two “seas”

While the Patolu was the Indian cloth par excellence, it was only a minor part of the circulation of Indian textiles in eastern Indonesia. To understand this circulation, one needs to analyse the sea routes that enabled the trade. A sea may not only be seen as a physical entity, i.e. a body of water, but can also be seen as a set of complex interactions between the
human and physical forces where a dynamism of exchange takes place, not necessarily corresponding to traditional sea names.

Historian Leonard Andaya has identified two seas in eastern Indonesia, namely, the Topasses Sea and the Sea of Makassar (Andaya, 2016). The Topasses had a leading role on Flores and Timor where White Portuguese were few, while the Makassarese (Muslim seafarers from South Sulawesi) constructed a network that stretched over a large part of the East Indies and acted as traders, raiders and collectors of valuable natural products and their influence stretched all the way to North Australia, long before European colonialism in that direction (Duggan, 2014; MacKnight, 1976). Makassar was a thriving port and a lot of Indian textiles passed through the city, partly en route eastern Indonesia (Knaap and Sutherland, 2004). Much of the trade nevertheless bypassed Makassar and was conducted by what the Dutch termed “smugglers” who were a constant headache for Dutch officials in Timor and Maluku, bringing their goods to distant islands where Europeans seldom set foot [VOC 8051, Dagregister Banda (1687-1688), sub 3 February, 1688]. Toos van Dijk (2000) has shown how the small island Marsela, to the east of Timor, was involved in a network of commercial contacts with Makassarese and others, which allowed it to import Bastas, textiles with block-print motifs which were produced in India and certain other parts of Asia.

How the Portuguese and Makassarese interests coalesced can be seen from some early references. There is a description from 1603 of Portuguese traders coming annually from Malacca to Makassar with shiploads of Indian cloths. These were bartered against cloves, nutmeg and mace which had been brought from Maluku by Malays, Javanese and people from the Malukan Banda Islands. Building on the know-how of these people, the Makassarese themselves began to frequent the eastern parts of the Indies (Andaya, 2016). In the course of the seventeenth century, they gained much influence on Timor, as seen by numerous oral traditions as well as documentary sources; a major item was daggers which were in particular produced in Luwu’ on Sulawesi (Duggan, 2014; Spillett, 1999). The import of utilitarian objects also tended to bring along items of “luxury” consumption, which can of course also be seen as utilitarian regarding their importance for marital alliances and other social forms of exchange. Another item the Makassarese brought with them was foreign textiles. A verbose Dutch report from 1670, detailing the trading relations of the Makassarese kingdom, says that the seafarers brought material of Indian origin such as red Karkams, Dragams, Turia gadia, red Bethilles, Turia cindai and Chinese Armosijns which was bartered against beeswax, sandalwood, slaves and amber (Noorduyn, 1983). A typical oral story from the north coast of Timor (Jenilu) says:

The Portuguese first came for trade, and then came the missionaries. They landed in Manatuto and Lifau. The Makassans [Makassarese] came for trade not war. They landed at Palakka, about 6 kms. east of Batugede [...] [They] also landed at Fatu Luka, Atapupu. They brought iron tools, silk and Surik Samara [swords]. Samea Manumean or dragon and red chicken, and sarungs. The Makassans took sandalwood, wax and honey. (Spillett, 1999, p. 186)

Because Indonesia was not a silk producer in early times, this and other references to imported silk probably refer to Indian stuff, or less likely goods from China. As for the Topasses, they became indigenised in certain important respect, though being distinctly foreign in others (Yoder, 2005). In times of peace with the Dutch, they were able to profit on their hold over much of Flores and Timor to incorporate the VOC in their economic network. Being localised and non-white Portuguese, they still kept economic contacts with the Luso-affiliated areas in India as well as Macau in South China, but the Dutch were also providers of Indian cloths in this part of Asia. In the late-seventeenth century, a routine evolved where the Dutch of Kupang would go to the Portuguese stronghold Lifau (in the Oecussi enclave on
the north coast of Timor) on a yearly basis, to purchase the sandalwood that they could not
find in Kupang. They also visited the other Portuguese port of Larantuka in East Flores. For
example, in August 1677, the Topass officer (capitão mor) reserved 10 to 12 bahars
(corresponding to 375 to 500 pounds) of beeswax which the Dutch could pick up against the
delivery of the following items: Muris (blue cloths, mainly from Nellore in South India),
Karikams (simple red or blue textiles, mostly from Gujrat), Guinees (simple chequered cotton
stuff, often from Gujrat), Blue bethilles (fine muslin textiles, generally from India) and
various many-coloured textiles (VOC 1335, Dagregister, sub 28 August 1677, NA). The
preponderance of Indian stuff is thus apparent in this case.

What the Portuguese capitão mor used the cloths for is apparent from other sources from
this era. The Topass sphere on Timor was divided into a few provinces with a tenente
(lieutenant) over each. Under these were numerous small “kingdoms” which were only
marginally catholicised. The capitão mor sometimes gave the more considerable rulers gifts
of cloths to keep them attached to his governance (VOC 1461, report by Willem Moerman to
Batavia, 1689, f. 553-4, NA). Because the major part of Timor was under Portuguese
influence in this era – the VOC only had control over a small enclave by the Kupang Bay – it
meant that the increasing Topass control reinforced a consumption pattern where Indian
cloth had a major role. Curiously enough, the White Portuguese from Goa, who established
an administration on Timor in 1702, handed out European-style cloths to the various local
princes, rather than the usual Indian stuff (Matos, 1974).

Weaving tradition and long-distance contacts
In modern times the societies of eastern Indonesia have often gained fame for their high-
quality production of handwoven cloths. This is true for Sumba, Savu, Timor and the
southern islands of Maluku where elaborate weaving techniques have been studied by
ethnographers and art historians. As seen above, there are indications that the
dissemination of weaving was a slow process, and consumption of the woven textile in the
sixteenth- to seventeenth centuries was mainly by the wealthier strata of the society while
also indicating changes in the pattern of consumption on a sub-elite level also. But in what
way were the local weaving techniques and patterns influenced by the outside, apart from
India? Based on the new scientific methods for dating (especially carbon-14), a number
of cloths from Central Sulawesi have been dated to the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, some
being trade goods from India, but others of an indigenous design probably originating in
North Sulawesi. A preserved ceremonial cloth from the 1400s or 1500s found in Poso
displays intriguing parallels to eastern Indonesian cloths known from more recent times.
This reinforces ideas previously put forward by historians of a north–south maritime trade
route from Sulawesi to Flores, Timor, South Maluku and so on, starting long before the
onset of European commerce (Duggan, 2014). When Malacca fell to the Portuguese
conquistadors in 1511, part of its functions as a commercial hub was taken over by other
places in the East Indies, not least Makassar. The impact of the circulation of textiles is
evident from local traditions from eastern Indonesia; thus, there is a motif on hip-cloths on
Savu called Kowa Makaha (Makassar boat), and an East Florenese cloth known as Kewatek
Makasar (Duggan, 2014, pp. 59-60). And, as seen above, Makassar received much Indian
cloths, partly apparently for redistribution.

The Indian cloth was transported to many regions in the world during the period of 1500-
1850, and as Riello and Roy (2009) describe, “Indian textile was one of the agents lubricating
the wheels of commerce” (p. 3), and there were diverse reasons for why Indian cloth was so
high in demand in the Asia, Europe and Africa. We have already seen that textiles of eastern
Indonesia are quite often influenced by Indian design. This is to be expected, given the
never-ending local fascination for *Patola* and other types, visible in the archival sources. In particular, Ruth Barnes has detailed how the weavers of Lembata, one of the Solor islands, have incorporated the Indian *Patola* motifs in a local setting, even associating certain *Patola* patterns with particular clans. It is however striking that the centre motifs of the panel design are associated with alleged forebears from Sulawesi. The Lembata tradition is a telling example of the way that Indian aesthetic ideals were transplanted in an otherwise non-Indianised milieu through the intermediation of Asian or European traders, and even bound together different parts of the Archipelago in the local mind (Barnes, 1989; Taylor and Aragon, 1991, p. 223).

Woven Timorese everyday cloths which are preserved from the early-nineteenth century are not directly related to Indian models. Rather, they depend on local weaving traditions which evolved in the preceding centuries under circumstances which are largely unknown to us. However, as pointed out by Barnes, certain complex structures remain when comparing with three early clothes (a man’s cloth and two belts) which have been scientifically dated to the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Partly, these showed inspiration from Indian designs, although Barnes warns against jumping conclusions about external contacts. The continuities include the supplementary-weft wrapping technique which is sometimes combined with twining to build up patterns (Barnes, 2015a, p. 113). The development of design on Timor was dynamic enough to eventually attract people further east, as the Timor Islands became a cloth exporter in their own right. *Kain Timor*, sarungs of Timor, found their way to easternmost Indonesia, all the way to western Papua, and were intimately bound up with status issues, often being used as bride-wealth. In the local understanding in the Sorong area in Papua, the *kain Timor* arrived from Timor with missionaries and gurus (teachers) around the eighteenth century and have designs similar to those found in Timor (Zonadamai, 2013). While some of this must remain uncertain until better evidence turns up, Roy Ellen has mapped an impressive system of trading routes going from Papua to Timor and beyond which was propelled by seafarers from Ceram in Maluku since the sixteenth century or earlier (Ellen, 2003). The classic *Kain Timor*, manufactured with *Ikat* technique, appears to have originated from Flores, Sumba, Timor, Lembata and Alor, and the trade may have started in the Bird’s Head Peninsula in Papua several centuries ago (Timmer, 2011, pp. 387-390).

**Conclusions**

Writing about the distribution of ceramics in early Southeast Asia, Witkowski (2013) has noted how the sea routes operated by Indians, Chinese, Arabs, Europeans and Southeast Asians generated consumer cultures which were globalised to a degree, exposing consumers to long-standing motifs and patterns. In the same vein, historian Ruurdje Laarhoven (1994) has shown how the Dutch VOC entered a commercial “world of clothes” in Southeast Asia. While fast-cash items such as spices were what drove Europeans to Asia in the first place, it was soon realised that the best way to manage an Asian trading network was to bring trading goods from one part to another rather than to merely bring goods the long sea trip to Europe. Clothes were (often) less spectacular than many other products of Asia, but they were in steady demand over the centuries. While the earlier consumption of textiles, especially in reference to the Patola, is seen as connected to ritualistic and social practices in eastern Indonesia, a comparison with archival records gives relief to the historical processes whose “end result” can be seen in dressing culture and related consumer behaviour and market dynamics from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The enormous value attached to some prestige goods is seen from the bartering of fine textiles for slaves, and the demands for gifts of Indian clothes as token of friendship, thereby exhibiting the varied
shades of conspicuous consumption tendencies, consumer identity and social positioning of the self. The eastern Indonesian aristocrats stand out in the sources as connoisseurs who were well aware of the various types offered by European, Eurasian and Asian traders: *Bethilles, Karikams, Chintz, Muris* and not least the coveted *Patola*. This in turn is reflected in oral traditions which sometimes even assign a role for *Patola* in origin stories, giving it a symbolic, hedonic and utilitarian function, and thereby explaining how the world was ordered in a remote past. Moreover, a comparison of the sources shows how the trade and redistribution of Indian clothes played a vital role in political systems which arose in places like Timor; the Eurasian Topasses constitute a telling example. Finally, the textual and tangible records hint at interesting developments where woven textiles gradually spread among the populations of the Timor Islands, and local weavers partly took up Indian aesthetic elements, adapting the weaving technique to the needs of the local consumers and creating alternate consumption of the *Patola* by including expressions for local social patterns and finally developing skills which enabled them to sell the clothes to the Far East.

The study of textiles in eastern Indonesia therefore opens up interesting perspectives of the ways that maritime trade, early colonialism, social rituals and customs interacted with the consumption behaviour and the local people in complex historical processes to bring new meaning to objects and cultural connections.

References

**A. Unpublished sources**

Archive of the VOC, 1.04.02, National Archief, The Hague.

“Iets over het eiland Timor en onderhoorigheden” (c. 1819), in KITLV Archive, Leiden, H 245a.

Letters from three Timorese allies, 1795, LOr 2238, Leiden UB (University Library).


**B. Published sources**


MacKnight, C.C. (1976), The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia, Melbourne University, Melbourne.


Taylor, P.M. and Aragon, L.V. (1991), Beyond the Java Sea: Arts of Indonesia’s Outer Islands, The National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC, D.C.

Teixeira, M. (1957), Macau e a Sua Diocese IV, a Diocese de Malaca, Tip. Do Orfanato Salesiano, Macau.


Weiner, A.B. and Schneider, J. (Eds), (2013), Cloth and Human Experience, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC.


**Further reading**


**Corresponding author**

Soniya Billore can be contacted at: soniya.billore@lnu.se